

Telemakhos
Naked Prey 15
by George Gauthier

Author's Note: This tale is a pastiche of Homer's Odyssey set in the Aegean World during the Bronze Age, the early XIIIth century BC. It is entirely fictional, with no resemblance intended to any person living or dead, other than to the characters in the Homer's Odyssey. As the Prologue notes, my story differs from that in the epic poem. Readers with a classical education should understand that departures from the original are deliberate plot developments rather than mistakes on my part. May the shade of Homer not haunt me for my effrontery.

This story contains graphic descriptions of the male human body, of consensual and non-consensual sexual activity between adult males. If any of this would offend a reader, read no further. This is not intended for persons younger than an age where they may freely and legally select their reading matter in whatever jurisdiction applies.

This is the fifteenth story in my 'Naked Prey' series for the Historical section of the Nifty Archive, each with different characters. The Naked Prey Series was inspired by the old movie "Naked Prey" (1966) set in Africa starring Cornel Wilde and the movie "Run of the Arrow" set among the Indians of North America. Both movies were inspired by the real life exploit of the mountain man John Colter.

The other stories in the series so far are: 'Naked Prey' set in 19th century Africa, 'The Shawnee', set in colonial America, 'Terra Australis', set during the great age of exploration in the South Seas, 'Dangerous Game' set largely in the Caribbean in the mid-seventeenth century, 'White Comanche' set in the American Southwest in the 1830s, 'Fearful Symmetry' about two castaways on the island of Sumatra in the early 18th century, 'Periplus' a tale of a voyage around the Indian Ocean in the late eighteenth century, 'Source of the Nile' set in Roman Egypt and Africa, 'Treasure of Carthage' set in the Mediterranean during the mid 12th century, 'Monster' set in the Pacific Ocean in the early XIXth century, 'Hispania' set during the fall of Visigothic Spain to the Moors in the early VIIIth century, 'Cast Away' set in the Pacific Ocean during the early XIXth century, 'Lost Boy' set in the American Southwest in the late XIXth century, and 'Christmas Island' set in the Indian Ocean in the early XIXth century.

Readers who like this story and others in the 'Naked Prey' series should try my other series of historical novelettes, the 'Daphne Boy' tales. They depict an eternally youthful protagonist and his adventures in exotic climes and times. My other series are the 'Jungle Boy' stories about young actors in Hollywood in the Gay/Authoritarian section, the 'Track and Field' stories in Gay/College and my 'Mer-Boy' stories in Gay/Beginnings. For links to all my stories, look on the list of Prolific Authors on the Archive for George Gauthier.

Comments and feedback welcome.

Prologue

Recent archaeological finds in the deserts of Egypt have unearthed portions of the lost library of Alexandria, deliberately buried by its custodians to protect the texts from destruction during the Muslim conquest of Egypt in the seventh century AD. The rationale the Arab commander gave for burning all the books in the Great Library became infamous. "They will either contradict the Koran, in which case they are heresy, or they will agree with it, in which case they are superfluous."

From the desert sands archaeologists rescued portions of several versions of Homer's Odyssey along with fragments of other works relating the adventures of his son, Telemakhos. Some fragments were clearly from parodies written for comic effect or from ancient erotica written to arouse prurient interest. These must be of late date, possibly written during the Ptolemaic or even Roman periods since the texts dispense with the machinations of the Hellenic gods and tell their story as a human narrative, a tale of courage and adventure. This style presumably reflects the influence of the popular genre of Greek novels like 'Daphnis and Chloe' by the romancer Longus and his ilk.

From these disparate and initially unpromising materials, your author has managed to construct a connected narrative, weaving the various fragments together into a whole. With texts in different

genres, some in verse, some in prose, written in a combination of Attic Greek and the Koine (also called New Testament Greek), the translation was challenging enough as it was to render in simple English prose. Perhaps some other hand, more skilled at prosody, will someday care to render the story into English verse.

This version of the tale departs in many ways from the canonical text of the *Odyssey*. That should be seen as a virtue rather than a defect, giving us another account of the fascinating characters Homer originally gave to the world. Here then is a new version of the tale of Telemakhos, son of Odysseus.

Chapter 1. Ithaka

"There he goes, Euryades, through that grove of cypress trees. I saw a flash of yellow just before he vanished into the woods and caught a glimpse of that fine rump of his. Peisandros, you and Elatus, and Agelaus circle right, we'll go left and trap him in between."

For the first time in his life prince Telemakhos regretted the shoulder length blond locks that were part of his Dorian heritage. Nothing stands out against green vegetation like something yellow. Otherwise, he might have gotten away with his natural camouflage. His nude body was deeply tanned from much exposure to the Mediterranean sun. This was a lad who spent much time outdoors in the nude, training on the exercise grounds outside the town walls, running long distance along the island pathways, swimming at the beach, working in the fields and the vineyards. So his tawny hide would blend in with the landscape much like the coloration of the fawn the boy so much resembled with his slight build, slender limbs, his quick and nervous movements, and his innocent face set with a pair of large green eyes.

Too bad this was a hunt and not a race. The young prince was much more fleet of foot than anyone else on the island. In a straight race, he would leave the others behind. A slender lad of seventeen unencumbered by clothing and equipment does have the advantages of speed and stamina over a pack of grown men, all muscular warriors burdened with bows, quivers, and swords. But this was not a race but a mock hunt. Trackers could follow his spoor ever after they lost sight of him. True, he sometimes could shake them off his trail, keeping to rocky areas or taking to the trees to break any trail he might have left. He was lightweight enough to be able to cross from one tree to another using interlocking branches though occasionally he had to jump a gap, grabbing a branch or landing with his feet on a stout limb. There were no vines in this forest to allow him to swing from tree to tree. Still the hunters usually picked up his trail later.

The truth is, that even with a head start of quarter hour, they usually caught him thanks to military style tactics, sending out flankers and scouts to cut him off or to drive him towards the rest of the hunting party. Often the pursuit hemmed him against cliffs or the seashore, leaving him nowhere to run. Once in a while he managed to get away by swimming around a headland faster than the men could climb it. Still, alone, outnumbered, hemmed in, unarmed, and naked, beset on all sides, the boy had maybe one chance in four to win, despite his determination and pluck, and then only because the hunters did not use dogs to track him by scent.

The hunt lasted from noon till sundown. If he could stay free till then, he won. Usually though, they cornered him among the rocks like a stag or trapped him up a tree like a bear or wild cat. He had no choice but to come down and surrender. The hunters could and would take up stones to throw at him, forcing him to the ground. On occasions when he had been stubborn, they had shot the blunted arrows they used for the hunt into his chest or back or belly. Blunted or not, they hurt a lot and left nasty bruises. Of course such stubbornness just got him punished with a beating that left his butt cheeks flaming.

