



OPEN SEASON (Marathon 490 B.C.)

BY

DANIEL P. STOKES

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...Daniel P. Stokes writes in a truly epic style in 'OPEN SEASON' revisiting Marathon 490 B.C. His voice and tone is commanding and the language is as classic as the recounting is intimate; logos and ethos abound--with just a*

pinch of pathos. If you need to brush up on your ancient Greek history or just want to feel like you were there, this piece is for you. There isn't a line not worth quoting but here is an excerpt of what you can expect. "Blood bulged / his brain and clamoured for respite. / With Lycabettus looming on his left / and city walls in sight..." A virtual reality spawn from organic intelligence. I dare you not to get entrenched...

Five Stars

OPEN SEASON

(Marathon 490 B.C.)

Renown is not for winning.
It's bestowed. At times obliquely.
Take Eucles for example.
Pheidippides exhausted and the cream
of runners injured, they chose him fifth-hand,
warned him of his gravity of charge
and blessed his mission.
Oh great, he says, I've got the job. I'll show them.
and takes off, over-striding.
He hadn't passed the salt marsh when
the demon he expected showed on cue.
Unabashed, remorseless it beset him
between the static sun and foul terrain.
It wrung his heart and lungs and, leaning crassly,
tittered in his brain I'm here to stay.
He spat a dry defiance, cleared the spittle
and faced the file of hills before him
gravely. Firmly fixed the pattern on the first –
reduce to stages, targets. Attack
attain, attack and at the top, triumphal,
he'd bellow out his name.
He didn't. Crossed and coasted,
nodded. Past tense pain is easily borne.
He skirted chipped Pentellicus, glad
he needn't scale it, tag it to his name.
Araphen just sported sheep, who watched,
bemused, but didn't bleat applause.
Near Pallene a goat bucked from the ditch

and bounded up. Pan's proxied visitation
was not propitious. Chopped his steps
and hopped a dried-up gully.
Calf spasmed. Shot him upright. Writhed.
Frantic. Threw himself to earth
and drew his toes back. Helpless.
Clutched them. Held them. Held
till throes uncoiled to twinges. Clambered
knees to feet and hobbled. Muttered,
Great Athena help me. Forced a jog.
And when the throbbing ebbed –
entreaty answered - raised his pace.
The scrub Aeolus scourged
he drove through grimly. A shunted branch
that whipped his eyes served as a caution.

And when his bowels turned liquid
he didn't break his stride. Suspected,
as he sensed the city nearing,
if will had commandeered control
and hardened, he couldn't opt to stop.
But where the roads converge at Alopece
his flesh belied him. Fatigue fell like a fog
and flushed its poison. Each stride shrieked
it couldn't take another. Blood bulged
his brain and clamoured for respite.
With Lycabettus looming on his left
and city walls in sight - the demon wiled -
wiser now to walk, arrive intact,
articulate. Shrugged and plodded. Prudence
can't obscure capitulation.
The anxious at the gate came into focus
somewhat. Spurred. A pothole pitched him
sideways. Teetered. Floundered forward.
Twilight people blocked the post
that he'd resolved to touch. Butted,
burrowed, whining unawares, clutched it,
spluttered, "We did it. Beat them. Won."
And swooned unconscious.

And here it might have ended: fed and bedded,
mentioned in the dispatch, and pointed
out to children as he passed.
But a feat completed enters open season,

fair game for scribes to target, market
and peddle for applause.

So, they primed him up and hailed him Athens' saviour,
forgot his name and called him one they knew,
thanked the gods and bumped him off for pathos,
then barred the gates till Miltiades,
proving run redundant, outstripped the Persian
and led his hoplites home.

THE POET SPEAKS: *I suppose two of my favourite activities – running and reading the classics – inspired Open Season. The disparate legends that describe the run provoked me to imagine how it might have actually taken place and its effect on the man who did it. As I see most things in the colour of words, poetry stands out as the easiest way to express myself. Poets I admire highly include Yeats, Frost, Larkin and A.E. Houseman.*

AUTHOR BIO: Daniel P. Stokes has published poetry widely in literary magazines in Ireland, Britain, the U.S.A. and Canada, and has won several poetry prizes. He has written three stage plays which have been professionally produced in Dublin, London and at the Edinburgh Festival.