BOOK 1

Tell me, Muse, of the man versatile and resourceful, who wandered many a sea-mile after he ransacked Troy’s holy city.
Many the men whose towns he observed, whose minds he discovered, many the pains in his heart he suffered, traversing the seaway, fighting for his own life and a way back home for his comrades.
Not even so did he save his companions, as much as he wished to, for by their own mad recklessness they were brought to destruction, childish fools—they decided to eat up the cows of the High Lord, Helios: he then took from the men their day of returning.

Even for us, holy daughter of Zeus, start there to recount this.

Then were the others, whoever escaped from the sheer destruction, all in their homes, since they had escaped from the war and the deep sea; only the one still yearned to go home, still wanted his woman; queenly Kalypso, a nymph and illustrious goddess, was holding him in her spacious cavern; she wanted to make him her husband.
But when the year came round in the course of the seasons’ revolving wherein the gods had spun as his destiny making the journey homeward to Ithaka, once he was there he did not escape trials, even among his own friends. All the gods took pity upon him, all but Poseidon, who hated with deep unquenchable anger godlike Odysseus, until he arrived at last in his country.

But to the far Ethiopians now that god had departed—these Ethiopians, farthest of men, are divided asunder; some of them dwell where the High Lord sets; near the others, he rises.

He was with them to partake of their hecatomb, bulls and mature rams; there he rejoiced as he sat at the feast; but the other immortals were in the house of Olympian Zeus all sitting together.
Speaking among them opened the Father of gods and of mankind, for in his heart he was moved to reflect on faultless Aigisthos, whom Agamemnon’s child had killed, far-honored Orestes.
Mindful of him, Zeus spoke these words there among the immortals:

"Strange to behold, what blame these mortals can bring against godhead!
For their ills, they assert, are from us, when they of themselves by
their mad recklessness have pain far past what is fated.

So even now has Aigisthos, beyond fate, married the lawful
bedmate of Atreus' son, then murdered the man as he came home,
though he knew of his ruin, because we told him beforehand—
sending as messenger Hermes, the keen-eyed slayer of Argos—
neither to murder the man himself nor to marry his bedmate:

'For from Orestes will come the requital for Atreus' scion,
when he reaches adulthood and feels a desire for his country.'
So spoke Hermes but did not prevail on the mind of Aigisthos,
though so kindly disposed; now all has been paid for together."

Speaking to him then answered the goddess bright-eyed Athena:

"Father of all of us, scion of Kronos and sovereign ruler,
surely indeed that man most fittingly lies in destruction.
So let all be destroyed, whoever may work such malice.
But for ingenious Odysseus the heart inside me is troubled.
Wretch! Faraway from his friends, he has long been suffering sorrows,

off on a tide-washed island the broad sea has at its navel.
There on the forested isle in her home is a goddess residing,
daughter of Atlas the murderous-minded, who knows of the deepest
chasms in all of the seas and himself holds up the enormous
pillars that hold in their separate places the earth and the heaven.

His is the daughter who keeps that man, unhappy and weeping,
avways in speeches of tender cajolery tries to beguile him,
so that he might put Ithaka out of his mind. But Odysseus,
longing to catch at the least some glimpse of the smoke as it rises
out of his land, wants rather to die. Yet even for this no
care is your heart now taking, Olympian. Did not Odysseus
please you, offering victims beside the Achaian's vessels
there in the broad Troôd? Why is he so odious now, Zeus?"

Answering her in return spoke forth the cloud-gathering god Zeus:

"Oh my child, what a word has escaped from the fence of your teeth now!

How could I ever indeed be forgetful of godlike Odysseus,
who in his mind is beyond all men, and beyond them he offers
sacred gifts to the gods, the immortals who hold the broad heaven?
No, it is earth-upholding Poseidon who feels a relentless
wrath on account of the Cyclops, deprived of his eye by Odysseus—
that godlike Polyphemos, who is among all the Cyclopes

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greatest in power and strength. He was born to the nymph Thoösa, who is the daughter of Phorkys, a lord of the desolate sea-brine—deep in the hollow caverns, she mingled in love with Poseidon. Since that deed of Odysseus, although the earth-shaker Poseidon does not kill him, he leads him astray from the land of his fathers. But come now, let us all take thought and consider together how he may go back home; and Poseidon will have to renounce his wrath at the man: he cannot, against all of the other immortal gods who now are unwilling, alone go on with his wrangling.”

