RECOGNITIONS AND A DREAM

and wept hot tears, and murmured:

"Oh, my child!

I can do nothing for you! How Zeus hated you, no other man so much! No use, great heart, O faithful heart, the rich thighbones you burnt to Zeus who plays in lightning—and no man ever gave more to Zeus—with all your prayers for a green age, a tall son reared to manhood. There is no day of homecoming for you. Stranger, some women in some far off place perhaps have mocked my lord when he'd be home as now these strumpets mock you here. No wonder you would keep clear of all their whorishness and have no bath. But here am I. The queen Penelope, Ikarios' daughter, bids me; so let me bathe your feet to serve my lady—to serve you, too.

My heart within me stirs, mindful of something. Listen to what I say: strangers have come here, many through the years, but no one ever came, I swear, who seemed so like Odysseus—body, voice and limbs—as you do."

Ready for this, Odysseus answered:

"Old woman, that is what they say. All who have seen the two of us remark how like we are, as you yourself have said, and rightly, too."

Then he kept still, while the old nurse filled up her basin glittering in firelight; she poured cold water in, then hot.

But Lord Odysseus whirled suddenly from the fire to face the dark. The scar—he had forgotten that. She must not handle his scarred thigh, or the game was up. But when she bared her lord's leg, bending near, she knew the groove at once."

strangers will bear report to the wide world, and distant men will praise him."

Odysseus answered:

"Honorable lady, wife of Odysseus Laertiades, a weight of rugs and cover? Not for me. I've had none since the day I saw the mountains of Kret, white with snow, low on the sea line fading behind me as the long oars drove me north. Let me lie down tonight as I've lain often, many a night unsleeping, many a time afield on hard ground waiting for pure Dawn. No: and I have no longing for a foottabth either: none of these maids will touch my feet, unless there is an old one, old and wise, one who has lived through suffering as I have: I would not mind letting my feet be touched by that old servant."

And Penelope said:

"Dear guest, no foreign man so sympathetic ever came to my house, no guest more likeable, so wry and humble are the things you say. I have an old maid servant ripe with years, one who in her time nursed my lord. She took him into her arms the hour his mother bore him. Let her, then, wash your feet though she is frail. Come here, stand by me, faithful Eurykleia, and bathe, bathe your master. I almost said, for they are of an age, and now Odysseus' feet and hands would be enameled like his. Men grow old soon in hardship."

Hearing this, the old nurse hid her face between her hands.
a boar’s white tusk inflicted, on Parnassos
years ago. He had gone hunting there
in company with his uncles and Autólykos,
his mother’s father—a great thief and swindler
by Hermēs’ favor, for Autólykos pleased him
with burnt offerings of sheep and kids. The god
acted as his accomplice. Well, Autólykos
on a trip to Ithaka
arrived just after his daughter’s boy was born.
In fact, he had no sooner finished supper
than Nurse Eurykleia put the baby down
in his own lap and said:

“It is for you, now,
to choose a name for him, your child’s dear baby;
the answer to her prayers.”

Autólykos replied:

“My son-in-law, my daughter, call the boy
by the name I tell you. Well you know, my hand
has been against the world of men and women;
odium and distrust I’ve won. Odysses
should be his given name. When he grows up,
when he comes visiting his mother’s home
under Parnassos, where my treasures are,
I’ll make him gifts and send him back rejoicing.”

Odysses in due course went for the gifts,
and old Autólykos and his sons embraced him
with welcoming sweet words; and Amphithēa,
his mother’s mother, held him tight and kissed him,
kissed his head and his fine eyes.

The father

called on his noble sons to make a feast,
and going about it briskly they led in
an ox of five years, whom they killed and flayed
and cut in bits for roasting on the skewers
with skilled hands, with care; then shared it out.

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So all the day until the sun went down
they feasted to their hearts’ content. At evening,
after the sun was down and dusk had come,
they turned to bed and took the gift of sleep.

