ODYSSEUS AND PENELlope

Odysseus now calls forth the maids who have betrayed his household by associating with the suitors. He orders them to clean up the house and dispose of the dead. Telemachus then "pays" them by hanging them in the courtyard.

Euryclée tells Penelope about the return of Odysseus and the defeat of the suitors. The faithful wife—the perfect mate for the wily Odysseus—suspects a trick from the gods. She decides to test the stranger who claims to be her husband.

Crossing the door sill she sat down at once
in a fright, against the nearest wall,
across the room from the lord Odysseus.
leaning against a pillar, sat the man
and never lifted up his eyes, but only waited
for what his wife would say when she had seen him.

And she, for a long time, sat deathly still
in wonderment—for sometimes as she gazed
she found him—yes, clearly—like her husband,
but sometimes blood and rags were all she saw.
Telemachus’s voice came to her ears:

"Mother,
cruel mother, do you feel nothing,

A smile came now to the lips of the patient hero, Odysseus,
who turned to Telemachus and said:

"Peace, let your mother test me at her leisure.
Before long she will see and know me best.

These tatters, dirt—all that I’m caked with now—
make her look hard at me and doubt me still..."

Odysseus orders Telemachus, the swineherd, and the cowherd to
jutth and put on fresh clothing.

Greechaed Odysseus, home at last,
was being bathed now by Euryklea
and rubbed with golden oil, and clothed again
in a fresh tunic and a cloak. Athena
sent him beauty, head to foot. She made him
taller, and massive, too, with crimping hair
in curls like petals of wild byacinth
but all red-golden. Think of gold infused
on silver by a craftsman, whose fine art
Hephaestus taught him, or Athena: one
whose work moves to delight; just so she
lavished beauty over Odysseus’s head and shoulders.
He sat then in the same chair by the pillar,
facing his silent wife, and said:

"Strange woman,
the immortals of Olympus gave you hard,
harder than any. Who else in the world
would keep aloof as you do from her husband
if he returned to her from years of trouble,
ocast on his own land in the twentieth year?
Nurse, make up a bed for me to sleep on.
Her heart is iron in her breast."

Penelope spoke to Odysseus now. She said:

"Strange man,
if man you are... This is no pride on my part
nor scorn for you—not even wonder, merely.
I know so well how you—how he—appeared
boating the ship for Troy. But all the same...

Make up his bed for him, Eurycleia.
Place it outside the bedchamber my lord
built with his own hands. Fit the big bed
with fuses, rags, and sheets of purest linen."

Vocabulary
lavished (lav’id) v.: gave generously.
aloof (ə-lōf’) adj.: at a distance; unfriendly.
"Woman, by heaven, you've stung me now! Who dared to move my bed? No builder had the skill for that—unless a god came down to turn the trick. No mortal in his best days could budge it with a crowbar. There is our pact and pledge, our secret sign, built into that bed—my handiwork and no one else's!"

An old trunk of olive
grew like a pillar on the building plot, and I laid out our bedroom round that tree, lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof, gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors. Then I lopped off the silver leaves and branches, hewed and shaped the stumps from the roots up into a bedpost, drilled it, let it serve as model for the rest, I planed them all, inlaid them all with silver, gold, and ivory, and stretched a bed between—a pliant web of oxbile thongs dyed crimson.

There's our sign! I know no more. Could someone else's hand have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?"

Their secret! as she heard it told, her knees grew tremulous and weak, her heart failed her.

With eyes brimming tears she ran to him, throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him, murmuring:

"Do not rage at me, Odysseus! No one ever matched your caution! Think what difficulty the gods gave; they denied us life together in our prime and flowering years, kept us from crossing into age together. Forgive me, don't be angry. I could not welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself long ago against the frauds of men, impostors who might come—and all those many..."

Vocabulary

_pliant_ (pl'chant) adj.: flexible.

_tremulous_ (trem'uh-luhs) adj.: trembling; shaking.