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BOOK



DEATH IN THE GREAT HALL

TWENTY-TWO



Now shrugging off his rags the wiliest fighter of the islands leapt and stood on the broad door sill, his own bow in his hand.

235 He poured out at his feet a rain of arrows from the quiver and spoke to the crowd:

“So much for that. Your clean-cut game is over. Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before, if I can make this shot. Help me, Apollo.”

240 He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for Antinous just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful drinking cup,

embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his fingers: the wine was even at his lips: and did he dream of death? How could he? In that revelry amid his throng of friends who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe indeed—

245 could dare to bring death's pain on him and darkness on his eyes?

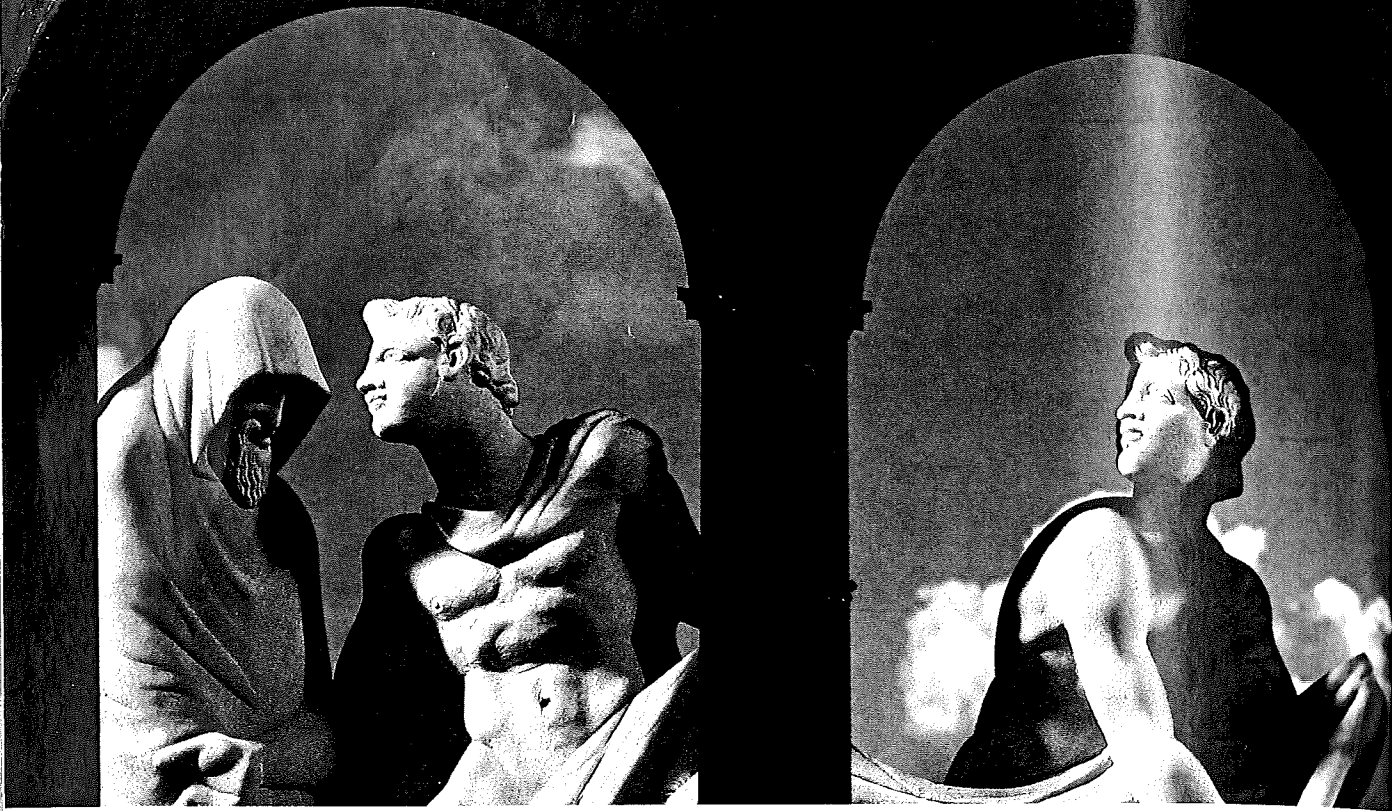
Odysseus' arrow hit him under the chin and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

233 The epithet “wiliest fighter of the islands” emphasizes Odysseus' cleverness and skill at this important point in the story.

