

PENELOPE TO ULYSSES

Your Penelope sends you this, Ulysses, the so-long-delayed.

Don't reply to me however: come yourself.

Troy lies in ruins, an enemy, indeed, to the girls of Greece - Priam, and all of Troy, were scarcely worth this!

O I wish, at that time when he sought Sparta with his fleet, Paris, had been whelmed beneath angry seas!

I would not have lain here, cold in an empty bed, nor be left behind, to complain, at suffering long days, nor my hand, bereft, exhaust me, working all night long to cause deception, with my doubtful web.

When have I not feared dangers worse than all realities?

Love is a thing full of anxious fears.

(...)

In short, whoever of the Greek camp was killed, the heart of a lover was chilled like ice.

But the god, who favours pure love, truly gave protection:

Troy is turned to ashes: by a hero who is unharmed.

(...)

One seated at table describes the fierce battle and draws all of Troy in a little wine:

"Here was Simois, here Sigeon ground, here stood aged Priam's towering palace: here Achilles camped, here Ulysses, here mangled Hector scared the galloping horses"

Indeed Nestor related it all to your son Telemachus, sent to enquire about you, then he to me.

(...)

It was brave, oh you, who are more and more forgetful of your own,

to enter the Thracian camp, with night's deception, and kill so many men, with the help of one!

Then you were truly cautious, and thinking first of me!

My heart shook all the time, with fear, while my dear hero was depicted, riding through the army on Ismarus's horses.

But what benefit to me if Troy's cast down, by your arms, and the walls that it possessed are razed to the ground, if I wait here, as I waited while Troy still stood, and my husband away, with no end in sight?

(...)

The victor is absent, and I am not allowed to know, the reason for his delay, or in what land he cruelly hides.

Whoever turns his wandering vessel towards this shore departs weary of being questioned by me, about you: and what he'll deliver to you, if he sees you anywhere, will be letters surrendered to him, written by my hand.

I sent to Pylos, to the Nelean fields of ancient Nestor:

doubtful rumours returned from Pylos:
and I sent to Sparta: no known truth from Sparta either.
What land do you live in, or with whom do you delay so long?

It would be better if Apollo's walls still stood:
alas I'm angered myself by my thoughtless prayers!
I might have known where you were fighting, and only fear the war,
and my complaints would then have been joined with many others.

I don't know what to fear: I fear everything, insanely,
and my anxieties are open to wide speculation.
Whether the sea contains the danger, or the land,
such long delays equally cause me to suspect.
While I foolishly fear it, that is your wilfulness,
you could be captive now to a foreign love.
And perhaps you tell her, that your wife is an innocent,
considered to be almost like raw wool.
Let me be deceived, and let this charge vanish in thin air
and let your returning sails not be wilfully absent.
(...)

An insistent crowd of suitors comes to ruin us,
from Dulichium and Samos, and those who hold high
Zacynthus,
and they rule in your palace, without restraint:
they tear your possessions to pieces, and my heart.
What should I say of how you, shamefully absent, nourish
Pisander, Polybus, cruel Medon, the greedy hands of
Eurymachus, and Antinous, and others: all of them, with
your blood?

Irus and Melanthius driving in the flocks to be slaughtered
add the final insult to your ruin.

The unwarlike ones are three in number: a wife with no
strength,
old Laertes, and Telemachus your son.

He, recently, was almost taken away from me by trickery,
when he prepared to go to Pylos, against their will.

I pray the gods decree that, in the natural order of things,
he will close my eyes in death, and yours!

The faithful guardian of the filthy sty makes up another
three,

along with the herdsman, and your very ancient nurse:
but Laertes, has no power to hold his own among enemies,
he whose weapons are useless to him.

Telemachus, if only he lives, will become stronger with
age:

now he ought to be protected with his father's help.

I have no strength to drive these enemies from the house:

you must come quickly, to your harbour and refuge!
You've a son, and I pray he'll be one who, in his tender
years,
will be educated in his father's arts.
Consider Laertes: who keeps death back to the very last
day,
so that you might close his eyes.
You'll find that I, in truth, a girl when you went away,
though you soon return, have become an aged woman.