The Odyssey

By Homer

Odysseus vs. the Suitors

Odysseus in the Cave of the Cyclops
“Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns driven time and again off course, once he had plundered the hallowed heights of Troy. Many cities of men he saw and learned their minds, many pains he suffered, heartsick on the open sea, fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home. But he could not save them from disaster, hard as he strove—the recklessness of their own ways destroyed them all, the blind fools, they devoured the cattle of the Sun and the Sun-god blotted out the day of their return. Launch out on his story, Muse, daughter of Zeus, start from where you will—sing for our time too.”

INVOCATION OF THE MUSE

Just as he does in the *Iliad*, the narrator of the *Odyssey* calls on the divine assistance of the Muse for inspiration to tell the story of Odysseus’ return journey from Troy to his island home of Ithaca in the opening twelve lines of the poem. The bard—Homer—asks the Muse to sing through him, so he may tell the story in a manner worthy of its subject matter.

An ancient epic poem states at the beginning the subject of the work to follow, and this epic is no exception. The *Odyssey* announces its subject matter in a different fashion from the *Iliad*. Whereas Homer’s first epic treats Achilles’ rage, this one focuses on a “man of twists and turns.” It chronicles not battles, the stuff of Achilles’ brief life, but a long journey through “[m]any cities” and “many pains,” the kind of test worthy of a resourceful hero like Odysseus.

The opening lines foreshadow how the epic will end—with all of Odysseus’s men dead except Odysseus himself—and provide a reason for these deaths: the recklessness and blind foolishness of his crew, who do not realize that by slaughtering the cattle of the Sun they seal their own dooms. The opening leaves unmentioned many other temptations the Greeks will face and says nothing of the situation in Ithaca,—Odysseus’ kingdom that suffers a very different threat while its king is lost at sea—, which consumes nearly half the epic. It treats the subject matter of the epic in an abbreviated form but captures the themes those subjects will explore. In the *Odyssey*, in contrast to the *Iliad*, the Muse is asked to choose where to begin. Giving the Muse this freedom prepares us for the more complex narrative structure of the *Odyssey*, which relies on flashbacks as it moves through the many settings of the hero’s ten-year journey.

---

1 The *Muses* were nine goddesses that presided over the arts and science. They were the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (personification of Memory). The Muses are generally listed as Calliope (epic poetry), Clio (history), Euterpe (flute playing and lyric poetry), Terpsichore (choral dancing and song), Erato (lyre playing and lyric poetry), Melpomene (tragedy), Thalia (comedy and light verse), Polyhymnia (hymns, and later mime), and Urania (astronomy).
PROLOGUE: REVENGE OF OLYMPUS

The story begins ten years after the end of the Trojan War. After the Greek armies had finished with the destruction and plunder of Troy, and the many spoils of the Trojan War had been divided up accordingly among the victors, Agamemnon called what remained of the Greek fleet together, and all warrior-kings sailed with their soldiers for their individual homelands. But many a captain faced troubles as black as those each had brought down on the Trojans. Athena and Poseidon had been the Greeks’ greatest allies among the gods, but all of that changed when Troy fell. They became the Greeks’ bitterest enemies. The Greeks went mad with their victory the night they entered the Trojan city, looting Troy of its many treasures, slaying the men and children, mistreating the women who were to become their slaves, and—worst of all—did not offer sacrifices to the gods for their triumph in the war. So, on their individual voyages home, the captains and their soldiers were terribly punished.

Athena’s wrath was the most brutal among the gods, for the Trojan prophetess Cassandra had been defiled by Little Ajax on the altar of Athena’s temple in Troy. During the sack of Troy, Cassandra clung to the statue of Athena for protection, but Little Ajax violently tore her away from the statue and dragged her out of the sanctuary as war booty. Not one Greek protested against this sacrilege. This vicious act was a direct insult to Athena, and the goddess would have her revenge. She went to Poseidon and laid her wrongs before him. “Give the Greeks a bitter homecoming,” she said. “Stir up your waters with wild whirlwinds when they sail. Let dead men choke the bays and line the shore’s reefs.” Poseidon agreed. Troy was a heap of ashes by now. He could afford to lay aside his anger against the Trojans. So Poseidon sent a devastating tempest that struck the Greeks after they left Troy for Greece. Agamemnon came near to losing all of his ships; Menelaus was blown to Egypt; and the arch-sinner Ajax was drowned.

THE CURSE OF ODYSSEUS

The hero Odysseus was also blown far off course; but unlike most of the other Greek captains who eventually returned to their kingdoms safely, Odysseus was cursed to wander the treacherous seas of Poseidon for ten long years.

When the Odyssey begins, Odysseus languishes on the remote island of Ogygia with the sea goddess Calypso, who fell in love with him when he washed up alone and shipwrecked on the shores of her island seven years ago, and refuses to ever let him leave. Though Odysseus lives a charmed life with Calypso, he chooses to dwell with her on Ogygia mainly because he has given up hope in trying to return home to his kingdom in Ithaca. The gods have plagued his return journey with struggle after struggle for ten long years that Odysseus feels he is cursed to forever wander the seas, never to see his wife, his son, or his peaceful kingdom ever again. It is hard to imagine that it has been twenty years since Odysseus has seen any of them.

Unbeknownst to Odysseus, circumstances in his kingdom of Ithaca have gone from bad to worse. Everyone in Greece by now had taken it for granted that Odysseus was dead, except for Penelope, his wife, and his son Telemachus, an infant when Odysseus left for Troy but now a 20-year-old man. Most everyone else in the kingdom assumed Penelope was a widow and could and should marry again. From the islands round about and, of course, from Ithaca,
men came swarming to Odysseus’ house to woo his wife. Penelope would have none of them, however; the hope that her husband would return was faint, but it never died. Moreover, she detested every one of the suitors, as did Telemachus, and with good reason. They were rude, greedy, overbearing brutes, who spent their days sitting in the great hall of the house devouring Odysseus’ store of provisions, slaughtering his cattle, his sheep, his pigs, drinking his wine, burning his wood, giving orders to his servants. They would never leave, they declared, until Penelope consented to marry one of them. They treated Telemachus with amused contempt as if he were a mere boy and quite beneath their manliness. It was an intolerable state of things to both mother and son, and yet they were helpless, only two of them against a great company of rowdy, overindulgent men.

Penelope had at first hoped to tire them out by stalling to accept any of the suitors as her new husband. She told them that she could not marry until she had woven a very fine and exquisitely crafted funeral shroud for Odysseus’ father, the aged Laertes, as a preparation for her father-in-law’s death. The suitors had to give into so noble a purpose, and they agreed to wait until the work was finished. But it never was, for each night Penelope carefully undid the knitting that she had completed during the day, so that the shroud would never be complete. One of her handmaidens, however, told the suitors about Penelope’s ruse and they discovered her in the very act one night. Now that her trick was uncovered, the suitors became more insistent and unmanageable than ever for Penelope to choose a new husband.

And so this is how grim matters stood for Odysseus and his family when the tenth year of his wanderings neared its close: Odysseus, stranded and held captive on an island far from his home; his wife and son menaced and practically imprisoned by a horde of detestable men in their own house. But their luck was about to change.

ATHENA TO THE RESCUE
Because of the wicked way they had treated Cassandra, Athena had been angry at all the Greeks indiscriminately; but before that, during the Trojan War, she had especially favored Odysseus. She delighted in his wily mind, his shrewdness and his cunning; she was always eager to help him. After Troy fell she included him with the others in her wrathful displeasure and he too was caught by Poseidon’s storm when he set sail and was driven so completely off his course that he never found it again. Year after year he voyaged, hurried from one perilous adventure to another (of which much more will be told of later).

Ten years, however, is a long time to hold a grudge. The gods had by now grown sorry for Odysseus, with the single exception of Poseidon, and Athena was sorriest of all. Her old feelings of admiration for him had returned; she was determined to put an end to his sufferings and bring him home. With these thoughts in her mind, she was delighted to find one day that Poseidon was absent from the gathering of the gods in Olympus. He had gone to visit the Ethiopians, who lived on the farther bank of Ocean, to the south, and it was certain he would stay there some time, feasting merrily with them. Instantly, Athena brought the sad case of Odysseus before the other Olympians. She told them that at the moment Odysseus was a virtual prisoner on the island of Ogygia, ruled by the sea goddess Calypso, who loved him and planned never to let him go. Though Calypso treated Odysseus with kindness, he had become utterly wretched. He longed for his home, his wife, his son. He spent his days on the seashore, searching the horizon for a sail that never came, sick with longing to see even the smoke curling up from his house.
Athena’s words moved the Olympians. They felt Odysseus had deserved better at their hands. Agreeing that Odysseus had suffered long enough, Zeus assured Athena that he would send Hermes down to Calypso’s island to demand the goddess release Odysseus and speed him on his way back home, and permitted Athena to use her powers to help Telemachus prepare for his father’s return in Ithaca. But it was important the gods act fast, since they all knew Poseidon would be enraged to find that his fellow gods were coming to the rescue of Odysseus. Poseidon had a special reason for hating Odysseus, which will be revealed soon enough.

So Athena sped down from Olympus to the island of Ithaca to speak with Telemachus. Athena was exceedingly fond of Telemachus, not only because he was the son of dear Odysseus, but because he was a sober, discreet young man, steady and prudent and dependable. She thought it would do him good to take a journey while Odysseus was sailing home, instead of perpetually watching the outrageous behavior of the suitors in silent fury. A journey would also advance him in the opinion of men everywhere if the purpose of the journey was to seek for some news of his father.

Upon her arrival in Ithaca, Athena disguised herself as an old seafaring man. Telemachus saw her waiting by the threshold of the house and was angry to the heart that a guest at the house of Odysseus should not find instant welcome from any of the servants on the estate. He hastened to greet the visitor, take his spear, and seat him on a chair of honor. The attendants also hurried to show the hospitality of the great house, setting food and wine before him. Athena asks Telemachus if there is a drinking game occurring among the rowdy suitors, and suggests that a decent man might excuse himself from the presence of such barbarous and gluttonous behavior. Telemachus then tells the visitor of the shameful tale of his father’s house, how King Odysseus has been absent from his estate for twenty years and is now most likely dead, while Telemachus and his mother must suffer the brutish company of these crude men who hope to wed Penelope and take over a kingdom none of them deserves. Athena was outraged by what Telemachus had to say. She advised Telemachus that he must find out whatever news he can about the fate of his father. The men most likely to know about Odysseus’ whereabouts, she said, were Nestor and Menelaus, and encouraged Telemachus to sail west to Pylos and Sparta to speak with them. With that, Athena left and went on her way. Telemachus liked what he heard from his visitor, and determined to set sail the next day on a mission to learn what he could about his father.