Speaking to him then answered the goddess bright-eyed Athena: “Father of all of us, scion of Kronos and sovereign ruler, if to the fortunate gods it indeed is agreeable now that various-minded Odysseus return back home to his palace, let us at once send Hermes the messenger, slayer of Argos, to the Ogygian isle, so that he may swiftly deliver this our certain decree to the nymph with the beautiful tresses: ‘Send home steadfast-hearted Odysseus, that he may return now.’ Meanwhile I will go down into Ithaka, so as to rouse his son about him much more and to put more strength in his spirit. When to assembly he summons the long-haired men, the Achaians, he will speak out the case against all of the suitors, who keep on killing his thick-thronged sheep and his swing-paced crooked-horned cattle. I will dispatch him to Sparta as well as to sandy-soiled Pylos asking about his father’s return, if he hear of it somewhere, so that a noble renown among men may hold him in honor.”

So she spoke; on her feet she fastened her beautiful sandals, golden, undying, divine, which carry her over the water, over the measureless surface of earth with the breath of the storm wind. Then she took up the powerful spear, well pointed with sharp bronze, heavy and huge and compact, that she uses to shatter the close-pressed ranks of the fighters who rouse her wrath whose Father is mighty. Speedily she came down from the summit of lofty Olympos; there in the Ithakan land, she stood at the doors of Odysseus, on the threshold of the court—in her hand still holding her bronze spear—making herself like a stranger, the chief of the Taphians, Mentes. There she discovered the suitors, presumptuous nobles, who then were playing at draughts to amuse their minds in front of the doorway, sitting on hides of the cattle that they themselves had slaughtered. They had heralds attending on them, and efficient retainers, some of them mixing the wine and the water together in wine bowls;
others were cleaning the tables with many-holed sponges, and then they
set them ready for dining and carved much meat for the suitors.

Godlike Télémachos now was the first by far to observe her;
for in the midst of the suitors he sat, much troubled in spirit,
seeing in mind his glorious father, if coming from somewhere
he might cause those suitors throughout his palace to scatter,
than have honor himself and be lord of his own possessions.
Thinking of this he sat with the suitors, but seeing Athena
went straight out to the porch; in his heart he was vexed that a stranger
stood so long a time there in the doorway; standing beside her
then, he gripped her right hand and received from the other the bronze spear;
raising his voice he spoke, and in these winged words he addressed her:
“Welcome, stranger—with us you will have kind greeting, and only
when you have eaten a meal shall you tell what you are in need of.”

So as he spoke he led her; with him went Pallas Athena.
When these two had arrived in the high-built hall of the palace,
first then, taking the spear, he stood it against a tall pillar,
inside the well-polished holder for spears, in which there were others,
many a spear left there by steadfast-hearted Odysseus.

He led her to a seat in an armchair, covered with linen,
beautiful, skillfully made; and beneath for her feet was a footstool.
Nearby, his own painted chair he set, well apart from the other
diners, the suitors, for fear that his guest, in disgust with the tumult,
have no taste for the meal, coming so among arrogant idlers—
also that he might ask him concerning his faraway father.
Hand-washing water a maid then carried to them in a lovely
gold-wrought pitcher, and over a basin of silver she poured it,
so they could wash; nearby, she set out a well-polished table.
Carrying food, the revered housekeeper approached them and set it
close to them, many a dish she gladly supplied from her storage.
Platters of meat an attendant lifted and set there beside them,
every sort, then close to their hands placed gold drinking goblets;
often the herald who poured out wine came round to the diners.

