



The homecoming of Ulysses

## ULYSSES IN ITHACA

Ithaca, 26 November 1173 BC.

Dear Aggie [1],

I hope you are well in old Mycenae, in the arms of Clytemnestra (sure she loves you, I tell you). And you are lucky that Aegisthus took good care of Mycenae during your absence [2].

I am not happy. I don't know how to put it, but I have been back only one month , and I already have enough of it. Yes, I know, I always told you how I longed to see Ithaca, and Penny, and Telly, and daddy Laertes ... I know, I even kissed the bloody soil of Ithaca when I landed , but I never imagined it would be like this.

You know Aggie, this is not like Mycenae. Here you cannot walk a quarter of an hour without enjoying a sight of our beautiful sea. A darned little island, in a darned beautiful sea, that's what it is. A small island, twenty five stadia across, with a flock of inhabitants who all hate me, all because of those damned Suitors. Nobody argues that I should have left them alive, but there were so many of them! And the inhabitants of Ithaca are as prolific as rabbits. Practically everybody I meet is related to one or more of the Suitors. Even I am related to some Suitors, blast it. So, I hardly leave my house, not to get pelted with goat dung.

And Penny! Yes, a model wife, but do you know what happened the very first evening I was back? We retire to our room and she tells me, "Excuse me, but I have to go to undo the peplum". "What peplum!?" says I. You have finished with the peplum. There are no more Suitors. I am back". She tells me, "Sorry, but my psychoanalyst tells me that I must reduce graaaadually my work on the peplum. Otherwise I get withdrawal symptoms". "OK, I say, go and then show me what you did". She looks at me with an angry look: "You never listen, Oddie [3]. In the night I undo the peplum. That's the way it works".

Telemachus is a nerd. Yes, a nerd, I am sorry to say. And only because he travelled around Greece looking for me, he thinks he is a man. This is ridiculous, Athena was protecting him all the time. A moron could have succeeded! Now he wants a bigger weekly allowance, staying out late in the night etc. etc. etc.

And Eumaeus? Always there, asking for a raise in his salary. "If it was not for me you wouldn't have made it, sure you wouldn't! You would still be a tramp etc. etc." One of these days I will cut him into little pieces and feed him to his pigs.

And Laertes, always telling me that when he was young things were different - and better, of course: wives kept their place, sons kept their place, pigherds kept their place: the old man drives me up the walls. Did not grandfathers keep their place, when he was young?

After a couple of weeks, Nausicaa dropped by, with the yacht of her father. An elegant girl, and, I tell you, a feast for the eyes, with that little see-through mini-peplum which is now fashionable in Schaeria. She is still in love with

me, I know. Well, I am a fascinating mature gentleman, nothing wrong about it. I was looking at myself in the mirror before going down to dinner, when Madame Penelope came to my room with another of those fierce looks: "Don't make a fool of yourself, she says. A perfume from Paris, *n'est-ce pas?* ". "What are you talking about, Penny! This is my customary Eau de Toilette, and where Paris will exist there are only swamps, now. The natives are barbarians, have no cheese, but yogurt, no champagne, but beer". "Ha! says she. The Frogs without cheese and champagne! You tell somebody else!" (but of course she was a bit shaken). Anyhow, she kept a close guard on me the whole evening (and the following days, for that matter). Telemachus, the nerd, turned red as a cherry as soon as he saw Nausicaa. Then he stammered an invitation to go out together, to visit the new disco they have just opened downtown, with strobe-torches and all that. He even asked for the keys of my new chariot, which I had to lend him.

At two in the morning I hear a commotion outside the main door: a police officer is there with the two brats and tells me that he arrested them for reckless driving (apparently she was driving). The chariot is dented, and I must pay a talent, unless I want my son and his girl-friend, a princess, the daughter of my friend Alcinous [4], to spend the night in jail with drug-addicts and prostitutes. Well, I pay, and I even thank the man (a cousin of Antinous [5], I bet). The next day Nausicaa disappears, and I could not even talk once to her alone.

The day before Thanksgivings Penny wants me to drive her downtown to buy a turkey. Leroy says: "Hullo Sir! I have not seen you for a while. (You bet, it is just twenty years!) What can I do for you?" " We want a turkey", says Penelope. "We have no turkeys, yet, Ma'am". "What do you mean 'no turkey'? What am I supposed to stuff with my stuffing? You didn't have any turkeys last year either. When are we going to see one of those blasted birds?" Leroy says: "It is not my fault, Ma'am. Turkeys live in America, which has not yet been discovered". "Well, hurry up, then", says I.

But he gave me an idea. So, three days ago I told Penelope: "You know what? Maybe I should pop over to America and look for a turkey". She looks at me with a penetrating glance and tells: "I understand. It is a good idea". I say: "I may be sometime". She tells: "I understand". And by golly, she really does. I

prepare everything with a group of old sailors from Ithaca. They also have enough of Ithaca and whatever it represents. But they are old: the young ones are good for nothing, they go to the disco, watch the chariot races, have muscles like ricotta etc.

So, this is the last night. At dinner I had the impression that everybody knew what I was about to do, but nobody said anything. Penny gave me some heavy sweater she knitted for me, and recommended that I take care of myself. Of course I will, but she brought tears to my eyes when she kissed me good bye.

But what can I do? Tonight the sky is full of stars and the sea is quiet. The ship is ready at the pier, and we will sail at dawn, before Ithaca wakes up. Heavenly gods! I cannot wait to put myself into the great open sea, to smell the salty water and see the sail swelling under the wind. I want to see new islands coming gradually towards us, getting bigger and bigger, and land, and visit them, and learn what is there to learn, and leave them again, and look for other islands until there are islands in the sea. And you know, there is this legend about a tall brown mountain far in the west. I want to see it: I cannot wait.

I know that you understand me.

Oddie.

*Thus ends the letter, which was returned unopened from Mycenae.*

*Of course, the continuation of the story is told by Dante in the Divine Comedy, Inferno, Canto XXVI, starting from line 93.*

## NOTES

[1] Aggie is here the nickname of Agamemnon..

[2] Clytemnestra, in agreement with Aegisthus, her lover, killed Agamemnon as soon as he was back from Troy. See "Agamemnon" on SparkNotes.

[3] Oddie is here the nickname of Odysseus, the greek name of Ulysses

- [4] Alcinous was king of the Phaeacians.  
[5] Antinous was the head of the Suitors.



Ulysses in sight of the tall brown mountain