When the young Dawn spread in the eastern sky
her finger tips of rose, the men and dogs
went hunting, taking Odysses. They climbed
Parnassos’ rugged flank mantled in forest,
entering amid high windy folds at noon
when Hēlios beat upon the valley floor
and on the winding Ocean whence he came.
With hounds questing ahead, in open order,
the sons of Autólykos went down a glen,
Odysses in the lead, behind the dogs,
pointing his long-shadowing spear.

a great boar lay hid in undergrowth,
in a green thicket proof against the wind
or sun’s blaze, fine soever the needling sunlight,
impervious too to any rain, so dense
that cover was, heaped up with fallen leaves.
Patter of hounds’ feet, men’s feet, woke the boar
as they came up—and from his woody ambush
with razor back bristling and raging eyes
he trotted and stood at bay. Odysses,
being on top of him, had the first shot,
lunging to stick him; but the boar
had already charged under the long spear.
He hooked aslant with one white tusk and ripped out
flesh above the knee, but missed the bone.
Odysses’ second thrust went home by luck,
his bright spear passing through the shoulder joint;
and the beast fell, moaning as life pulsed away.
Autólykos’ tall sons took up the wounded,
working skillfully over the Prince Odysses
to bind his gash, and with a rune they stanched
the dark flow of blood. Then downhill swiftly
they all repaired to the father’s house, and there
tended him well—so well they soon could send him,
with Grandfather Autólykos’ magnificent gifts,
rejoicing, over sea to Ithaka.
His father and the Lady Antíkleia
welcomed him, and wanted all the news
of how he got his wound; so he spun out
his tale, recalling how the boar’s white tusk
captured him when he was hunting on Parnassos.

This was the scar the old nurse recognized;
she traced it under her spread hands, then let go,
and into the basin fell the lower leg
making the bronze clang, sloshing the water out.
Then joy and anguish seized her heart; her eyes
filled up with tears; her throat closed, and she whispered,
with hand held out to touch his chin:

"Oh yes!
You are Odysseus! Ah, dear child! I could not
see you until now—not till I knew
my master’s very body with my hands!"

Her eyes turned to Penélope with desire
to make her lord, her husband, known—in vain,
because Athena had bemused the queen,
so that she took no notice, paid no heed.
At the same time Odysseus’ right hand
gripped the old throat; his left hand pulled her near,
and in her ear he said:

"Will you destroy me,
nurse, who gave me milk at your own breast?
Now with a hard lifetime behind I’ve come
in the twentieth year home to my father’s island.
You found me out, as the chance was given you.
Be quiet; keep it from the others, else
I warn you, and I mean it, too,
if by my hand god brings the suitors down
I’ll kill you, nurse or not, when the time comes—
when the time comes to kill the other women."

EURÝKLEIA kept her wits and answered him:

"Oh, what mad words are these you let escape you!
Child, you know my blood, my bones are yours;
no one could whip this out of me. I’ll be
a woman turned to stone, iron I’ll be.
And let me tell you too—mind now—if god
cuts down the arrogant suitors by your hand,
I can report to you on all the maids,
those who dishonor you, and the innocent."

But in response the great tactician said:

"Nurse, no need to tell me tales of these.
I will have seen them, each one, for myself.
Trust in the gods, be quiet, hold your peace."

Silent, the old nurse went to fetch more water,
her basin being all spilt.

When she had washed
and rubbed his feet with golden oil, he turned,
dragging his bench again to the fire side
for warmth, and hid the scar under his rags.
Penélope broke the silence, saying:

"Friend,
allow me one brief question more. You know,
the time for bed, sweet rest, is coming soon,
if only that warm luxury of slumber
would come to enfold us, in our trouble. But for me
my fate at night is anguish and no rest.
By day being busy, seeing to my work,
I find relief sometimes from loss and sorrow;
but when night comes and all the world’s abed
I lie in mine alone, my heart thudding,
while bitter thoughts and fears crowd on my grief.
Think how Pandáreos’ daughter, pale forever,
sings as the nightingale in the new leaves
through those long quiet hours of night,
on some thick-flowering orchard bough in spring;"