

SOMETIMES, IN QUIETUDE

I lie awake and turn it over in my head
that waiting for a man twelve years is useless.
A man away that long
should have the heart to send word home.
Othertimes I try to have no thoughts at all, no thoughts
on what the Fates are spinning out for young Telemachus,
and me;
on whether I can find it in myself to honor custom—
to take another man in marriage, a father for my son,
withdraw completely from this place,
and not look back.

Nights, I try to find deep sleep, which easily
doesn't come.
Worst the nights of cold and frost when my longing
drags my spirit down to the stony floor, the air
moving through the branches
jangling my nerves.
In bed beside me—great gods in the morning
...I'm married to the passing of time! What bliss is this,
counting the years in the dark, useless time
like a living thing I can't escape?

Warm nights are not much better
when tormentor Aphrodite overwhelms me
at the slightest movement I might make,
or when a lulling, loving breeze slips in through the window
and has its way with me, wandering all along my naked skin.
How much are you a wife, my spirit finally asks,
if tomorrow you relent and take another man as mate?
Not much, comes my reply:
not much if you cast too soon bright hope aside.
And so I wait along the sands...and keep on
waiting for the whims of the gods,

the rocking motion of the sea
to issue up a man as much in love with me
as I with him.

and so they gaze their fill whenever I'm downstairs.
How flattered they must feel
thinking I'm doing it for them, when it's really for myself.

And little do they realize when they see me smiling
through my veil,
that I'm smiling with my mouth,
not with my eyes.

At last...at last it's night,
and each suitor has repaired to his home, out of sight.

I breathe the fresh, clean air.

WAKEFUL DREAMING

These days I follow a path
straightway into wakeful dreaming.
The wind rises,
and I imagine a black, smooth-sailing ship approaching Ithaca;
the wind subsides, and I dream on,
hearing a man's footsteps—
Argos barking in the background.

Another year has come full round,
and in my mind's great meanderings trying to understand
why my husband in due season has not returned,
I've nowhere to go but to believe
it's Odysseus striding through the palace,
husband I love all the way to the moon.
His leaving is the tears behind my eyes.

Back-to-back nights play upon the mind,
nights fading into the mounting rose-blush
of yet another dawn.
Soon upon me comes the light
marked by the mid-day blazing of the sun
slanting down toward afternoon and the colors of twilight.
Then dark again... dark.
What's the use—my days get spent that way;
no wind can blow back the years gone past.

O just once would suffice: a cluster of silver arrows
launched from the bow of Artemis divine,
finding their mark through flesh, here,
the center of my heart.

LOVE BOUND

The sun rose,
 blossomed into brightness, then took its time
 heading toward the center of the sky. There it stood,
 the solitary sun keeping its place,
 glaring down until
 the shadowed places were on the move again;
 by which time I was bored, hungry,
 so I had a bite to eat.
 While the maids on their knees
 kept grinding and sifting wheat and barley grain,
 heaping handfuls cupped together, six-hundred someone said,
 measured into baskets big,
 and grumbling they were, all the while,
 working masses of dough into flat loaves for the fire,
 I slept,
 and awoke at the moment when the sea was glazed
 with red-becoming-orange—it was Helios
 at the end of his run at the horizon's precipice,
 then was gone.

In my room and around the palace, darkness abounds,
 my mind sitting in shadow when two thoughts come to light:
 that out of love bound together
 by whatever binds together love over time,
 I can wait for Odysseus, the man I like to think is mine alone;
 that whatever lives in me, I call love—
 true-wife love kept deep in the bone,
 where only a wife can know it.