

INTRODUCTION

Ancient myths are "liquid" narratives, in the sense that in most cases they do not provide a single version, but several minor variants that show facts and characters in a way that is sometimes very different from the canonical version. Penelope does not outrun this reality and some variations of the myth that concern her depict a woman also quite different from the chaste and faithful wife referred by Homer in his Odyssey. For example, as reported in the Rizzoli Dictionary of Classical Civilization, «After the death of Odysseus Penelope would marry Telegono, Circe and Odysseus' son. According to another tradition (as testified by a fragment of Pindar and Herodotus) Penelope generated Pan from either Hermes or Apollo, or even, after joining all the suitors who aspired to her hand during the absence of Odysseus. He, on his return, would have driven her away, so that she would have gone back to her father Icarius in Mantinea, where her tomb was shown». Then we also tried to play the role of modern bards and rewrite the character of Penelope. Four short stories are the result of our work, that we present below. Enjoy!

AT EVERY COCKCROW

«Cock-a-doodle-doo!»

It is six o'clock in the morning and just like any other day the cock crows, starting the usual dull day. I got up, had breakfast, and washed. In short, I got ready to weave the shroud. Yes, that's right. Since Ulysses left, I have lived only to weave the cloth, I have been awaiting his return and I have lived like this for almost twenty years. I have felt empty and lost for twenty years. I feel alone. It is as if Ulysses has the real Penelope there with him, the incredibly happy woman, the best part of her with him, and although I may make myself believe otherwise, it is like this. I am not happy. Without him I am nothing.

To convince myself that I do not need a man to be happy, I sometimes wonder if all these long years he has been living in expectation of being able to see me again. But no, instead of feeling sorry for himself because I am not there, he has been having a wonderful time, visiting the most hidden and wonderful parts of the world.

All this without his constantly thinking of me as I wait, as I spend the best days of my life waiting for him and grow old waiting.

I would like to be strong and brave enough to run away from this land, this cursed Ithaca, but I know not how to do it... I would like to change my meaningless life! Now I am going to sleep and stop fantasizing again. It is better...

«Cock-a-doodle-doo!»

It is six o'clock in the morning and just like any other day the cock crows, starting the usual dull day. I get up, have breakfast and wash. In short, I get ready to weave the shroud. I was finally ready with my beloved loom and my cherished ball of yarn when I noticed a mysterious figure instead of my three trusted maids in front of me. There was something strange, troubling about him... At first, I was afraid but then I kept saying to myself, Penelope, don't be afraid. Be brave and ask him who he is! After various attempts at convincing myself, I gathered my strength and asked him who he was and where he came from. He replied saying, «Last night I sensed everything you thought before going to bed. I am your savior, that is who I am.»

At first, I was puzzled. I knew not what to do, whether to scream, call the guards or keep on talking with him (or her?). I took a risk and decided to keep on talking. Do you want to know how the story unfolds now? Have no fear and read on...

At one point I found myself all at sea. I cannot say what catapulted me there... It was a strange contraption, maybe a time machine. I didn't even know the time period I was in, but I didn't care because I was happy and carefree. I was fine and it was the first time I had done something without thinking about the consequences of my actions. It was the first time I had done something for myself, something that made me happy... I was in the middle of the sea. My savior had disappeared, and I was alone. There was only Penelope, the sea and a ship...

Days went by and my adventures became more and more exciting. I spent the days listening to the world talking to me. It was as if everything had a message for me. It was as if everything in the world had its reason. It was as if everything had an explanation. I was exhausted. I could sail no longer; I needed to stop and rest. I docked ship at the first island I came across along the way. As soon as I got off the ship, I met a girl called Nausicaa who I had already heard of. She was the daughter of Alcinous, King of the Phaeacians and Queen Arete of Scheria. Her name means «she who burns ships». There was a lot of talk about her in Ithaca. Everyone spoke well of her and described her as a kind girl who was always ready to help anyone in need. I had never seen her but honestly dear readers, it was as if I had already met her...

«Cock-a-doodle-doo!»

