And just as the huntress Artemis stands out among her nymphs, beautiful as they are, so here Nausikaa shone among her maids.
Prelude

Odysseus sleeps in exhaustion on the shore

Night
Odysseus slept on the shore, in deep exhaustion. Athene went to the city of the Phaeacians and their wise king Alkinoos.
The goddess entered the fine room where slept Alkinoos’ daughter, Nausikaa, and her two maids.
The goddess stood by the bed in the form of a dear friend and spoke to the sleeping princess.
Nausikaa, you are careless; you will soon be ready to wed (suitors come thronging already!) and will need fine clothes to wear.
Tomorrow take all the best clothes and wash them in the river; I shall come too, to help.
In the morning ask your father for mules and a wagon to carry everything there.
Grey-eyed Athene spoke, and returned to cloudless Olympus, where it is always fair weather, home of the carefree gods.
When dawn woke Nausikaa
she wondered at her strange dream
and went to speak to her parents.
Her mother sat by the hearth spinning purple yarn with her maids. Her father was leaving the house to meet the Phaeacians in council.
Dear papa, I need a wagon to take my best clothes to wash. You too should have clean clothes when you meet the lords in council.
Not to mention your five grown sons (two married, but three still single) who need clean clothes for dancing. I have to think of these things.
Shy, she did not mention marriage, but her father understood.
ALK: You shall have mules and wagon and anything else you need.
His servants readied the wagon and the clothes were loaded on it. Her mother packed good food and wine, and oil for bathing.
Then Nausikaa took whip and reins, the mules set off with a clatter and her maids walked alongside.
When they got to the river
they unhitched the mules to graze,
Then washed the clothes in clear water,
making a game of it all.
They spread the clean clothes to dry then bathed and oiled themselves, and had their meal by the river.
Then they threw off their veils, and began to play a ball-game, and Nausikaa led the song.
And just as the huntress Artemis stands out among her nymphs, beautiful as they are, so here Nausikaa shone among her maids.
But when it was time to go
Athene intervened
to make sure that Odysseus met
the lovely Phaeacian girl.
Nausikaa’s next throw went wide. The ball went into deep water. The girls cried out. Odysseus woke and wondered where he had landed.
What sort of people live here? Are they fierce or hospitable? Do I hear the cries of nymphs or mortals? Let me have a look.
Odysseus rose from the bushes with a branch to cover himself. Crusted with brine, he looked grim. The frightened girls scattered.
Only Alkinos’ daughter stayed made brave by Athene. Odysseus wondered how he should approach her.
He thought best to keep his distance rather than clasp her knees, and spoke gently but cunningly.
O queen – goddess or mortal – if goddess, most like Artemis, daughter of mighty Zeus.
If a mortal, dwelling here,
how blessed your father and mother
how blessed your brothers too
and most blessed the man you marry.
I have never seen such beauty
I am in awe – but need help,
wrecked after twenty days at sea.
No doubt more evil awaits me.
Have pity, queen, on a stranger, one who has suffered much. Point me the way to the town, and give me a rag to wear.
And may the gods grant your desire – husband, home, and domestic peace, the highest good for mankind.
Stranger, you do not seem stupid or base: so your ills come from Zeus and you must simply endure them. But help you shall certainly have.
We Phaeacians hold the town here;
I am Alkinoos’ daughter,
and he is the lawful king.
Maids, stand fast!
Why flee at the sight of a man?
No enemy he: living here,
loved by the gods, we have none.
We must tend this wanderer for such are sacred to Zeus. So feed him and then bathe him in the river, out of the wind.
She spoke; the girls led Odysseus to the river, giving him clothes and a golden flask of oil.
But noble Odysseus spoke:
OD: Maidens, stand further off while I bathe and anoint myself. Girls should not see me naked.
The girls told their mistress of this. Noble Odysseus bathed, washing off brine and salt from back, broad shoulders, and head.
And when he was bathed and oiled and wearing the borrowed clothes, Athene made him look taller with gleaming curls on his head.
And when he was bathed and oiled and wearing the borrowed clothes, Athene made him look taller with gleaming curls on his head.
Nausikaa marvelled at him.
NAU: This man is sent by the gods.
Oh, for a husband like that,
if only he wanted to stay.
But now give him food and drink. HOM: She spoke and they obeyed and noble Odysseus, starving, ate and drank greedily.
Stranger, let us go to the city, but listen carefully to me: while we are out in the fields, walk behind me with my maids.
When we get to the city there is a wall, a causeway, a harbour on either side, and men busy with shipwork,
for Phaeacians care only for ships and seafaring. But these rude men may tease me if they meet us and one of the worst sort might say:
‘Where did Nausikaa find this tall, handsome stranger? She will surely marry him – she scorns Phaeacian suitors.’
This would embarrass me; in fact I’d not approve an unwed girl making friends with a man without her parents’ consent.
So, stranger, do as I say.
Find the poplar grove of Athene
where my father has an estate
a shout away from the city
Wait there and give us time to get home, then ask directions to my father’s house; you can’t miss it, even a child could show you.
When you get to the house
make your way straight to my mother,
spinning purple yarn by the hearth,
her maids sitting behind her.
My father will be nearby drinking his wine like a god. Go past him, kneel to my mother – you need her goodwill to get home.
She spoke, and whipped up the mules and they quickly left the river. But she drove carefully so that those on foot could keep up.
The sun set, they reached the grove which was sacred to Athene, and Odysseus sat down and prayed:
Athene, daughter of Zeus, grant my prayer this time. Let me find welcome and pity.
Pallas Athene heard him but did not show herself, fearing still that Poseidon would strike before Odysseus reached home.
Entracte

