

ODYSSEUS & EDEN



CAT DOSSETT

Odysseus

You left me here, a bleating lamb.

For twenty years I waited, wove and unraveled,
tightening the shroud of myself against hosts of suitors
who would have gladly taken your place.

I knew you were alive. The red thread,

tangled about our fingers, would have surely been cut—
by the sword that had taken your life,
or by the gnawing of fishes at the bottom of the sea.
Had I known your infidelity, I'd have cut it sooner.

You thought it wouldn't reach me.

Blood in your wake, you thought the deaths of your men
and of my suitors would seal your consorts
safe in the past. No witnesses, no evidence. But,
for the first time, your sharp tongue betrayed you,

that night after your return. As the red fingers of dawn
grasped at the horizon, you called her name: Calypso.

I saw your face fall, and rise again, like an actor
returning to the stage with a different mask.

I convinced myself you hadn't, you didn't mean to,

that it had been twenty years, perhaps you thought I had died,
as I had wondered if you had. But I couldn't convince myself.
I knew, under it all. I was the good wife, waiting
until the end of time for you, but you could not wait for me—

you, slave to your loins. But I am not your Argos.
I am no bitch loyal to her last breath. I am your wife.
I waited for you, and you did not have the mind
to wait for me. I am the good wife, and my son

will not suffer under a weak father. You live in fire,
you die in fire. This parchment burns with you.
It will blacken and crumple as my heart did.
When you sail across the river of the underworld
for a second time, remember how

the hope of soldiers became the hope of women,
the hope of wives and lovers, left behind.

Eden

adam was a gardener and i his daughter
picked flowers from the vine and ate them
unable to control myself i lingered by the gates of eden
watching the angel with the flaming sword

he was the towering figure of the long agos that came before me
and i forgotten clung to the one who was Other
in a world unpopulated i knew only brothers father mother yet he
was unfamiliar his face like a rose curls like hydrangea

fingers like ivy and wings like layers of babys breath
before him i settled myself cutting and binding
and weaving a silent figure at her post
mountainous he paid no attention to me

when night fell the flaming sword cast embers into his eyes
two burning stars in the basin of heaven
and when night fell i wandered home and dreamt of them
that they may fall upon me and set me afire

long days passed before he spoke to me
in the distance my mother's voice
and when i didn't respond a zephyr stirred my hair
"your mother is calling you"

he cast me like a leaping fawn to the woman
who suffered by my birth
he had broken the seal and on setting down his sword
he became man my voice became a dove laughing at her mate

and his the hum of bees his eyes were more than i had ever known
and my heart swelled that i became more than my own
i knew only summer those days
it was to him i came when i found the body

bloodied in my mother's arms when i ran
until i couldn't hear my mother's wails my father's silent tears
i had said something stupid when i saw them
wondering at what sort of game they were playing

but with the limpness of his arms and his rolling eyes
he became a frightening Other and so i ran to find my own
i found him where he always was and described
with breathless words the streams of blood and tears

it was then i saw his face break his fingers abandon that sword
it was then i learned the smell of his hair
the softness of his skin with detached mind
i traced the lineless palms of his hands

and fingered the edges of his sleeves
it was then i found him and found him and found him
and so i touched the flames and he lifted me over the wall
and i brought him down with me

ophelia, unnoticed

drew crow-flowers from the maw of her heart,
convincing all she'd found them by the banks
of the river—though the bloody stems,

her pallor, told a different story. she died
long before her lover told her he loved her no longer.
she didn't fall to pieces then;

she was like this from the beginning.
she assured herself her nervous disposition
was a side effect of her femininity,

though she saw no other woman wring her hands
quite as often as she did.
when the color drained from her face,

joining the pool of her father's blood
on the floorboards, she realized with horror
that she hadn't wanted him in the first place.

she wanted the inescapable madness without men—
the male thread that sewed her, motherless, shut.



Cat Dossett is a contributing editor or writer for publications including *Clarion*, *Hawk & Whippoorwill*, and *New England Review of Books*. Her work as an illustrator has appeared in *Queen Mob's Tea House*, *Hoochie Reader*, *Burn*, and other venues. Writing as Brinna Littlewood Hobbs, she is the author of the occasional Kettle & Wolf newsletter.

// She can be found on Twitter as [@aboutadaughter](#), and on Etsy as [@aboutadaughtershop](#).



KOMMA SERIES NUMBER EIGHTEEN

The bite-sized booklets of the Komma Series are a mouthful of literature each, intended to be read in a single sitting. When you're done with one, pass it along! Look for them lying around in Boston, Portland, or New York City. When you see one waiting to be read, go ahead and pick it up. Give it a home in your hands for a ten-minute lit snack. Then when you're finished, leave it behind for the next person to find, in an ATM lobby, on a train station bench, in the coffeeshop, at the pub. To request a single copy of any chapbook in the series, or a set of copies in bulk quantity so you can pepper them around your neighborhood, just contact the Pen & Anvil Press and we can put a plan together to mail some over to you. You can reach us via the good folks at the Boston Poetry Union, PO Box 15274 Boston MA 02215. If you don't have a stamp, feel free to send us an email: press@penandanvil.com.

NB: "Odysseus" and "Eden" appeared originally in *The Journal of the Core Curriculum*, published at Boston University—in Numbers 26 and 27, respectively. The cover photo was taken by Darby Thompson from the Boston-Wachusett commuter rail line in September 2019. On the left of the swath of graffiti can be seen a curled figure; this is an illustration by the author.

published in 2019 // penandanvil.com/chapbooks