

Calypso by Emma Lefevre (2020)

Tell me about this complicated man.

Calypso, tell me about his time lost with you.

Tell us how you imprisoned him,

Cruelly held him against his will.

Watched him tormented in pain,

Tell us how, when he longed to return home,

You kept him, ignoring his misery.

With that the Daughter of Atlas,

The lustrous goddess looked away,

Her turquoise eyes settling on some distant place,

She smiled wistfully and sighed, drawing a long breath,

As if reaching for somewhere deep within,

And began to reveal her tale,

From time to time the bewitching goddess drifted away

Lost in the moment again:

It's not that I was lonely: not at all.

The song of birds filled my cavern,

A glorious chorus of dawn,

Seasoned with the scent of cypress,

Accompanied by the rhythmic breath of the waves,

As they rise over the shore and retreat back into the sea.

My days were filled with song and weaving,

Pouring delicious libations to the Gods.

Then one night,

Earth shaker Poseidon's rage,

roused a tempestuous storm.

Mighty Zeus reacted with the power of his thunderous bolt.

Sons of Cronus locked in a furious dispute,

A ship splintered into a thousand pieces.

Looking out to the thrashing black sea,

Swirling waves crashing against the shore.

Under the glint of faint moonlight,

Something caught my eye,
Hurled about in the Stygian waters,
There a half-dead man clung to a piece of wood.
I rescued him from the sea, and
in a way he rescued me.
I tended to his frail and broken body,
Laid him on a bed of cedar,
Unconscious, he wrestled with demons,
Tossing and turning,
As if lamenting at the gates of Hades.
And when the fever passed, he slept,
For days I tended to his wounds,
And then one day he opened his eyes.

Odysseus, the man of twists and turns,
Opened his eyes with dawning realisation,
As the surroundings gradually became clear.
A woman of astounding beauty came into focus.
And like a man who awakens from a dream,

with sweet recognition of his lover next to him,
Smiled gently and thought: 'Thank the gods:
I am alive'.

Calypso was bewitching,
Her soft voice, easy and calm, a sweet song.
Her eyes attentive and understanding,
Her manner patient and kind,
Like a comforting touch of velvet,
Gently caressing the skin and
Billowing silky sheets, unrestrained in the breeze.
No questions asked, no need to know,
Tending my wounds, soothing my mind.
I lay and watched an enchanting beauty,
Delicate and fair.

The palms of dawn opened with each new day,
A soft breeze came scurrying off the seas,
Warm waves caressed the sands.

The voluptuous undulations reaching a crescent peak,
Breaking with a crash.
Fingers of the salty foam reach up the beach,
Retreating over the pebbles.
Seaweed sprawled, resting over rocks.
Rock pools revealed
Crab scuttling out from a crevice.
Occupy one's mind with peace.

As I bathed, Odysseus appeared. A presence.
He talked. As he casually occupied the space,
I felt exposed. Aware of my body, my vulnerability.
Giggling, I tried to conceal myself,
He found my discomfort amusing,
He ignored my shyness, seemed disinterested in
My nakedness and yet I knew he was noticing.
Because I was noticing.
I felt his presence,
His physicality, a beauty and a sureness.

His strength catalysed something inside.
Rising up through to my cheeks,
He teased me casually as if he knew. He reeled me in.
Enchanted me. He gazed at my eyes
And for moments we recognised each other.
Intoxicating, eternal moments of bliss.

Days rolled into weeks, weeks into years
Sharing the soft, velvet, silence together,
Delighting in the life we created, stillness,
Surrendering ourselves to intense passion
as our bodies became one and swelled with love.
With Calypso, the great-hearted Odysseus was home,
His skin tingled with divinity, moments became lifetimes
His soul was settled. He was free.
His heart was overflowing with simple joy.

From her lofty throne,
Green-eyed Athena grew increasingly annoyed,

This was not the ending she had planned.
She tired of her hero wasting his life with the nymph.

