

EPISODE 12 – Home

total running time: 12:00

A grim harvest (⌚ 4:48)

The old beggar, sitting among the shadows by the door, caught the nursemaid's eye and he winked and he nodded. And the old nursemaid Eurycleia smiled and she hobbled up the stairs, but as soon as she was out of sight she made her way out of the hall and down and round. And she locked all the doors to the feasting hall from the outside.

5 And inside the hall there was silence, broken at last by Antinous, who spat on the ground. He said, "It's not so much losing the woman I mind. She's pretty enough, I grant you, but there are plenty of other fish in the sea. It's more making ourselves seem such weaklings, beside the memory of that cursed Odysseus!"

And the other suitors nodded and they spat on the ground. And then a voice came echoing
10 from the shadows by the door. "I was an archer once, in the days of my youth." And Antinous turned and he looked at the old beggar and he lifted his lip in a sneering smile and he said, "You might have been an archer once but now you are nobody!"

"I was an archer once in the days of my youth, and I wonder if there is still strength enough in these old arms to draw a string across that bow." And all the suitors threw back their heads
15 and they laughed. And a hail of bones and broken crockery flew across the feasting hall at the old beggar. But then Telemachus got up to his feet. He said, "Enough! Enough! Antinous, are you afraid that this old beggar will put you to shame? Old man, show us what you can do!"

And Telemachus gave the old beggar the bow. And Odysseus felt the smooth familiar wood of his bow in his hands. For the first time in nineteen years, he set the foot of the bow to the floor
20 at his own feet, and he began, slowly taking his time, to bend it. And he bent it, and he bent it and he drew the string across. And then with one finger, as though he was plucking the string of a lyre, he plucked the bow string and it gave a beautiful clear note, like a swallow's song. And from high above the roof of the feasting hall there was an answering rumble of thunder. And the suitors stood and they stared. And the old beggar took an arrow and he fitted the
25 arrow to the bow string, and he drew the bow string back and he loosed the arrow. Clean through the rings of the twelve ceremonial axe handles and it lodged quivering in the wall beyond.

And the suitors were amazed. And the old beggar said, "That match is played and won! Now for the second." He took another arrow, he fitted it to the bow string, he drew the bow string
30 back. Straight through the throat of Antinous. The blood was pouring from his nose. He fell face down on the ground, his legs were kicking. And then he was dead.

The old beggar leapt up onto a table, Telemachus leapt up beside him. Athene, invisible, reached into the hall. She touched the old beggar's shoulder and straightaway the auburn curls returned, the hawk-like light came back to the eyes, the broad shoulders, the thick arms,
35 the beautiful cloak. The suitors ran to the walls to grab weapons, but all the weapons were

gone. And Odysseus and Telemachus were loosing arrow after arrow after arrow after arrow. The suitors ran to the doors. They rattled at the doors but the doors were locked from the outside. And Odysseus and Telemachus were loosing arrow after arrow after arrow and when all the arrows were spent, with a sword in one hand and a spear in the other, they made their
40 way across the hall, cutting and slicing the living flesh, reaping a grim harvest of death.

The secret (☉ 7:12)

And when every last suitor was dead, when the floor of the hall was ankle-deep in steaming red blood, Odysseus turned to his son. He said, "Telemachus, call the old woman, tell her to open the doors!" And Telemachus called to old Eurycleia and the woman came, and she pulled back the bolts, and she opened the doors to the feasting hall. And there she saw her king
5 standing like a mountain lion, splattered with blood, and she let out a thin, shrill, cackling cry of triumph. And she lifted up her skirts and she came dancing and splashing and plashing through the blood into the hall.

And Odysseus lifted his hand, "Old woman, don't dance and celebrate over the dead. It is wrong to exult over the slain. Gloat in silence! Fetch servants and maidservants with buckets
10 and sponges and water and clean every speck of blood from this feasting hall. And Telemachus, you and I will burn the bodies of the dead."

And so it was that Odysseus and Telemachus dragged the bodies of the suitors, slithering through the blood across the hall and down the hill, and they built a great pyre, a great funeral fire. And all that day the heat of the fire's heart consumed the houses of bone. And when all
15 was reduced to smouldering white ash Odysseus and Telemachus climbed up the hill, they entered the hall and it was spotless. There was no trace or fleck or speck of blood.

Odysseus called old Eurycleia. He said, "Old woman, go upstairs and tell my wife Penelope that her husband is home and he is waiting for her!" And the old woman nodded and she twinkled up the stairs and into the bedchamber. And there was Penelope lying fast asleep on
20 her bed. All day she had been sleeping, her heart heavy with sorrow. And the old woman said, "Madam, madam! Wake up, wake up, wake up!"

Penelope rubbed her eyes and old Eurycleia said, "Madam, wake up. Your husband is home! He's downstairs, he's waiting for you!" And Penelope said, "Old woman, what are you talking about? Have the mighty gods and goddesses addled your wits?"

25 "For pity's sake, madam, come downstairs!" And Penelope climbed out of bed, and she followed the old woman down the stairs, and she saw in the hall there was a man, standing. And she stood and she looked at him and she said nothing. And Telemachus said, "Mother, strange, cold-hearted mother, your husband is home after nineteen years and you stand there and you say nothing."

30 And Odysseus turned to Telemachus. He said, "Leave us alone." He turned to his servants and his maidservants who were lined up along the walls watching. He said, "Leave us alone now".

And as soon as the last one had left the room Penelope came across and she looked into his face and she said, "Is it you? You're so changed." And she reached and touched his cheek with her fingertips. She said, "I do not know you any longer. I do not even know that it is you.
35 You're not the young man I remember sailing off to fight in distant Troy and me with a baby in my arms. I cannot sleep with you. I will not share a bed with you. I will tell the servants to move the bed. You can sleep the other side of a closed door."

And Odysseus said, "Penelope, you know that cannot be. You know I built this hall around an ancient olive tree. You know I carved our bed with my own hands, from one of the branches of
40 that tree. There is no-one who can lift it and set it the other side of a closed door."

And Penelope threw back her head and she laughed and she said, "Then it is you! Then it is you! Nobody knows the secret of our bed. You and I alone." And Odysseus looked at her and he seized her hands and he said, "Penelope, my wife, my queen – only now am I truly home."

And that night Odysseus and Penelope and Telemachus sat down together and they told their
45 stories. Telemachus told of his journey to Sparta. Penelope told of her long wait and her trickery with the loom. And Odysseus told of his adventures on the fields of Troy and his great journey across the broad face of the world. And then he told of the one adventure still left to make – that journey far inland with the oar over his shoulder to the place where he would be stopped and someone would ask him what it was. But Penelope silenced his mouth with her
50 kisses and she said, "Sweet Odysseus, that will be as it may be and as the gods decree. But now you are here, in this place, where all past and all future melt into present joy."

Dreams and visions come through two gates: either through a gate of ivory or through a gate of horn. If the dream, the vision comes through the ivory gate it is mere fancy, fantasy. If it comes through the gate of horn it carries truth. This dream, this vision is over. You must decide
55 through which gate it has come.