238 The god Apollo was, among other things, the supporter and protector of archers. The bow was his sacred weapon.

239–252 Why does Odysseus kill Antinous first? Why does he do it in such a sudden, terrible way?

WORDS **wiliest** (wī'lē-ĭst) *adj.* most crafty or sly; trickiest  
TO **revelry** (rēv'al-rē) *n.* noisy merrymaking; festivity  
KNOW **throng** (thrông) *n.* a large gathering; crowd



250 Backward and down he went, letting the winecup fall  
from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted  
crimson runnels, a river of mortal red,  
and one last kick upset his table  
knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.

250 runnels: streams.

255 Now as they craned to see their champion where he lay  
the suitors jostled in uproar down the hall,  
everyone on his feet. Wildly they turned and scanned  
the walls in the long room for arms; but not a shield,  
not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take and  
throw.  
All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:

255–257 Earlier, in preparation for this confrontation, Odysseus and Telemachus removed all the weapons and shields that were hanging on the walls.

“Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!”

260 “Your own throat will be slit for this!”

“Our finest lad is down!

You killed the best on Ithaca.”



“Buzzards will tear your eyes out!”

For they imagined as they wished—that it was a wild  
shot,  
an unintended killing—fools, not to comprehend  
they were already in the grip of death.

265 But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:

“You yellow dogs, you thought I’d never make it  
home from the land of Troy. You took my house to plunder,  
twisted my maids to serve your beds. You dared  
bid for my wife while I was still alive.

270 Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule wide  
heaven,  
contempt for what men say of you hereafter.  
Your last hour has come. You die in blood.”

As they all took this in, sickly green fear  
pulled at their entrails, and their eyes flickered  
275 looking for some hatch or hideaway from death.

266–272 At last Odysseus reveals his true identity and announces that he plans to kill all the suitors. What reasons does he give for killing them?

274 entrails: internal organs.

Eurymachus alone could speak. He said:

“If you are Odysseus of Ithaca come back,  
all that you say these men have done is true.  
Rash actions, many here, more in the countryside.  
280 But here he lies, the man who caused them all.  
Antinous was the ringleader; he whipped us on  
to do these things. He cared less for a marriage  
than for the power Cronion has denied him  
as king of Ithaca. For that  
285 he tried to trap your son and would have killed him.  
He is dead now and has his portion. Spare  
your own people. As for ourselves, we’ll make  
restitution of wine and meat consumed,  
and add, each one, a tithe of twenty oxen  
290 with gifts of bronze and gold to warm your heart.  
Meanwhile we cannot blame you for your anger.”—

Odysseus glowered under his black brows  
and said:

“Not for the whole treasure of your fathers,  
all you enjoy, lands, flocks, or any gold  
295 put up by others, would I hold my hand.  
There will be killing till the score is paid.  
You forced yourselves upon this house. Fight your way  
out,  
or run for it, if you think you’ll escape death.  
I doubt one man of you skins by.”

300 They felt their knees fail, and their hearts—but heard  
Eurymachus for the last time rallying them.

“Friends,” he said, “the man is implacable.  
Now that he’s got his hands on bow and quiver  
he’ll shoot from the big door stone there  
305 until he kills us to the last man.

Fight, I say,

let’s remember the joy of it. Swords out!  
Hold up your tables to deflect his arrows.  
After me, everyone: rush him where he stands.  
If we can budge him from the door, if we can pass

**276–291** What is Eurymachus’ strategy here? How does he hope to save himself and the remaining suitors?

**279** *rash*: foolish; thoughtless.

**283** *Cronion* (krō’nē-ōn’): Zeus, the son of Cronus.

**289** *tithe*: payment.

**293–299** Why do you think Odysseus rejects Eurymachus’ explanation and offer of restitution?

**299** *skins by*: sneaks away.

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**restitution** (rēs’tī-tōō’shen) *n.* a making good for loss or damage; repayment  
**implacable** (īm-plāk’ə-bəl) *adj.* impossible to soothe; unforgiving

310 into the town, we'll call out men to chase him.  
This fellow with his bow will shoot no more."

