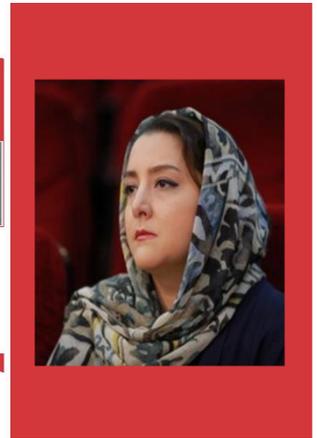


No One Is Home



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Elham Fallah



Elham Fallah is the editor and collector of this collection. She has been working in the fields of novel writing, literary criticism, and journalism for over ten years. She has published two story collections, six adult novels, and three adolescent novels so far. She is a columnist in the fiction magazine *Kargadan*, Iran newspaper, *Hamshahri Fiction*, *Arman*, etc. She is also a virtual lecturer of story criticism base at the Fiction and Poetry Literature Foundation.

Some of her honors are:

Her *Ecchymosis* novel won the 7th round of Parvin Etesami Literary Prize and the people's votes section at 11th round of Jalal Al-Ahmad Prize and has been nominated for Ghanipor Award.

Some of her works:

Winter with the Black Cherry Flavor – An adult novel in the field of psychology.

Ecchymosed - An adult novel in the field of Iran's eight-year war.

All The Sea Girls - An adult novel in the field of political activities and armed campaigns before the revolution and the MKO.

Look at Me - An adult novel in the field of mental and social health of families with autistic children.

About the book:

The book contains fourteen short stories about topics relating to the focus of women in Iranian society. Women who - in the struggle between tradition and religion, and the rampant modernization of society - have been plagued by multiple identities and complex problems to accept their multiple roles. The book perfectly mirrors all the diverse strata of Iranian women and the dilemmas and difficulties they countenance. Each story opens a new window to the world of an Iranian woman in today's Iran. The story of a woman whose wooden leg has been eaten by termites; a woman who is in conflict with the female myth of Penelope, a woman who had sought an occasion to abandon a man inches away from death, a man who had endured her during his lifetime; a woman who is addicted to play a mental game of killing other women in the subway station; a woman who has killed her husband's sister and the murder has forced her to wandering and homelessness; a woman who uses magic and sorcery to take revenge of her loneliness of women who are loved by their men; a woman who at the zero point border, to escape ethnic and family prejudices, is trapped in a pit as prey to wolves; a woman who, after years of abstaining from relying on her gender aspects for career advancements, is back to square one and regrets that; a woman who sees other women in her life as monsters that have nibbled on her life; a woman who rescues a man from destruction with her gold and possessions; a woman who daydreams about getting away from her life and save herself from the boredom of being a housewife, while still dependent on her spouse and children; a woman who considers her man's debauchery and sexual promiscuity a malignant tumor

that must be tolerated; a woman who is no longer alive, but is still watching her mother and father and identifies with their sick relationship and feels its impact on herself; the story of a woman who knowingly establishes a relationship with a married woman to cure her loneliness.

The present book is a collection of 14 short stories written with different styles by 14 most prominent and most honorable contemporary Iranian female authors. The editor of the collection presents a brief introduction of the author and her story at the preface to each story.

Expert of the Book:

What If the Termites Had Not Eaten My Leg!

I leaned on the wall sideways and pushed again. The straps were worn out. Its old buckle was rusty and every time made you mad to open and close it. I forced it out and put it at the corner of the wall. Its place was not yet quite dry that the ants marched in line like a regiment of soldiers on it. I could not understand what in that junk was so interesting to them, that they were waiting for it every day like that. I was still unable to breathe due to too much effort when I saw the shadow of Yahya casting itself over my head. He wanted to make a joke right between where I was panting and the sun. As the shadow of Yahya arrived, a brief breeze twirled in the folds of his wrinkled shawl and brought about a little coolness. The flowers on my skirt were withering away. Their color and shine had gone over to the fountain and had stayed there with ash and soap root. Yahya first cleared his throat.

