



PENELOPE.

~ A SONG CYCLE ~

by Sarah Kirkland Snider

Lyrics

All Texts by Ellen McLaughlin

1. The Stranger with the Face of a Man I Loved

*I have a house
Looks out to sea
And this is where he came
The stranger with the face of a man I loved
To the house by the sea
Long time, long time gone
A sort of home*

*It's this house
That what's left of his mind
Seems to have remembered
So what's left of his mind
Claims the house as his
Though it's been mine and mine alone since he left me here*

*He left me here
Half a life ago
But this is where he came
The stranger with the face of a man I loved*

*In this house
Where the best of our times
I try to remember
And the rest of the time
I try to forget*

*The times he lied and lied
Before he just left me here*

*The stranger with the face of a man I loved
In the house by the sea
Long time, long time gone
A sort of home*

2. This Is What You're Like

*I'd give a lot
I'd give a lot to hear him
tell me lies like that again
tell me much of anything.*

*It's true, he talks
It's true, he talks, but it's not
Anything like it was then
Anything like it was
when he talked the way a bird sings,
just to sing.*

*This is what you're like
Do you remember?
This is what you once were like.
You are a man who when the music dies away
You keep on dancing
And when there's nothing left to say
You tell me lies*

*You wrote a poem
You wrote a poem about me
Swimming in the open sea
You loved my eyebrows and my stomach and my knobby knees
I loved your mouth
I loved your mouth and every story that you told to me*

*Where is it you've gone?
How can I find you?
I heard you weeping in the dawn
But you won't say if I can bring you back alive
I'll come and find you
I can't help thinking you survived
Just went astray.*

*This is what you're like
Try to remember
This is what you once were like
Where is it you've gone? How can I find you?
Where is it you've gone?*

*Do you remember, you are a man who
Told me you loved me
You are a man who told me you loved me,
Do you remember?*

*This is what you're like
Try to remember*

3. The Honeyed Fruit

The honeyed fruit they offered dripped forgetfulness. Those who tasted it fell where they were, dreaming, their faces smeared smiling with the sweetness of the end of any desire for home. I drove them, weeping, to their rowing benches and tied them in, but still they moaned, straining to look back over their shoulders at the disappearing shore, like children carried off from their calling mothers.

4. The Lotus Eaters

*Down the ward, the men are dreaming,
drooling in their cots.
Pricks of blood in every elbow,
I am no better.
It's just that I'm awake
It's just that I'm awake and walking.
Walking.*

*Hear my footsteps down the hall.
Now I'm smelling the night air,
crunching gravel as I walk, walk, walk.*

*Never, never, never, never will I
never will I sleep like that again
Never, never, never, never, never,
Never will I sleep like that, sleep like that...*

*And I'm lost in this night
I'm lost in this night
I'm already lost, but not as lost as them
And I'm lost in this night
I'm lost in this night
I'm already lost, but not as lost as them
my sleeping, drooling, smiling men*

*I'm not as lost,
I'm not as lost
I'm not as lost as them.*

5. Nausicaa

*Don't be afraid, Stranger
I'm not afraid,
I'm not afraid of you.*

*You look so lost, Stranger
But you're not lost,
'Cause I've just found you.*

*Just take my hand, Stranger
Just take my hand
And I will lead you home.*

6. Circe and the Hanged Man

*“Is he dead?” the Stranger said
No, she tells him.*

*Say you bounce a ball
Have you ever noticed that
Between the business of its going up
and the business of its fall
it hesitates?*

*It just waits
There’s a fraction of a second there
when it’s luxuriating in the air
Before its fate rushes it on.*

*“But he’s hanging there”
Yes, he’s hanging, yes, but from the tree of life
“Is he some sort of sacrifice?”
Yes, he’s a sacrifice...
He gave himself to himself so he could see.
He gave himself to himself so he could see.
He gave himself to himself so he could see.*

*He gave himself
“So he could see?”
As only you can see
When the world is upside down
And you hang
From the branch of a tree*

*“So that’s me?”
Yes, it’s where you seem to be.
And you hang from the branch of a tree.
“So that’s me?”
Yes, it’s where you seem to be.
“So that’s me.”*

7. I Died of Waiting

He says, “Oh, Mother, I am so sad to see you here. I didn’t know. What happened to you?” She says, “I died of waiting. Year after year, I stood the days out, squinting across the water that never showed your sail. One day my hollow heart cracked to powder like an old egg and I fell where I stood, eyes still clinging to the empty horizon.” Bitter with longing Odysseus reaches out to his mother. Three times he tries and three times he fails. She is as untouchable as smoke. He says, “Oh, Mother, why can’t I hold you in my arms? Is this some fresh cruelty the gods devised to trick me?” She says, “It is only death, my son. It is the end we all come to. You and I had our last embrace long ago, in the sunlit world above. Such things can never happen here. Go back, my child. You will be here soon enough, and that is a return I shall not rejoice to see you make.”