The next day, Telemachus announced to the suitors that he intended to sail to Pylos and Sparta to consult with the kings Nestor and Menelaus in the hopes of learning some news about his father’s fate. He also asked for a well-built ship to carry him across the water and twenty sturdy rowers to man it. But Telemachus’ request was met with jeers and taunts. Antinous3 and Eurymachus4, two particularly defiant suitors, rejected Telemachus’ orders. “Sit at home, boy,” they yelled, “and wait for the sad news of your father here as you’ve been doing all your life.” Telemachus then called upon the gods to punish the suitors. At that moment, a pair of eagles, locked in combat, appeared overhead. The court soothsayer Halitherses5 interpreted their struggle as a portent of Odysseus’ imminent return and warned

---

3 Antinous: (an-TIN-oh-us)
4 Eurymachus: (yoo-RIM-uh-kus)
5 Halitherses: (hal-i-HER-uh-kus)
the suitors that they will face a massacre if they do not leave. But the suitors only ridiculed the soothsayer for his augury and went back to their eating and drinking.

Telemachus felt crushed and crestfallen. He muttered to himself, “These wicked suitors are hindering me so that I cannot sail the seas in search of my father, who has so long been missing.”

As he said this, a man suddenly appeared to him. It was Mentor, the man that of all Ithacans Odysseus had trusted the most and had left in charge of his servants and his family when he sailed for Troy. But unbeknownst to Telemachus, it was truly gray-eyed Athena disguised as the good Mentor. She spoke good words of comfort and courage to him, and promised that a fast ship should be made ready for him, and that she herself would sail with him. Telemachus of course had no idea except that it was Mentor himself speaking to him, but with this help he was ready to defy the suitors. He set off to prepare for the voyage. That night, under the cover of darkness, Telemachus crept out of his house, unnoticed by the suitors who slept in a drunken slumber, and made his way down to a ship where Mentor (Athena) was waiting. Together they embarked and put out to sea toward Pylos, Nestor’s old home.

THE QUEST OF TELEMACHUS

Upon arriving at the shores of Pylos, Telemachus and Mentor witnessed an impressive religious ceremony attended by thousands of citizens in which dozens of bulls were sacrificed to Poseidon, the god of the sea. It was a grand spectacle, magnificent enough to intimidate Telemachus from approaching Nestor. But Mentor encouraged him: “Telemachus, you must not be in the least shy or nervous. You have taken this voyage to try and find out where your father is buried and how he came by his end; so go straight up to Nestor that we may see what he has got to tell us. Beg of him to speak the truth, and he will tell no lies, for he is an excellent person.”

Trusting Mentor’s motivating words, Telemachus approached Nestor and requested a word with him. Nestor made Telemachus and Mentor heartily welcome, but he unfortunately could give them no information about the fate of heroic Odysseus. They had not left Troy together and no word of him had reached Nestor since. In his opinion, the man most likely to have news would be Menelaus, who had voyaged all the way to Egypt before coming home. He gladly offered to have his son Pisistratus take Telemachus to Sparta by chariot to speak with Menelaus. Telemachus accepted the kind offer and left the next morning for Sparta by land, leaving Mentor in charge of their ship in Pylos.

Pisistratus and Telemachus soon arrived before the lordly dwelling of Menelaus, a mansion far more splendid than either young man had ever seen. A princely welcome awaited them. The house-maidens led them to the bath place where they bathed them in silver bathtubs and rubbed them with sweet-smelling oil. Then they wrapped them in purple mantles over fine tunics, and conducted them to the banquet hall. There a servant hastened to them with water in a golden jug, which she poured over their fingers into a silver bowl. A shining table was set beside them and covered with rich food, and a golden goblet full of wine was placed for each. Menelaus then entered and gave them a courteous greeting, encouraging them to eat their fill. The young men were happy, but a little abashed by all the

---

6 Pisistratus: (piss-i-STRAT-us)
magnificence. Telemachus whispered to Pisistratus, very softly for fear someone might hear, “Zeus’s hall in Olympus must be like this. It takes my breath away.” But a moment later he had forgotten his shyness, for Menelaus began to speak of Odysseus—of his greatness and his long sorrows. As the young man listened, tears gathered in his eyes and he held his cloak before his face to hide his agitation. But Menelaus had seen Telemachus’ reaction to his story of Odysseus, and guessed that Telemachus must be the son of Odysseus, who was but an infant the last time he saw his father, some twenty long years ago.

Just then, however, came an interruption that distracted the thoughts of every man in the room. Helen the beautiful—the face that launched a thousand ships two decades ago—came down from her fragrant chamber attended by her women, one carrying her chair, another a soft carpet for her feet, and a third her silver work-basket filled with violet wool. She recognized Telemachus instantly from his likeness to his father and said to her husband, “This young man is like Telemachus, whom Odysseus left as a baby behind him, when you Achaeans went to Troy with battle in your hearts, on account of my most shameless self.”

Pisistratus rose from his seat and informed all in the room that Helen was correct: this was Telemachus, son of Odysseus. He explained that Telemachus had come to Sparta for help and advice. Telemachus then spoke and told them of the wretchedness at home in Ithaca from which only his father’s return could save them, and asked Menelaus if he could give him any news about Odysseus, whether good or bad.

Menelaus tells what he learned of Odysseus while stranded in Egypt during his return from Troy. He was advised by a goddess who took pity on him to disguise himself and three members of his crew in sealskins and then pounce on her father Proteus, Old Man of the Sea, who was a shapeshifter and had the ability to transform into anything he wanted. If Menelaus and his men could hold him down while he transformed himself into various animals and shapes, he would send them on their homeward way and give news of their companions. Menelaus did as instructed and successfully trapped Proteus when he came to shore one day near their ships. He informed Menelaus, among many things, that Odysseus was presently being held against his will by the sea goddess Calypso.

When he finished speaking, silence fell upon the company. They all thought of Troy and what had happened since, and they wept—Telemachus for his father; Nestor’s son for his brother, swift-footed Antilochus, killed before the walls of Troy; Menelaus for many a brave comrade fallen on the Trojan plain, and Helen—but who could say for whom Helen’s tears fell? Was she thinking of Paris as she sat in her husband’s splendid hall?

ESCAPE FROM THE ISLAND OF CALYPSO

Meanwhile, far across Ocean, the messenger god Hermes skimmed across the waves on magic sandals to the island of Ogygia on a mission from Zeus: to command Calypso to free Odysseus. Upon his arrival, Hermes found Calypso weaving alone in her cave; Odysseus as usual was on the sandy shore, weeping while he gazed at the empty sea. Calypso welcomed Hermes warmly, but her calmness turned to rage when he delivered Zeus’ command to her: “Zeus says that you are to let Odysseus go at once, for it is decreed that he shall not perish here, far from his own people, but shall return to his house and country and see his friends again.”

Calypso flared in anger. “You gods ought to be ashamed of yourselves!” she yelled. “You are always jealous, and hate seeing a goddess take a fancy to a mortal man, and live with him
in open matrimony. I found the poor creature sitting all alone next to the remains of his smashed ship, for Zeus had struck his vessel with lightning and sunk it in mid-ocean, so that all his crew were drowned, while he himself was driven by wind and waves onto my island. I got fond of him and cherished him, and had set my heart on making him immortal, so that he should never grow old all his days. Still I cannot cross Zeus, or bring his counsels to nothing; therefore, if he insists upon it, let the man go beyond the seas again. But I cannot send him anywhere myself, for I have neither ships nor men who can take him. Nevertheless, I will readily give him such advice, in all good faith, as will be likely to bring him safely to his own country.”

“Then send him away,” said Hermes, “or Zeus will be angry with you and punish you.” With that, Hermes left and returned to Olympus.

Calypso gloomily set about the necessary preparations. She told Odysseus, who was at first inclined to think it all a trick on her part to do something detestable to him,—drown him, very likely,—but she finally convinced him. She would help him build a splendidly strong raft, she promised him, and send him away on it equipped with everything necessary. Never did any man do work more joyfully than Odysseus while constructing his raft. Twenty great trees furnished the wood, all very dry so that they would float high. On the raft Calypso put food and drink in abundance, even a sack of the dainties Odysseus specially liked. The fifth morning after Hermes’ visit found Odysseus putting out to sea before a fair wind over quiet waters. Once again, he was on his way home.

For seventeen days Odysseus journeyed without change of weather, always steering, never letting sleep close his eyes. On the eighteenth day a cloudy mountaintop arose up across the sea. He believed that he was saved.

At that very moment, however, Poseidon, on his way back from Ethiopia, caught sight of him. He knew at once what the gods had done. “But,” he muttered to himself, “I think I can give him even yet a long journey into sorrow before he reaches land.” With that he summoned all the violent winds with a stir of his trident and let them loose, blinding sea and land with storm clouds. The East Wind fought with the South, and the ill-blowing West with the North, and the waves rose up mightily. Odysseus saw death before him. “Oh, happy are the men who fell gloriously on the plain of Troy!” he thought. “How I wish I could have shared such an end with them than to die so alone and dishonorably here in the hateful sea!”

It seemed indeed that he could not escape. The raft was tossed as a dried thistle goes rolling over a field in autumn days. Finally, a colossal wave slammed him and tore the logs of the raft apart. Odysseus was flung into the wild waters, where he struggled to stay afloat. Satisfied with Odysseus’ suffering, Poseidon at last relented and swam to a distant corner of Ocean to plan some other storm.

Athena had been watching all of this occur from Olympus, and now, with Poseidon gone, she was free to intervene on the side of her hero. She calmed the waves enough so that Odysseus could now swim.