- “How lucky was that bastard. How many people has he carried on his shoulder so far?”

I laughed.

- “May God have mercy on Yunus the Carpenter and his deeds. It was a year of cholera death. Do you remember? The year when everyone fled to the mountains and plains. The year we went at the foot of the Moshkel Mountain and ... it just did not work. It did not work at all. Those godless people arrived like barbarians and shot anyone who had survived the typhoid fever and cholera in the plains and deserts. It was because of one of those bullets that Yunus dropped his gun and his brother amputated his infected leg with a knife to keep him alive. It is why he came up with the idea of carpentry. Then his cousin Elias; after Elias, Mobad; after Mobad, Abdullah; after Abdullah, Shah Shanbeh; then Sammy and then me. Almost all met their death at a young age in this goddamned war. All lined up in a row and went to the netherworld. What a legacy we have! Now, do you think I will die young too? If I had not stepped on the mine? If we had reached the other side of the Moshkel mountain? If...’

Yahya hit himself on the forehead, ‘May God kill me. I opened my mouth again and....’

It was getting late. The sun was reluctant to reach the zenith, but when it was time to descend, happy and eager like young teenage girls who slide and crawl down the lush slopes of Mazar-e-Agha mountain, rolled and in the blink of an eye jumped behind the blood-vomiting mountains and hid itself so the wandering moon goes looking for it and continuously runs and becomes fat and lean, and yellow and white, due to the grief of being away from its lover.

“These two are not glued together from the beginning to eternity,” said granny Shabdar, “That is to say, they will always chase each other the same way till god knows when, from this side of the sky to the other side, but never meet. They miss each other continuously by day and night until... .’

I swallowed my saliva, “Until? When, granny?”

The old woman felt around on her white scarf blindly to find the string of her Coke bottle glasses. She pulled up the string from behind her neck and picked up the spectacles with their cracked lenses. She always did the same thing when she reached that part of the story. She wiped the tears from her dim eyes and put the spectacles inside the prayer rug.

- ‘Well, the rest is clear, dear. Until the Day of Resurrection.’

- ‘So, what will happen if they meet?’

She rubbed her tired knees impatiently, “There will be bloodshed, dear. Perhaps it is not supposed to be so. They should not get together. On the day when the moon and the sun overlap, there will be the Resurrection. Resurrection.”

It was the story of me and Yahya since my father had said that he would launch the resurrection day if we got together. The story of many people whose spiritual pain was greater than their physical pain here.

I used to say to the granny, “At night, the more I press my eyelids together, the more sleep escapes me and I am sleepless.”

Granny Shabdar answered, “When a person is sleepless it means she is awake in the dream of someone. Somebody is thinking of you.”

Yahya used to say, “I have to buy you new clothes. I have to bring you Kandahar’s wooden comb and Kabul’s velvet and Herat’s mascara. I have to go to Shiraz to bring you Narcissus. This time if I go across the border, I will bring you non – moistened loincloth from Mashhad to make a vow and together put a love lock to the shrine of Imam Reza. This time if I . . .”

The shade of sunshine had again covered my head intensely and relentlessly, and sweat beads dripped from my forehead and landed on the ground. The wooden leg was still panting against the wall and the ants tickled it. I was mourning it. Sammy, in his last moments of life, had said that I could take his wooden leg for myself provided I did not give the gun to the ground. Before blood filled his throat and he stopped breathing, he had said the termites were chewing the wooden leg. If the termites hollowed out my wooden leg, it would be impossible for me to go to Mashhad with Yahya to bring the good luck gift cloth. I had not told Yahya. I did not say that I had vowed to pour wheat seeds for the Imam’s pigeons. I will keep pace with Yahya if termites do not eat my leg.

