

THE WILL OF
ODYSSEUS
IN HIS SLEEP
IS DOOM

*"I hate saying the same thing over and over again."
The Odyssey, Book XII*

by
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Among islands where no one knows of his kingdom, but all are well-versed in his fame as the man most clever, most punished, a devisor, an escape-artist, a survivor, Odysseus finds men he can lie to, men he can confess to, and men who will row their boats without thought. From the island of Scheria, Odysseus is brought home on the boats of the Phaeacians, which, without rudder or sail, are guided solely by the thoughts of those who ride in passage. The Scherians, the Phaeacians —mere marks for manipulation. It is a brief and unremarkable passage in the story as Homer tells it, one that works mostly as an easy trick, sped machinery, to bring the hero back home. And we say it is justified. We breathe relief at his safety. We say this is good. And, to the men who know less than us, we say, he was there and did these acts, as poorly costumed as he needed to be. We are his accountants, custodians, meant to give not safe escort but communal alibi.

I was asleep through it all.

My dreams begin with dampened sounds, with sound as heard from underwater, face up, floating, brow barely breaching the surface of the sea, each swelling wave bringing with it the washing basso of the sea, the muffled calls of birds, lingering winds, the distant dissolution of white caps back into the grey-blue of foreign water. My dreams begin with such sounds, such beginnings of sounds, and then reel, the head lifted out. The sounds of my breath again roosting, emanating from the mouth and not the deep vessel of the body. Each dream I rise from the nothingness of water and find again a shore, another shore that mind alone has brought me to.

Whether the oars ran into the water without fussing or whether the Phaeacian ship dug mercilessly loud to pull itself further through the sea, we are told only that it moved quickly. Curled on a mat spread out before the prow, the ship's fare, a taxi's fare, slept.

When Odysseus, ever sly, stepped out of the trappings of the sly man and revealed to the court of the island his slyness, he knew it was not faded, his trick. And so there was the shadow of the stranger that he entered the palace of Alcinous within and within this fog he wept before them, not hidden nor yet with a purpose, but wept, and having foreseen that weeping would not kill a sly man, gained himself this ease. And the men who rowed him now, who studied him sleeping, knew him as a truer man than they saw first, even if only by degree. And yet the shadow persisted, was still a cloak, only now cast off and spilled out along its folds. His story rose out of the stranger's wool and owed it's substance to the absented lie — that it became something of truth.

The ships of the Phaeacian fleet are not sly or cunning and yet they are, in roughest terms, each a rudimentary mind, quick and forgiving. I have read that they rely only on thought, that they have hidden in themselves the soul of the pilot, that they read the desires of the men stationed on their backs and find the path best suited. They brought upon their passengers something of the sad moments of love. It was this quality especially which meant they would never be warships, that the islanders must turn themselves peacemakers, their island an attraction of sanctuary.

"Think of Ithaca, Odysseus. Hold it in your mind." As if hearing these words aloud meant his soul had met it's echo, had learnt at last the cavern's limits, how wide the void, now that his desires, long cast out, were carried back to him. He knew the message. He needed not be told, and

still it touched him. He would guide the ship. It would listen. It would lead him homeward, at last,
a return to prior lands.

I see the skin of great sharks drying on leaning, unfastened poles. Even in my dreams, I am left to skulk upon the lands of others and seek charity from those who are ruled already by a king. Even in my dreams, solace is but a moment's impression. There's a woman nearby raising brown hares for their pelts. The whole countryside appears lush with some dark, wide-leafed brush, and there's a short-handled strawbroom fallen down along the two-walled shelter. I ask the woman if she can spare me some bread. Her alms are tasteless, though, in my dreams, I make it a habit to eat what I am fed.

The sailors had gathered together as the sun pitched off westward. I can only imagine there was doubt among them. *Do you believe him?* A poisonous question, but grievance enough to keep their thoughts attended as their bodies stooped in aimless work; not sensing yet the death of every man aboard, the old king's prophecy and the doom, et cetera, *do not be loose with granting safe escort...* each man looked elsewhere, outwards. There is often a symmetry to these moments, witnessed clairvoyance and an equivalent disbelief, to balance the books for the details overlooked, a usury law of the ironic. A young man, feigning fearlessness, stands and crouches before Odysseus's bed. He stares upon the body, the sun-flecked growths around the eyes, the hard groundcrush skin. I give him a name. I ask:

"Polypemon, what? What are you after?"