He swam for two days and nights before he finally made it safely to the shores of a strange land. He came out of the surf exhausted and starving and naked. It was evening; not a house, not a living creature, was to be seen. But Odysseus, being a man of great resourcefulness, found a place where a few trees grew so thick and close to the ground, no moisture could penetrate them. Beneath were heaps of dry leaves enough to cover many men.
He scooped out a hollow and lying down piled the leaves over him like a thick blanket. Then, warm and still at last, with the sweet land odors blowing to him, he slept in peace.

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND
The next morning, Odysseus awoke to the sound of voices—female laughter! He wandered through the bushes following the direction of the pleasant youthful voices. He could now hear splashing sounds and running water nearby. He soon arrived at a lovely river in the forest, where he saw a group of young maidens singing and bathing in the soothing pools. He emerged from the trees, naked and wild-looking, and approached the group of bathing women. When they saw him stumbling toward them, they shrieked and quickly ran off—all, save for one. A lovely young girl named Nausicaa remained behind and faced him fearlessly.

Odysseus threw himself at Nausicaa’s feet and said, “I am a suppliant at your knees, O Queen. But whether you are mortal or divine I cannot tell. Never anywhere have I set eyes on such a one as you. Be gracious to your suppliant, a shipwrecked man, friendless and helpless, without a rag to cover him.”

Nausicaa answered him kindly, assuring him he was in a country whose people were kind to luckless wanderers like himself. The king, her father, would receive him with all courteous hospitality. She summoned the frightened maids and instructed them to bathe Odysseus and anoint him in oils so he may be made presentable for an audience with the king. When this was done, they led Odysseus to their city.

And so, Odysseus was led to the great palace of the Phaeacians, a kind people and splendid sailors. Their king, Alcinous, was a good, sensible man who knew that his wife Acrete was a great deal wiser than he and always let her decide anything important for him. Odysseus marveled at the giant palace threshold. The very walls were covered in shining bronze and trimmed with lapis lazuli. The blacksmith god Hephaestus had even provided two brass hounds to guard the entrance.

Entering the magnificent house, Odysseus strode through the hall to the hearth and sank down before Queen Arete, clasping her knees and praying for her help. The king knew better than to refuse hospitality to a decent petitioner, so Alcinous quickly raised him and bade him join a banquet that was currently in progress and take his fill of food and drink without fear. He promised Odysseus a safe passage home on the following day after he had been suitably entertained as a guest and had sufficient sleep. So Odysseus slept blissfully in the comforts of that heavenly palace on a couch soft and warm as he had not known since he left Calypso’s isle.

The next day, Odysseus emerged from his chambers in the palace to find that King Alcinous had declared a holiday in honor of their guest, whose name the king still did not know. The holiday was to involve a great feast followed by an athletic competition. During the feast, a blind bard named Demodocus was brought in to the banquet hall to entertain

---

7 Nausicaa: (no-SICK-ay-uh)
8 Phaeacians: (fee-AY-shunz)
9 Alcinous: (al-SIN-oh-us)
10 Acrete: (ah-REE-tee)
11 lapis lazuli: a bright blue metamorphic rock
everyone with a melodious ballad. The bard began striking the chords of his lyre and sang a song about, of all things, the feats of the heroes of the Trojan War. The entire company listened to Demodocus’ song enthralled—everyone, except for Odysseus, that is. He was now being reminded of his fallen comrades, the bloody deeds the Greeks had committed against the Trojans the night Troy was sacked, and the wrath of the gods that damned him to wander the cruel Ocean for ten years. So terrorizing were these memories that Odysseus was forced to raise his cloak over his face to cover the tears that now poured down his cheeks. The only person among the company that noticed his grief was King Alcinous. Hearing Odysseus’ heavy sighs, he clapped his hands and shouted, “We have had enough now, both of the feast and of Demodocus’ song. Let us proceed therefore to the athletic sports, so that our guest on his return home may be able to tell his friends how much we Phaeacians surpass all other nations as boxers, wrestlers, jumpers, and runners.”

So the company moved outdoors to where the athletic competition was held, with foot races, wrestling, and the discus throw. Odysseus was invited to join in the disc-throwing event, but he respectfully declined—his mind was still grieving from his memories of war, though he kept his sadness only to himself. But Odysseus’ refusal to participate prompted one of the athletes to suggest that he lacked the athletic skills necessary to compete against the men of Phaeacia. Insulted to the point of outrage, Odysseus seized a disc, larger, more massive and much heavier than those used by the Phaeacians when disc-throwing among themselves. Then, swinging it back, he threw it from his brawny hand, and it made a humming sound in the air as he did so. The Phaeacians quailed beneath the rushing of its flight as it sped gracefully from his hand, and flew beyond any mark that had been made yet. Odysseus then declared to the Phaeacian audience that he has proven himself a greater athlete than any man in the nation both in sporting events and in battle. King Alcinous then declared the athletic competition over and ordered the company back into the palace for dinner.

That evening, during another fine supper, the blind bard Demodocus entertained Odysseus and the Phaeacians once again with a song. This time the bard sang of the great Odysseus—not knowing he was in the audience, of course—and how he tricked the Trojans with the wooden horse; how he led the Achaean forces through the streets of Troy, bold and bloodthirsty like Ares; how the Greeks razed the city to ruin, slaughtered its men, and conquered the women as slaves. Once again, just as he had wept earlier that day during a similar song by this bard, Odysseus was forced to hide his face in his mantle to hide the stream of tears that poured from his eyes. The horrors of war ravaged his mind, and Odysseus, as brave and strong as he was, was powerless to overcome his grief.

King Alcinous noticed Odysseus’ sobs and once again interrupted the bard: “Let Demodocus cease his song, for there are those present who do not seem to like it. From the moment that we had finished supper and Demodocus began to sing, our guest has been all the time groaning and lamenting. He is evidently in great trouble, so let the bard leave off, that we may enjoy ourselves, hosts and guests alike.”

The king then turned to Odysseus and said, “Tell me the name your father and mother used to call you, and by which you were known among your neighbors and fellow citizens. Tell me also your country, nation, and city, that our ships may shape their purpose accordingly and take you there. Tell me and tell me true. Where have you been wandering, and in what countries have you traveled? Tell us of the peoples themselves, and of their
cities—who were hostile, savage, and uncivilized, and who, on the other hand, hospitable and humane. Tell us also why you are made so unhappy on hearing about the return of the Greeks from Troy. The gods arranged all this, and sent them their misfortunes in order that future generations might have something to sing about.”

THE CHRONICLES OF THE ADVENTURES OF ODYSSEUS
And Odysseus answered, “King Alcinous, it is a good thing to hear a bard with such a divine voice as this man has. There is nothing better or more delightful than when a whole people make merry together, with the guests sitting orderly to listen, while the table is loaded with bread and meats, and the cupbearer draws wine and fills his cup for every man. This is indeed as fair a sight as a man can see. Now, however, since you are inclined to ask the story of my sorrows, and rekindle my own sad memories in respect of them, I do not know how to begin, nor yet how to continue and conclude my tale, for the hand of heaven has been laid heavily upon me.

“Firstly, then, I will tell you my name that you too may know it, and one day, if I outlive this time of sorrow, may become my fair guests though I live so far away from all of you. I am Odysseus son of Laertes, renowned among mankind for all manner of subtlety, so that my fame ascends to heaven. I live in Ithaca, where there is a high mountain called Neritum, covered with forests; and not far from it there is a group of islands very near to one another—Dulichium, Same, and the wooded island of Zacynthus. It lies squat on the horizon, highest up in the sea towards the sunset, while the others lie away from it towards dawn. It is a rugged island, but it breeds brave men, and my eyes know none that they better love to look upon. The goddess Calypso kept me with her in her cave, and wanted me to marry her, as did also the cunning Aeaean goddess Circe; but neither of them could persuade me, for there is nothing dearer to a man than his own country and his parents, and however splendid a home he may have in a foreign country, if it be far from father or mother, he does not care about it. Now, however, I will tell you of the many hazardous adventures that I met with on my return from Troy by the will of Zeus.

“When I had set sail thence the wind took me first to Ismarus, which is the city of the Cicons. There I sacked the town and put the people to the sword. We took their wives and also much booty, which we divided equally amongst us, so that none might have reason to complain. I then said that we had better make off at once, but my men very foolishly would not obey me, so they stayed there drinking much wine and killing great numbers of sheep and oxen on the seashore. Meanwhile the Cicons cried out for help to other Cicons who lived inland. These were more in number, and stronger, and they were more skilled in the art of war, for they could fight, either from chariots or on foot as the occasion served; in the morning, therefore, they came as thick as leaves and bloom in summer, and the hand of heaven was against us, so that we were hard pressed. They set the battle in array near the ships, and the hosts aimed their bronze-shod spears at one another. So long as the day waxed and it was still morning, we held our own against them, though they were more in number than we; but as the sun went down, towards the time when men lose their oxen, the Cicons got the better of us, and we lost half a dozen men from every ship we had; so we got away with those that were left.

\[Aeaean: \text{(eh-EE-an)}\]
“Thence we sailed onward with sorrow in our hearts, but glad to have escaped death though we had lost our comrades, nor did we leave till we had thrice invoked each one of the poor fellows who had perished by the hands of the Cicons. Then Zeus raised the North Wind against us till it blew a hurricane, so that land and sky were hidden in thick clouds, and night sprang forth out of the heavens. We let the ships run before the gale, but the force of the wind tore our sails to tatters, so we took them down for fear of shipwreck, and rowed our hardest towards the land. There we lay two days and two nights suffering much alike from toil and distress of mind, but on the morning of the third day we again raised our masts, set sail, and took our places, letting the wind and steersmen direct our ship. I should have got home at that time unharmed had not the North Wind and the currents been against me as I was doubling Cape Malea, and set me off my course hard by the island of Cythera.

“I was driven thence by foul winds for a space of nine days upon the sea, but on the tenth day we reached the land of the Lotus-eaters, who live on a food that comes from a kind of flower. Here we landed to take in fresh water, and our crews got their mid-day meal on the shore near the ships. When they had eaten and drunk I sent two of my company to see what manner of men the people of the place might be, and they had a third man under them. They started at once, and went about among the Lotus-eaters, who did them no hurt, but gave them to eat of the lotus, which was so delicious that those who ate of it left off caring about home, and did not even want to go back and say what had happened to them, but were for staying and munching lotus with the Lotus-eater without thinking further of their return; nevertheless, though they wept bitterly I forced them back to the ships and made them fast under the benches. Then I told the rest to go on board at once, lest any of them should taste of the lotus and leave off wanting to get home, so they took their places and smote the gray sea with their oars.

