

Straight to his house the clear-eyed Pallas went,
full of plans for great Odysseus' journey home.
She made her way to the gaily painted room
where a young girl lay asleep ...
a match for the deathless gods in build and beauty,
Nausicaa, the daughter of generous King Alcinous.
Two handmaids fair as the Graces slept beside her,
flanking the two posts, with the gleaming doors closed.
But the goddess drifted through like a breath of fresh air,
rushed to the girl's bed and hovering close she spoke,
in face and form like the shipman Dymas' daughter,
a girl the princess' age, and dearest to her heart.
Disguised, the bright-eyed goddess chided, "Nausicaa,
how could your mother bear a careless girl like you?
Look at your fine clothes, lying here neglected—
with your marriage not far off,
the day you should be decked in all your glory
and offer elegant dress to those who form your escort.
That's how a bride's good name goes out across the world
and it brings her father and queenly mother joy. Come,
let's go wash these clothes at the break of day—
I'll help you, lend a hand, and the work will fly!
You won't stay unwed long. The noblest men
in the country court you now, all Phaeacians
just like you, Phaeacia-born and raised. So come,
first thing in the morning press your kingly father
to harness the mules and wagon for you, all to carry
your sashes, dresses, glossy spreads for your bed.
It's so much nicer for you to ride than go on foot.
The washing-pools are just too far from town."

With that

the bright-eyed goddess sped away to Olympus, where,
they say, the gods' eternal mansion stands unmoved,
never rocked by galewinds, never drenched by rains,
nor do the drifting snows assail it, no, the clear air
stretches away without a cloud, and a great radiance
plays across that world where the blithe gods

live all their days in bliss. There Athena went,
once the bright-eyed one had urged the princess on.

Dawn soon rose on her splendid throne and woke
Nausicaa finely gowned. Still beguiled by her dream,
down she went through the house to tell her parents now,
her beloved father and mother. She found them both inside.
Her mother sat at the hearth with several waiting-women,
spinning yarn on a spindle, lustrous sea-blue wool.
Her father she met as he left to join the lords
at a council island nobles asked him to attend.
She stepped up close to him, confiding, "Daddy dear,
I wonder, won't you have them harness a wagon for me,
the tall one with the good smooth wheels ... so I
can take our clothes to the river for a washing?
Lovely things, but lying before me all soiled.
And you yourself, sitting among the princes,
debating points at your council,
you really should be wearing spotless linen.
Then you have five sons, full-grown in the palace,
two of them married, but three are lusty bachelors
always demanding crisp shirts fresh from the wash
when they go out to dance. Look at my duties—
that all rests on me."

So she coaxed, too shy
to touch on her hopes for marriage, young warm hopes,
in her father's presence. But he saw through it all
and answered quickly, "I won't deny you the mules,
my darling girl ... I won't deny you anything.
Off you go, and the men will harness a wagon,
the tall one with the good smooth wheels,
fitted out with a cradle on the top."

With that
he called to the stablemen and they complied.
They trundled the wagon out now, rolling smoothly,
backed the mule-team into the traces, hitched them up,
while the princess brought her finery from the room

and piled it into the wagon's polished cradle.
Her mother packed a hamper—treats of all kinds,
favorite things to refresh her daughter's spirits—
poured wine in a skin, and as Nausicaa climbed aboard,
the queen gave her a golden flask of suppling olive oil
for her and her maids to smooth on after bathing.
Then, taking the whip in hand and glistening reins,
she touched the mules to a start and out they clattered,
trotting on at a clip, bearing the princess and her clothes
and not alone: her maids went with her, stepping briskly too.

