
Athena

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for PLP

Grey-eyed Athena had no childhood.

She stepped out of the old god's terrible skull a grown young goddess
and began her apprenticeship: running sex-driven cults
among the hunters and gatherers, collecting snakes and owls,
her aegis looming behind the altars, over her priestesses,
prophetic crones and breathless temple prostitutes,
sacrificed animals bleeding and burnt ears of grain.

She gained a reputation: she liked clever men,
not that way, no, but she did them favors, paid attention
to their deeds and needs and risks and wounds and wants. Her
admiration
was something a clever man could count on; she would give
protection, opportunities, good luck. There was a catch, of course:
you had to be clever again, you had to keep impressing
the grey-eyed one, and so men lasted a while
but couldn't keep it up, and fell, and well, she forgot them. She
was busy.

But Odysseus: He was another kind. One stratagem
after another, he built up so much credit that she saved him
even when he disgraced himself one time or another. (Olympus
might have disapproved if they'd noticed,
but she had walked far away from that rabble of archetypes,
totems, fertilities, boogeymen and witch-mothers,
nightwalkers, netherdwellers, sexpots and satyrs.
She owned her firmament.) Odysseus

was something new to her in his little flick of mortality.

So when she stood alone in Penelope's bedchamber
watching the reunion, the circling dance of man and woman
step by step negotiating what they knew after so many years
their carefulness like oil on water, leveling out
the fresh reek of murder from the great hall below them
the suitors' teeth driven into the earthen floor
Odysseus striped with their blood
Penelope before her loom, many-stringed weapon of her own
warfare

weaving each other in that long rite of recognition:
Her grey eyes saw words forming and fading unsaid
As they circled in the salt red sunset Ionian air.

And saw the end of her story with Odysseus; goddess and all,
it took away her breath.
In the end she had this much to show for her years with this
clever man:
He came home from the war alive, with all his teeth.