Into the house then came the presumptuous suitors, who straightway
took their seats in orderly rows on benches and armchairs.
Heralds at once poured over their hands clean water for washing;
bread they were served by the maids, who had heaped it high in the baskets;
young men filled to the brim great wine bowls, ready for drinking.
They put forth eager hands to partake of the food lying ready.

When they had quite satisfied their appetites, drinking and eating,
and tells her his sorrows and household troubles

into the minds of the suitors came other affairs to attend to,
singing and joining in dance, since these are adornments of dining.
Therefore a herald delivered a beautiful lyre to the hands of
Phemios, who by compulsion would sing his tales for the suitors.

155 Straightway he struck up a beautiful song by playing a prelude.
Meanwhile Telémachos spoke of his troubles to bright-eyed Athena,
keeping his head near hers, so as not to be heard by the others:
“ Stranger and friend, will you blame me for what I am going to tell you?
These men turn their attention to such things, harping and singing,
lightly, because they consume without payment the goods of another,
one whose glistening bones are now somewhere rained on and rotting,
lying upon the firm earth, or else rolled by the billowing sea-brine.
Should they ever behold him return to his Ithakan homeland,
all of them then would pray to be far more nimble in running,
160 rather than richer in gold or in clothing or other possessions.
But as it is, he has died by a terrible death, and there is no
comfort remaining for us, even if some earth-dwelling man should
say he will yet come back. Quite lost is his day of returning.
But come now, tell me this and recount it exactly and fully:

170 Who are you? Whence do you come? What city is yours, and what parents?
Then, upon what sort of ship did you come here? How did the sailors
bring you to Ithaka? What did they claim as their names and their nation?
For it was certainly not on foot, I suppose, that you came here.
Truthfully speak to me now about these things, so that I know well
whether indeed you arrive for the first time or are an old-time
friend of the family, since there were numerous men who would come here—
others, when he was among men too, still coming and going.”

Speaking to him made answer the goddess bright-eyed Athena:
“These things I will indeed now tell you exactly and fully.
180 It is my boast to be Mentes, sagacious Anchialos’ offspring;
I rule over the Taphian folk, those lovers of rowing.
Just now I have put in for a call with my ship and my comrades,
sailing the wine-dark sea toward peoples of alien language,
carrying lustrous iron to trade for Temesian copper.
185 Out by the fields my galley is anchored, away from the city,
inside the harbor of Rheithron, beneath dark-forested Neion.
We can indeed make claim to be family friends of each other
long since, if you would now go question the elderly hero
Lord Laërtes; no longer, they say, he comes to the city,
190 but far out in the fields he suffers affliction, with only
one old woman attendant, who places the drink and the victuals next to him when the exhaustion of labor has taken his limbs as he creeps over the ridge of his orchard planted with grapevines. I have come now, for they said he really was back in the country, your dear father; but always the gods block him from his pathway, since nowhere on the earth can the noble Odysseus have perished, but he is somewhere alive still and kept in the midst of the broad sea, off in a tide-washed isle, where cruel and harsh men hold him, savages, who somehow, though he is unwilling, have kept him.

But now I will deliver a prophecy, as the immortals send it into my mind, and I think this will be accomplished, though I am no soothsayer nor skilled at interpreting bird flights. No very long time now will he yet be away from his own dear fatherland, even if he should be bound in fetters of iron. He will contrive his return, since he is so full of devices. But come now, tell me this and recount it exactly and fully, whether, as big as you are, you can be the own child of Odysseus. Marvelously, in your head and your beautiful eyes, you resemble that man, since very often we visited each with the other; that was before he parted for Troy, when also the other Argive nobles and kings went away in their hollow galleys. Since then, neither have I had sight of Odysseus nor he me.”