We ran. We had run exactly five days and ten days and nine days and seven days and seven days and six days and five days. If we count it as such. The only reason was that we were seven people and our days of running were different. Moreover, we did not count the nights because we could spend some nights somewhere or take shelter or die in our imagination. We pulled the veil of the night sky over our heads and thought we were dead. Our eyes slowly grew warm and our bodies, cold. A feeling of numbness and relaxation ran under our skin and a kind of fake ecstasy as if we were wobbling in the coolness of our bed. At that time, I still had legs. I could run all of the plains to reach Moshkel Mountain and slide down, emerge in Sistan and from there, go wherever I wanted. I did not ask smugglers for help. I could find my way out. We all ran but did not arrive. Seven days to Pakistan and then to the foot of Moshkel Mountain, on the other side of which was Sistan and from there to another

place. But we died one by one. Except for I and Yahya. The night before starting to reach the Moshkel Mountain, I dreamed of rain relentlessly falling from the sky, and big and small fishes had opened their mouths to devour it. Granny Shabdar had laughed: “Honey, how is it possible that the sky rains fish?”

I said, “Not just the fish. It rained too. Forget it, will you?”

“By the way, do you have to leave?” asked granny worriedly, “Nothing happened to all of those people who stayed, right?”

She raised her palms to the sky: “May God heal. O’ God . . . do not let the eyes that wait for a dear one turn white by too much waiting.”

Granny Shabdar bolted and closed the door, loneliness spread across the room. A long time ago, the last particles of light had retreated from the thin wooden seams of the window and had gone far away. It seemed to her that it may take a lifetime until the light rubs its body to this window. How long it would take for the light to go to the other side of the world and return?

The return of the day depended on many things. Most of all, on the people’s loneliness. Lonely people do not like the day. At night, they sit in the dark and think. About many things. About many people. Lonely people sleep in the daytime so the days may end sooner. Lonely people are always waiting for the miracle. The miracle is more available at night. The miracle may come behind the door of the house and suddenly gets lost in the hustle and bustle of the day, and you do not find it again.

It was almost sunset when Stalakhjan, Khalu Shirku’s daughter, dragged down her feet over the fine and coarse rocks of Kheeshabad Hill and pressed her silver-studded rifle firmly against her chest. Upon arriving at the stable, my uncle - who was giving orders to us after the execution of my father - was shoeing Shah Jalal’s black horse. Stalakhjan tucked the cuffs of his pants between his legs and jumped over the manor that was piled beside the pond. He frowned by the splashing of sludge near the foot wash. The cold had turned his lips blue.

My uncle did not swallow his rage, “What does it mean coming here with a rifle on the chest? Did you bring it for Afifa? I will not allow this girl to start and go

somewhere. Even to the Imam. There are so many mountains and valleys, it does not make sense a few naïve young people cross them, take risks, hold their life in their hands, to what end? To go to the other side of the world seeking wickedness? Study and university is an excuse. What if those godless ones catch them in the middle of the desert? What if they do not get to the Moshkel Mountain? What if they reach them before they reach the border? What would Yahya and Yunus and the others do? Who else is going?"

Stalakhjan swallowed her saliva, "Abdullah and Mubad and Elias and . . ."

Stalakhjan was watching the baby goat that was peeing near the wall and the hot steam tickled the stable. The kid finished its job and snuggled under the heat of its mother's body. The doe stuck out her tongue. At first, at Stalakhjan and then began licking her kid.

The buffalo grunted and slammed its horns against the wall. A piece of clay and straw plastered wall was chipped off and fell. My uncle pulled his fur cloak over his shoulder and got up. From the waist shawl, he took out the pack of tobacco and began to fill the turned pipe that Shirku had made for him with mulberry wood. Shah Jalal's black horse stood on hind legs, neighed and landed on the sludge.

Shirku was standing at the tip of the tallest mountain, picking thyme. She straightened up, shaded her eyes with her right hand and checked the end of the plain. The wind passed through the plain of Kaiser's crown flowers and caressed their feverish bodies. The calm, silent sun was dragging its feet to go past the noon prayer sky and get itself behind the mountains. The sky was still a little bit far from sunset. From the height, Shirku saw Shah Jalal's old horse and a long mane that black and arrogant was rubbing against the tulips and collected their fever.

A bit farther, Afifa was limping with her white dog and two kids in the middle of the plain, shuffled the Kaiser's crown flowers and yarrows with her handstick, looking for the left leg she had lost at the same spot many years ago.