Now once again the hunters were closing in on his track. His breathing was ragged from running all afternoon. Sweat poured down his flanks; his lower legs were smeared with the dust he had kicked up. He was thirsty and dehydrated, that last drink at a stream was two hours ago. His tawny hide bore minor scratches from pushing through brush and scrapes from sliding down slopes or slipping between boulders. He did not doubt that in minutes the hunters would run down their naked prey. That was what he was to them, a prey item, as naked as any wild animal they might hunt in the hills of the island where his mother Penelope was queen and his long absent father Odysseus was king.

The hunters were Penelope's uninvited guests and she the unwilling hostess of a hundred suitors for her hand. All assumed that her long missing husband was dead, still not returned after the Trojan War ended almost eight years earlier. The suitors were mostly younger sons of kings and nobles from other kingdoms with no prospect of inheriting lands of their own. Instead they had arrived on Ithaka and stayed, lingering for years, living off the fat of the land, feasting in the palace of the king, in violation of all laws of hospitality, under the pretext of courting Penelope. With the king away with his soldiers, there was nothing the queen could do but stall them, hoping her husband was still alive and would return after so many years.

The suitors had taken over most of the palace and spent evenings drinking wine and feasting on finer cuts of meat from Odysseus's herds and flocks of cattle and sheep and goats. Theirs was a life of leisure broken only by weapons training, drinking bouts, gambling, story-telling, and hunting. The problem with the hunt was that an island the size of Ithaka held only so many game animals, so many boars or deer. The stray lion or two from the mainland had long since killed. With the countryside stripped bare of big game the suitors hit on the idea of hunting fleet-footed Telemakhos, champion runner of the island. That would add interest and difficulty to the hunt, going after a prey endowed with human intelligence.

At first the then nearly sixteen year old Telemakhos liked the idea of being the quarry of the hunt with blunted weapons. In those early days, the suitors were still on their best behavior towards him, taking him under their wing, trying to charm him into persuading his mother that she should take a second husband, for the good of the kingdom. Besides the hunt sounded exciting to a teenager. It was an adult version of hide and seek where the youth would get to show off his speed, his agility, his cleverness, and the trim lithe body he had so recently grown into and was so proud of.

Telemakhos welcomed chances to show off his lissom physique. He habitually exercised in the nude with the other ephebes on the open ground outside the town, wrestling, jumping, training with javelin and sword. He also kept up his stamina running the paths that linked the villages of the island with one another. His nude physique was a familiar and pleasing sight to all of the islanders. He would wave as he passed and they waved back at him.

Indeed Telemakhos was a comely lad, small for his age and slender. Standing not quite four inches over five feet (162 cm) and weighing only 110 pounds (50 kg) he had a fawn-like physique but with a wiry musculature, toned and taut, as befits a trained athlete. Though seventeen, he still had the smooth hairless skin of a prepubescent lad. He was natural hairless, a condition was related to his failure to reach full height. He had never developed more than sparse downy wisps in his armpits or at the fork of his legs while his ballsac was smooth and bare. Anyway, the suitors kept even those sparse tufts clipped so close as to be invisible. They preferred the lad boyish and smooth, deliberately denying him those tokens of incipient manhood.

From his tiny red nipples to a deeply indented navel, to narrow hips framing a surprisingly generous manhood for one so slight of build, Telemakhos was real beauty. Cock and balls were reasonably sized but he wouldn't be scaring the horses. It took both his small hands to cover his erection, but only one when he was soft. That was just fine when you were running cross country naked with your dangly bits bouncing about. His foreskin outlined the glans nearly covering the head with only the piss slit visible at the tip.

He carried so little body fat that his flat belly showed a tracery of downward pointing veins just under the skin. The beat of his heart was visible on the left side of his smooth chest. He was sleek and smooth, deeply and evenly tanned all over, the sheen of sweat from his exertions making his skin shine in the bright sunlight. The sweat on his brow dripped off the end of his straight nose or followed the twin arcs of his eyebrows to his temples. Stray wisps of hair were plastered against his temples and forehead, darkened by perspiration as were the tapering sideburns by his ears. It was obviously no blade had ever scraped his cheeks or had needed to. He was naturally beardless, without even a hint of peach fuzz.

He was as beautiful of face as of form. Telemakhos was prettier than any boy rightly ought to be with fine-boned delicate features: a straight nose and high cheekbones over a chiseled jaw line, plus large green eyes, with eyelashes so long they could never have been meant for a boy, all topped by a tousled blond thatch. He had a keen mind to go with that pretty face too.

One thing you can give Greek culture credit for is a deep and sincere appreciation of the male physique. The Greeks considered adolescence as the time in the life of a boy when he was "in season" or "in bloom", say fifteen to nineteen. A boy who loved men and enjoyed lying with men and being embraced by them was considered the most manly. Boys were valued not only for their beauty but for their modesty, diligence, and courage. As was customary, the erastai also provided intimate companionship and sexual relief for boys whose juices were flowing.

The Greek love of boys was a key part of their social system, closely and synergistically linked with the practice of athletics, the gymnasium (from the Greek 'gumnazein' meaning 'naked exercise'), delayed marriage for upper-class males, symposia (drinking parties), the celebration of nude males in sculpture and painting, and the social seclusion of women. It was also integral to Greek military training, mostly clearly with the Spartans and the later Sacred Band of Thebes. One of the principal functions of pederastic relationships was the cultivation of courage and fighting skills.

Under the tutelage of the suitors, the prince practiced swordplay and archery. They taught him archery and swordsmanship the way his absent father would have done. The suitors were all muscular men, accomplished with weapons, the kind of males a young prince would look up to, even if he were not also attracted to their hard bodies. He loved it when a one of them helped him with the archery, stepping right up behind him, enveloping his much smaller body, reaching around with his arms to guide the boy's stance and pull of the bow, their nude bodies pressed together. The boy grew heady on the masculine aromas exuded by the older males, a combination of sweat, olive oil, and pheromones. He liked having the men touch him, holding him. In time two of them took him as their eromenos, young male lover.

So with their relationship with the young prince, the suitors acted, at least initially, like normal male role models in that society. The leaders of the suitors, Antinous, son of Eupheides, and Eurymachus, son of Polybus had been the first to take their pleasure of him, seducing the boy with pretty words and gifts when he was fifteen. At first they had been gentle and attentive, listening to the boy express his hopes and dreams while encouraging him in his athleticism. The two older men spoke of their travels and places they had heard about, filling the boy's head with romantic notions of the wider world.

The prince's exquisite looks made the suitors especially enthusiastic about taking him to their couches. Originally rivals for the boy's affections, the leaders had formed a partnership, sharing the prince between the two of them but not at first with the others. For his part, the randy teenager had appreciated the attentions of two such handsome and virile men. He liked being the center of their attention and their vigorous sex was wonderful.