Odysseus waits in the grove

Late afternoon
Odysseus set off for the town hidden in mist by Athene. Disguised as a girl, she met him and Odysseus spoke to her thus:
Child, where is Alkinoos’ house?
I am a stranger from afar
and know nobody in this place.
Sir, I will show you the house; follow me but speak to no-one for they do not love strangers here.
The goddess led the way quickly and Odysseus followed her. At the splendid house Athene spoke again:
Here, sir, is the house you sought where the kings are feasting. Go in boldly: boldness is best even for a man from elsewhere.
Go first to the queen Arete. She is wise and resolves disputes. If you win her favour you can hope to get home again.
So Athene spoke and left him. Odysseus was thoughtful as he reached Alkinoos’ palace bright as the sun and the moon.
Bronze walls, silver doors, gold pillars – here the Phaeacians feasted lit by torches held by figures of young men sculpted in gold.
Outside lies the great orchard with pears, apples, pomegranates, sweet figs and flourishing olives.
Fruit is ripe there throughout the year, in the west wind pear after pear ripens, apple after apple, grape after grape, fig after fig.
Such were the gifts of the gods at the palace of Alkinoos. Odysseus stood, gazed, and admired, then passed quickly into the house.
Still wrapped in Athene’s dark mist
he passed through the hall till he reached
Arete and king Alkinoos,
and clasped Arete’s knees.
The mist dissolved. All fell silent and gazed in wonder at the man and Odysseus made his appeal:
I come as a suppliant, Arete,
to you, your husband, and these lords.
Help me, a much-tried man, reach home;
I have suffered long far from friends.
He spoke, and sat in the ashes.
All were silent, till old Echeneos,
wise, eloquent, and kind, spoke:
Alkinoos, this is not right; 
the others await your orders, 
so raise up the stranger, seat him, 
send for wine, and order him food.
At this, mighty Alkinoos seated Odysseus beside him. He was brought water to wash in and served a generous meal.
Godlike Odysseus ate and drank. Then Alkinoos said to them all:
ALK: Listen to me, Phaeacians while I say what my heart commands:
Having feasted, go home now, rest. Tomorrow we’ll sacrifice and consider the best way of sending the stranger home.
But if he is one of the gods, that would be something new; as a rule the gods visit us in their own forms, undisguised.
Alkinoos, I am no god.
Think of the most wretched men –
it is they whom I resemble,
my sufferings sent by the gods.
Tomorrow set me on my way:
I shall be ready for life to end
when I have seen my possessions,
my slaves, and my high-roofed house.
He spoke, and all approved then made libations and left. Odysseus remained in the hall with Arete and Alkinoos.
Then Arete spoke first, recognising the clothes he wore, for she knew she had made them, she and her serving women.
Stranger, let me ask some questions. Who are you? Where do you come from? Who gave you those clothes? I thought you said you came over the water?
Queen, it would be hard to tell all for I have suffered so much. There is a far island, Ogygia, home of the goddess Kalypso.
Zeus’s thunderbolt struck my ship breaking it up, killing the crew but I clung to the ship’s keel and drifted for nine days.
On the tenth night the gods brought me to Ogygia. There Kalypso loved me, promised me godhood but could not win my heart.
Seven years I stayed there, weeping, till she herself helped me to leave. She gave me a raft, food, clothes and a gentle following wind.
For seventeen days I sailed and came in sight of your land but Poseidon stirred up a storm and broke my raft in pieces.
Then I swam, till wind and waves brought me close to your shore but too rocky, so I swam on and reached a sheltered river.
I landed, gasping; night fell; 
away from the river I slept 
among bushes, covered with leaves, 
till noon of the next day.
I woke and saw your daughter’s maids and her, like a goddess, among them. I approached her as a suppliant and she fed me and clothed me.
Stranger, in one thing my daughter was remiss – not to bring you here herself: you were her suppliant.
Hero, your daughter is blameless. She urged me to walk with her maids but I thought you might be angry for men are easily angered.
Stranger, I am not quick to anger. Rather, I pray to the gods that you might wed my daughter if you were willing to stay.
If not, Zeus forbid we detain you; tomorrow, while you sleep, a ship shall take you home back to all that you love.
He spoke, and Odysseus prayed. 
**OD:** Zeus, may Alkinoos keep his word, 
so that he may gain renown 
and I return to my homeland.
Entracte