Afifa did not hear the old man's voice. The yarrow flowers smelled Afifa's red and green silk skirt and handed it out to the mane of the wind.

Shirku pulled out his pipe from his shawl and blew. He put the pipe on a rock and grabbed his tobacco bag. He poured some soaked tobacco in his palm and rubbed it well. The wind filled the gaps in the mountain with the smell of tobacco.

Shirku emptied the thyme in the middle of a white shawl that he had loosened on his waist and as he saw the partridge chicks amid their thorny nest, he changed his way and went down the valley to avoid the chicks creep out by the smell of a human being. At the bottom of the valley and by the small creek that had branched from Tashan and Urad rivers, the smell of fresh pennyroyal could even intoxicate the fairies. He screamed in the face of the mountain, “Do not you give up this game? Did you not get enough blood?”

It was a long time that Afifa did not want anything anymore, except for opening her shawl so the sun could shine on her dark blond hair and the smell of clay hair cleanser fades out from her hair and go along with the wind toward Moshkel Mountain that was very far away. She could no longer remember that Elias and others had died in the same plain so that Yahya could grab her hand and they fled together and the enemy did not reach them.

Elias had said, “There is no one waiting for me. I have lived my life. Living here for twenty-seven years seems like a thousand years!”

The horse stopped. It opened its nostrils and let out some steam. The coolness from the folds of the embroidered silk shawl twirled around its head and neck and refreshed it. The hot wind pushed away from the coolness and the fabric, and the horse with one eye saw Afifa with her hair released in the wind leaning against the haloxylon tree next to the creek facing the sun with closed eyes. The horse’s body was feverish again and it stood on hind legs and neighed. The shawl fell to the ground and the horse trampled it over the yarrows’ stems.

The letters and words written with henna spun on the horse’s body so much that they got tired and when the horse calmed down beside Afifa, threw themselves into the creek water to chill. The horse’s body was full of prayer texts and scars of work that were not perceptible. The horse was heartsick.

Thanks to the breeze, the sound of the singing of Afifa rolled across the plain until it reached the mountain. It went around the mountain the Kaiser's crown plain and fell to the ground. The white horse began to paw the ground and scared the hell out of the woman.

Between the horse's eyes, Afifa saw a man who was like no other. The man's bony face had traces of aging and his furrowed brows were heavy and rough like a camel hump. Afifa did not recognize Yahya!

The distraught white horse neighed and raised on its pair of legs. It recognized the man and neighed again. The man spread the gifted fabric on the ground and put the wooden combs and mascara and fresh bread and velvet cloth with a bouquet of tulips and a Badakhshan diamond ring, his mother's keepsake.

The muffled voice of Afifa turned around the tree and came out from behind it and sat on the velvet cloth, "Why so late? We died. It is all over."

The Zars, in the middle of the plain, behind Afifa's home, had thrown a wedding party. The horse closed its eyes and listened to the sound of Zars beating drums.

The smell of clay hair cleanser was being sprinkled among the haloxylon trees. The haloxylons began to applaud. Afifa touched the prayers written on the white torso of the horse.

Yahya said, ". . ."

But Afifa did not hear anything except for the sound of a neighing horse!

August 2019

Istanbul

Ulysses

Beautiful Penelope, behind a window at the top of the tallest Ithaca tower, watches the last Greek ship departing for war. In her eyes is the sunset, purple and hazel intertwined with streaks of silver, and a few drops of clear tears that endow dew to the eyelashes, and looking at the horizon. She raises her white arms, that are not less

glorious than the glittering sails of the ships departing for Troy, above her head. She opens the hair clip on her voluminous hair and opens the sail. Suddenly, the morning rises; a stack of gold and honey and dawn flow over her shoulder and reach down to the knee.