"You and Eurymachus have been so good to me," the naive prince enthused to his companions on the training fields. "I love being out here in the fresh air, the sun kissing my back and ass, the wind blowing my hair, the other boys looking on jealous of me for being your eromenos. I know I am still a boy, but I feel I will develop into the right sort of man with both of you as my erastai, guiding me, training me, not least in the arts of love. To think, I was a virgin when we met. Now I know what it is to make love with another male. Oh women have their uses. Someday I will have to marry and have sons to continue the royal line, but that is from duty. It is men and boys that I like."

"Good thinking, Telemakhos. Now let me show you how to improve your stance with the sword. Here let me step up behind you and grasp your limbs and talk you through it. That's it press your back against me."

The boy wriggled his hips then turned his head and laid a mischievous kiss on his lover's lips. He loved the bodily contact with these virile males, so much larger and stronger than himself. Prince or not, he was sure the men liked him for his slight boyish build, long blond hair, and his delicate nearly elfin features. True his was one of those faces far too pretty to belong to a boy, but he liked his fine boned features, and he was glad the men liked them too.

And Telemakhos was vain enough to want to be seen by the other boys in the arms of his erastoi as they trained him in the military arts, their nude bodies pressed together, his butt pressed to their laps, so much like when they made love. Indeed sometimes they left off practice with the bow and made love right there on the exercise field. As the boy stood with his body pressed back to his suitor, the man would run his hands over the boy's delectable body, fingering and tweaking his

nipples, poking a thumb into his navel, gripping his hipbones and pulling the boy's back and backside into his front. The boy would spread his legs and the man bend his knees thrusting forward and upward, impaling the young prince's ass on his cock. Sometimes the man would lift the boy up bodily by his hips and settled the lad onto his virile member.

Impaled, aroused, the boy would be on display in front of everyone, while the man fondled and manipulated the youth's genitals, stimulating him to orgasm. Right there on the exercise field, with all the other boys watching his lovers would milk his cock till he ejaculated. It felt good to cum like that for Telemakhos was a cock proud boy, glad to let the other boys witness his sexual prowess. Let them match how far he could shoot his gism. As he came, he let out a series of inarticulate cries as a wave of pleasure washed over him. Afterwards he sagged back into the strong arms of his erastos.

So things went for the first year and a half, the leaders of the suitors making nice. Indeed it was easy being pleasant and kindly with this highly-sexed young prince with the outgoing personality. He really was a fine lad, small in stature yes, but all the more boyish for it and very fast and agile, quite the athlete really. His hard adolescent body was a treasure, which he was glad to share, and his unusual features and coloring were an added attraction.

If not for their ambitions, the men might have become real friends with the lad. But over time they grew impatient for one of them to be chosen as the new king. That man would then appoint his closest allies to the high offices of the land in the military, the government, and among land holders. The small army and navy had never returned from the war yet the kingdom needed protection from pirates and raiders. The farmlands of widows and abandoned wives could be awarded to the winning suitor's friends, thus providing the new king a power base of his own.

Over time then the hunt changed from a game to a way of putting pressure on Penelope to finally choose one of them as her husband. Once a week, they took the boy out to some other part of the island and gave him his head start, marking the start of the race with a hard slap to his rump. Then he took off. The only way he could win was to keep ahead of pursuit till sundown. As the hunters grew familiar with the island, that happened less and less often. Instead of a perfunctory and good natured spanking for getting caught, the boy now had to endure a hard switching that left red weals on his bronzed skin. That was just preliminary to a lusty gang bang from the dozen or so suitors who had taken part in that particular hunt. So it had gone with the latest hunt, the panting boy trapped at the end a small forested peninsula.

"Well, well, well, so this is our catch of the day. Pretty little thing, isn't he, Euryalas? He looks so much like a captive fawn with his large innocent eyes, slender but muscular limbs and their delicate tracery of veins, plus that light brown hide of his. They say he might not be Odysseus's son at all but Apollo's. With that golden hair and his preternaturally good looks, I could believe it of our little Golden Boy. My, isn't he cute when he is afraid? No need to tremble, little one, though it makes you look very fetching indeed. We would never inflict permanent harm on the loveliest boy any of us has ever laid eyes on. It is your physical beauty that attracts us after all."

Antinous laid his hand on the trembling boy's shoulder as if to reassure him. Then that hand wandered down the boy's chest to take hold of the boy's genitals proprietarily. The boy had to stand there as the man manipulated him, treating his manhood as a plaything, a toy. Actually they did that with his entire body now. Prince or not, he was theirs, a captive boy with no more say over what would be done with his young body than a slave in a boy brothel.

Now that the hunters had caught him once again, the first order of business was to string him up. Telemakhos struggled but to no avail as they bound his wrists then tied them to a branch overhead. His weight was mostly on his arms and shoulders as his toes could barely reach the ground. The hunters crowded around the boy, touching him intimately, sliding the blades of their hands in his cleavage, tweaking his nipples, weighing his genitals. Then it was time for his switching. Euryalas cut a birch switch and applied it to the boy's rump and the back of his thighs. Peisandros and Agelaus whipped his back and his chest, respectively, while Antinous punished the front of his thighs, sometimes cutting at the boy's vulnerable genitals. Soon Telemakhos was sobbing both from the pain and from the frustration and humiliation of what kept happening to him. He didn't deserve this.

Even before they cut him down, the men raped the beaten youth. Eurymachus stepped up behind him and thrust his rigid cock into the boy's hole. The youth found himself impaled, lifted bodily off the ground on the man's cock, his legs kicking ineffectually in the air as the man thrust into him, turning to let everyone get a good look at the impaled boy. In his passion, the man left the imprint of a love bite on the boy's shoulder. Later, after Telemakhos was let down from the branch, both his orifices were put to use by the lusty hunters whose blood was up from the long pursuit. The men loved to grapple the youth's trim and taut body, small as it was, but firm and hard and muscular too. How wonderful it felt to envelop it in their arms, to feel the lad struggle, his nude body all slick with sweat, tugging, pulling, and squirming, twisting and straining that tight little body of his.

A muscular pursuer would mount the lad, covering him like a stallion does a filly, practically engulfing the much smaller male before thrusting into him in a sudden full penetration, bringing a strangled "aaagh" from the boy's throat. The boy took in deep breaths, trying to accept the intrusion despite the pain, his torso flexing sexily as his rib cage expanded and contracted. To the hunters, such labored breathing, the twisting and turning, and moans and groans were signs of the irrepressible vitality of this impossibly sexy youngster, the best they had ever frolicked with, slave boy or free.

This was not delicate intercrural intercourse either, i.e. the cock thrusting between a boy's thighs. These lusty men took him in the ass and they weren't particularly gentle about it. The poor lad was beside himself at the pain and humiliation of it. Even when they finished with him, his humiliations continued. They slung him from a pole by his wrists and ankles, carrying him like prey they had taken such as a deer or bear. His long blond tresses hung nearly to the ground. They paraded their naked prey in triumph to the palace. His slight weight no real burden for the muscular brutes.