THE CAVE OF THE CYCLOPS

“We sailed hence, always in much distress, till we came to the land of the lawless and inhuman Cyclopes. Now the Cyclopes neither plant nor plow, but trust in providence, and live on such wheat, barley, and grapes as grow wild without any kind of tillage, and their wild grapes yield them wine as the sun and the rain may grow them. They have no laws nor assemblies of the people, but live in caves on the tops of high mountains; each is lord and master in his family, and they take no account of their neighbors.

“Now off their harbor there lies a wooded and fertile island not quite close to the land of the Cyclopes, but still not far. It is overrun with wild goats that breed there in great numbers and are never disturbed by foot of man; for sportsmen—who as a rule will suffer so much hardship in forest or among mountain precipices—do not go there, nor yet again is it ever plowed or fed down, but it lies a wilderness untilled and unsown from year to year, and has no living thing upon it but only goats. For the Cyclopes have no ships, nor yet shipwrights who could make ships for them; they cannot therefore go from city to city, or sail over the sea to one another’s country as people who have ships can do; if they had had these they would have colonized the island, for it is a very good one, and would yield everything in due season. There are meadows that in some places come right down to the seashore, well-watered and full of luscious grass; grapes would do there excellently; there is level land for plowing, and it would always yield heavily at harvest time, for the soil is deep. There is a good harbor where no cables are wanted, nor yet anchors, nor need a ship be moored, but all
one has to do is to beach one’s vessel and stay there till the wind becomes fair for putting out to sea again. At the head of the harbor there is a spring of clear water coming out of a cave, and there are poplars growing all round it.

“Here we entered, but so dark was the night that some god must have brought us in, for there was nothing whatever to be seen. A thick mist hung all round our ships; the moon was hidden behind a mass of clouds so that no one could have seen the island if he had looked for it, nor were there any breakers to tell us we were close in shore before we found ourselves upon the land itself; when, however, we had beached the ships, we took down the sails, went ashore and camped upon the beach till daybreak.

“When the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, we admired the island and wandered all over it, while the nymphs, Zeus’s daughters, roused the wild goats that we might get some meat for our dinner. On this we fetched our spears and bows and arrows from the ships, and dividing ourselves into three bands began to shoot the goats. Heaven sent us excellent sport; I had twelve ships with me, and each ship got nine goats, while my own ship had ten; thus through the livelong day to the going down of the sun we ate and drank our fill,—and we had plenty of wine left, for each one of us had taken many jars full when we sacked the city of the Cicons, and this had not yet run out. While we were feasting we kept turning our eyes towards the land of the Cyclopes, which was hard by, and saw the smoke of their stubble fires. We could almost fancy we heard their voices and the bleating of their sheep and goats, but when the sun went down and it came on dark, we camped down upon the beach, and next morning I called a council.

“‘Stay here, my brave fellows,’ said I, ‘all the rest of you, while I go with my ship and evaluate these people myself: I want to see if they are uncivilized savages, or a hospitable and humane race.’

“I went on board, bidding my men to do so also and loose the hawsers; so they took their places and smote the gray sea with their oars. When we got to the land, which was not far, there, on the face of a cliff near the sea, we saw a great cave overhung with laurels. It was a station for a great many sheep and goats, and outside there was a large yard, with a high wall round it made of stones built into the ground and of trees both pine and oak. This was the abode of a huge monster who was then away from home shepherding his flocks. He would have nothing to do with other people, but led the life of an outlaw. He was a horrid creature, not like a human being at all, but resembling rather some crag that stands out boldly against the sky on the top of a high mountain.

“I told my men to draw the ship ashore, and stay where they were, all but the twelve best among them, who were to go along with myself. I also took a goatskin of sweet black wine that had been given me by Maron, who was priest of Apollo, the patron god of Ismarus, and lived within the wooded precincts of the temple. When we were sacking the city we respected him, and spared his life, as also his wife and child; so he made me some presents of great value: seven talents of fine gold, and a bowl of silver, with twelve jars of sweet wine, unblended, and of the most exquisite flavor. Not a man nor maid in the house knew about it, but only himself, his wife, and one housekeeper: when he drank it he mixed twenty parts of water to one of wine, and yet the fragrance from the mixing-bowl was so exquisite that it was

---

13 **hawsers:** thick ropes or cables for mooring or towing a ship
14 **talents:** form of currency in ancient Greece
impossible to refrain from drinking. I filled a large skin with this wine, and took a wallet full of provisions with me, for my mind misgave me that I might have to deal with some savage who would be of great strength, and would respect neither right nor law.

“We soon reached his cave, but he was out shepherding, so we went inside and took stock of all that we could see. His cheese-racks were loaded with cheeses, and he had more lambs and kids than his pens could hold. They were kept in separate flocks; first there were the hoggets, then the oldest of the younger lambs and lastly the very young ones all kept apart from one another; as for his dairy, all the vessels, bowls, and milk pails into which he milked, were swimming with whey. When they saw all this, my men begged me to let them first steal some cheeses, and make off with them to the ship; they would then return, drive down the lambs and kids, put them on board and sail away with them. It would have been indeed better if we had done so but I would not listen to them, for I wanted to see the owner himself, in the hope that he might give me a present. When we saw him, however, my poor men found him ill to deal with.

“We lit a fire, offered some of the cheeses in sacrifice, ate others of them, and then sat waiting till the Cyclops should come in with his sheep. When he came, he brought in with him a huge load of dry firewood to light the fire for his supper, and this he flung with such a noise on to the floor of his cave that we hid ourselves for fear at the far end of the cavern. Meanwhile he drove all the ewes inside, as well as the she-goats that he was going to milk, leaving the males, both rams and he-goats, outside in the yards. Then he rolled a huge stone to the mouth of the cave, so huge that twenty-two strong four-wheeled wagons would not be enough to draw it from its place against the doorway. When he had so done he sat down and milked his ewes and goats, all in due course, and then let each of them have her own young. He curdled half the milk and set it aside in wicker strainers, but the other half he poured into bowls that he might drink it for his supper. When he had got through with all his work, he lit the fire, and then caught sight of us, whereon he said:

“Strangers, who are you? Where do you sail from? Are you traders, or do you sail the sea as rovers, with your hands against every man, and every man’s hand against you?’

“We were frightened out of our senses by his loud voice and monstrous form, but I managed to say, ‘We are Achaeans on our way home from Troy, but by the will of Zeus, and stress of weather, we have been driven far out of our course. We are the people of Agamemnon, son of Atreus, who has won infinite renown throughout the whole world, by sacking so great a city and killing so many people. We therefore humbly pray you to show us some hospitality, and otherwise make us such presents as visitors may reasonably expect. May your excellency fear the wrath of heaven, for we are your suppliants, and Zeus takes all respectable travelers under his protection, for he is the avenger of all suppliants and foreigners in distress.’

“To this he gave me but a pitiless answer, ‘Stranger,’ said he, ‘you are a fool, or else you know nothing of this country. Talk to me, indeed, about fearing the gods or shunning their anger? We Cyclopes do not care about Zeus or any of your blessed gods, for we are ever so much stronger than they. I shall not spare either yourself or your companions out of any
regard for Zeus, unless I am in the humor for doing so. And now tell me where you made your ship fast when you came on shore. Was it round the point, or is she lying straight off the land?’

“He said this to draw me out, but I was too cunning to be caught in that way, so I answered with a lie; ‘Poseidon,’ said I, ‘sent my ship on to the rocks at the far end of your country, and wrecked it. We were driven on to them from the open sea, but I and those who are with me escaped the jaws of death.’

“The cruel wretch vouchsafed me not one word of answer, but with a sudden clutch he gripped up two of my men at once and dashed them down upon the ground as though they had been puppies. Their brains were shed upon the ground, and the earth was wet with their blood. Then he tore them limb from limb and supped upon them. He gobbled them up like a lion in the wilderness, flesh, bones, marrow, and entrails, without leaving anything uneaten. As for us, we wept and lifted up our hands to heaven on seeing such a horrid sight, for we did not know what else to do; but when the Cyclops had filled his huge paunch, and had washed down his meal of human flesh with a drink of neat milk, he stretched himself full length upon the ground among his sheep, and went to sleep. I was at first inclined to seize my sword, draw it, and drive it into his vitals, but I realized that if I did we should all certainly be lost, for we should never be able to shift the stone which the monster had put in front of the door. So we stayed sobbing and sighing where we were till morning came.

“When the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, he again lit his fire, milked his goats and ewes, all quite rightly, and then let each have her own young one; as soon as he had got through with all his work, he clutched up two more of my men, and began eating them for his morning’s meal. Presently, with the utmost ease, he rolled the stone away from the door and drove out his sheep, but he at once put it back again, as easily as though he were merely clapping the lid on to a quiver full of arrows. As soon as he had done so he shouted, and cried ‘Shoo, shoo,’ after his sheep to drive them on to the mountain; so I was left to scheme some way of taking my revenge and covering myself with glory.

“In the end I deemed it would be the best plan to do as follows. The Cyclops had a great club that was lying near one of the sheep pens; it was of green olive wood, and he had cut it intending to use it for a staff as soon as it should be dry. It was so huge that we could only compare it to the mast of a twenty-oared merchant vessel of large burden, and able to venture out into open sea. I went up to this club and cut off about six feet of it; I then gave this piece to the men and told them to fine it evenly off at one end, which they proceeded to do, and lastly I sharpened it to a point myself, charring the end in the fire to make it harder. When I had done this I hid it under dung, which was lying about all over the cave, and told the men to cast lots which of them should venture along with myself to lift it and bore it into the monster’s eye while he was asleep. The lot fell upon the very four whom I should have chosen, and I myself made five. In the evening the wretch came back from shepherding, and drove his flocks into the cave, this time driving them all inside, and not leaving any in the yards; I suppose some fancy must have taken him, or a god must have prompted him to do so. As soon as he had put the stone back to its place against the door, he sat down, milked his ewes and his goats all quite rightly, and then let each have her own young one; when he had

\[18\] quiver: an archer’s portable case for holding arrows
\[19\] dung: animal excrement; manure
got through with all this work, he gripped up two more of my men, and made his supper off them. So I went up to him with an ivy-wood bowl of black wine in my hands:

“‘Look here, Cyclops,’ said I, you have been eating a great deal of man’s flesh, so take this and drink some wine, that you may see what kind of liquor we had on board my ship. I was bringing it to you as a drink-offering, in the hope that you would take compassion upon me and further me on my way home, whereas all you do is to go on ramping and raving most intolerably. You ought to be ashamed of yourself; how can you expect people to come see you anymore if you treat them in this way?’