He drew his own sword as he spoke, a broadsword of fine  
bronze,  
honed like a razor on either edge. Then crying hoarse and  
loud

315 he hurled himself at Odysseus. But the kingly man let fly  
an arrow at that instant, and the quivering feathered butt  
sprang to the nipple of his breast as the barb stuck in his  
liver.

The bright broadsword clanged down. He lurched and fell  
aside,

pitching across his table. His cup, his bread and meat,  
were spilt and scattered far and wide, and his head  
slammed on the ground.

320 Revulsion, anguish in his heart, with both feet kicking out,  
he downed his chair, while the shrouding wave of mist  
closed on his eyes.

Amphinomus now came running at Odysseus,  
broadsword naked in his hand. He thought to make  
the great soldier give way at the door.

325 But with a spear throw from behind Telemachus hit him  
between the shoulders, and the lancehead drove  
clear through his chest. He left his feet and fell  
forward, thudding, forehead against the ground.

Telemachus swerved around him, leaving the long dark spear  
330 planted in Amphinomus. If he paused to yank it out  
someone might jump him from behind or cut him down  
with a sword

at the moment he bent over. So he ran—ran from the tables  
to his father's side and halted, panting, saying:

335 "Father let me bring you a shield and spear,  
a pair of spears, a helmet.

I can arm on the run myself; I'll give  
outfits to Eumaeus and this cowherd.  
Better to have equipment."

Said Odysseus:

"Run then, while I hold them off with arrows



**320 revulsion** (rĭ-vŭl'shen): a sudden feeling of disgust.

**320–321** Eurymachus' death is physically painful, but he also has "revulsion, anguish in his heart." What do you think causes this emotional pain?

**322 Amphinomus** (äm-fĭn'ə-məs): one of the suitors.

**325–332** Telemachus proves to be a valuable help to his father.

340 as long as the arrows last. When all are gone  
if I'm alone they can dislodge me.”

Quick

upon his father's word Telemachus  
ran to the room where spears and armor lay.  
He caught up four light shields, four pairs of spears,  
345 four helms of war high-plumed with flowing manes,  
and ran back, loaded down, to his father's side.  
He was the first to pull a helmet on  
and slide his bare arm in a buckler strap.  
The servants armed themselves, and all three took their  
stand  
350 beside the master of battle.

345 helms: helmets.

While he had arrows  
he aimed and shot, and every shot brought down  
one of his huddling enemies.  
But when all barbs had flown from the bowman's fist,  
he leaned his bow in the bright entry way  
355 beside the door, and armed: a four-ply shield  
hard on his shoulder, and a crested helm,  
horsetailed, nodding stormy upon his head,  
then took his tough and bronze-shod spears.

353-358 Notice this depiction of Odysseus as a warrior. Try drawing a sketch of him armed for battle to get the full impact.

**T**HE SUITORS MAKE VARIOUS unsuccessful attempts to expel Odysseus from his post at the door. Athena urges Odysseus on to battle, yet holds back her fullest aid, waiting for Odysseus and Telemachus to prove themselves. Six of the suitors attempt an attack on Odysseus, but Athena deflects their arrows. Odysseus and his men seize this opportunity to launch their own attack, and the suitors begin to fall. At last Athena's presence becomes known to all, as the shape of her shield becomes visible above the hall. The suitors, recognizing the intervention of the gods on Odysseus' behalf, are frantic to escape but to no avail. Odysseus and his men are compared to falcons who show no mercy to the flocks of birds they pursue and capture. Soon the room is reeking with blood. Thus the battle with the suitors comes to an end, and Odysseus prepares himself to meet Penelope.