"What bond do we have to this man — this living epistle we sign our names to with every stroke? Who do we help? We can spy upon these foreign coasts drifting by and know nothing of them — it is beyond us, why time has such pressure, to know what reason it drops the air into our chests and courses it about therein. The boat, but the flesh of trees reshaped, does not push itself against the sea, but with whatever thought it houses, must wonder what we are, leaning our own shoulder of time to its being, moving it along. What other natures sit and wait within our world for slick understanding to impel them? What orders of will must we consider? The ship perceives the stranger's dreams and we lay speed upon the boat, and yet we dream some, too, as time lays speed upon us, as if by accident. Who do we help? Our tether to the man himself — none — except by rowing, sighting horizons he's chosen, unintelligible communion that it is, but persistent, familiar

only to our innards, an intuition, a sort of tugging love, for love is the only way to understand it. And these strings that wind about to snare us, these lines cast from the mind of this man, can we, the puppets, tug, too — an equal love known through equal lovesickness. If we ceased to row would his visions ferment? Would we see the shores melt away, a sickly scene erupt as we journey?"

It was true that none on the ship recognized the landscape, this was expected, a given in the charter, but still it was hardship. The young sailor knew that none could tell for himself if the unknown shorelines were the right ones or simply unknown.

I watch as the hills slowly part in the distance, as the horses draw nearer, as pillars of steam, more playful than smoke, glide along the valley walls. I look down upon my hands and see that I am carrying stones, that I am now walking behind the cart, that I am carrying a single, rather large, stone. From the seat, the driver turns around to say he has forgotten to bring with him his own boulder, that he must return to retrieve it, that I must carry on alone. The driver gone, I hurl my stone upon a hard place in the turf. I watch it shatter, the pieces tumble and come to rest. I collect them into my pockets, twist them in the folds of my tunic, dozens of them — now my arms will be free as I walk between the mountains.

These ships have nothing of the clever about them, wood and crude iron to the touch, and yet this is their nature — a cleverness born not of the stuff itself, but born in absence of certainty, of its never having been in the material. It is only in response that it thinks. A ship with no sea does not desire one, not as choice, but as nature, cannot. A ship upon the sea responds in another kind, the sea in its vastness an alphabet that writes each word in rhyming synonymy, *be a ship*. And the ship forgives its asking, becomes a ship without complaint, and thinks it through, wave's crest by wave's crest, until the deed is no longer conscionable, and it retires, giving up the name. And the sea's questioning harp keeps sounding until some other matter touches it and, almost miraculous, floats. Amidst uncertainty, only forgiveness remains to yield intelligence, as when a man asks a question seeking truth. Only once chased and cornered can truth be asked in certain terms, truths already known, as those the philosophers know. Failing that, a man must hope for forgiveness, for leeway in his asking. Without either, the world falls victim to a trick, the abuses of a rotten djinn. And this is my worry. Having not seen his own shores for twenty years, having been lost in an archipelago of unknown islands, and having no man beside him in this ship who knows of the place he seeks, how certain could Odysseus have been in his asking? The ship must be forgiving, forgiveness itself, as no warship would be, and still this ship enters into the story as doom.

What of evil and of those to whom it is ascribed — of meanness? What order to the world proscribes it, and if none, in what forms do we admit it, welcome it? I set my chair in the middle of an open room, a foyer, where all are invited to come and make comment. Here sits Odysseus, or the sediment of him, the residue of the great traveler. Is it my actions that bring me to trial or intentions only revealed in the words, or in between them? I make no claim to arrogance, and yet I writhe with it. This pompous soul, a spirit of craft at being dispirit, of temper tempered by deception. In my dreams, I am a worse man than I see myself waking, though no worse than I might fully be. In my dreams, words are in the wool, all things imbued with conscience and spirit and me the rich oil of evil among the fiber. What warps can I cause? What garments made that still give warmth, comfort, despite the soiled material? Alive, I am the sheep that bears the wool, still unshorn and oil only elsewhere in the world. Alive, the question is only of duration, of wool left too long to grow on the beast.