The islanders shook their heads in sympathy with their battered prince. How could these hunters disgrace young Telemakhos, the boy they had long since taken to their hearts. Odysseus' subjects had come to like and respect the lad as they watched him grow into a fine boy and athlete. It hurt them to see his bruises particularly the finger marks on his ass that told of rape, and the cuts and weals from his switchings, not to mention the cum that leaked from his nether hole, sometimes mixed with what the hunters laughingly called his virgin's blood.

This was not the Hellenic ideal of an older lover as a mentor but the boy's reduction to the status of sex toy for these two and for nearly a hundred men more besides. From crown prince to boy slut, his fall had been precipitous. Even in his father's own palace, the prince was little different in status from any servant girl whom the suitors might force to their beds. Indeed at this point, the boy was a virtual sex slave, his past two years an irreversible descent into sexual thralldom.

Chapter 2. Hope

The small Greek kingdoms had no use for idle royalty. The spring and summer days found the young prince working the land. The prince labored in the field and orchards and vineyards much like anyone else: planting, weeding, tending, gathering. At the harvest of tree crops, he could be seen with the other lads climbing naked into the upper branches of the trees to knock olives or nuts off with a cane or stick. Without clothing, no one had to worry about snagging their garments or getting hung up though they might tangle the long locks they cultivated as youths. (Telemakhos' lush blond tresses, symbolic of his youth, hung down to his shoulder blades.)

Besides this was a traditional way for the local girls to get a look at the unattached lads without causing scandal. (They were not allowed near the training field or into the gymnasium). The girls bustled about on the ground, helping to police up the harvest into baskets and not so incidentally checking out a likely boy perched on a branch. In that way, the harvest doubled as the opening for courtship.

It was hot work, and scrambling among the branches did leave scratches, but it was a lot of fun too, both a challenge and a chance to show off. What boy does not love to climb trees? As they reached the topmost branches the boys would yell out in sheer youthful exuberance. And if he also got a socially acceptable chance to posture and display himself for a potential mate, so much the better.

Row crops and gardens had their own satisfactions for this young man who was as much farmer as prince. Nude, bent over the planted rows, tending to the crops, you could hardly tell prince from farm hand. All the young lads worked nude under the hot sun. You could find Telemakhos any day in the growing season, kneeling on the ground, brown cheeks resting on bare feet, his lithe torso bent over, ribs and spinal bumps prominent as, trowel in hand, he worked at his mundane tasks, the firm muscles of his petite physique playing under his skin.

The prince liked tending to growing things: hoeing, weeding, pruning, staking, watering. He much preferred it to tending farm animals. They were messy and smelly and contrary, and he was happy to leave those tasks to others. The only animals he had any time for were horses and dogs, but plants he loved. It was deeply satisfying to tend to green things, to grub his hands in the soil, the good earth from which all things sprang. They responded to his care, shooting up, flowering, ripening, turning into the food that kept his kingdom alive. No disgrace then for a prince to raise a sweat doing farm labor. The prince never cared that his work in the fields and gardens left him sweaty and dusty or muddy. It was honest dirt, the good earth and would wash off easily whether in the bath or just standing out in the rain. Like anyone he welcomed the rare summer rains, gleefully standing in the downpour as the falling waters cooled him off and washed him clean.

In the spring they made something of a game after plowing the bottomlands, the low lying fields with rich alluvial soils and no rocks. The young men and boys would throw clods of earth at each other, a warm weather version of a snowball fight, though rather messier. Another difference is that they never aimed at the head. The combatants were not always content to stand off at a distance and bombard each other. They might wade in for mock combat hand to hand, smearing the dark soil over their opponents faces and chests and backs, sometimes shoving the rich loam it into another boy's cleavage with predictably earthy remarks, laughing and joking all the while. Sometimes that turned into a wrestling match where the youths might get most of their sweaty bodies covered in dirt. It did not really matter who won. The game itself was the thing, healthy grab ass play and a good way for young men to remind themselves that agriculture wasn't all drudgery, or it didn't have to be.

A dip in pool or creek with the aid of some sand to scour their skin undid the damage. The lads would step out clean and refreshed, their skins reddened and gleaming, hair slicked back then settle down in a grassy spot for a bit of talking, as young men are wont to do about the future and their hopes and dreams. Telemakhos treasured those moments of normalcy, when he could be a carefree boy, a farmer, one of a group of friends and royal dependents, lying in the afternoon sun, drying off, their healthy nude bodies familiar sights to each other.

The young prince loved the way the rays of the warm Ionian sun turned his skin to a tawny gold. Telemakhos was quite proud of his trim little body and liked to show it off. He had no false modesty about himself. He knew that for all his petite size, he was very much worth looking at: his trim bronzed body spread out on the grass, eyes closed, looking so very desirable and sexy: small, naked, hairless, with a trim and taut boyish physique and angelic features. He dozed on quite unconcerned that with his legs spread apart he was totally exposed: even his well formed genitals and the small whorl between his buttocks.

As in any monarchy, a group of young males formed around the crown prince. They joined him swimming and picnicking in the nude and talking and joking and singing. They would run to the shore and swim back and forth in the warm waters of the sea or splash and play the grab ass games typical of youth. It was a chance to display themselves naked in public, to show off their hard bodies, clean limbs, and youthful faces. Telemakhos especially liked it when his friends stood in water chest high and let him set his feet in their hands like stirrups. Light as he was, two of them could lift him high and fling him up and away in a brief moment of flight. As he came down he twisted his trim body catlike to enter the water in a clean dive. The prince was an excellent swimmer, and he loved the way the water flowed over his body, touching him everywhere at once like a lover with a hundred hands.

These activities were all part of the bonding process with youths who would be his life long friends and supporters. Some liked the prince for himself, as a friend. Others looked forward to preference when he took the throne. Others were sexually attracted to the pretty lad and needed little encouragement to pull the prince into the bushes for a quick shag. Two at a time the randy boys would grab Telemakhos' ankles and drag him from sight. The rest pretended not to hear the sounds of

laughter and lusty sexual congress coming from the shrubbery. Very much a bottom boy, the prince liked for others to take the lead, to ignore his feigned protests, and put him to service whether on his knees with rump held high or on his back dutifully holding the backs of his knees, spreading himself for penetration.

One of the tasks of the heir was to get to know the sons of the ruling class, the landowners and government officials and to win their loyalty. Their boyhood adventures would cement bonds of affection and give a shrewd prince insight into their varied characters as he observed them at games, sports, exercise, military training, as well as at meals and drinking parties and even during sex. How a youth treated a sex partner said a lot about him, after all. As men the clever ones would be set to collect taxes, the bold ones enlisted as officers in the army, and the disagreeable and untrustworthy ones kept away from the levers of power.

