

### §39. Nausicaa

Straight to a rich-wrought chamber she went, wherein was a maiden  
slumbering, like to a goddess immortal in form and in feature,  
Nausicaa, sole daughter of Alcinoös great-hearted.

Near to her, two of her damsels, of beauty endowed by the Graces,  
lay by the post of the door, and shut was the glittering portal,  
yet as a breath of the air to the couch of the maiden the goddess  
glided, and standing nigh to her head these words she addressed her,  
taking the form of the daughter of Dymas, mariner famous,  
one that in age was her equal, and dear to the soul of the maiden;  
such was the form, as she spake, of the grey-eyed goddess Athena:  
“Nausicaa, how comes it thy mothers has borne thee so headless?  
Lo, still wholly neglected thy glistening raiment is lying  
while that thy wedding is nigh, and thou needst right beautiful garments  
both for thyself and to give a supply to the friends that escort thee . . .”

– *Athena, in Od 6:13-28*

And Athena, continuing to sound the conjugal note, goes on (32-35):

“Lo, I will come as thy comrade, and share in the labor, that quickly  
all shall be ready, for soon we shall see thee a maiden no longer,  
since thou art woo’d by the best of the whole Phaiakian people,  
chiefs of the race from which thou also thy lineage drawest . . .”

In asking her father presently, for the use of the cart and the mules (62-68):

“Five dear brothers moreover of mine were born in thy palace.  
Two are wedded indeed; but the three are younger and lusty,  
clamoring away to have their garments fresh from the washing  
ere to the dances they go – which things were ever my duty.”  
Thus did she speak, for her gladsome marriage it irked her to mention . . .

She and her maids discover Odysseus, grimy and naked. They scatter, but she  
is unafraid. Odysseus speaks from a distance, struck by her beauty (153-159):

Art thou a daughter of man, and dwellest on earth as a mortal,  
happy I deem, yea three times happy, thy mother and father,  
happy and three times happy thy brothers, for surely exultant  
gloweth in gladness the spirit within them, whene’er they behold thee  
entering into the dance, so lovely a flower of girlhood.  
Yet ah, how in his heart, more happy than every other  
he that with gifts shall prevail, and homeward lead thee as lover!  
“Suchlike wonder indeed by Apollo’s altar in Delos  
once I beheld – uprearing its column a sapling of date-palm;  
(Yea, e’en thither I came, and was followed by many a fighter,  
holding a course whereon sore sorrow was fated to meet us).  
Even as then, this wonder beholding I marveled in spirit,  
long time gazing – for ne’er such shaft from the earth shot upward –  
thus, O lady, I marvel at thee, and am greatly astonished,  
Fearing thy knees to approach, though sorrow hath fallen upon me.”

The maids then bathe him, and give him clothes and a golden vial of olive oil.

Clean, clothed, anointed, he impresses Nausicaa, who says to them (243-245)::

“Now he is like to the gods, who infinite heaven inhabit.  
Would that a man like this might win him the name of my husband,  
should he be pleased to remain in the land, and to settle amongst us!”

Just that thought occurs to her father, next day at the palace (7:311-315),

Ay, and by Father Zeus, by Athena and Phoebus Apollo,  
would that a man like thee, who art minded, meseemeth, as I be,  
taking my daughter to wife might will as my son, to content him  
here to remain! I am ready to give both cattle and homestead  
shouldst thou consent to remain . . .

It was not to be. Nest day, his last in Phaiakia, Odysseus is once again bathed, clothed, and anointed by the maids. He sees her, not as a tree, but by a tall pillar of the palace. And what then transpires, brief though it is, must rank as the most poignant moment in the whole poem (8:454-468).

Now when Odysseus was bathed and anointed with oil of the olive,  
round him the maids cast raiment – a beautiful mantel and tunic.  
So from the bath he returned, and he came to the chiefs at their wine-cups.  
Even as Nausicaa in her beauty, the dower of heaven,,  
stood by the side of a post of the strong-built roof of the palace/  
There, as he passed her, she looked at Odysseus with wondering glances;  
then did she open her lips and with swift-wingéd words she addressed him:

“Stranger, farewell – and at times, while happy and safe in thy homeland,  
Think upon me – since mostly to me thou owest thy safety.”

Her then in answer addressed these words deep-plotting Odysseus:

“Nausicaa, fair daughter of Alkinoös great-hearted,  
So may omnipotent Zeus, loud-thundering husband of Hera,  
grant me the day of return, and to come back safe to my country.  
Then e’en there in my home will I offer thee prayers as a goddess  
all of the days of my life – for my life thou gavest me, maiden.”

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Life moves on, the singer moves on, and the story continues as it must do. We will follow it presently. But we pause just a moment, to notice the exquisite craftsmanship of the Phaiakia sequence, with its echoes at beginning and end, its theme of what will not be, so carefully wrought . . . and then to vanish.

We hear no more of Nausicaa. She is not the story. There will be something similar to say of Penelope when, after many adventures, we have reached that point in what the singer is telling us.

*The singer knows.* And the rest of us can only wait.