The crew must have been aware of their fate, but how could they let their fear emerge. This, after all, was a team of men conditioned so that none was quite a leader, that all worked together beneath the mindful eye of the boat, swallowing personality and ego as if it were written out in the terms of their employment. Fear, if there was to be fear, and words, if words were to be spoken, would have to well up into all of them at once. But such moments happen. I have seen this happen... an odd moment of silence, a distraction, in a conversation which occurs to both speaker and listener in tandem, entirely unnoticed, and then breaks, lingers until the same dutiful alarm, a social awareness, pries loose pair of tongues both at once. Surely the men knew one another's tics, would respond to such subtle cues. The knowledge is passed between the eyes, a mutual embarrassment betrayed; letting a few unpointed phrases of recognition pass out loud should be admitted. And so the men begin to talk.

The first speech itself is more than probable, if not entirely begged, but, all in order, it presupposes a greater unlikeliness. "How many men have we brought across the sea? A handful of men. Who knows this man? Have any of us spoken to him? Yes, we know his story, but do we fall for such stories? The path he has walked has been violent. He trips through his tests, pities himself, and hides in false pretense. His crew is dead. He has come from hell. He has laid abuse, blindness, and slaughter on many shores. Why do we carry him to a new one? Do we trust his intentions? Do we know what we unleash upon its people? We know his story, we have heard it. We know his dreams, as well, we carry them with us. But how do we know the good of them if he hides always behind cloaks, behind tears, behind sleep?"

What follows from speech, is harder to say. I sometimes doubt that the men's concerns were so aligned with the story itself, for they could not know yet how filled with revenge the heart of Odysseus would become, how wrathful his return would present itself, not foresee that it would cause his own kingdom to turn against him or scar the soul of the land so deep that the gods could only bring peace by means of a lethal imposition of their own. A wanderer returning to ignite a civil war. If the men saw an omen of what was to come, if they could even interpret one if they had, there is no account of it to ease the mind. They found an oasis while following a mirage.

There is distaste in correlating disparate truths. The men do not trust Odysseus's story. They wonder if he has veiled his intentions, if their destination is truly his home, and if he will bring peace there. They are not an island of warriors, as I have said —paraphrased — for it is recorded in the histories. The men of Scheria prove themselves in the petty contests of the discus or the javelin, they stretch their muscles only in the work of the able-bodied, as in rowing. What business would they have ferrying a vengeful force upon a land, launching unvested attacks from the other reaches of the sea? Their greatest fear is not Odysseus's power, the aftermath he might leave, but what his passage makes them, these Phaeacians of the island sanctuary. This is valid, entirely valid. What is troubling to admit, though, is that their fears came true even when the Phaeacians had everything wrong in their reasoning. What oasis is deserved when fooling with hot illusion? Pity and helplessness only get a man so far. How wide shall the gates be thrown open? Odysseus was who he had claimed, a lost sailor wishing for rest. He had spread lies in Scheria, true, but he came clean when it was safe. He longed to be home, to sleep in his own bed at the side of long-missed Penelope. Wrath came later. Massacre was not at the front of his mind. He truly dreamt of home, it was no trick. How, I ask myself each time I must think of these men, can I excuse their suspicions for being right when they should have had no right to them?

I come to upon a shelf of rocks just beyond the reach of any waves. Creatures are sunbathing around me in hoards, and with every motion of my head, they grow in number. I begin to slide back into the water, unable to grasp onto anything more substantial than a crab or pull myself upon anything more true than a turtle. I struggle before learning, once submerged, that the water is sweet, that this is a fresh bay, and the salt-water has long since been behind me. I feel as if I knew this all along, that I had caught myself in the middle of a fantasy, a game to stave off boredom as I stalk the perimeter of my domains.