Many of these boys were eromenai themselves and joined their erastoi at the drinking parties called symposia. At the symposia held in the houses of loyal nobles, the prince could escape from the rowdy nightly drinking parties the suitors indulged themselves in at the palace. He attended in his own right, like a guest, though he went as nude as any eromenos there. The boy had enough vanity in him to be gratified that he was always the prettiest lad at the party.

The symposium was a forum for males to talk, to debate, to brag, to introduce youths into aristocratic society, or simply to party. Symposia might be held to celebrate victories in athletic and poetic contests. It was a chance for serious conversation or for light banter depending on the mood and the mix of guests. The guests, that is the grown men, would recline on couches arrayed against the three walls of the room facing the door. The youths went nude and sat upright on their couches as the companions and eromenos (lover) of the older male. It was a public declaration of their physical relationship and a chance for the men to show their boys off, not to mention feel the boy up the entire evening.

Servers drew wine from a large jar called a krater into pitchers which were carried to the guests by nude servant boys in their very early teens, beautiful lads every one of them, with their soft hairless skin, lightly scented, and oiled to make them shine. The prettiest among them hoped to attract the attention of a patron, to become an eromenos in their own right or perhaps a body servant.

One day a palace servant intercepted Telemakhos as he walked from the vineyards where he had been working. He led the boy to the rear of the palace where artisans worked and let him in through a narrow door. There, in a dusty workshop used for woodworking, he encountered his mother.

"Mother, I should not be standing here with you all naked and sweaty and dirty. It is unseemly and improper. Let me bathe and dress before we talk."

"Thank you, my son, but there is no need for polite niceties nor is your habitual nudity the least bit immodest, certainly not between mother and son. At least here we can meet without unwanted ears listening in. I have watched you grow to be the fine young man that you are today. That said, we must now speak not as mother and son but as queen and prince. I know what you have suffered for my sake, the hunts, the rapes, the beatings and humiliations. I shake with rage when I see them haul you back to the palace like prey taken in the hunt, hanging from a pole naked, the signs of your whipping and rape obvious on your abused body. This is not what I raised my son for, to entertain those horrid brutes. These damn suitors have become intolerable. It was all I could do the other day not to snatch up a knife and plunge it into Eurylaos' back as he raped you right in front of me. I have never hated anyone so much."

Indeed the two leading suitors had commanded the boy to their couch and had him sit between them. It wasn't long before one slipped the top of his sleeveless tunic off the boy's shoulder, letting it fall to his hips, exposing his whole upper body. Right in front of his mother, the men tweaked the boy's nipples, kissing him, stroking his hair and his firm flesh. The hem of the tunic came down only halfway to his knees so it was easy to reach under it and toy with him there too. When they were half drunk, the two men grew bold enough to simply pull the tunic off the boy and lay him belly down on their couch for a public fucking from the both of them, the other suitors cheering them on. Son and mother were in tears at the boy's utter humiliation.

It didn't help that randy teenager that he was, Telemakhos' teenage body had responded involuntarily to their attentions, erecting while being raped. The suitors made it seem like that made him a willing accomplice to his degradation. The boy was just a cock crazy ephebe after all. They were doing him a favor, providing an outlet for his passions.

That was the last straw. Penelope was no longer content to stall. She wanted action, and now her son was old enough and, she hoped, man enough to do something about the situation. She asked him to travel to Pylos and Sparta to gather news of his father. In Pylos they had a family friend in king Nestor. He would surely help the son of Odysseus.

A fishing boat carried the young prince down to the small city of Pylos, situated on a charming bay on the southwestern tip of the Peloponnesus, a ring of green hills almost enclosing the blue waters of the bay, its shores fringed by white beaches. Its king was Nestor, a son of Poseidon, one of the Argonauts in his youth like Odysseus's own father Laertes, a veteran of the Trojan War, but even then he was an aged man and now over one hundred. He was a man whose exploits were legendary though also one who had known great tragedy. He succeeded to the throne only after Hercules slew his father and all his brothers and sisters when the king refused to cleanse the demigod of a blood-debt. Though Hercules was the greatest of Hellenic heroes, his checkered career was marked by many such atrocities. He once killed a king who had refused him hospitality then stripped, raped, and enslaved the man's teenage son as his catamite.

The king of Pylos received the fugitive prince with every kindness, assigning him a comfortable suite of rooms, providing refreshment. His own daughter Polycaste bathed the prince and dressed him in a soft tunic. Her brother Aretos was her chaperone for this though Nestor need not have worried about his daughter's chastity. If the prince of Ithaka had eyes for anyone it was for dark haired Aretos, a fine looking young man a year or two older and more than a hand span taller. His younger sister left them afterwards, bestowing a knowing look on her brother and nodding to wish him well in his suit. He was obviously smitten by the blond beauty from Ithaka, and why not. He was stunning.

From the first the two princes were inseparable, completely taken with each other. They made a fine looking couple too, one blond, the other dark, one tall and lean, the other slim and wiry, one pretty and the other handsome. At the king's insistence, Telemakhos stayed on for many days in Pylos, even though Nestor had no real information about his father's fate. The prince spent much time with the king, keeping him company on a terrace overlooking the sea. The king had largely withdrawn from the management of the kingdom, given his advanced age. So he had time on his hands.

As an old sailor, the king liked to watch the sea and to gauge its fickle moods. They spoke often and at length, with Aretos usually joining them. Nestor had the virtues and the faults of the very old: he was kindly and indulgent but garrulous and full of well-meaning if not necessarily well-thought out advice. He reminds one of Polonius in that regard. Still he had wonderful stories of his adventures on the Argo during the voyage in search of the Golden Fleece and of the long Trojan War where his role was to inspire his troops, he being much too old for active command in the field.

When he was free, Telemakhos explored the city and its environs with Aretos. The waters of the bay were warm and inviting so the two young princes liked to doff their tunics at the palace and run naked to the beach outside of town, spending most of the daylight hours between breakfast and dinner together. Serving boys brought a light lunch and well watered wine to the princes at midday. They swam in the warm waters of the bay, raced each other along the strand, or went for longer runs through the surrounding woods and fields, displaying their trim taut bodies to the locals.

Occasionally they repaired to inviting meadows and woodland copses for a tryst, the strong physical attraction between the youths an expression of a growing friendship. The princes were enthusiastic in their lovemaking, though both knew that their idyll could not last. Still Telemakhos needed this pleasant interlude after his travails on Ithaka. It felt good to be treated like a human being and not a hunted animal or a whore. Aretos was just what the troubled prince needed at that point in his life.

Telemakhos knew that his duty required him to push on to Sparta and meet with King Menelaus and his once and present queen, Helen, though for ten years she was a princess of Troy. The old king reluctantly gave the prince his leave to start on the overland journey to Sparta. The prince was delighted when Nestor sent Aretos with him to Sparta as his escort.