“He then took the cup and drank. He was so delighted with the taste of the wine that he begged me for another bowl full. ‘Be so kind,’ he said, ‘as to give me some more, and tell me your name at once. I want to make you a present that you will be glad to have. We have wine even in this country, for our soil grows grapes and the sun ripens them, but this drinks like nectar and ambrosia all in one.’

“I then gave him some more; three times did I fill the bowl for him, and three times did he drain it without thought or heed; then, when I saw that the wine had got into his head, I said to him as plausibly as I could: ‘Cyclops, you ask my name and I will tell it you; give me, therefore, the present you promised me; my name is Noman; this is what my father and mother and my friends have always called me.’

“But the cruel wretch said, ‘Then I will eat all Noman’s comrades before Noman himself, and will keep Noman for the last. This is the present that I will make him.’

“As he spoke he reeled, and fell sprawling face upwards on the ground. His great neck hung heavily backwards and a deep sleep took hold upon him. Presently he turned sick, and threw up both wine and the gobbets of human flesh on which he had been gorging, for he was very drunk. Then I thrust the beam of wood far into the embers to heat it, and encouraged my men lest any of them should turn faint-hearted. When the wood, green though it was, was about to blaze, I drew it out of the fire glowing with heat, and my men gathered round me, for heaven had filled their hearts with courage. We drove the sharp end of the beam into the monster’s eye, and bearing upon it with all my weight I kept turning it round and round as though I were boring a hole in a ship’s plank with an auger20, which two men with a wheel and strap can keep on turning as long as they choose. Even thus did we bore the red hot beam into his eye, till the boiling blood bubbled all over it as we worked it round and round, so that the steam from the burning eyeball scalded his eyelids and eyebrows, and the roots of the eye sputtered in the fire. As a blacksmith plunges an axe or hatchet into cold water to temper it—for it is this that gives strength to the iron, and it makes a great hiss as he does so, even thus did the Cyclops’ eye hiss round the beam of olive wood, and his hideous yells made the cave ring again. We ran away in a fright, but he plucked the beam all besmirched with gore from his eye, and hurled it from him in a frenzy of rage and pain, shouting as he did so to the other Cyclopes who lived on the bleak headlands near him; so they gathered from all quarters round his cave when they heard him crying, and asked what was the matter with him.

“‘What ails you, Polyphemus’21,’ said they, ‘that you make such a noise, breaking the stillness of the night, and preventing us from being able to sleep? Surely no man is carrying

20 **auger**: a tool with a helical bit for boring holes in wood, much like modern drill bits

21 **Polyphemus**: (pol-i-FEE-mus) a gigantic Cyclops, son of Poseidon
off your sheep? Surely no man is trying to kill you either by fraud or by force?’

“But Polyphemus shouted to them from inside the cave, ‘Noman is killing me by fraud! Noman is killing me by force!’

‘Then,’ said they, ‘if no man is attacking you, you must be ill; when Zeus makes people ill, there is no help for it, and you had better pray to your father Poseidon.’

‘Then they went away, and I laughed inwardly at the success of my clever stratagem, but the Cyclops, groaning and in an agony of pain, felt about with his hands till he found the stone and took it from the door; then he sat in the doorway and stretched his hands in front of it to catch anyone going out with the sheep, for he thought I might be foolish enough to attempt this.

‘As for myself I kept on puzzling to think how I could best save my own life and those of my companions; I schemed and schemed, as one who knows that his life depends upon it, for the danger was very great. In the end I deemed that this plan would be the best. The male sheep were well grown, and carried a heavy black fleece, so I bound them noiselessly in threes together, with some of the withies\textsuperscript{22} on which the wicked monster used to sleep. There was to be a man under the middle sheep, and the two on either side were to cover him, so that there were three sheep to each man. As for myself there was a ram finer than any of the others, so I caught hold of him by the back, hid myself in the thick wool under his belly, and hung on patiently to his fleece, face upwards, keeping a firm hold on it all the time.

‘Thus, then, did we wait in great fear of mind till morning came, but when the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, the male sheep hurried out to feed, while the ewes remained bleating about the pens waiting to be milked, for their udders were full to bursting; but their master in spite of all his pain felt the backs of all the sheep as they stood upright, without being sharp enough to find out that the men were underneath their bellies. As the ram was going out, last of all, heavy with its fleece and with the weight of my crafty self; Polyphemus laid hold of it and said:

‘My good ram, what is it that makes you the last to leave my cave this morning? You are not wont to let the ewes go before you, but lead the mob with a run whether to flowery mead or bubbling fountain, and are the first to come home again at night; but now you lag last of all. Is it because you know your master has lost his eye, and are sorry because that wicked Noman and his horrid crew have got him down in his drink and blinded him? But I will have his life ye yet. If you could understand and talk, you would tell me where the wretch is hiding, and I would dash his brains upon the ground till they flew all over the cave. I should thus have some satisfaction for the harm that this no-good Noman has done me.’

‘As he spoke he drove the ram outside, but when we were a little way out from the cave and yards, I first got from under the ram’s belly, and then freed my comrades; as for the sheep, which were very fat, by constantly heading them in the right direction we managed to drive them down to the ship. The crew rejoiced greatly at seeing those of us who had escaped death, but wept for the others whom the Cyclops had killed. However, I made signs to them by nodding and frowning that they were to hush their crying, and told them to get all the sheep on board at once and put out to sea; so they went aboard, took their places, and smote the gray sea with their oars. Then, when I had got as far out as my voice would reach, I began to jeer at the Cyclops.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{withies}: tough, flexible branches of a willow used for tying, binding, or basketry
“‘Cyclops,’ said I, ‘you should have taken better measure of your man before eating up his comrades in your cave. You wretch, eat up your visitors in your own house? You might have known that your sin would find you out, and now Zeus and the other gods have punished you.’

“He got more and more furious as he heard me, so he tore the top from off a high mountain, and flung it just in front of my ship so that it was within a little of hitting the end of the rudder. The sea quaked as the rock fell into it, and the wash of the wave it raised carried us back towards the mainland, and forced us towards the shore. But I snatched up a long pole and kept the ship off, making signs to my men by nodding my head, that they must row for their lives, whereon they laid out with a will. When we had got twice as far as we were before, I was for jeering at the Cyclops again, but the men begged and prayed of me to hold my tongue.

“‘Do not,’ they exclaimed, ‘be mad enough to provoke this savage creature further; he has thrown one rock at us already that drove us back again to the mainland, and we made sure it had not been the death of us; if he had then heard any further sound of voices he would have pounded our heads and our ship’s timbers into a jelly with the rugged rocks he would have heaved at us, for he can throw them a long way.’

“But I would not listen to them, and shouted out to him in my rage, ’Cyclops, if any one asks you who it was that put your eye out and spoiled your beauty, say it was the valiant warrior Odysseus, son of Laertes, who lives in Ithaca.’

“On this he groaned, and cried out, ‘Alas, alas, then the old prophecy about me is coming true. There was a prophet here, at one time, a man both brave and of great stature, Telemus son of Eurymus, who was an excellent seer, and did all the prophesying for the Cyclopes till he grew old; he told me that all this would happen to me some day, and said I should lose my sight by the hand of Odysseus. I have been all along expecting someone of imposing presence and superhuman strength, whereas he turns out to be a little insignificant weakling, who has managed to blind my eye by taking advantage of me in my drink; come here, then, Odysseus, that I may make you presents to show my hospitality, and urge Poseidon to help you forward on your journey, for Poseidon and I are father and son. He, if he so will, shall heal me, which no one else neither god nor man can do.’

“Then I said, ‘I wish I could be as sure of killing you outright and sending you down to the house of Hades, as I am that it will take more than Poseidon to cure that eye of yours.’

“On this he lifted up his hands to the firmament of heaven and prayed, saying, ‘Hear me, great Poseidon; if I am indeed your own true son, grant that Odysseus may never reach his home alive; or if he must get back to his friends at last, let him do so late and in sore plight after losing all his men. Let him reach his home in another man’s ship and find trouble in his house.’

“Thus did he pray, and Poseidon heard his prayer. Then he picked up a rock much larger than the first, swung it aloft and hurled it with prodigious force. It fell just short of the ship, but was within a little of hitting the end of the rudder. The sea quaked as the rock fell into it, and the wash of the wave it raised drove us onwards on our way towards the shore of the island.

“When at last we got to the island where we had left the rest of our ships, we found our comrades lamenting us, and anxiously awaiting our return. We ran our vessel upon the sands and got out of her on to the seashore; we also landed the Cyclops’ sheep, and divided them
equally amongst us so that none might have reason to complain. As for the ram, my companions agreed that I should have it as an extra share; so I sacrificed it on the seashore, and burned its thigh bones to Zeus, who is the lord of all. But he heeded not my sacrifice, and only thought how he might destroy my ships and my comrades.

“Thus through the livelong day to the going down of the sun we feasted our fill on meat and drink, but when the sun went down and it came on dark, we camped upon the beach. When the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, I bade my men onboard and loose the hawsers. Then they took their places and smote the gray sea with their oars; so we sailed on with sorrow in our hearts, but glad to have escaped death though we had lost our comrades.

THE GIFT OF AEOLUS
Thence we went on to the Aeoli island where lives Aeolus son of Hippotas, dear to the immortal gods. It is an island that floats (as it were) upon the sea, iron bound with a wall that girds it. Now, Aeolus has six daughters and six lusty sons, so he made the sons marry the daughters, and they all live with their dear father and mother, feasting and enjoying every conceivable kind of luxury. All day long the atmosphere of the house is loaded with the savor of roasting meats till it groans again, yard and all; but by night they sleep on their well-made bedsteads, each with his own wife between the blankets. These were the people among whom we had now come.