Odysseus thought of home and slept. In its course, the ship precipitated in him sad moments of love, but love nonetheless and sadness only therewith. Odysseus slept deep and there remains no record of his dreams. The voyage of the ship, its rowing, if not the rowers themselves, can only be presumed. They would not last for the island to debrief — dead — stone. Casualty, sure, but not buried under high mountain. *The ships themselves understand what it is that we are thinking about and want.*

Odysseus's chest filled out and arched with each sleepy breath, a sufficient sail, resting but not slack. The men stared at their payload, weary. "Who is he?" Their pilot, comatose, asleep, an emotionless face that seemed wearier still, showed no sign of revealing to the crew the reality of their mission. They were following blind; their own thoughts, not tied to any told-of land, were left free to wander.

A forest of large towers, each too thin to contain any utile room but spiring up for yards and yards like naked pines, is silhouetted against the roseate evening. I know this land. I was told a story of it when I was younger. The towers bend upwards and linger as if each were the spine of a boy craning to look upon a giant's eye. This has not changed as I have grown older. In my dreams, I am grown older still, until I am stooped like these towers once only appeared, and between them, in the lanes, scurry generations of my children, who have just been called home for a meal. From behind me flood the spiced smells of the kitchen, the night dims, and I need not turn around to know that the entire city has fallen asleep out of blessing for our meal.

They encountered no storms on their trip, no great excitement to startle and waken the dozer. When they ate, they set aside some rations for Odysseus should he come to, and proving each time to have been a waste, they cast the scraps over the side into the water. Polypemon, humbled by his own adumbrative swagger, has given himself over to communal duties, that form of sulking we have bred into dogs. He packs the food back into the stores, the wine bladders back into the cold and damp of the ship's bottom. He brushes the water off the deck and makes sure that no man is suffering too much from the sun. It should be made clear, while he yet stands in humble light, this man is my own supposition — that, though I have tried to stay strictly in line with the records, I have been lenient here. I have combed shelf after shelf, ledger after ledger, for a ship manifest. I suffer to think not of Odysseus as the only named man of the trip, but as the only individual. The famous accounts prefer muteness on this fact; the crew died as they rowed — that is, collectively. And so I've made a point to give myself another name to think of, Polypemon — "Old King Pain" — the name Odysseus steals for his own games, when he reaches the orchard of his father, stolen, as I imagine it, the way a traveller is given over to collecting the posture of what little novelty he has found on his way, the really impressive stuff, and to donning it in the style of broad familiarity or of self-education.

It is to this man I cling when I try to think of the ship and what it carried, for the ship itself was in concert only with Odysseus, a private force that dragged so many others along, borrowed them for its own purpose. The men posed no threat, made their presence so little known. Being one of the rare points in his journey when there was no guile or ulteriority forced upon him, Odysseus

showed no interest to that around him. There were no sirens to resist; he slept. Is peace for him only peace to be ignored? What brilliance would new challenges arise in him if he were to be awake and keen and should we be satisfied that he lays there in rest, a once living boat, bent for adventure, but beached and the tide withdrawn?

I dream that I am midstride, descending the steps of a temple. Uncertain of the place, I doubt my vision, though the sense of omen fills the scene. Below my feet, a pair of tarnish-green snakes, to my side a cyprus that has had long peels of bark stripped from its tangles, heaped and burned at its base. In the sky, a single hawk spans its wings to shade my left shoulder. With the tide out far enough to make the sea no more than the fine edge of a sword beneath the soft tin of the sky, I sit, heels dug into the shrub-strewn sand. With a knife that does not feel my own, weightless in my hand, I carve at driftwood to sculpt a shield, flat and light. On its face, I cut symbols foreign even to the gods, an earnest fraud — a new language to bend, for it is the bending of a bow that lets archers keep distance from inimical swords.

Were his sleep and the boat's acuity merely devices to let us know that these men were expendable, that even if they had in them the heroic traits it would have been to no effect, it would have mattered only between the men themselves, a local disturbance making no impression upon the tale at large? The only clue to their character: they did not rob him. This is explicit.