Like his fellow king, Menelaus received the prince of Ithaka with every courtesy. Unfortunately, his only information about Odysseus was years out of date. On his way back from Troy, Menelaus had compelled Proteus the shape shifting and oracular Old Man of the Sea to tell him three secrets, one of which was that Odysseus was stranded on Calypso's Isle Ogygia. That was the last the King of Sparta knew of his old friend and comrade in arms. There was nothing for it but to return to Pylos and then on to Ithaka. Neither king was willing to send an army to clear the suitors from the island. That would have created enmities with the Greek kings and nobles whose sons they were. Discouraged but also determined to take the situation in hand on his return, Telemakhos sailed back to Ithaka, this time on a royal ship lent by Nestor, with Aretos along once again as escort.

Chapter 3. Return to Ithaka

The sea voyage back to Ithaka was uneventful though tedious. The son, Telemakhos did not run into any witches or one eyed giants or serpents as his father Odysseus had. He never got anywhere near the land of the lotus eaters or the island of the sirens. The only problem was that the winds blew strong from the north. That meant they had to row all the way back against both wind and currents. It was a long hard slog.

Nestor's own ship or not, royal status did not exempt the two princes from doing their share of the rowing. The captain put them on the last oar on the starboard side where he could keep an eye on them from where he stood near the rudder, really a steering oar. Handing their tunics over to the ship's boy for stowage till the end of the voyage, Telemakhos and Aretos sat down on their bench in the open rowing deck and took up their oar. Some of the sailors were skeptical that a couple of untried lads like Telemakhos and Aretos, both beardless and virtually hairless nude boys, could wield an oar by themselves and keep the tempo with the other rowers. Better they should pair off with two other men. The boys were determined to prove themselves and to prove the doubters wrong.

In time with the other rowers, the lads bent forward raising their oar out of the water and swinging it forward, feathering the blade to reduce the backward push of the wind on its surface. Then they dropped the blade into the water with nary a splash, leaning back, legs braced on the blocks in front of them, pulling with the full strength of their legs and buttocks and backs and shoulders, their rumps almost coming up off the bench as they put their whole bodies into it.

The youths' wiry physiques were visible to all the other rowers. That brought smiles to their faces. Who did not like a close look at these pretty lads, their taut bodies moving rhythmically back and forth? The muscle bundles on their arms and shoulders and back were outlined under their smooth skin, their abs heaving with their exertions and deep breathing, the long muscles of thigh and calf standing out like a classical sculpture of an athlete, and their pert buttocks rock hard as they braced themselves and pulled on the oar.

The captain had the most rewarding view of the lads. As they reached the end of their power strokes their bodies were straight, leaning all the way back, nearly recumbent, every muscle standing out from the strain of the effort. When they leaned forward, the rowers behind were treated to a fine view of their shoulders, back, and ribs, their spinal bumps pointing downward to their clenched cleavages.

They were particularly taken with the beauty of the young prince of Ithaka. Telemakhos was smaller than the rest and had to use his strength economically, without wasted motion, flexing forward and back like a long bow flexing in the hands of an archer. He moved in time with the others, careful not to entangle his oar with anyone else's. Maybe he couldn't impart as much impetus to the ship as Aretos or the other males could, but no one could fault the lad for not doing his utmost.

As he rowed, sweat poured off him till he was positively glowing in the sunlight, a shining vision of a male beauty at the peak of his physical powers. He worked away unselfconscious about his nudity and utter hairlessness, only the admiring glances of Aretos and the crew gave evidence of the effect his lubricious display of concupiscence had on the libidos of the crew. With his pretty face, long blond locks blowing in the wind, and sweat dripping off his taut body everywhere, the sight was just about the most erotic thing they had ever seen short of actual sex. They had never seen anyone in their lives, male or female, so physically desirable as this slender youth who worked beside them at the oars. And all that sweating and straining and grunting from the effort of rowing was uncannily

suggestive of sexual congress.

"You know, Telemakhos, this contrary wind from the north may be a blessing in disguise. There is nothing like rowing to build whole body strength. Runners like you tend to neglect the upper body, except maybe for sword practice."

"I suppose that is good advice, Aretos. I might need that strength in a confrontation with the suitors, but right now I would sacrifice a bull and a heifer to Poseidon if only he would provide us with a steady south wind."

That earned the prince a friendly clap on the shoulder from the man behind him.

"Well said, young Telemakhos. All I can afford is a pair of hens, but I would gladly add those to the sacrificial altar."

Telemakhos was surprised to find that the steady rowing actually lifted his spirits. The rhythmic bending and swaying of their bodies keeping time with the drum beats from the hortator induced a semi-hypnotic state of day dreaming and euphoria that moderns call a runners' high. On the open sea, they sometimes took up sea chanties instead of relying on the hortator to keep the beat. The singing may have used up some of their breath, but mostly it was air that had to be expelled from their lungs anyway. Sea chanties also helped the men bond into a crew with a united purpose.

The crew were gratified that both young princes pulled their weight. Aretos at least had much experience at sea. The smaller youth next to him had very little. Still he took the drudgery and blisters on his palms in stride, washing his hands in brine to promote healing and forestall infection. One of the rowers jokingly counseled him:

"Ah lad, those blisters on your hands are nothing to fuss much about. Pull on an oar as long as we have and the bench will give you blisters on your rump."

"Pay no heed to that oaf, young prince." another countered. "It would be a shame that as fine an arse as yours were anything but soft and silky smooth, or less than pleasing to the touch of that princeling seated next to you. Isn't that so, Lord Aretos?"

Aretos flashed him a grin in unspoken agreement. For the princes, it was a good lesson for them in leading and inspiring ordinary men, those from the lower classes, who after all were most of their future subjects. They were laying the foundation for the good reputation they enjoyed in later years when they were called to the thrones of their respective kingdoms and ruled them long and wisely and well.

Much the smallest of the rowers, Telemakhos finished his shifts at the oar literally trembling with fatigue, muscles sore, too tired to feel real hunger in his belly though his energy was badly depleted, yet he never complained. This ship was carrying him homeward. There, he would fulfill his duty to his father, his mother, and his country or die trying.

In the meantime, he had Aretos with him to work the kinks out of his shoulders with a evening massage. A short swim also helped ease muscular aches and got the sweat off them. Sometimes they had the luxury of bathing in the fresh water stream where they filled their water casks. After supper, the two youths found a secluded spot a little remote from the others and made love, though in truth, the sounds of their lusty sexual congress might carry back to the ship. The crew exchanged ribald but friendly jokes about the two young lovers. Later they joined their shipmates around the fire. The red and yellow light of the flames painted intriguing chiaroscuro effects on their torsos and limbs.

The crew thought the boys looked so sweet and romantic, sitting spooned together, back to chest. Telemakhos was content within the protective embrace of his lover, his head lying back on Aretos shoulder. Aretos loved those quiet moments, when he would stroke the boy's forehead and blond locks affectionately or kiss the top of his head. Everyone was acutely aware of the fact that the two princes soon must part. Aretos would have to take the ship back to his father in Pylos. As prince of Pylos and wary of entangling his kingdom in blood feuds, Aretos could no more join his friend in his coup than his father Nestor or King Menelaus could support it with soldiers.