Thoughtful Telémachos then spoke out to her, giving an answer: “These things, stranger and friend, I will tell you exactly and fully. Yes, my mother has told me that I am his son, but in fact I do not know; for a person can never be sure of his father. How I wish now that I were the fortunate son of a man whom old age came upon dwelling contented amidst his possessions! But as it is, he was born to be most unlucky of mortals. His they say I was born, since you are inquiring about it.” Speaking to him made answer the goddess bright-eyed Athena: “Yours is a race that the gods, for the men of the future, have not made nameless, seeing Penelope bore you to be of such mettle. But come now, tell me this and recount it exactly and fully: What is the feast, this throng, that you have here? Why do you need it? Wedding or festival? Since it is no shared communal dinner. Such unabashed arrogance I see! How rudely they strut it, feasting around this palace! A man would feel indignation seeing so much that is shameless, whoever discreet came among them!”

Thoughtful Telémachos then spoke out to her, giving an answer:
"Friend, as about these things you are asking and making inquiry, there was a time this house would have been both wealthy and faultless, during the years that man still dwelt in the land with his people. Now have the gods' wills changed, now they are devising us evil—
him they have made disappear without trace, in a way never any other man did—since, though he was dead, I would not so much mourn him if among comrades he was brought down in the land of the Trojans or in the arms of his friends after he had wound up the warfare. Then would a funeral mound have been heaped by all the Achaians;
so also for his son had he won great fame for the future.
But ingloriously he has been snatched up by the stormwinds, taken away, out of sight, out of mind, and he left to me only sorrows and wailing; nor yet are my mourning and lamentation only for him, for on me have the gods wrought other afflictions.
All of the highborn chieftains who lord it over the islands, over Doulíchion, Samè, and also wooded Zakynthos, those men too who in rock-strewn Ithaka govern the people, all these seek my mother in marriage and wear out the household. She will neither reject this odious marriage, nor can she make herself carry it through; meanwhile they eat and destroy this household of mine. And indeed they will soon put me to the slaughter."

Letting her wrath break out, thus Pallas Athena addressed him: "Oh, what a shame! How great is the need you have of Odysseus, now faraway, who could lay his hands on these insolent suitors!

If he could come this moment and take his stand in the outside doorway, bringing along two spears, with a shield and a helmet, such as he was at the time when first I made his acquaintance, when in my family's house he was drinking and taking his pleasure as he returned from Ephýrē, from Ilos, Mérmeros' scion—

for to that land in a swift-sailing galley Odysseus had traveled trying to get a man-killing elixir, that he might anoint his bronze-tipped arrows with it; but to him King Ilos would not give any of it, for he dreaded the wrath of the gods who live always; but my father did give it to him, so sorely he loved him—

would that Odysseus in such a condition could mix with the suitors!
Then they all would become quick-dying and bitterly married! Nevertheless, on the knees of the gods these matters are resting, whether he is or is not to return and exact a requital, here in his house. As for you, I urge you to ponder the problem how you will finally drive these suitors away from the palace.
Come now, listen to what I say, take heed of my counsel. 
Early tomorrow, convolve to assembly the hero-Achaians; 
say your word to them all, with the gods themselves to be witness; 
lay your command on the suitors to scatter and go to their places.

But for your mother, if now her heart should urge her to marry, 
let her return to the house of her wealthy and powerful father; 
they will make ready the marriage, arranging the gifts for her dowry, 
many and rich, as are fitting to go with a much loved daughter. 
You yourself I will offer some crafty advice, if you trust me:

fit out a galley, the one that is strongest, with twenty good oarsmen; 
set forth then to inquire of your father, who long has been absent, 
if someone among mortals can tell you or if you can hear some 
rumor from Zeus, which best bears fame and report among mankind. 
First then voyage to Pylos and question illustrious Nestor;

thence go onward to Sparta to see light-haired Menelâos— 
he was the last to return out of all of the bronze-clad Achaians. 
If you hear that your father, in fact, is alive and returning, 
though you are quite worn out, you should bear it yet one year longer; 
if however you hear he has died and no longer is living,

straightway, when you return to the much loved land of your fathers, 
heap a memorial mound and provide him funeral honors, 
many and rich, as is fitting, and get your mother a husband. 
Finally, when these things you have done to the end and accomplished, 
then indeed you should lay down schemes in your mind and your spirit,

by what means, right here in your house, you will slaughter the suitors— 
either by treacherous guile or by open attack. You should not be 
practicing childishness, since you are no longer of that age. 
Have you not heard what fame was acquired by noble Orestes 
throughout all of mankind when he slaughtered the father-destroyer 
subtle and scheming Aigísthos, who killed his glorious father? 
You too, friend—for I see you sufficiently handsome and grown-up— 
be bold now, so that those born later may speak of you fitly. 
As for myself now, I will return to my swift-sailing galley 
and to my comrades, who I suppose are impatiently waiting;

you take care for yourself and be mindful of what I have told you.”