The last sheet of the old newspaper on the windowpane rotates and rotates in eternal and repeated circles, leaving new tracks of water every time. The mechanical motion of Sima's hand entangles the circles and pushes them into one another to make the glass cleaner. She draws the last circle to the metal corner of the window frame, where the old paint has dripped down from it. The mother's voice enters the room sooner than her plump body: "It is no use. Finish it. Go take a shower so they do not run away from your greasy hair. Rub that dark powder cream."

It is no use, but it does not end either. Do they run away? Let them do. She does not want to marry again. For someone who is more skittish than loyal, a memory that for once and ever has been enough for her is a good excuse for kicking out. After the generous kindness of Mordady, her husband, one can no longer think of another man. The only problem is that she utters this last sentence loudly, in the presence of white and red roses that the marriage proposers have brought as a gift, and in front of her brother's angry eyes.

Ulysses is a man of war. Men are always men of war. But the Trojans have been bravely resisting for ten years until Ulysses comes up with a trick to build a wooden horse that silently infiltrates the Troy with the Greeks in its womb.

Agamemnon, the leader of Greeks, not in opposition but astonishment says, "This is a hoax."

And Ulysses replies, "War is a hoax."

From this moment on until the conquest of the city and the forced liberation of the beautiful Helen, which was the humble pretext for this turmoil, the universe will be in favor of the conquerors. Athena the goddess, is a supporter of the conquerors, but a bit farther, there is also an angry god called Apollon who is a supporter of Troy. He looks at his city, which is fated to burn. If overthrowing the fate that has been

predetermined in the Olympus is not within his power, he is still capable of rendering that wily warrior a wanderer of the seas for twenty years. It is fate that a few centuries later, a sage, an old man, a historian named Homer, writes the story of this triumph and wandering in its full glory.

Sima has not read the *Odyssey*, she does not read books at all. She also handles the newspapers just enough to imprison them in the window frames. She counts the days after the death of her spouse by months and years and increases them. These might be her mother's words: "If that deceased that God may have mercy on him was going to return, you would have sent two kids to school till now. You expect too much. Your brother said, 'this shrew wanted to discredit me in front of my colleague'. He said, 'Scare her, so we will dismiss her.' I said I know my child; she is not headstrong but she does not accept a married man; she wants a young single man. But by God dear, are you asleep, a young boy falls for teenage girl. The marketplace quotes have changed. On Fridays, when we go to lunch at Salari, do not you see all the rich white-haired people come down the stairs with a chick on their side . . . like those who have made themselves black and brown and puffed up their lips twenty pounds? Being a second wife is better than after a few more years you marry a blind and bald seventy-year-old to handle his bowl and on Fridays cook soup for his grandchildren and great-grandchildren and other creeps. Now, if your brother finds out you are still thinking about that deceased man, he will send you right to the madhouse."

She says this and stirs the large red pan with a chipped wooden spoon in her hand and draws intertwined hot oil circles so that the smell of the ring onions fly to the beginning of their narrow asphalt-paved alley.

Penelope, however, stays in place; not on the seawater but *terra firma*; on the same allowed few feet of the earth; neither ask for help nor loses anyone; and the only other body heat she knows will be that of her child's, Telemachus. She does not stare into the eyes of any new human being. she does not set foot on the giant one-eyed Polyphemus' island-like her husband. She is bounded and does not make a firm foothold. She has told everybody that on the day she finishes weaving her embroidery

cloth she will marry a new husband. But every night in hiding, guarded by the wakeful eyes of the chambermaids, tears up whatever she had weaved in the daytime so that weaving never ends.

She thinks as she stares at the horizon:

- “In this half of the month, how many nights of how many years have passed that I am tearing the weavings? I wish I could tear the fence around the palace with the same razor, I wish this rotating shield could be pierced.”

Homer composes for her, “Never, lady, never! You have to stay. Penelope is the earth, the steady soil. Enjoy staying and taking root. The fate of stepping into the water has not been written on your forehead, even under the pretext of searching for your husband. Wait until the day he comes back to you with his legs. Let your insolent suitors be happy with the clashing swords and drunken shout outs.”

