

Telemachus's Journal

I've never known a time when my father was definitely alive. It's been up in the air since the day I was born. As a child my mother taught me that he had sailed to Troy for war, and that he was the greatest and mightiest soldier that had ever lived. For years she was filled with pride for his bravery and hope for his return. Lately, however, her smile has begun to fade, her hope to dwindle, and I don't think she believes my father to be alive anymore. I don't think that I do either.

And then, of course, there are all of the men that have swarmed my father's home to keep my mother company. They seem to hurt her more than they help. They are what has brought us to this impasse.

A very strange thing happened today. My father's friend, Mentos, came to me and told me to hold an assembly to rid the estate of my mother's suitors. Then, he suggested he depart for Pylos and Sparta to ask around about my father! I am unnerved by the encounter, and unsure if it was really Mentos who appeared to me. Perhaps the events of tomorrow will make things clear.

Later, I found my mother crying in the room with her suitors over the song of the bard. I believe it was something about the Greeks' return from Troy. I hated to see her that way – I reminded her that she was not alone in her waiting for a loved one to return, and told her she should go into her own room if they song had upset her so much. She did. Then I told the suitors that the assembly will take place tomorrow, and that they all must leave, but two stepped up to question my authority. I was afraid to share my hunch on who had visited me, so I simply said I'd been commanded by a friend of my father.

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At the assembly today, the first to speak was the wise Aegyptius. He commended me for my efforts in filling my father's shoes, as the assembly had not taken place since his departure so long ago. I spoke second, sharing my despair over my still-absent father and the men who have flooded his home. I called the suitors out, that they all court my mother again and again but never go to Icarus to ask for her hand in marriage. Then Antinous stepped forward and blamed the whole thing on my mother – the nerve! He said it is she who won't commit, that she swore she wouldn't marry until she finished the shroud for her late father-in-law, Laertes, but unweaves some of it every night. He believes my mother is too irresponsible to pick her own husband and that her father will have to do it for her.

I had had enough of his and all of the men's disrespect at this point, and so I requested that the gods come and destroy them for their slander. Suddenly, two fighting eagles showed up in the sky above. The soothsayer Halitherses claimed it was an omen that my father would soon return, urging the suitors to get out or die. But none of the men believed him, and nothing happened after that. It was a wholly fruitless affair.

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Today, I was visited by another of my father's friends, Mentor, who told me not to worry about my journey to Pylos and Sparta, that it will be successful. His insight renewed my bravery, but still I won't tell my mother or any of the staff that I'm going. I don't want the news to get back to her and cause her worry.

I did tell one person, however – my nurse, Eurycleia. She reacted almost as my mother might have, urging me to avoid the dangers my father had fallen to, and not to go. I comforted her by saying there would be a god traveling by my side. It's too soon to say whether it's true or not, but it certainly made her feel better.

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When Mentor and I arrived at Pylos, we saw bulls sacrificed to Poseidon in a splendid religious ceremony. As we traveled to meet King Nestor, Mentor helped me to build up the courage to ask for information about my father. Sadly, Nestor had no idea where he was. After the war, he said, Agamemnon and Menelaus had gotten into a fight. Menelaus took off for Greece with Nestor in tow, but Agamemnon and my father stayed. That was the last time that Nestor saw him.

Nestor had heard about all of the suitors at my father's house and expressed his hope that I would be able to defend him, holding up the bravery of Orestes, son of Agamemnon, as a standard that I should aspire to.

Evidently, Agamemnon had returned from the war to find his wife, Clytemnestra, married to the coward Aegisthus – a man who hadn't even fought! At Clytemnestra's urging, Aegisthus had murdered Agamemnon, and would have cashed in on the whole kingdom had not Orestes swooped in to kill both him and Clytemnestra. Nestor cited this event as a good example of how I should honor my father.

Because there was nothing to learn of my father's return in Pylos, the time came for me to depart for Sparta. Nestor sent his own son, Pisistratus, on the journey with me.

And something incredible happened before we set off on that journey, something I'd suspected all along. Mentor threw off his disguise, revealing himself as not a "he" at all – it was the goddess Athena! She thence turned herself into a great eagle, flying overhead for protection as we trekked on.