“Aeolus entertained me for a whole month asking me questions all the time about Troy, the Argive fleet, and the return of the Achaeans. I told him exactly how everything had happened, and when I said I must go, and asked him to further me on my way, he made no sort of difficulty, but set about doing so at once. Moreover, he flayed me a prime ox-hide to hold the ways of the roaring winds, which he shut up in the hide as in a sack, for Zeus had made him captain over the winds, and he could stir or still each one of them according to his own pleasure. He put the sack in the ship and bound the mouth so tightly with a silver thread that not even a breath of a side-wind could blow from any quarter. The West Wind, which was fair for us, did he alone let blow as it chose; but it all came to nothing, for we were lost through our own folly.

“Nine days and nine nights did we sail, and on the tenth day our native land showed on the horizon. We got so close in that we could see the stubble fires burning, and I, being then dead beat, fell into a light sleep, for I had never let the rudder out of my own hands, that we might get home the faster. On this the men fell to talking among themselves, and said I was bringing back gold and silver in the sack that Aeolus had given me. ‘Bless my heart,’ would one turn to his neighbor, saying, ‘how this man gets honored and makes friends to whatever city or country he may go. See what fine prizes he is taking home from Troy, while we, who have traveled just as far as he has, come back with hands as empty as we set out with, and now Aeolus has given him ever so much more. Quick—let us see what it all is, and how much gold and silver there is in the sack he gave him.’

“Thus they talked and evil counsels prevailed. They loosed the sack, whereupon the wind

---

23 Aeoli: (EE-oh-lee)
24 Aeolus: (EE-oh-lus)
25 flayed: peeled the skin off (a corpse or carcass)
flew howling forth and raised a storm that carried us weeping out to sea and away from our own country. Then I awoke, and knew not whether to throw myself into the sea or to live on and make the best of it; but I bore it, covered myself up, and lay down in the ship, while the men lamented bitterly as the fierce winds bore our fleet back to the Aeolian island.

“When we reached it we went ashore to take in water, and dined hard by the ships. Immediately after dinner I took a herald and one of my men and went straight to the house of Aeolus, where I found him feasting with his wife and family; so we sat down as suppliants on the threshold. They were astounded when they saw us and said, ‘Odysseus, what brings you here? What god has been ill-treating you? We took great pains to further you on your way home to Ithaca, or wherever it was that you wanted to go to.’

“Thus did they speak, but I answered sorrowfully, ‘My men have undone me; they, and cruel sleep, have ruined me. My friends, mend me this mischief, for you can if you will.’

“I spoke as movingly as I could, but they said nothing, till their father answered, ‘Vilest of mankind, get you gone at once out of the island; him who heaven hates will I in no way help. Be off, for you come here as one abhorred of heaven.’ And with these words he sent me sorrowing from his door.

“Thence we sailed sadly on till the men were worn out with long and fruitless rowing, for there was no longer any wind to help them. Six days, night and day did we toil, and on the seventh day we reached the rocky stronghold of Lamus—Telepylus, the city of the Laestrygonians, where the shepherd who is driving in his sheep and goats [to be milked] salutes him who is driving out his flock [to feed] and this last answers the salute. In that country a man who could do without sleep might earn double wages, one as a herdsman of cattle, and another as a shepherd, for they work much the same by night as they do by day.

“When we reached the harbor we found it land-locked under steep cliffs, with a narrow entrance between two headlands. My captains took all their ships inside, and made them fast close to one another, for there was never so much as a breath of wind inside, but it was always dead calm. I kept my own ship outside, and moored it to a rock at the very end of the point; then I climbed a high rock to reconnoiter, but could see no sign neither of man nor cattle, only some smoke rising from the ground. So I sent two of my company with an attendant to find out what sort of people the inhabitants were.

“The men when they got on shore followed a level road by which the people draw their firewood from the mountains into the town, till presently they met a young woman who had come outside to fetch water, and who was daughter to a Laestrygonian named Antiphates. She was going to the fountain Artacia from which the people bring in their water, and when my men had come close up to her, they asked her who the king of that country might be, and over what kind of people he ruled; so she directed them to her father’s house, but when they got there they found his wife to be a giantess as huge as a mountain, and they were horrified at the sight of her.

“She at once called her husband Antiphates from the place of assembly, and forthwith he set about killing my men. He snatched up one of them, and began to make his dinner off him then and there, whereon the other two ran back to the ships as fast as ever they could. But Antiphates raised a cry after them, and thousands of sturdy Laestrygonians sprang up from every quarter—ogres, not men. They threw vast rocks at us from the cliffs as though they

26 ogres: man-eating giants
had been mere stones, and I heard the horrid sound of the ships crunching up against one another, and the death cries of my men, as the Laestrygonians speared them like fishes and took them home to eat them. While they were thus killing my men within the harbor I drew my sword, cut the cable of my own ship, and told my men to row with half their might if they too would not fare like the rest; so they laid out for their lives, and we were thankful enough when we got into open water out of reach of the rocks they hurled at us. As for the others there was not one of them left.

CIRCE, THE BETWITCHING QUEEN OF AEAEA

“Thence we sailed sadly on, glad to have escaped death, though we had lost our comrades, and came to the Aeaean island, where lives Circe, a great and cunning goddess, who is sister to the magician Aeëtes, for they are both children of the sun by Perse, who is daughter to Oceanus. We brought our ship into a safe harbor without a word, for some god guided us thither, and having landed we there for two days and two nights, worn out in body and mind. When the morning of the third day came I took my spear and my sword, and went away from the ship to reconnoiter, and see if I could discover signs of human handiwork, or hear the sound of voices. Climbing to the top of a high lookout I saw the smoke of Circe’s house rising upwards amid a dense forest of trees, and when I saw this I doubted whether, having seen the smoke, I would not go on at once and find out more, but in the end I deemed it best to go back to the ship, give the men their dinners, and send some of them instead of going myself.

“When I had nearly got back to the ship some god took pity upon my solitude, and sent a fine antlered stag right into the middle of my path. He was coming down his pasture in the forest to drink of the river, for the heat of the sun drove him, and as he passed I struck him in the middle of the back; the bronze point of the spear went clean through him, and he lay groaning in the dust until the life went out of him. Then I set my foot upon him, drew my spear from the wound, and laid it down; I also gathered rough grass and rushes and twisted them into a fathom or so of good stout rope, with which I bound the four feet of the noble creature together; having so done I hung him round my neck and walked back to the ship leaning upon my spear, for the stag was much too big for me to be able to carry him on my shoulder, steadying him with one hand. As I threw him down in front of the ship, I called the men and spoke cheeringly man by man to each of them. ‘Look here my friends,’ said I, ‘we are not going to die so much before our time after all, and at any rate we will not starve so long as we have got something to eat and drink on board.’ On this they uncovered their heads upon the seashore and admired the stag, for he was indeed a splendid fellow. Then, when they had feasted their eyes upon him sufficiently, they washed their hands and began to cook him for dinner.

“Thus through the livelong day to the going down of the sun we stayed there eating and drinking our fill, but when the sun went down and it came on dark, we camped upon the seashore. When the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, I called a council and

---

27 **Oceanus**: a Titan son of Uranus and Gaia, the personification of the great river believed to encircle the whole world
28 **stag**: a male deer
29 **fathom**: a unit of length equal to six feet, chiefly used in reference to the depth of water
said, ‘My friends, we are in very great difficulties; listen therefore to me. We have no idea where the sun either sets or rises, so that we do not even know East from West. I see no way out of it; nevertheless, we must try and find one. We are certainly on an island, for I went as high as I could this morning, and saw the sea reaching all round it to the horizon; it lies low, but towards the middle I saw smoke rising from out of a thick forest of trees.’

Their hearts sank as they heard me, for they remembered how they had been treated by the Laestrygonian Antiphates, and by the savage ogre Polyphemus. They wept bitterly in their dismay, but there was nothing to be got by crying, so I divided them into two companies and set a captain over each; I gave one company to Eurylochus, while I took command of the other myself. Then we cast lots in a helmet, and the lot fell upon Eurylochus; so he set out with his twenty-two men, and they wept, as also did we who were left behind.

“When they reached Circe’s house they found it built of cut stones, on a site that could be seen from far, in the middle of the forest. There were wild mountain wolves and lions prowling all round it—poor bewitched creatures whom she had tamed by her enchantments and drugged into subjection. They did not attack my men, but wagged their great tails, fawned upon them, and rubbed their noses lovingly against them. As hounds crowd round their master when they see him coming from dinner, for they know he will bring them something—even so did these wolves and lions with their great claws fawn upon my men, but the men were terribly frightened at seeing such strange creatures. Presently they reached the gates of the goddess’s house, and as they stood there they could hear Circe within, singing most beautifully as she worked at her loom, making a web so fine, so soft, and of such dazzling colors as no one but a goddess could weave. On this Polites, whom I valued and trusted more than any other of my men, said, ‘There is some one inside working at a loom and singing most beautifully; the whole place resounds with it, let us call her and see whether she is woman or goddess.’

“They called her and she came down, unfastened the door, and bade them enter. They, thinking no evil, followed her, all except Eurylochus, who suspected mischief and stayed outside. When she had got them into her house, she set them upon benches and seats and mixed them a mess with cheese, honey, meal, and Pramnian but she drugged it with wicked poisons to make them forget their homes, and when they had drunk she turned them into pigs by a stroke of her wand, and shut them up in her pigsties. They were like pigs—head, hair, and all—and they grunted just as pigs do; but their senses were the same as before, and they remembered everything.

“Thus then were they shut up squealing, and Circe threw them some acorns and beech masts such as pigs eat, but Eurylochus hurried back to tell me about the sad fate of our comrades. He was so overcome with dismay that though he tried to speak he could find no words to do so; his eyes filled with tears and he could only sob and sigh, till at last we forced his story out of him, and he told us what had happened to the others.

“‘We went,’ said he, as you told us, through the forest, and in the middle of it there was a fine house built with cut stones in a place that could be seen from far. There we found a

---

30 *subjection*: the state of being under someone’s control
31 *loom*: an apparatus for making fabric by weaving yarn or thread
32 *pigsties*: enclosures for pigs to live in
woman, or else she was a goddess, working at her loom and singing sweetly; so the men shouted to her and called her, whereon she at once came down, opened the door, and invited us in. The others did not suspect any mischief so they followed her into the house, but I stayed where I was, for I thought there might be some treachery. From that moment I saw them no more, for not one of them ever came out, though I sat a long time watching for them."