Finally they arrived off the far side of the island from possible watchers closer to the royal palace. The young princes kissed one last time, a long tender lingering kiss with their nude bodies pressed against each other. Neither was the least bit embarrassed by the throbbing erections that brought on. The crew smiled indulgently at the two young lovers. Instead of pinning his sleeveless tunic over the left shoulder like normal, the prince let the top part of the garment hang loose so his tunic resembled a knee length kilt, his upper body bared to the hips. He had to admit that Aretos was right. He did feel stronger for all that rowing. Now he had good upper body strength as well speed and stamina.

Telemakhos then set out on foot across Ithaka. Nearly halfway to his destination he caught up with a wandering beggar walking along the road and studying the country as he went. If the prince caught him up, it was not that the man's pace was slow because he was infirm, far from it. Close up the prince could see that the man was not yet forty with a strong body though prematurely gray as if from much travail. The look in his face was that of a man who was seeing this island for either the very first time or after a very long absence.

"Greetings old one, if I may call you that. I could not help but notice the way you were admiring our fine countryside. It pleases you does it not, the lush sweet smelling fields in the lowlands, the forests and meadows at the higher elevations, all joined by clear sparkling streams such as this one at our feet."

"Indeed, young sir, this is a fine country, situated on the sea, neither too hot nor too cold, too rainy or too dry. You are a lucky lad to call this country your own. And a lucky country it is that breeds such fair and well knit youths such as yourself. From the set of your shoulders I would guess you a good hunter and swordsman, while your slender but muscular legs indicate fleetness of foot. Also the fact that you are barefoot. Runners have tough calluses and seldom bother with sandals. No doubt your beauty of face and of form turns heads on the exercise fields."

"Rather too many heads, if the truth were known, but that is not a tale for today. Besides agility and coordination count for much too. Let me show you."

The young prince picked up a round flat stone, washed down from the hills during the last spring floods and skipped it across the surface of the small pond that the stream fed. It gave three skips before plopping below the surface. He did it twice. The old beggar smiled in remembrance of his own younger days and followed suit. He managed to skip his first stone four times, the second five. Telemakhos looked closer at the man noting his wide shoulders and heavy arm muscles.

"Well done, sir." Then, indulging in a bit of hyperbole for the sake of courtesy, he continued. "For your prodigious feat, worthy of a son of Hercules, let me I offer you my hospitality at the next inn. Their wine is quite good for a country vintage but then we are all simple country folk at heart on Ithaka. Even the palace is frugal about its wines. Come, the tavern lies just up ahead on the other side of the swale."

"Thank you young sir. I accept your offer gratefully. Tell me, does Xanthippus still water the wine of unsuspecting strangers?"

Telemakhos laughed.

"Not any more, but his son carries on the family tradition. You know the place then. How so?"

"Ah, young sir, therein lies a tale, a very long one, I am afraid."

"We have all afternoon and most of the morrow. Tell your tale to me as we go. It will pass the time, and I will stand you for food and lodging as well as wine. For I have enjoyed the hospitality of the generous minded, most recently Nestor of Pylos and Menelaus of Sparta. Their example is my schooling."

"You keep good company and are wise beyond your years, young sir. By what name may I call you?"

"I am Telemakhos, son of Odysseus." the prince said simply.

The beggar was thunderstruck, stopping and staring, disbelief warring with joy on his face.

"Can this be true, are you really the son of Penelope by the son of Laertes."

"I swear it. But why so surprised sir? Tell me, are you recently returned to Ithaka after a long absence?"

"Aye, the better part of twenty years since I left my young wife Penelope with a babe in her womb. She told me that if it were a boy she would name him ... Telemakhos."

Now it was the prince's turn to be thunderstruck.

"And what was the name of your father, sir." he asked carefully.

"Laertes, who was king of Ithaka before me ... son."

"Father!"

The two men embraced deeply moved. Though neither had ever known the other before, each represented the embodiment of the other's hopes and dreams. Finally the boy held his father at arms length and said.

"You must tell me everything."

"That will take more time than we have but I will give you the highlights. Meanwhile how go things with the kingdom and my dear wife."

Telemakhos told him everything: about the suitors, about their haughtiness, their selfishness, their insults to the Queen, about his mission to find out the fate of his father. It took more time to admit what they had done to him personally: the hunts, the beatings, the rapes.

"What then shall we do father?"

"We shall return to the palace, spy the lay of the land, gather some faithful retainers, and slay every one of those wastrels."

"I am yours to command, sire, both as my father and as my king. And I have stout friends; I am sure they will join us."

This time the two males grasped each other's right wrist, as allies and comrades in arms.

The two travelers, now known to each other as father and son as well as king and prince, plotted the ouster and downfall of the suitors. For their violations of the laws of hospitality alone, their lives were forfeit, but Odysseus could never forgive them their insults to his wife and their degradation of his son and heir. No matter the odds were two against a hundred, he would find a way. Meanwhile he stayed in his beggar disguise the better to get into the city unnoticed.

Chapter 4. Nemesis

When they reached the palace, Telemakhos went ahead and called on his mother. He dared not tell her anything where they might be overheard so he arranged a rendezvous later in a small disused chamber near the kitchen. Penelope might plausibly go by the kitchen to see about the preparations for supper.

Telemakhos filled her in on his unsuccessful mission but did not tell his mother that her husband had turned up after all these years with the help of the gods. All he asked her to do was to follow his lead in their dealings with the suitors and to be ready for anything. Also she should grant charity to an old beggar who would soon call on her. The duo, mother and son, presided over the usual raucous dinner party, giving no sign of what was on their minds. The suitors had guessed that the prince had gone looking for allies, but his return alone seemed to indicate that his mission was

a failure. Nevertheless, Antinous promised him that at the next hunt, he would be punished severely for his effrontery.

The next day later a dozen of the suitors stripped the prince of his tunic and brought him nude to a side door of the palace. Ostensibly this hunt was a chance to welcome the prince home. The suitors hands roamed all over the boy's body, examining him proprietarily like a trainer checks a race horse. One man squeezed his shoulder muscles and biceps, gauging his strength. Another stroked his ribs and his ass. He suffered their hands to fondle his private parts and their fingers to penetrate his hole. One man murmured dark hints while rolling the boy's balls in his fingers and remarking that the continuation of the line that led from Laertes, his grandfather, could end with the loss of "these soft spheres", if he ever got out of line again.

The not so subtle threat delivered by his henchman, Eurylaos then showered the lad with insincere compliments on his fine physique.

"I see that travel agrees with you young Telemakos. I have never seen you look healthier or more desirable. Your hide is tawnier than ever, making you resemble a gazelle even more than before. That is what you shall be on today's hunt, a sleek fleet footed gazelle that we shall try to bring down with our padded arrows. Mind you. You must keep running. If you stop running before sunset, we will beat you then turn you over to be mounted by our dogs.

