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

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

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

He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for Antinous just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful drinking cup, embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his fingers, the wine was even at his lips, and did he dream of death? How could he? In that revelry amid his throng of friends who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe indeed—could dare to bring death’s pain on him and darkness on his eyes?

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

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

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

All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:

“Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!”
“Your own throat will be slit for this!”
Our finest lad is down!
You killed the best on Ithaca.”

“Buzzards will tear your eyes out!”

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

But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:

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

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

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

Eurymachus alone could speak. He said:

“If you are Odysseus of Ithaca come back,
all that you say these men have done is true.
Rash actions, many here, more in the countryside.

But here he lies, the man who caused them all.
Antinous was the ringleader, he whipped us on to do these things. He cared less for a marriage than for the power Cronion has denied him as king of Ithaca. For that
he tried to trap your son and would have killed him. He is dead now and has his portion. Spare your own people. As for ourselves, we’ll make restitution of wine and meat consumed, and add, each one, a tithe of twenty oxen with gifts of bronze and gold to warm your heart. Meanwhile we cannot blame you for your anger.”
Odysseus glowered under his black brows
and said:

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

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

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

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

(into the town, we’ll call out men to chase him.
This fellow with his bow will shoot no more.”

He drew his own sword as he spoke, a broadsword of fine
bronze,
Honed like a razor on either edge. Then crying hoarse and
Loud
He hurled himself at Odysseus. But the kingly man let fly
an arrow at that instant, and the quivering feathered butt
Sprang to the nipple of his breast as the barb stuck in his
Liver.
The bright broadsword clanged down. He lurched and fell
Aside,
Pitching across his table. His cup, his bread and meat,
Were spilt and scattered far and wide, and his head
Slammed to the ground.

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

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

But with a spear throw from behind Telemachus hit him
Between the shoulders, and the lancehead drove
Clear through his chest. He left his feet and fell
Forward, thudding, forehead against the ground.
Telemachus swerved around him, leaving the long dark spear
planted in Amphinomus. If he paused to yank it out
Someone might jump him from behind or cut him down
With a sword
At the moment he bent over. So he ran – ran from the tables
To his father’s side and halted, panting, saying:

“Father let me bring you a shield and spear,
a pair of spears, a helmet.
I can arm on the run myself; I’ll give
Outfits to Eumaeus and this cowherd.
Better to have equipment.”

Said Odysseus:
“Run then, while I hold them off with arrows
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as long as the arrows last. When all are gone
If I’m alone they can dislodge me.”

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

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

The suitors make various unsuccessful attempts to expel Odysseus from his post at the door. Athena urges Odysseus on to battle, yet holds back her fullest aid, waiting for Odysseus and Telemachus to prove themselves. Six of the suitors attempt an attack on Odysseus, but Athena deflects their arrows. Odysseus and his men seize this opportunity to launch their own attack, and the suitors begin to fall. At last Athena’s presence becomes known to all, as the shape of her shield becomes visible above the hall. The suitors, recognizing the intervention of the gods on Odysseus’ behalf, are frantic to escape but to no avail. Odysseus and his men are compared to falcons who show no mercy to the flocks of birds they pursue and capture. Soon the room is reeking with blood. Thus the battle with the suitors comes to an end, and Odysseus prepares himself to meet Penelope.