But Wahideh does not have a mother to dismiss her because of disobedience; perhaps her imprisoned husband’s relatives, who are also her relatives, may damn her. After all, these days, one has to keep the nice tradition of damnation alive. She is twenty-five years and three months and nine days, to this date. She looks at her small square mirror in her handbag and, as much as the twilight of the stinking toilet of their office allows, separates the extra strands one at a time from the bottom of the long black eyebrows so their ends eventually smooth out and direct upwards. Tears come running down and leave circular tracks on the powder of her face. ‘It is not your business. That guy has to play with matchsticks in the corner of the jail for twenty years. I just wait and rot so that the gentleman comes back and finds out that his property is intact? Did these black owls love me so much so that now I respect their titles as my aunt and aunt’s daughter? No, you know, I spit on your face, you know what, I just want to shout I want to get married again.’ Those words do not come out. All hit the rusty mirror above the toilet bowl of her husband's uncle's company, where the family, under the title of *secretary*, are watching over her.

Ulysses is on the way for a number of days corresponding to the number of war casualties. With the sword, he makes his way through the hearts of the cannibal

wizards and the beautiful witches; pushes the sword into the soul of everyone. Passes the houses one at a time. Passes undamaged through the phase of the intoxicating smell of forgetfulness fruits, rests a bit in the tight quarters of the Malacca Strait, then raises his head and after giving thanks to the gods, says to Homer, who is trying to see him from afar, “Hey, aged friend, How many centuries! I know you write your Odyssey about our bravery. Let it be so. Write down what hardships I had endured and will endure; and how I wandered on the water to go back to my ancestral territory. And write how Penelope stayed loyal to me for years till I return and take possession of her and my property anew.”

Homer puts down his pen. He tries to straighten up his back, but in the movement of that twisted bow, only the fifth and sixth vertebrates in his waist move. He coughs and wheezes, “The gods have made the sword eternal for you, and the pen for me. Trust the one who will make you immortal.”

Ulysses’ laughter echoes across the Seven Seas, “May your pen be sharp as our sword, and at our command.”

Wahideh tears the cooking pages off the middle of the family magazine and stuffs them in her bag. This is where she learned how to cook breakfast pancakes with sweet sauce. Her heart is nostalgic to set a breakfast table again for someone. Basically, what is the virtue in eating the same ordinary cheese and the bitter orange jam, without fear, without memories, in a home of her own, with a head held up high; not half-chewed frozen hamburgers at modest and secret mixed parties that she swallows down with the saliva of fear and embarrassment lest to be exposed. These pancakes will surely taste yummy for honeymoon mornings, but the claws of her husband sister’s hand, who has accompanied her to the dental office, jump to the middle of her bag’s zipper, and pulls the corner of the papers with full force, “What? What were those you stuffed in here, sister-in-law? Was it the horoscope page? Let me see is written about Azeris.”

Drop by drop, raw egg and mushy pancake and burnt sauce are dripping from the husband's sister's voice.

Penelope is facing the sea. Is she waiting for her husband or love? Which one of them will return to her? A familiar man who went with a raised sail or a stranger who will come with the wind? In the middle of the story are we. We know that these days Ulysses, thanks to the kind advice of his host, King Elius, is approaching the waters of his hometown but his fate is still under a curse. At the threshold of the port, his suspicious companions open a mysterious sealed bag and the opposing and wrathful wind that was trapped inside the bag, drives them away from their homeland again. This is fate. The earth is a woman. The woman is the mother . . . Eleven of Ulysses' ships are drowned by the boulder-throwing cannibals of Laestrygonians Island. But he is lion-hearted and continues his journey with the last one. Homer writes that Ulysses wants to return to his native land. Homer writes lies.

Sima cleans the glass diligently, the glasses of her own and her mother's rooms, then the door handles and the toilet's faucets and siphon. She does not know which one had been touched by the hand of this Xantia-driving bridegroom.