"Then I took my sword of bronze and slung it over my shoulders; I also took my bow, and told Eurylochus to come back with me and show me the way. But he laid hold of me with both his hands and spoke piteously, saying, ‘Sir, do not force me to go with you, but let me stay here, for I know you will not bring one of them back with you, nor even return alive yourself; let us rather see if we cannot escape at any rate with the few that are left us, for we may still save our lives.’"

"‘Stay where you are, then,’ answered I, ‘eating and drinking at the ship, but I must go, for I am most urgently bound to do so.’"

"With this I left the ship and went up inland. When I got through the charmed grove, and was near the great house of the enchantress Circe, I met Hermes with his golden wand, disguised as a young man in the heyday of his youth and beauty with the down just coming upon his face. He came up to me and took my hand within his own, saying, ‘My poor unhappy man, whither are you going over this mountain top, alone and without knowing the way? Your men are shut up in Circe’s pigsties, like so many wild boars in their lairs. You surely do not fancy that you can set them free? I can tell you that you will never get back and will have to stay there with the rest of them. But never mind, I will protect you and get you out of your difficulty. Take this herb, which is one of great virtue, and keep it about you when you go to Circe’s house, it will be a talisman to you against every kind of mischief.

‘And I will tell you of all the wicked witchcraft that Circe will try to practice upon you. She will mix a potion for you to drink, and she will drug the meal with which she makes it, but she will not be able to charm you, for the virtue of the herb that I shall give you will prevent her spells from working. I will tell you all about it. When Circe strikes you with her wand, draw your sword and spring upon her as though you were going to kill her. She will then be frightened and will desire you to go to bed with her; on this you must not point blank refuse her, for you want her to set your companions free, and to take good care also of yourself, but you make her swear solemnly by all the blessed that she will plot no further mischief against you, or else when she has got you naked she will unman you and make you fit for nothing.’"

"As he spoke he pulled the herb out of the ground an showed me what it was like. The root was black, while the flower was as white as milk; the gods call it Moly, and mortal men cannot uproot it, but the gods can do whatever they like.

"Then Hermes went back to high Olympus passing over the wooded island; but I fared onward to the house of Circe, and my heart was clouded with care as I walked along. When I got to the gates I stood there and called the goddess, and as soon as she heard me she came down, opened the door, and asked me to come in; so I followed her, much troubled in my mind. She set me on a richly decorated seat inlaid with silver, there was a footstool also

---

33 **heyday**: the period of a person’s greatest success, popularity, or vigor
34 **down**: fine, soft hair on the face of a person
under my feet, and she mixed a mess in a golden goblet for me to drink; but she drugged it, for she meant me mischief. When she had given it me, and I had drunk it without its charming me, she struck she, struck me with her wand. ‘There now,’ she cried, ‘be off to the pigsty, and make your lair with the rest of them.’

“But I rushed at her with my sword drawn as though I would kill her, whereon she fell with a loud scream, clasped my knees, and spoke piteously, saying, ‘Who and whence are you? from what place and people have you come? How can it be that my drugs have no power to charm you? Never yet was any man able to stand so much as a taste of the herb I gave you; you must be spell-proof; surely you can be none other than the bold hero Odysseus, who Hermes always said would come here some day with his ship while on his way home from Troy; so be it then; sheath\textsuperscript{35} your sword and let us go to bed, that we may make friends and learn to trust each other.’

“And I answered, ‘Circe, how can you expect me to be friendly with you when you have just been turning all my men into pigs? And now that you have got me here myself, you mean me mischief when you ask me to go to bed with you, and will unman me and make me fit for nothing. I shall certainly not consent to go to bed with you unless you will first take your solemn oath to plot no further harm against me.’

“So she swore at once as I had told her, and when she had completed her oath then I went to bed with her.

“Meanwhile her four servants, who are her housemaids, set about their work. They are the children of the groves and fountains, and of the holy waters that run down into the sea. One of them spread a fair purple cloth over a seat, and laid a carpet underneath it. Another brought tables of silver up to the seats, and set them with baskets of gold. A third mixed some sweet wine with water in a silver bowl and put golden cups upon the tables, while the fourth she brought in water and set it to boil in a large cauldron over a good fire that she had lit. When the water in the cauldron was boiling, she poured cold into it till it was just as I liked it, and then she set me in a bath and began washing me from the cauldron about the head and shoulders, to take the tire and stiffness out of my limbs. As soon as she had done washing me and anointing me with oil, she arrayed me in a good cloak and shirt and led me to a richly decorated seat inlaid with silver; there was a footstool also under my feet. A maid servant then brought me water in a beautiful golden jug and poured it into a silver basin for me to wash my hands, and she drew a clean table beside me; an upper servant brought me bread and offered me many things of what there was in the house, and then Circe bade me eat, but I would not, and sat without heeding what was before me, still moody and suspicious.

“When Circe saw me sitting there without eating, and in great grief, she came to me and said, ‘Odysseus, why do you sit like that as though you were dumb, gnawing at your own heart, and refusing both meat and drink? Is it that you are still suspicious? You ought not to be, for I have already sworn solemnly that I will not hurt you.’

“And I said, ‘Circe, no man with any sense of what is right can think of either eating or drinking in your house until you have set his friends free and let him see them. If you want me to eat and drink, you must free my men and bring them to me that I may see them with my own eyes.’

\textsuperscript{35} sheath: put a weapon, such as a knife or sword, into its protective covering
“When I had said this she went straight through the court with her wand in her hand and opened the pigsty doors. My men came out like so many prime hogs and stood looking at her, but she went about among them and anointed each with a second drug, whereon the bristles that the bad drug had given them fell off, and they became men again, younger than they were before, and much taller and better looking. They knew me at once, seized me each of them by the hand, and wept for joy till the whole house was filled with the sound of their hullabalooing, and Circe herself was so sorry for them that she came up to me and said, ‘Odysseus, noble son of Laertes, go back at once to the sea where you have left your ship, and first draw it on to the land. Then, hide all your ship’s gear and property in some cave, and come back here with your men.’

“I agreed to this, so I went back to the seashore, and found the men at the ship weeping and wailing most piteously. When they saw me the silly blubbering fellows began frisking round me as calves break out and gambol36 round their mothers, when they see them coming home to be milked after they have been feeding all day, and the homestead resounds with their lowing. They seemed as glad to see me as though they had got back to their own rugged Ithaca, where they had been born and bred. ‘Sir,’ said the affectionate creatures, ‘we are as glad to see you back as though we had got safe home to Ithaca; but tell us all about the fate of our comrades.’

“I spoke comfortingly to them and said, ‘We must draw our ship on to the land, and hide the ship’s gear with all our property in some cave; then come with me all of you as fast as you can to Circe’s house, where you will find your comrades eating and drinking in the midst of great abundance.’

“On this the men would have come with me at once, but Eurylochus tried to hold them back and said, ‘Alas, poor wretches that we are, what will become of us? Rush not on your ruin by going to the house of Circe, who will turn us all into pigs or wolves or lions, and we shall have to keep guard over her house. Remember how the Cyclops treated us when our comrades went inside his cave, and Odysseus with them. It was all through his sheer folly that those men lost their lives.’

“When I heard him I was in two minds whether or no to draw the keen blade that hung by my sturdy thigh and cut his head off in spite of his being a near relation of my own; but the men interceded for him and said, ‘Sir, if it may so be, let this fellow stay here and mind the ship, but take the rest of us with you to Circe’s house.’

“On this we all went inland, and Eurylochus was not left behind after all, but came on too, for he was frightened by the severe reprimand that I had given him.

“Meanwhile Circe had been seeing that the men who had been left behind were washed and anointed with olive oil; she had also given them woolen cloaks and shirts, and when we came we found them all comfortably at dinner in her house. As soon as the men saw each other face to face and knew one another, they wept for joy and cried aloud till the whole palace rang again. Thereon Circe came up to me and said, ‘Odysseus, noble son of Laertes, tell your men to leave off crying; I know how much all of you have suffered at sea, and how ill you have fared among cruel savages on the mainland, but that is over now, so stay here, and eat and drink till you are once more as strong and hearty as you were when you left Ithaca; for at present you are weakened both in body and mind; you keep all the time

36 gambol: run or jump about playfully
thinking of the hardships you have suffered during your travels so that you have no more cheerfulness left in you."

"Thus did she speak and we assented. We stayed with Circe for a whole twelvemonth feasting upon an untold quantity both of meat and wine. But when the year had passed in the waning of moons and the long days had come round, my men called me apart and said, ‘Sir, it is time you began to think about going home, if you are to be spared to see your house and native country at all.’

"Thus did they speak and I assented. Thereon through the livelong day to the going down of the sun we feasted our fill on meat and wine, but when the sun went down and it came on dark the men laid themselves down to sleep in the covered cloisters. I, however, after I had got into bed with Circe, besought her by her knees, and the goddess listened to what I had got to say. ‘Circe,’ said I, ‘please to keep the promise you made me about furthering me on my homeward voyage. I want to get back and so do my men, they are always pestering me with their complaints as soon as ever your back is turned.’

"And the goddess answered, ‘Odysseus, noble son of Laertes, you shall none of you stay here any longer if you do not want to, but there is another journey which you have got to take before you can sail homewards. You must go to the house of Hades and of dread Persephone to consult the ghost of the blind Theban prophet Tiresias whose reason is still unshaken. To him alone has Persephone left his understanding even in death, but the other ghosts flit about aimlessly.’

"I was dismayed when I heard this. I sat up in bed and wept, and would gladly have lived no longer to see the light of the sun, but presently when I was tired of weeping and tossing myself about, I said, ‘And who shall guide me upon this voyage—for the house of Hades is a port that no ship can reach.’

"‘You will want no guide,’ she answered; ‘raise your mast, set your white sails, sit quite still, and the North Wind will blow you there of itself. When your ship has traversed the waters of Oceanus, you will reach the fertile shore of Persephone’s country with its groves of tall poplars and willows that shed their fruit untimely; here beach your ship upon the shore of Oceanus, and go straight on to the dark abode of Hades. You will find it near the place where the rivers Phlegethon and Cocytus flow into Acheron, and you will see a rock near it, just where the two roaring rivers run into one another.