Thoughtful Telémachos then spoke out to her, giving an answer: 
“Friend, it is plain you speak of these matters with kindly intention, 
as to a son his father, and I will never forget them. 
But come now, stay awhile, though eager to get on your journey,

so after taking a bath and allowing your spirit some pleasure,
you can return to your ship with a present, rejoicing in spirit, something of worth and great beauty—for you it will serve as a keepsake out of my hand, such a token as hosts give guests that they care for.”

Speaking to him then answered the goddess bright-eyed Athena:

315 “Now no longer detain me, as keen as I am for the journey. As for the gift your courteous heart might bid you to give me, when I return through here, then give me a present to take home, choosing a very fine one—it will bring an exchange to be valued.”

So having spoken departed the goddess bright-eyed Athena; she flew up and away like a bird, but she put in his spirit confident purpose and courage and made him think of his father more than before he had done. In his mind he noticed the changes, wondering deep in his heart, for a god it was, he suspected. Straightway then did the godlike man go back to the suitors.

325 There still singing to them was the far-famed singer; in silence they sat listening yet, as he sang the Achaians’ homecoming, wretched returning from Troy inflicted by Pallas Athena.

Noble Ikários’ daughter Penelope, thoughtful and prudent, up in her room was impressing the sacred song on her spirit.

330 After a time, she descended the long stairway of the palace, not by herself, for together with her came two of her handmaids. When she had come down there to the suitors, the splendor of women stood by the pillar supporting the roof beams, stoutly constructed, holding in front of her cheeks as a veil her shimmering head scarf; standing with her there, one at each side, were the virtuous handmaids. As the sad tears ran down, she spoke to the godlike singer:

335 “Phemios, since you know much else that to men is enchanting, deeds both of gods and of mortals, that bards make famous in story, sing them now one of those as you sit here, and they may in silence go on drinking the wine. But of this do not sing any longer. Hateful it is, and it always wears out the heart in my bosom, since unforgettable, ceaseless, the grief comes on as I listen, such is the glorious person I long for, remembering always one whose fame through Hellas has spread, and the middle of Argos.”

340 Thoughtful Telémachos then spoke out to her, giving an answer: “Mother of mine, why do you object when the trustworthy singer pleases, however his mind may prompt him? For never should singers bear any blame, but the blame somehow is on Zeus, who apportions what he wishes to give each man among grain-eating mortals.

345 Do not accuse him for singing the Dánaëns’ evil misfortunes;
for it is true that the song most honored and praised among men is that which is newest in coming around to the people who hear it. So within you let the head and the heart be chastened to listen, since not only Odysseus was robbed of his day of returning; others at Troy there were, great numbers, who came to destruction. But go back to your room and devote more care to your own work, weaving and spinning, the loom and the distaff, bidding your handmaids busy themselves with their labor. The men will attend to the talking, all of them, I above all, since mine is the rule of the household.”

Struck with astonishment then, she went back up to her chamber, for to her heart she had taken the thoughtful remarks of her offspring. Going upstairs to her chamber along with her women attendants, there she lamented Odysseus, the husband she loved, till a pleasant slumber was cast down over her lids by bright-eyed Athena.