The tight top and the deadly corset underneath her loose-fitting black clothes caused the sweat to run in many lines on her body. One meal a day, a few times scrubbing the legs of the table and wardrobe, ten cigarettes allegedly in secret, and an hour laying on her back on the carpeted floor without a mattress. She does her best to suppress the sounds of her body, to suffocate her body so that no limb chirrup anything contrary to the wishes of her mind. If they push her too far, she takes a razor and makes a few small scars on her arm. As the blood and the smell of blood gush out, the screams inside her body go to sleep. She dreams of a hairy hand holding a Kebab dish in front of her.

It is years that Penelope's hair has been waving at the top of the tower. The suitors' ships come in every color, drop and withdraw anchor. One day a luxurious ship arrives with masts of ruby and coral and sailors of ebony. A handsome Emir, with a black beard down to his waist and a thousand sailors in the company, gets down. He does not enter the sanctum of Penelope's palace to plunder her possessions like those

indecent drunkards who have been nibbling on the slave girls and warehouses and kitchen of the palace for months.

From below, he raises his head to face the tower, “Beautiful queen. Years have passed since the lying spies have aired the fake news about the return of Ulysses’ ships. Those who should have returned have returned, and every man has lit the light of his house. In the lofts of your tower though, it is always night. Ulysses would have arrived by now if he was destined to come. Give me your hand and step into a palace in which from mirrors to newly-wed brides, all will be at your service.”

Penelope’s left foot takes a step forward. Her boobs tremble. Her heart longs for renewed party and glory and laughter. But suddenly, the sound of Homer’s alarming cough is heard, “Chaste woman!”

Penelope freezes. She steps back and slowly crawls in front of her stone-framed mirror. She collects her hair above her head to get busy with the embroidery. It is sunset.

- “Excuse me, sir . . . how much is that floral skirt?”

- “Which one ma’am? Point it out.”

- “That one . . . uh . . . the short one, lace-edged skirt.”

- “Be my guest, fifteen Tomans.” |

Wahideh’s fingers with spots remaining from the last week’s nail polish, slide under the garment’s cold satin. How nice if one could wear this skirt and sit calmly on a tall stool, but the aunt’s or husband’s mother’s voice tears the satin skirt’s stitches.

- “Dear Wahideh, where are you staying honey? We are going to the goldsmith’s place at the beginning of the shopping center. Do not miss it, huh? What is that in your hand? Like a hooker’s outfit in the movies. No sir, thank you. We do not want it. Let’s go, it is late.”

On an island, Ulysses experiences the difficult phase of making love to Circe, the tempting witch. Circe, after transforming his companions, desperate to overcome this brave man, has befriended Ulysses at first and then as her lover, and they live happily.

After a year, Circe finally allows Ulysses to continue his journey under the guidance of the prophet of the world of the dead.

Penelope is about to break the silence of undelivered-mail years. At the top of the tower, she smells the cool sea air, imprisons it, and then exhales it with a scream. A scream was so loud that it crosses the distance of three seas until it reaches the Ulysses' ship. But alas, because Ulysses has covered his own and his companions' ears with wax for fear of hearing the sound of the Sirens. The first and last scream of Penelope vaporizes in the Sirens' song and does not reach Ulysses' ears; and Homer also forgets until the end of history that he should have removed the wax out of Ulysses men's ears, those manliest men in the history of world literature.

Years and years come by. Sima and Wahideh are left behind in fried onion and glass cleaning and family magazines' nightgown photos and anti-wrinkle creams and frozen sandwiches and claws of relatives. Lost in the single-person rooms, secret friends and secret cell phone rings and compulsory physical exercise classes; until a few hundred years pass so someone may come and pull them out of these things.

Now, in this night that we are, in this tonight, Penelope is fed up. She cannot wait until the story reaches its 20th year to complete the Odyssey. She is going to get out of the story. What happened to her tonight that she changes her gilded dresses, soaked with sweat, three times, from pink to purple? She is impatient.

She says, "Impatient I am tonight."

She runs across her empty and spacious bedroom. She roars, rolls on the bare rocks of the porch floor. She separates her hair, strand by strand and lock by lock. The gaze of a young man has driven her crazy, the young man who has arrived at Ithaca today with his ship, without a sailor, without coral, without a souvenir. Penelope has seen someone who has shocked her heart again after years.