"What! I'm to be mounted by your dogs!"

Of course. Alas there would be no offspring. If only my sable mastiff really could breed a litter on you, young prince, what beauties they would be! His strength and your speed. Mind you, my Xyphax holds his bitches with his knot for a good long while. He likes to turn his body around and stand ass to ass so they face in opposite directions. You will have to get used to that sort of coupling yourself for you can expect that kind of thing every unsuccessful hunt from now on, bitch boy. Or should it be boy bitch, I wonder?"

That provoked a general chuckle among the hunters.

"Can't you just see yourself, little prince, on all fours, covered and knotted to a dog. Come to think of it, as long as you are going to be our boy bitch, maybe we should dog train you, teach you to follow the leash on your hands and knees around the palace, nude, and with a nice dog collar around your neck."

"He could do tricks for us too," another suitor interjected. "like rolling over and sitting up to beg. Or he could lie at the feet of our couches till we ourselves are ready to mount him."

The boy himself was shocked and frightened at the thought that these men whom he had once considered his friends would turn him over to their dogs to be mounted and bred like any bitch in heat. There he would be on all fours, the mastiff reared up on his back, its dewclaws digging in and leaving marks to evidence his shame. The worst part was that with the dog's cock thrust into his ass hole, its knot would lock their bodies together. His face burned with shame at the thought that the mastiff might take off, as he had actually seen happen, and pull him along behind, a human boy bitch scabbling ineffectually at the dirt as the huge canine dragged him by his boy pussy.

If ever the boy had any thoughts of mercy, of merely driving the suitors into exile, they vanished at the prospect of this latest degradation.

Telemakhos then set the trap. He boldly told them to do their worst, that the thumps of their blunted arrows on his bare body hardly tickled. Their bows were weak; why a child could string and pull them. The only bow he feared was the great hunting bow his father had left behind when he had gone off to war. His father had been the only man strong enough to string it alone or to pull the bow for that matter.

"I am sick and tired of hearing about this mighty bow of the absent king. We have all seen it hanging on the palace wall next to Laertes' double headed war axe. It looks serviceable enough, a formidable looking bow to be sure, but nothing special."

"Prove it Eurylaus." the prince challenged.

The group marched into the palace to the reception chamber. There they found Penelope giving charity to an old beggar who had sought her aid. It was of course Odysseus in disguise. Not for nothing was he called Odysseus the Sly. They explained their presence to Penelope who asked the beggar to lift the bow off its pegs and hand it to Eurylaus.

Confidently the man tried to string the bow, bracing the bottom end of the stave against his instep while he grasped the cord with his right hand and the top of the stave with the other. Although normally accounted a strong man, Eurylaus could hardly bend the bow, much less string it. One by one the dozen suitors present tried their strength, all except Antinous. The last man finally exclaimed. This is the work of the gods. Apollo had robbed us of our strength!"

"How can Apollo take from you what you never had. Here, let me show you how to string a bow".

Antinous was sure that his own strength was up to the task. Indeed he was powerfully built with the shoulders of a bull and came close to succeeding. Only one span of a man's hand and he would have slipped the loop at the top of the cord over the end of the bow. Close but not enough.

"No man can string that bow. This is some trick."

"No trick, replied Telemakhos. Why I think even this poor beggar could string it."

The suitors laughed that notion to scorn.

"Those are bold words coming from a runt of a boy we have stripped naked as our prey for today's hunt."

The prince persisted.

"The man seems as healthy and as well knit together as anyone else. Why not let him try?"

After some grumbling and debate over the propriety of a beggar in competition with princes and nobles, they handed the bow over to the heretofore silent Odysseus. He stepped up to the bow rack, braced the stave to his foot and in one fluid motion hooked the loop over the top. At that very moment a thunderbolt flashed and crashed out of a clear blue sky. It was taken as an omen that Zeus himself signaled his approval of Odysseus' bold coup. The old beggar threw off his disguise to reveal himself clad in a tunic with the royal colors.

"To me, Telemakhos! For Ithaka!"

As his son rushed to his father's side, Odysseus drew a war arrow from a quiver and drew the bow back to his ear. The first arrow transfixed Eurylaus in the neck. His next arrow actually went through one suitor and lodged itself in the chest of a second one standing behind him.

Pandemonium.

While his father shot the suitors with the powerful bow, Telemakhos used a sword and a shield he had snatched up to defend their position against anyone who tried to rush in. As a servant led Penelope out of harm's way, the suitors rallied and tried to fire back, but their arrows were blunted for the mock hunt and did no real harm. Odysseus and Telemakhos, King and Prince, Father and Son, slaughtered the suitors with war arrows and sword. The last to fall was Antinous who did not even resist his fate, staring wide eyed across the room at what must have seemed like a doom ordained by the gods.

That took care of the two leaders and ten of their followers, the twelve men who would have gone on the hunt. Telemakhos slipped on his tunic and fetched reinforcements: a half dozen loyal friends who had rallied to their prince and armed themselves at need. Then all together, shouting their war cry of "For Ithaka!", they stormed through the palace shooting the suitors with arrows or cutting them down with their blades. It was eight against nearly a hundred, but those hundred were mostly unarmed, disorganized, dispersed in small groups, befuddled by wine, and utterly demoralized. One

group tried to rally behind a warrior who raised his spear skyward for a rallying point. A lightning bolt flashed down to the spear head and to the ground. When their eyes cleared from the brilliant flash, Telemakhos and his allies saw four men laid low by the blast. They took this as yet another sign that Zeus himself favored their cause, indeed was helping them.

No one was spared. Anyone who tried to hide was pointed out by servants and stable hands, most with scores to settle with the suitors. No one lifted a hand to help them, as few mourned their passing.

The kingdom was restored to its rightful lords, its oppressors annihilated.

Epilogue

The legend later arose that Odysseus revealed himself by having Telemachus set up twelve axes upright in an even line and shot an arrow through the hole that was in the back of each axe-head. What he really shot were the holes he put into a dozen suitors, the ones who were going on the hunt. The fact that the bow had hung next to the labrys or double headed axe of Odysseus' father may have colored the legend.

Odysseus was reunited with Penelope. Conscious of their long separation, he did not merely assert his marriage rights that very night, but took things slowly, step by step, giving her time to adjust. He courted her as if she were a maiden and not a matron with a grown son, charming her with verses and flowers. It was as if the years had fallen away from them and they were young again. Their love renewed, they lived together happily for many years. Odysseus was even reunited with his aged father Laertes, long since forced by old age and his infirmities to retire to a remote farm.

Telemakhos remained lifelong friends with Aretos who eventually became king of Pylos in his own right. In time the prince of Ithaka wed Polycaste, Aretos' sister, strengthening the ties between the families and kingdoms.