Once they reached the banks of the river flowing strong
where the pools would never fail, with plenty of water
cool and clear, bubbling up and rushing through
to scour the darkest stains—they loosed the mules,
out from under the wagon yoke, and chased them down
the river's rippling banks to graze on luscious clover.
Down from the cradle they lifted clothes by the armload,
plunged them into the dark pools and stamped them down
in the hollows, one girl racing the next to finish first
until they'd scoured and rinsed off all the grime,
then they spread them out in a line along the beach
where the surf had washed a pebbly scree ashore.
And once they'd bathed and smoothed their skin with oil,
they took their picnic, sitting along the river's banks
and waiting for all the clothes to dry in the hot noon sun.
Now fed to their hearts' content, the princess and her retinue
threw their veils to the wind, struck up a game of ball.
White-armed Nausicaa led their singing, dancing beat ...
as lithe as Artemis with her arrows striding down
from a high peak—Taygetus' towering ridge or Erymanthus—
thrilled to race with the wild boar or bounding deer,
and nymphs of the hills race with her,
daughters of Zeus whose shield is storm and thunder,
ranging the hills in sport, and Leto's heart exults
as head and shoulders over the rest her daughter rises,
unmistakable—she outshines them all, though all are lovely.
So Nausicaa shone among her maids, a virgin, still unwed.

But now, as she was about to fold her clothes
and yoke the mules and turn for home again,
now clear-eyed Pallas thought of what came next,
to make Odysseus wake and see this young beauty
and she would lead him to the Phaeacians' town.
The ball—

the princess suddenly tossed it to a maid
but it missed the girl, splashed in a deep swirling pool
and they all shouted out—

and *that* woke great Odysseus.

He sat up with a start, puzzling, his heart pounding:
“Man of misery, whose land have I lit on now?
What *are* they here—violent, savage, lawless?
or friendly to strangers, god-fearing men?
Listen: shouting, echoing round me—women, girls—
or the nymphs who haunt the rugged mountaintops
and the river springs and meadows lush with grass!
Or am I really close to people who speak my language?
Up with you, see how the land lies, see for yourself now ...”

Muttering so, great Odysseus crept out of the bushes,
stripping off with his massive hand a leafy branch
from the tangled olive growth to shield his body,
hide his private parts. And out he stalked
as a mountain lion exultant in his power
strides through wind and rain and his eyes blaze
and he charges sheep or oxen or chases wild deer
but his hunger drives him on to go for flocks,
even to raid the best-defended homestead.
So Odysseus moved out ...
about to mingle with all those lovely girls,
naked now as he was, for the need drove him on,
a terrible sight, all crusted, caked with brine—
they scattered in panic down the jutting beaches.
Only Alcinous' daughter held fast, for Athena planted
courage within her heart, dissolved the trembling in her limbs,
and she firmly stood her ground and faced Odysseus, torn now—

Should he fling his arms around her knees, the young beauty,
plead for help, or stand back, plead with a winning word,
beg her to lead him to the town and lend him clothing?

This was the better way, he thought. Plead now
with a subtle, winning word and stand well back,
don't clasp her knees, the girl might bridle, yes.
He launched in at once, endearing, sly and suave:

"Here I am at your mercy, princess—
are you a goddess or a mortal? If one of the gods
who rule the skies up there, you're Artemis to the life,
the daughter of mighty Zeus—I see her now—just look
at your build, your bearing, your lithe flowing grace ...
But if you're one of the mortals living here on earth,
three times blest are your father, your queenly mother,
three times over your brothers too. How often their hearts
must warm with joy to see you striding into the dances—
such a bloom of beauty. True, but *he* is the one
more blest than all other men alive, that man
who sways you with gifts and leads you home, his bride!
I have never laid eyes on anyone like you,
neither man nor woman ...
I look at you and a sense of wonder takes me.

Wait,

once I saw the like—in Delos, beside Apollo's altar—
the young slip of a palm-tree springing into the light.
There I'd sailed, you see, with a great army in my wake,
out on the long campaign that doomed my life to hardship.
That vision! Just as I stood there gazing, rapt, for hours ...
no shaft like that had ever risen up from the earth—
so now I marvel at *you*, my lady: rapt, enthralled,
too struck with awe to grasp you by the knees
though pain has ground me down.

Only yesterday,

the twentieth day, did I escape the wine-dark sea.
Till then the waves and the rushing gales had swept me on
from the island of Ogygia. Now some power has tossed me here,
doubtless to suffer still more torments on your shores.