Her chambermaid is stunned: "My queen! What has this anonymous young man that the warriors and kings who have been in power for many years do not have? A pearl from the waistband of the ruler of Malta is worth his entire single-mast dowry. Compare his sunburnt body with the whitish skin of my master Ulysses' forehead!

Shame on us. This pirate who has certainly been sleeping with a woman every night in every island, and not a noble lady for that matter but one of the infamous and anonymous ones beside the temples' gates. The trace of a hundred women's tracks is still visible on his cheeks. Do you want this pirate?"

The other slave girl shouts, "I swear to Zeus that this long hair that has wrapped around your belly is worth nothing."

Homer, walking with a stick, with that respectable white beard, comes forward from the corner of the hall, "No, Penelope. What will happen to history? You, Penelope, are a word, a symbol, a sign and a ritual. The eyes of all warriors are upon you to swing swords in other lands assured of their wives' fidelity. Do you know how many thousands of tablets and books will be written in hundreds of languages about your loyalty by the end of history? People around the world will always hear only one story (clears his throat); for example, in the next three thousand years, you walk into the main hall of Paris's central bookstore so the librarian lady would provide you with at least eight versions of my Ulysses. With bilingual, trilingual interpretation, nor - interpreted, for beginners, for scholars, and learners. But in all of them, Penelope has always stayed in her palace! The story of me and you will even reach across the eastern borders, to the land of Iran. Although they, forced by morality, will introduce our beautiful Helen as Menelaus's daughter instead of his wife! But the books, thanks to Zeus, will remain intact."

Penelope, not thinking of self-restraint, kicks Homer on the waist and throws him aside. The chambermaids step back for the fear of being burned by the flash in her eyes. She darted down the stairs barefoot and with open collar, half modest and a half in a hurry. Now, she is a queen without a husband and chastity. She holds the partly embroidered fabric in her hand and swings it overhead. Homer runs after her limping and cursing to avert disaster. The drunken guests, with astonishment and as far as confusion allows, find that the queen's presence now has a different meaning. An Emir, the main suitor, comes forward and bows sarcastically, "Beauty of the day, the

lady of the night, what joyous presence have you made us proud of? Finally, you have decided to choose the most deserving of us?”

The other, who is similar to the first one in terms of boldness and wickedness, goes around Penelope in harmony with the consensual laughter of the hall, “Indeed, many years have passed over our patience and your beauty. You did not have much time to play hard to get anyways. It would be late if you came down the stairs later.”

And there comes a voice: “Play the trumpets, lady? Announce the wedding?”

Penelope passes through dragging her skirt along. She does not give a damn to astonishment and admiration and humiliation of their eyes and, like a small boat in the hands of the tailwind, reaches the ship by passing through the garden’s river and gate. She pushes her chest forward and puts her pierced fingers at the disposal of the roughness of its captain.

She climbs up and ties her half-torn cloth on his wooden wheel, “From this moment onward, I have no land and no territory. I travel from island to island. Without a destination and certainty. Today, I go to the waters with the dowry of someone I love. I do not think about the destination, except every night about the next day’s destination. I will pack up to travel from your land ship to ship without thinking about years and months.”

The astonished eyes of Homer and the readers watch their ship sailing far at the sea, and another ship getting close from afar. Maybe this is the new Ulysses’ ship that has untimely reached this point of the story . . . maybe it would come to the edge of Ithaca and then, another opposing wind make it wander again . . . as if Ithaca is a lost land and Ulysses is a forgotten name, and Penelope also has never existed from the start. Homer is bewildered, the disobedient creature has left his book. He has to find a remedy so the Odyssey remains an Odyssey; it may be easier to find a successor to Penelope, for example, to settle one of her slave girls in the tower for a while until Ulysses finally arrives at the designated page of the book. Or maybe a woman from another time and place, a woman who is familiar with waiting . . . but if she disobeys

. . . Homer excitedly looks for another woman, a woman that is left behind somewhere between fried onions and powder and floral skirt.

And on the horizon, a lonely ship pushes its way through the water.

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