Let us say, there was a point, however, when uneasy portents passed, when having traveled well past the latitudes familiar to the sailors, it seemed as if the boat were changing course. Without a rudder or a map, they could not say which it was, correction, anomaly, or illusion, but the lands they had been flanking began to recede, a new wind overcame the sail. These children of Poseidon, so at home upon the sea, were spooked in the recesses of its attic. Their oars slowed as they looked for some new landmark to ground them. As doubt arose in the crucible of the ship, some fears, frozen so long in the mind, began to thaw faster than others — by the time these men were enveloped in stone, on the verge of return in Scheria's harbor, you could see the striations in the rock above their heads, the terror still just beginning to flood out, the weak pockets where worries had already sublimated into a wild vapor.

And when they rowed, I must constantly remind myself, he was to their backs, a cold presence upon their shoulders that seemed to negate the sun, to keep their sinew tight and full of ache. They bent their backs with no sense of pacing, no idea when the ship would beach itself and the journey be done. *I had to wander on sick and sorry.* They sat and rowed, the eyes of each dazed upon the next man's nape. They were the augur's words, carved in deep upon a dumb mouth, longing to disembark.

*I spoke Greek at every port. I spoke Greek for years. I came to each port with a tongue
withered by the sun, gone soft in the brine. Some I met drew tongues from the deep murk within
their breasts, others let them dart like stones upon still water. In sympathy, my tongue moved too.
It was levitation above the water, a buoyancy of my own when the sea offered no other. At each
port I learned Greek anew. My Greek became hard. At the last ports, I spoke it like hide to be
tanned. My breathing burned with it. Tears came with the smoke of it. I drank to soften it. And
leaving each isle, I thought, now, I need not speak Greek again, not for a while. And at each port, I
thought, here, I must speak Greek again. And within my face, which was all then one solid meat,
like a flower's bulb, seamless, the seams came, first across the lips, and then once again deeper, a
shucking knife. I spoke those words like virgin blood. For moments at a time, my words were true.
Laying down to sleep, I would say the only word I knew that was not real Greek, could not be,
because no others knew it. Penelope, I said and imagined her voice, a voice which could no longer
speak Greek, it being too hard. My speech pours out like vomit, like mortar, needing to cast a wall
for which one has no stones, no ladder, no wood, no straw. I speak so that my family will never
need to. I've circled the world around them and made myself a loose knot that I slip tighter as I
return until it holds only three. She spoke thread. Endless spools, and I drove oxen to wind it,
loosen it, braid it. I built ships of it, ships that only I would sail, at night, in our garden.*

And we cannot forget the treasure, the forfeiture of the island demanded by the stranger's
woeful song. It was not given in pity and it was not begrudged. The men whose muscles drove the
ship had given up their share of gold, of wine, of cattle, and it sat below them, collected with the
bounty at large, in the stores of the vessel. It was given as a token of faith, faith not that the
stranger was who he had claimed, but that he had seen what he had told of. If they believed him
enough to grant him escort, they should affirm it with a gift, a pressing out of extant doubt, or else
they should commit themselves to neither and leave the man to wander.

The shepherdess runs ahead, coy, knee-deep in mustard flowers, and calls back to me — she'd dreamt of me. In my dreams, others dream of me. She'd dreamt I'd learned about the scar just above her knee, that I had read her name through all disguise, that I'd spent the night not in her bed, but raising an island beside it, an island to sleep on with her in sight beyond its limns. At dusk, peering down from the hillside, the steeples translate themselves side to side in the plane of the sky, rearranging themselves into figures, other cities. Memories pass by in glancing pangs. "Try me again," I cry and the steeples align into the image of my home, the palaces of Ithaca. And as the hillside follows, leans to capitulate in these tricks of shadow, a voice rises from behind me, "Now I." And the hillside retracts, the steeples shuffle to another's vision, foreign and cold to me in distance, in specificity. Another's cry and another's as a crowd grows again behind me. The landscape, still in languorous tempo, heeds these endless calls, and in the maneuvers, I catch here and there the chance recollections of my own times, my long days, though less and less as often, until night falls and I feel again in an unfamiliar place with no great insights except those that point inward.

The ship approached a crescent bay. As the waters shallowed, a small team of sailors descended and pulled the boat upon the sand. The wood whined as it rubbed on the hard-packed sand.