The rooster crowed and it was then that I realized it was just a dream...

ULYSSES DON'T COME LOOKING FOR ME

As usual I was about to do my household duties, when suddenly my attention was drawn to a rather battered leather notebook. I looked around carefully, checking that there was no one looking and decided to see what that mysterious notebook was hiding. I began to leaf through a few pages, and among the numbers in a book of accounts I saw the beginning of a letter addressed to Ulysses. I began to read it with great interest, and I knew right away that it had been written by Penelope, who had been away from the villa for a few days.

Dear Ulysses,

I really wish you were here, but you are not here today either, so I decided to act alone. Last night I went to the guest rooms and in the distance, I saw a dark figure looking out of the window and lit up by the brightness of the moon. I approached to find out who he was and suddenly the figure turned, and I recognized Amphimedon's face. He put his arms around my waist and drew me close to him. At that moment I was overcome with fear, but I remained alert and heard a door creak. I didn't give it much heed, so he took me to the window, and we started looking at the stars. I leaned on his shoulder and I remembered the time you and I went to gaze at the stars from the mountain as kids.

In the meantime, I noticed that the door was creaking more and more, but still, I did not give it much heed. I was so wrapped up in the moment that I also forgot to unravel the shroud. Just as I was letting my mind wander, Amphinomus hit Amphimedon on the head, and he fell down onto the rocks. I looked at him stunned and frightened because I feared he would kill me too, but actually he took my hand and told me that he knew my game and was going to help me get rid of my suitors. We went to my room and began to think about how to go about it. We decided to kill them all together so we would be less likely to fail.

Now all that remained was to make up an excuse to justify Amphimedon's absence. As soon as dawn broke, I rushed out of the house and went to the public square in search of the murder weapon agreed upon the night before. Meanwhile Amphinomus was making sure the suitors did not wake up. Once I found what I needed, I also decided to buy something for breakfast so I would not attract too much attention. Back home I tried my hand in the kitchen and prepared several potions.

The suitors awoke late in the day and the maids served breakfast as they did every morning. Before breakfast was served, I added the poison I had obtained in the square to everyone's plate. Its effect would be felt after a few hours. Then I went to the loom as usual where for the last time I had no choice but to weave the shroud. I wove until Amphinomus came to give me the news that Antinous, Ctesippus and Demoptolemus were dead and that soon the others would pass away too. We decided to run away so I gathered my belongings and headed to the stables to my trusty mare. I loaded her up with things to take and greeted my son, Telemachus, officially making him king of Ithaca.

As soon as I reached the port to set sail for Magna Graecia, I heard a voice in the distance saying my name. I turned and saw that Amphinomus was on horseback and he too had packed his bags. He rode towards me and said that after his brothers had died and after not securing the throne, he had no reason to stay in Ithaca, so he preferred to come with me. We boarded the ship and during the long journey we got to know each other. I was fascinated by how many things he knew and by the way he treated me so gently. I had the feeling that he could fill the void that had formed over 20 years. He is a wonderful companion.

Ulysses please don't come looking for me anymore.

Penelope

I, PENELOPE

It was the morning of a day like many others that have gone by for over twenty years, waiting for my dear Ulysses to return. The house is always full of those cursed suitors vying for me and the throne. I head into the living room to continue the burial shroud that I wove during the day and unravelled at night. My son Telemachus passes by. He has always felt great affection and admiration for Ulysses, the hero of the Trojan War, whereas he is angry with me and blames me. This situation hurts me sorely as I love my son intensely, with the same love I feel for Ulysses. Once part of the shroud is finished, I try to take my mind off the usual anguish that tormented me while waiting for Ulysses by devoting myself to household chores. I always turn my thoughts to my beloved, but I am tormented by a thousand doubts. Will Ulysses ever think lovingly about me? Will he still love me? Will he have loved other women on his journey?

