

The Trojan Horse and Home

by Eric Norris (March 2018)



Helen at the Scaean Gate, Gustav Moreau, 1888

The Trojan Horse

It stood there like this morning—golden, grand—
Risen from the mist. The seas behind
Retreated, carrying a thousand ships
To Hellas. And Hades. For the city,

It was a miracle. They celebrated.
They danced together in the surf like mad.
A wine-dark wave—they never saw—crested,
Crashed, and petered out in pinkish foam

And flower petals at their feet. The war
Over—ten years of toil, sweat and tears—
The sun set on a public sacrifice:

The sizzle and aroma of burnt fat

Filled the air. On the Scaean Gate, a boy

Leaning on his spear stifled a yawn

At midnight. Bored, with his watch nearly done,

He thought of love, as young men do. He was

Imagining a pair of gentle hands

Drawing his face down, between two breasts,

When somebody—I don't know who—slit

His throat with great experience and care.



Ulysses and Penelope, Francesco Primaticcio, 1545

Home

*Now the suitors trooped in with all their swagger
And took their seats on low and high backed chairs . . .*

—The Odyssey, I.169-170., tr. Robert Fagles

S ick of corporate reality—

Facebook, Twitter, Google—I took a knife
And cut through all the cables binding me,
Returning to the written word, my wife,
My one true love, faithful Penelope.
I come—exhausted—from the arms of strife.
I’ve just spent seven years inside a cave,
The plaything of Calypso. A sex slave

Is not the life for me. At 49,
Love making’s rather hard upon the knees,
And you must monitor intake of wine
If working with large machinery. Please,
Penelope, keep weaving. I’ll be fine.
A lifetime of adventures on rough seas

Can leave a sailor—no—I won't say limp—
But—for seven years I lived on shrimp,

Oysters, clams, and Lobster Thermidor—
Foods rich in zinc—a bitter chemical.

I don't know what the oysters use it for.

I merely note that zinc's available

In several things I don't eat anymore.

Calypso used it for cholesterol.

She liked to think of me as her dessert,

And careful preparation couldn't hurt.

Calypso's kitchen—her exotic flair

With spices, strange devices, and romance—

Left me, most mornings, paralyzed, I fear.

I don't think love stood much of a chance

Between us. No. Nymphs do not declare

Affection for a pair of underpants

Kept folded in a drawer for twenty years.

And Nymphs do not dissolve, like salt, in tears.

Don't cry, Penelope. Have some champagne.

This crystal's a great improvement on the shoe
I used to drink from. I am so ashamed.
The things that cruel Calypso made me do—
Every word she uttered was profane.
She was a scorpion, compared to you,
My dear—O, come to me!—my darling wife.
I'm lucky I escaped her with my life.

Look at these rags. I'm not the man I was,
Penelope: confident, arrogant,
Manipulative and duplicitous.
I'm looking forward to less excitement—
Abandoning the hot, Homeric fuss
For an existence less—well—violent.
Time changes all of us. True, I am still
Ulysses—king of Ithaca. I will

Not live forever. Yes, much earlier,
We should have had this little conversation.
In retrospect, too much may be too clear
To men involved in affairs of the nation . . .
Wasn't Telemachus's hair much curlier,

And lighter, when I left? He's changed. Our son.
Not only taller. He smiles like a stone.
How would he handle sitting on my throne?

Would you consider him, say, self-reliant?
Do dingy diplomats command his ear?

"Son, listen, nobody could blind a giant—
A brute like Polyphemus—with a spear—
Forget a charred broomstick. No, the science
Is settled: he would die." I want to hear
About our boy. Tell me, did he sigh
With satisfaction when he learnt I didn't die?

He has this distant look which bothers me.
As if his dad were a museum piece—
An amphora—a piece of pottery
Dredged up from somewhere after centuries.
Does he realize he's won the lottery?
I am Ulysses—not some fool with fleas
You try to pity, briefly, til those smells
Begin infecting your own two nostrils.

Perhaps we should have named the child Mike . . .

Are you certain that he belongs to us?

When I left Ithaca, he was a tyke—

So tiny. You raised him yourself. I trust

Your judgment, yes—your motherly insight.

Would he object to being devious

In a world where honest men cannot be found?

Please tell me that he walks on solid ground.

I want to know what kind of man he is,

Penelope, because, when we are dead,

This palace—and our people—will be his.

Us, this antique furniture—the bed

Where you received a young man with a kiss

That shook the stars—or so the servants said—

Might easily be tossed into the fire

And not be missed. And I would be a liar

If I said otherwise. Penelope,

I'm tired. I'd trade my kingdom for a bath,

My throneroom for a chamberpot. Really,

Penelope, downstairs, they'll hear you laugh!

You haven't changed. You are my Queen, I see.

I never doubted you. But when I asked

About Telemachus your face turned white—

As if you'd seen a ghost. He'll be alright.

Listen. Down in the banquet hall, great

Cups of wine are being passed around.

Fifty pairs of lips prepare to break

Fresh bread together: the disgusting sound

Of fifty mouths describing how they'd take

Turns with you, my dear, Ithaca's crown.

For twenty years, they've gorged themselves at will.

Tomorrow, I present them with the bill.

I didn't travel all the way from Troy

To just roll over, like a dog, and die.

This is my home. My family. You. The boy.

Though much is taken, love abides. That's why

I am here. The gods do not destroy

Evil men. Give me your hand. I

Need you. Give me that strength which in old days

Moved Earth and Heaven. I'll dig all the graves.

Eric Norris's short stories and reviews have appeared in: *Foglifter*, *Ambit*, *Impossible Archetype*, *The Peacock Journal*, *Classical Outlook*, *E-Verse Radio*, *Singapore Poetry*, *Softblow*, *Assaracus*, *Glitterwolf*, *New Walk Magazine*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Goodmen Project*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, and *American Arts Quarterly*. His latest book is [Astronomy For Beginners](#).

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