She rained down disturbing images to his dreams,
Disrupting their sleep with cries that echoed,
The anguished calls from ghosts of men,
Filling his past with spectres,
Shadows punishing him for their lost lives.
Torn by lurking memories of Penelope waiting for him,
Eerily calling him to come home to Ithaca.
These tormented nights began to seep into his days.
His mind was seized by madness.
Pulled back into his past,
Hauled home to the life left behind.
Suffering, he would leave the cave,
Attempting to conceal his pain,
He loved Calypso, their life, their home.
The source of ecstatic joy, their bodies united in bliss.
And, each night they would come together as one.

His mind would be soothed,
Until he drifted once again to sleep.

The long suffering and much enduring Odysseus,
Stumbled from one pained thought to the next.
He called out to the deathless ones in despair:
'Thanatos! You cruel and heartless god.
You fill my nights with haunting dreams,
Like the darkness of an intense storm threatening in the sky,
Bodies, scattered like fallen leaves, across a battlefield,
A new-born baby, neck broken, thrown from a tower.
Once bountiful hydria, smashed to smithereens
Pools of oil, water and blood
Sucked by greedy Gaia back into the land,
Draining my life blood to the gates of Hades.

On Mount Olympus the tireless goddess watched
Her eyes flashed with cunning,
And she called upon her father,

The mighty Zeus to release the suffering
Odysseus from his prison island.
'Great father, have you forgotten
Poor Odysseus, trapped on an island with that nymph,
she keeps him there bewitched,
wishing he will be a husband,
All the while the poor man grieves for home.'

Zeus chided her, and casting a knowing look:
'Athena have you not orchestrated the
Whole thing? This will anger Poseidon,
he will not let him leave without a battle.'
The cunning goddess insisted he must leave
and with that the gods took pity and decreed he should go home.
Hermes, messenger of the gods and son of Zeus,
Left to deliver the news.

When the keen-eyed emissary Hermes arrived at our shores,
I knew he brought with him the portent of doom.

I remonstrated with him.
A cold white fury filled my mind,
And then, I remembered,
An owl had come to nest in our cave,
Shape shifting Athena was watching us.
Planting seeds of past and future in his heart.
The gutless goddess, manipulating his mind,
Charging a restless soul to be wracked with guilt.
The rage swept over me like an enormous wave rising in the sea.
Anger shook the very ground beneath me.
A silent piercing scream echoed through my heart,

Hermes was ripping apart our lives.
He warned me that the gods will was done,
That only more trouble would land upon these shores.
And yes, in defiance of the games the gods might play,
I offered him the gift of eternal peace,
And exhorted Odysseus to stay.
It was too late, a decision had been made.

I implored him not to leave,
But I had to let him go.

My bones ached with a deep, hollow pain,
My mind cleaved apart, no longer here,
Heaving with dullness and a loss of lustre,
The weight of my sadness
Sinking into the ground.
The loss of this man was unbearable.

Increasingly distressed, the man of pain Odysseus,
Found each new day more unbearable than the last,
like a slow poison permeating every cell.
Hostage to the thought:
'I have to leave.
I must get back home.'
Yet battling with his shame:
'I can't look at her,
I can't bear to see her soulful eyes so sad'.

A cold silence grew between us.
She was thinking 'stay' and I:
'I will come back'.

Then one day that goddess most divinely made,
Found me perched upon a rock, gazing out to sea,
'Odysseus, my love, it is decreed, you must go home.'

We built a raft, lashed together with divine cord.
Stacked high with supplies for his long journey.
We embraced, and I held him tight,
Surrendering to his strength.
'Don't go' I thought.
He readied to depart.

Calypso's eyes welled up,
Recalling that day Odysseus left,
The separation that left in its wake,
A deep and cavernous wound,

And shipwrecked lives, torn asunder.
Three young boys played in amongst the rockpools,
Jumping and splashing, pointing and pushing.
Laughing, shouting and kicking sand.
For them it was just like any other day.
He gathered them in his arms and held them close.
I did not hear his words.
He was a tender father, a great teller of tales,

No doubt he told them of adventure,
Of great treasures, of giants and Cyclops,
Of warriors and battles.
Together we watched as tears streamed down my face,
The raft disappeared from view and the boys shouting:
'Daddy come home soon'.