They dumped their fare and his loot upon the rocks and grass beyond the sand. Neither wanting to touch nor to wake the sleeping warrior, the movements were tight and impulsive, like a throat giving itself to a bitter cure.

Before they could settle back into the routine of the ship, the vessel which once again felt their own, they looked out over their oars at the land that was growing again into the vagaries of a long past dream. Their gazes lingered in a confound of distance and not-yet-fading worry. The slow changes to the landscape as the ship moved outward, following the masthead to their backs, mixed with their drifting thoughts, which began to feel too close to a vision. A sweeping line of clouds, darkly colored and increasingly wild flew by before their eyes and adorned the bay like a gaudy plume. It could have been a change of light, or the aberration of their collective daydream, but they silently let it pass without knowing an answer. No oasis to be found in mirage.

"Think of home, men. We shall be there soon."

As if each man on the ship were a blade of grass, a stalk of grain, the remembered voices of back home blew along their spines, raising them in a wave, the hearts of these rippling grains of men full now with longing, heavy, and ready to disperse their content abroad. As before, both on this trip and ones further behind them, the men again do not speak, do not break from collective

grace into the noise of individuality, and yet each is attuned to his own song, a melody that touches his body like skin-warm honey, or milk-warmed breast. Each man becomes a tear in the blue lily eye of the sea. Knowing that together they circumscribe with such minor emotion a truth which not one alone could plumb, they ease into their backs and continue rowing with somewhat softer blood, somewhat pinker skin.

In the metropolis, the crowd becomes my hood, and my talents do not weigh upon my shoulders but put strength along my spine. The streets teem with a complicity as remarkable as how the stale water that pools at the foots of buildings demands of the sunlight that it retreat but in wilder hues. Material changes in the city as if its nature was not of being material but of generation. In the city, I must trim my sea-scorched locks, oil the skin left so long beneath demonic beard. I buy silk, I trade in it, wrap great cloths atop my shoulders, and strap new leather to my legs. I carry a sword, as I did before, for grandeur. The filiated silver that adorn the breasts of women become both the mail and the foliage of the metropolis. I push forth in the crowd, turning with every step, a shallow wave that lifts me and swoons between this feminine strength, its clarity of form, and a lower, bestial diffusion. I walk within the crowd as if summoned to process, civilian gallantry, all breathing in such ambulatory beauty. At the end of the street where tall towers send down vast patterns of shade, my eyes alight, unsuspectingly, on a green face, childishly bright but colored with age. In my hand, burnished with fresh skin, fleshy skin to hide what skinny flesh remains upon my bones, I hold a lode stone that draws the iron in my blood and holds it still.

I dreamt of the island where I was sleeping when I last had the same dream, as if I leave footsteps even in my sleep. On the island, an island of shipwrights and witches, I slept on a hill, well above the huts, deep in the pasture and the rocks, in the long crooked shadow of a stone-age juniper. And, dreaming there, I saw a procession, like a willful shadow clambering between the huts and to the cliff above the shore. I called to a goatherd nearby, but, when he looked, merely pointed to the sea. I saw her body, pale strands on the rocks below the cliffs, a vision within a dream. I knelt in the shadow of the unintelligible tree. The procession turned seaward, though a black mark crawled up the hillside like the char below an unseen flame, a cloaked figure who spoke to the goatherd, who shook his head and dismissed its presence, like a beggar. The figure came to me, a woman, finely shaped, who pulled the veil away from her face. Her face was Penelope's own, just as I had left it, unchanged with age or worry. She spoke with Penelope's voice, long threads that yawed in the air. I kissed her neck, which had at its nape the scent of my wife, meaningless. Her eyes shone like awful clouds. She shook all over and as her hair descended over her face, she began to speak. Her voice no longer spilled out in threads. At first it sounded barbaric, utter noise, but there was rhythm to it, a cadence that sprouted like a seed along my spine the tremors of deep-hidden truth. She spoke and I could not fathom it. "It is my blood and not my skin which turns itself pale for you," she spoke.

