

Penelope's Perspective: Cutting Up the Bed to Offer Him Olive Branches

How to admit I have a shipwreck in my bed where a man should be?
My sacker of cities, shuddering in his sleep as if he cannot make the crossing.

My snapped bow man. How he plucked strings with the sound of swallows
but could not carry his journey so lightly. Eurycleia could only recognise him

by a scar – only wounds travel well – but I trace the map of his face,
the great names. *Ismarus, Aeolia, Ogygia. Scylla and Charybdis* as twin tear troughs.

Thrinacia a darkened sunspot. His lips drip with other women's names.
They're rubbed in his skin like brine. Not women – goddesses. *Immortality*, he says.

Everlasting youth. I was offered this. On nights when I want to be hurt,
I ask, *Why didn't you take it?* *You*, he answers, not looking at me.

He always handled his weapons so carelessly. This, the man who gave up
even his own name and something vital with it. I've finished his father's shroud

but fear it fits his measurements. I'm quick to throw the bedsheets off come morning.
Hero, they call him. What is hero but a cast-off man? What is hero but humanity,

cast off? They played wedding songs the night he came home –
a beggar not bathed in blood but drowning in it, the serving maids hung as garlands,

swinging from their necks. The costume's off and I still can't see him.
I beg for the familiar. *Touch me*, I think, *not as an oar or a sword but as a woman.*

Your limbs, he says, *are white as moly.* *You liar*, I think, *to call me antidote.*
He survives in stories. He survives through his stories. In our tree carved bed

I offer an olive branch over and over. I climb across the planks, across the dowels
of his interlocking joints, across the decking of his chest then up the gunwales

to the halyards, to raise the great mast of his mind. With a fine wind,
I weave the only words he wants to hear. *Go on, my love*, I whisper.

Tell it all to me again.