There in the shadowy hall were the suitors arousing an uproar—they all loudly were praying to lie in the bedding beside her. Speaking among them, thoughtful Telémachos started the discourse:

“Suitors who court my mother, of such overbearing presumption, let us attempt to enjoy this dinner of ours now and leave off shouting, for it is an excellent thing to give ear to a singer, noble as this one is, most like to the gods in his singing. Going tomorrow at dawn, let us take our seats in the council, all of us, where unsparingly I may speak out my wishes, tell you to leave these halls, go away and provide other banquets, eat up your own possessions, proceed in turn through your houses. If this seems to you better and more to your own selfish profit, one man’s living to ruin, with never a thought about payment, lay mine waste: but then I will cry out to the gods who live always, hoping that somehow Zeus might grant to us deeds of requital; then you too would be ruined, destroyed in this house without payment.”

So he spoke; and they all kept biting their lips with their teeth in wonder at hearing Telémachos now, he was talking so boldly. Then in reply to him spoke Antínoös, son of Eupeithes:

“Surely, Telémachos, you have the gods themselves as your teachers, making you proud in speech, instructing you how to talk boldly. Never may Zeus son of Kronos in sea-washed Ithaka make you king over us, though you have inherited it from your fathers.”

Thoughtful Telémachos then spoke out to him, giving an answer: “Even if what I say, Antínoös, rouses resentment, I would indeed be willing to take it from Zeus, should he give it.
Or are you thinking that this among men is the greatest of evils?
Ruling as king is surely no evil, for quickly the riches
pile up high in the house, and the king himself is most honored.
But in truth there are yet other princes among the Achaeans,
many of them in sea-washed Ithaka, younger and older;
one of them might have this, since noble Odysseus has perished.
Nevertheless I will be the lord over our own household
and of the slaves, who were captured for me by noble Odysseus."

Speaking to him made answer Eurýmachos, Pólybos' scion:

"Surely, Telémachos, these things rest on the knees of the gods now,
who will as king in sea-washed Ithaka rule the Achaeans.
May you keep your possessions and govern in your own household.
Never may any man come who against your will and by force would
take your possessions from you, while Ithaka still contains people.

But I would like, noble sir, to inquire concerning the stranger,
whence that man has arrived. What land does he claim to have come from?
Where does his family live now, and where are the fields of his fathers?
Has he brought you a message about your father's returning?
Or has he come thus hoping to meet some need of his own here?

He was so hasty to get on his way, he did not even linger
so we could meet him, and yet he does not seem base in appearance."

Thoughtful Telémachos then spoke out to him, giving an answer:

"Surely, Eurýmachos, any return of my father is lost now;
I will no longer believe any message, wherever it comes from,

gets when she calls some soothsayer into the palace to question.
This was a stranger, a guest and a friend of my father, from Taphos;
it is his boast to be Mentes, sagacious Anchialos' offspring;
he rules over the Taphian folk, those lovers of rowing."

So did Telémachos speak, but he knew her divine and immortal.
They then turned their minds to the dance and delectable singing,
playing to please themselves, and awaited the evening's onset.
While they were taking their pleasure, the evening gloom came upon them;
then they departed to rest for the night, each one to his own house.

Meanwhile Telémachos went to the part of the beautiful courtyard
where, in a place well-guarded, was built his lofty apartment;
there he went to his bed; in his mind many worries kept working.
Carrying fiery torches for him went astute and devoted
old Eurycleia, the daughter of Ops, offspring of Peisénor—

once long ago Laërtes had used his resources to buy her
when she was still quite young; twenty oxen he gave to acquire her, honored her then in his palace as much as his virtuous bedmate; never he took her to bed, but he shunned his wife’s jealous anger—she now carried the fiery torches, for she, of the housemaids, always loved him the most; she had nurtured him when he was little. He now opened the doors of his bedroom, strongly constructed, sat down within on the bed, then took off his soft woolen tunic, putting it into the hands of the old wise-counseling woman. Then, when she had received and had carefully folded the tunic, she hung it on a hook by the bedstead corded for bedding, then went out of the chamber; and closing the door by the silver handle, she fastened the bolt by pulling a strap made of oxhide. There he rested the whole night long, wrapped up in a sheepskin, pondering plans in his mind for the journey Athena had counseled.