8. Home

*Home is where I’m going, but never coming
Home is someplace I can’t recall, but head for still.
Across the waste of water I search for her,
Dear blue land,
show your blessed curve
So tiny and only mine.*

*No, no, you can't go home, she says, the world,
where do you think you're going?*

We're not done with you.

*No, no, you can't go home, she says, the world,
where do you think you're going?*

We're not done with you.

The world is never done with you.

*The world wants her travelers to stay lost.
The world swats their eyes as they run through it,
She grasps at them, pulling and tugging,
She grasps at them.*

*No, no, you can't go home, she says, the world,
where do you think you're going?*

We're not done with you.

*No, no, you can't go home, she says, the world,
where do you think you're going?*

We're not done with you.

The world is never done with you.

Not you.

9. Dead Friend

*Dead friend
Turn your back on me
I beg you
Do not look at me
With those eyes*

*Dead friend
I must leave you here
I can't stay
You can't follow me
Where I go*

*Dead friend
Turn your back on me
Let me go
I've forgotten you
Forget me
I've forgotten you
Forget me*

10. Calypso

*But I do think of her
Standing in that parking lot
The stars are out, night drops down on her
She is alone again.*

*She's alone again.
She holds his cooling dinner in her lifted hand.
Something he just might like
Sweet or salty, no one will eat it now.*

*She looks for him in darkness,
stands alone now once again
tries to see where he might have gone,
where could he go,
She looks for him in darkness,
stands alone now once again
tries to see where he might have gone,
where could he go, without her.*

11. And Then You Shall Be Lost Indeed

Tiresias prophesies for Odysseus in the Underworld:

I know you, Captain, all you want in this world is to see the honey light of your own home at last. But there is more trouble to come for you. Poseidon hates you and your way home is through him. He will make it hard for you yet. But if you can hold fast to restraint, there is some hope. You shall find yourself sailing past the Island of the Sun God. Helios, who sees all and hears everything. Helios, from whom nothing is hidden. See his many cattle, sacred to the world, they dapple his island slopes like banks of clouds. They are beautiful and they are holy. But Captain, let no one interfere with them, even if you're starving. If any man so much as touches them, everything will be taken from you, all your men, your last ship, everything. And then you shall be lost indeed, your fine mind will be useless against the fury of the sun.

12. Open Hands

*Here's an ugly little something,
Broken bit of who knows what
Here's a bloody little secret
What I did and what I thought
Here is what I lost forever
Open hands, a certain laugh
Here is what I thought I wanted
Some lost smile in a photograph*

13. Baby Teeth, Bones, and Bullets

*Let a wind come
Let a wind come blow it all away
Let a rainstorm
Let a rainstorm swallow me
Can't you do that?
Can't you hide me, God?
Can't you...*

*Save me from you
(save me from you)
Sweep me someplace you can't see
(Hide me some place)
I am known here
(God help me I'm known)*

*Open eye, open eye staring down on me.
Yellow sky, yellow sky staring down on me.
I am known for what I am.
I am known by you
(Let a wind come and blow it all away)
I am known by you*

(Let a rain storm, let a wind come, and blow it all away)
I am known by you
(Let a rain storm, let a wind come, and blow it all away)
Can't you...

Save me from you
(save me from you)
Sweep me someplace you can't see
(Hide me some place)
I am known here
(I am known by you.)

Let a wind come
Let a wind come, blow it all away.
Blow it all, all away.

14. As He Looks Out to Sea

It moves like a live thing in his hands
The story, his story
Bloody and sacred, truth and lie,
The story, his story

And it tells itself,
the pages turn and tell themselves,
Backwards and forwards,
Backwards and forwards,
Backwards and forwards like the tide.

It moves like a live thing in his hands
The story, his story
Bloody and sacred, truth and lie,
The story, his story

And it tells itself,
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