I want to imagine that it was the dis-ease of this paddock somehow descending upon the spirit which brought him to, but there had been bad and anxious airs on the ship and this was not enough to have roused him then... and then that it was the embrace of the ship having receded, his thoughts exposed again to his own will. Before the wilderness into which he awoke, *I am in some other country*, he turned to his senses to shelter him, to reweather his mind. His heart so nearly stone, as unliving as if ice water had been doused upon it, the man of pain searched far, in the old habit, for something to stay him.

An alien tundra of sundogged mist and red-saddled wasteland spread out before the body. Indigenous sounds of queer timbre trebled in the branches. What had wakened him then? So much in the air seemed to exist only for resisting the light as if there were a luminous ague weighing on the breast of the world. There are days when I wake in a cold sweat and expect to be caught in this terror.

And so the sly man scoped the awful countryside for another shade to hide in, another boast to stand upon, another hand to force. The waters gave off in yawning sloshes, the trees burdened themselves with cloud-eyed birds. It couldn't have been the disjunct with his dreams, a trick, that had snared him in bad surroundings, but something in himself, neither godly nor of fate, manifest now, a thorough inability to know his true desire. And now for the first time in his journey, his doubt would not subside. *You are mocking me and deceiving me in all you have been saying. Tell me the truth for I do not believe I am really back in Ithaca.*

Like a dream still...

In my dreams, I was dressed in the clothes of a beggar, putting arrows through each of the throats of the sons of my subjects. I had to wander on sick and sorry until the bodies filled the sea that had been my half-dug grave. I do not believe this is Ithaca...

I once slept beneath collected leaves, in the dark of a windowless house, on the windless island of the sun, in the cave of a one-eyed child who knew nothing of making a home. In each place, I dreamt of Ithaca, not of symbols to puzzle out, but of the place itself. Puzzles meet me too often in the daytime, it is waking that has tested me, always. I became clever for a reason. I had a son to relieve me of my heavy days. There is not a soul upon this land. I do not believe this is Ithaca, but if it is...

This that I return to, empty, or emptied, a colony for years untouched by my thoughts and unthought of, that my home might be home to desperation. What gate did I pass through and not see closed? And what gate have I passed through again and failed to see opened? In my dreams, it is not paradise, my home. My mind does not keep my wife in unblemished youth nor my grounds like an elysian arcade. I see things clearly. I am not an idealist. In my dreams, my body is remade. I am new when all I long for is the old. Naked, descending from the mountains, I see my skin does not gather new scars. As I sit beside a lake, washing my feet and pulling at my beard, I notice my shoulder no longer aches from sitting long years at the rudder of a ship, that my battle-wounds are vanished, as are all reminders of youthful folly. If I am to return, I'll need my marks. The child of anger, the man of pain, must wear his name upon his skin. The water magnifies the loss, the reprimed canvas above the knee where the boar's tusk had once entered not quite to the bone. I

shall go to Parnassus and find his buried skull, drink wine unmixed with water, and sign my youthful name again upon my flesh. Only then will this harrowed plain be Ithaca, where the well-scarred Odysseus keeps his throne...

The morning must grow, if it is morning, and still the light succumbs to gloom, the clouds will not break to showers. Where is Telemachus — let him have sons to stay me. I shall find Laertes and claim my trees, grow white with him and leave the world. And Penelope, what could she want beyond reunion...

In my dreams, there is little pain. If my skin is opened, as upon a rock when being tossed back by the sea or upon a blade when unable to hold back a team of enemy, I feel it seep, as if real, as wet warmth, an extra sheet upon my makeshift bed. So little thrills me in my dreams, except, perhaps, to know I own the realm, may not worry who else has pretended plans. On the ship I succumbed to such peace, a sorrowful love that soaked my marrow and seemed alone a whole idea. I wish for it again, to live beyond life's constant action, to carry on as a longing mind, for an ailing joy to fill me to the pate.

In my dreams, I drift without intention, move without knowing that I mean to, and yet here I stagnate, a heap of unquickened slop. Let me be carried off again. I do not like it here at all. I do not wish to stay here. Even if this is Ithaca, I will leave.