While I watched my maids cleaning the house, Laertes, Ulysses' father, was always there. He insisted I be courted by the Proci princes, since he claimed that I had to reinvent myself. At first, I thought I should wait for my husband all my life but thinking about my father-in-law's words I realized that spending more time taking care of myself, not only aesthetically but also internally, would make me a strong woman, aware of her own independence.

After a long day of doubts and uncertainties I go to bed exhausted in the nuptial bed that Ulysses had built, so empty and cold without him.

After a sleepless night I am awakened by Eurycleia, Ulysses' wet-nurse and faithful guardian of our house, who announces his return. I got up without making a sound but plagued by a thousand thoughts, I started sobbing distressed and embittered. At the same time, I began to understand that Ulysses had come back and as I approached him the thought began to worm its way into me that waiting those last twenty fatal years had changed my feelings for him. Still, I tried to listen to him as he told me about his long journey. We sat in our room and I listened to him in silence, but I was so upset that without saying a word I got up and left. I headed for the hall where Amphinomus, the most beautiful and intelligent of the suitors, was. As soon as I saw him my eyes widened and I felt a sense of emptiness, as if my love for Ulysses had completely vanished.

Amphinomus was sitting on the sofa and I went up to him and sat next to him. He asked me why I had joined him rather than spending time with Ulysses and I revealed to him that I had fallen in love with him, his intelligence, and his good looks. Shocked by what I said, Amphinomus began to talk to me and told me about his life, but above all he made me understand how long he had waited for me and how much he had dreamed of a happy and carefree life with me. He also promised that I would never want for anything and he would make me feel like a woman among women.

We got up and together went to send away all the other suitors who had occupied my house for years. Ulysses, troubled and hurt by my profoundly changed behaviour since the last time we had said goodbye before his departure, left without regretting having betrayed me throughout his journey. And I never had any remorse towards him as I had become a strong, determined, independent woman. She is in love.

ULYSSES AND PENELOPE: A VERY DEEP UNDERSTANDING

In a hundred light years the Ithaca army finally defeats the Trojan army with a stratagem devised by Penelope.

She was the wife of Ulysses, commander of the Greek army. His aim was to destroy the Trojans and gain victory for his own people, and bring honour and victory to his homeland, Ithaca.

The journey between one planet and another was extremely difficult. The war, which was very violent, was carried out in a completely different place from the cities involved so as not to damage their lands. Each army reached the warrior people safe and sound on a military spaceship.

With more and more clashes and fighting there seemed to be no solution so Penelope decided to find an end i.e. to give herself to the Trojans and to put an end to the war. But all this would cause the city of Troy to be ruined because Penelope's aim was for the war to finish and to make it come about she decided to set the city on fire.

After a fierce battle in which the Greek army was about to capitulate, Penelope decided to retreat to her camp and find a solution after what had happened. After much thought she made up her mind to bring the war to a close by asking to meet Priam, the Trojan army general, who instantly accepted to see her because he was secretly in love with her.

The day they met at the gates of Troy the armies were lined up facing each other with their generals. Penelope and Priam withdrew to the royal palace where she suggested ending the fighting. In return she was to be his. Priam was astonished on hearing these words and did not think twice. He divorced his wife Arisbe and decided to prepare the marriage between him and Penelope without delay, thus ending the conflict between the two armies that very day.

While the reception was being prepared Penelope met her army to put her plan into action. On the wedding day she would give her army a sign at the altar and let them in to fight the enemy, taking them by surprise. Then she would set fire to the whole city.

The long-awaited day had come. Having prepared herself as best she could, Penelope turned up at the gates of Troy accompanied by an elderly man, Ulysses. Priam was told that this man had brought up and educated Penelope when she was a girl. As the party was about to begin Penelope signaled to her army. The gates of Troy swung open, and the Trojan people saw a vast number of soldiers come in and they began to fight. Ulysses seized the moment and took advantage of it to attack Priam, who immediately fell to the ground dead. Then he took Penelope by the hand and led her to safety.

After making sure Penelope was in no danger, the spaceships began to bomb everybody and set fire to the whole city. Troy was razed to the ground and nobody managed to escape from the Greeks' clutches.