Night, leading to dawn
When rosy-fingered dawn appeared
Alkinoos and Odysseus rose
and went to the assembly-place
close to the ships.
As they sat together, Athene, planning Odysseus’ return, walked through the city in the guise of the king’s herald.
Come, Phaeacian leaders,
come to the place of assembly
to learn about the stranger
who looks like one of the gods.
When they were all gathered
Alkinoos spoke to them:
ALK: Let us launch a new black ship
with our best young men to row her.
Then rowers and all you lords come back to my palace for a feast to entertain the stranger.
And summon Demodokos too whom the gods gave skill in singing to please when the spirit moves him. HOM: All followed him to the palace.
The herald brought the singer, both stricken and blessed by the Muse – blind, but gifted in singing – and all began to feast.
But when they had eaten and drunk, the singer inspired by the Muse began to sing of the quarrel of Odysseus and Achilles.
When Odysseus heard this song he hid his face in his cloak and wept. And nobody noticed except Alkinoos.
Listen, and tell your dear ones when you return: we Phaeacians love feasting, the lyre, dancing, clean clothes, hot baths, and our beds!
Phaeacians, dance. Then the stranger when he gets home will tell how we excel all others in sailing, dancing, and singing.
Demodokos stepped forward and the best-trained young men danced while Odysseus watched, admiring.
Then Demodokos began to sing of how Ares loved Aphrodite and how Helios brought the news to the lord Hephaistos, her husband.
So the famous singer sang and Odysseus rejoiced with the rest. Then he spoke to the singer:
Demodokos, how I honour you!
The Muse must have taught you the tale
of the sufferings of the Greeks.
Tell us some more of the story, 
tell us of that wooden horse 
which Odysseus filled with men – 
the men who then sacked Ilion.
So the singer told how the Greeks boarded their ships and left but the Trojans dragged the horse to the highest point of Troy.
But Odysseus wept bitterly like a woman over her husband killed while defending the city. She clings to his body and wails.
But men with spears beat her and lead her away as a slave to a life of hard work and grief.
That was how Odysseus wept. Only Alkinoos, sitting nearby, was aware of his grief, and swiftly he spoke out:
Listen, Phaeacian leaders, let Demodokos cease his song, for not everyone enjoys it.
Arete brought from her chamber a fine chest to fill with gifts and a robe and tunic made by her.
You must tie the lid on yourself so that no-one can break in on the journey home, while you lie deep in sleep on the black ship.
Meanwhile a bath was made ready and he was delighted by this: not since leaving Kalypso had he been so well looked after.
Bathed, oiled, and finely dressed by the maids, he returned to join the men who were drinking wine.
Nausikaa, made fair by the gods, stood beside the door-post, saw him, gazed at him in wonder, and spoke:
Farewell, stranger; and when you are back in your distant home, remember me, for it is I to whom you first owed your life.
Nausikaa, daughter of Alkinos, 
if Zeus brings me safely home 
I'll always worship you as a god 
for, maiden, you gave me life.
He spoke, and sat down by the king.
TELOS