"When you have reached this spot, as I now tell you, dig a trench a cubit or so in length, breadth, and depth, and pour into it as a drink-offering to all the dead, first, honey mixed with milk, then wine, and in the third place water-sprinkling white barley meal over the whole. Moreover you must offer many prayers to the poor feeble ghosts, and promise them that when you get back to Ithaca you will sacrifice a barren heifer to them, the best you have, and will load the pyre with good things. More particularly you must promise that Tiresias shall have a black sheep all to himself, the finest in all your flocks.

37 Tiresias: (ty-REE-see-us)
38 Phlegethon: (FLEG-uh-thon) the river of fire; one of the five rivers in Hades
39 Cocytus: (koh-SY-tus) the river of wailing, one of the five rivers in Hades
40 Acheron: (AK-er-on) the river of woe, which the dead must cross to enter Hades
41 cubit: an ancient measure of length, approximately equal to the length of the forearm
42 heifer: a young female cow that has not given birth to a calf
“...When you shall have thus besought the ghosts with your prayers, offer them a ram and a black ewe, bending their heads towards Hades; but yourself turn away from them as though you would make towards the river. On this, many dead men’s ghosts will come to you, and you must tell your men to skin the two sheep that you have just killed, and offer them as a burnt sacrifice with prayers to Hades and to Persephone. Then draw your sword and sit there, so as to prevent any other poor ghost from coming near the spilt blood before Tiresias shall have answered your questions. The seer will presently come to you, and will tell you about your voyage—what stages you are to make, and how you are to sail the see so as to reach your home.’

“It was daybreak by the time she had done speaking, so she dressed me in my shirt and cloak. As for herself she threw a beautiful light gossamer fabric over her shoulders, fastening it with a golden girdle round her waist, and she covered her head with a mantle. Then I went about among the men everywhere all over the house, and spoke kindly to each of them by man: ‘You must not lie sleeping here any longer,’ said I to them, ‘we must be going, for Circe has told me all about it.’ And this they did as I bade them.

“Even so, however, I did not get them away without misadventure. We had with us a certain youth named Elpenor, not very remarkable for sense or courage, who had got drunk and was lying on the house-top away from the rest of the men, to sleep off his liquor in the cool. When he heard the noise of the men bustling about, he jumped up on a sudden and forgot all about coming down by the main staircase, so he tumbled right off the roof and broke his neck, and his soul went down to the house of Hades.

“When I had got the men together I said to them, ‘You think you are about to start home again, but Circe has explained to me that instead of this, we have got to go to the house of Hades and Persephone to consult the ghost of the Theban prophet Tiresias.’

“The men were broken-hearted as they heard me, and threw themselves on the ground groaning and tearing their hair, but they did not mend matters by crying. When we reached the seashore, weeping and lamenting our fate, Circe brought the ram and the ewe, and we made them fast hard by the ship. She passed through the midst of us without our knowing it, for who can see the comings and goings of a god, if the god does not wish to be seen?

A VISIT TO THE UNDERWORLD

“Then, when we had got down to the seashore we drew our ship into the water and got her mast and sails into her; we also put the sheep on board and took our places, weeping and in great distress of mind. Circe, that great and cunning goddess, sent us a fair wind that blew dead aft and stayed steadily with us keeping our sails all the time well filled; so we did whatever wanted doing to the ship’s gear and let her go as the wind and helmsman headed her. All day long her sails were full as she held her course over the sea, but when the sun went down and darkness was over all the earth, we got into the deep waters of the river Oceanus, where lie the land and city of the Cimmerians who live enshrouded in mist and darkness which the rays of the sun never pierce neither at his rising nor as he goes down again out of the heavens, but the poor wretches live in one long melancholy night. When we got there we beached the ship, took the sheep out of her, and went along by the waters of Oceanus till we came to the place of which Circe had told us.

“Here Perimedes and Eurylochus held the victims, while I drew my sword and dug the trench a cubit each way. I made a drink-offering to all the dead, first with honey and milk,
then with wine, and thirdly with water, and I sprinkled white barley meal over the whole, praying earnestly to the poor feckless ghosts, and promising them that when I got back to Ithaca I would sacrifice a barren heifer for them, the best I had, and would load the pyre with good things. I also particularly promised that Tiresias should have a black sheep to himself, the best in all my flocks. When I had prayed sufficiently to the dead, I cut the throats of the two sheep and let the blood run into the trench, whereon the ghosts came trooping up from Hades—brides, young bachelors, old men worn out with toil, maids who had been crossed in love, and brave men who had been killed in battle, with their armor still smirched with blood; they came from every quarter and flitted round the trench with a strange kind of screaming sound that made me turn pale with fear. When I saw them coming I told the men to be quick and flay the carcasses of the two dead sheep and make burnt offerings of them, and at the same time to repeat prayers to Hades and to Persephone; but I sat where I was with my sword drawn and would not let the poor feckless ghosts come near the blood till Tiresias should have answered my questions.

“The first ghost that came was that of my comrade Elpenor, for he had not yet been laid beneath the earth. We had left his body unburied in Circe’s house, for we had had too much else to do. I was very sorry for him, and cried when I saw him: ‘Elpenor,’ said I, ‘how did you come down here into this gloom and darkness? You have here on foot quicker than I have with my ship.’

“‘Sir,’ he answered with a groan, ‘it was all bad luck, and my own unspeakable drunkenness. I was lying asleep on the top of Circe’s house, and never thought of coming down again by the great staircase but fell right off the roof and broke my neck, so my soul went down to the house of Hades. And now I beseech you by all those whom you have left behind you, though they are not here, by your wife, by the father who brought you up when you were a child, and by Telemachus who is the one hope of your house, do what I shall now ask you. I know that when you leave this limbo you will again hold your ship for the Aeaean island. Do not go thence leaving me unburied behind you, or I may bring heaven’s anger upon you; but burn me with whatever armor I have, build a barrow for me on the seashore, that may tell people in days to come what a poor unlucky fellow I was, and plant over my grave the oar I used to row with when I was yet alive and with my messmates.’ And I said, ‘My poor fellow, I will do all that you have asked of me.’

“Thus, then, did we sit and hold sad talk with one another, I on the one side of the trench with my sword held over the blood, and the ghost of my comrade saying all this to me from the other side. Then came the ghost of my dead mother Anticlea, daughter to Autolycus. I had left her alive when I set out for Troy and was moved to tears when I saw her, but even so, for all my sorrow I would not let her come near the blood till I had asked my questions of Tiresias.

“Then came also the ghost of Theban Tiresias, with his golden scepter in his hand. He knew me and said, ‘Odysseus, noble son of Laertes, why, poor man, have you left the light of day and come down to visit the dead in this sad place? Stand back from the trench and withdraw your sword that I may drink of the blood and answer your questions truly.’

“‘So I drew back, and sheathed my sword, whereon when he had drank of the blood he began with his prophecy.

---

43 barrow: an ancient burial mound
“You want to know,” said he, ‘about your return home, but heaven will make this hard for you. I do not think that you will escape the eye of Poseidon, who still nurses his bitter grudge against you for having blinded his son. Still, after much suffering you may get home if you can restrain yourself and your companions when your ship reaches the Thrinacian island, where you will find the sheep and cattle belonging to the sun, who sees and gives ear to everything. If you leave these flocks unharmed and think of nothing but of getting home, you may yet after much hardship reach Ithaca; but if you harm them, then I forewarn you of the destruction both of your ship and of your men. Even though you may yourself escape, you will return in bad plight after losing all your men, in another man’s ship, and you will find trouble in your house, which will be overrun by high-handed people, who are devouring your substance under the pretext of paying court and making presents to your wife.

“When you get home you will take your revenge on these suitors; and after you have killed them by force or fraud in your own house, you must take a well-made oar and carry it on and on, till you come to a country where the people have never heard of the sea and do not even mix salt with their food, nor do they know anything about ships, and oars that are as the wings of a ship. I will give you this certain token that cannot escape your notice. A wayfarer will meet you and will say it must be a winnowing shovel that you have got upon your shoulder; on this you must fix the oar in the ground and sacrifice a ram, a bull, and a boar to Poseidon. Then go home and offer hecatombs to all the gods in heaven, one after the other. As for yourself, death shall come to you from the sea, and your life shall ebb away very gently when you are full of years and peace of mind, and your people shall bless you. All that I have said will come true.’

“‘This,’ I answered, ‘must be as it may please heaven, but tell me and tell me true, I see my poor mother’s ghost close by us; she is sitting by the blood without saying a word, and though I am her own son she does not remember me and speak to me; tell me, Sir, how I can make her know me.’

“‘That,’ said he, ‘I can soon do. Any ghost that you let taste of the blood will talk with you like a reasonable being, but if you do not let them have any blood they will go away again.’

“On this the ghost of Tiresias went back to the house of Hades, for his prophecies had now been spoken, but I sat still where I was until my mother came up and tasted the blood. Then she knew me at once and spoke fondly to me, saying, ‘My son, how did you come down to this abode of darkness while you are still alive? It is a hard thing for the living to see these places, for between us and them there are great and terrible waters, and there is Oceanus, which no man can cross on foot, but he must have a good ship to take him. Are you all this time trying to find your way home from Troy, and have you never yet got back to Ithaca nor seen your wife in your own house?’

“‘Mother,’ said I, ‘I was forced to come here to consult the ghost of the Theban prophet Tiresias. I have never yet been near the Achaean land nor set foot on my native country, and I have had nothing but one long series of misfortunes from the very first day that I set out with Agamemnon for Troy, the land of noble steeds, to fight the Trojans. But tell me, and tell me true, in what way did you die? Did you have a long illness, or did heaven vouchsafe you a gentle easy passage to eternity? Tell me also about my father, and the son whom I left

44 hecatomb: (in ancient Greece) a great public sacrifice, originally of a hundred oxen
behind me; is my property still in their hands, or has some one else got hold of it, who thinks that I shall not return to claim it? Tell me again what my wife intends doing, and in what mind she is; does she live with my son and guard my estate securely, or has she made the best match she could and married again?"

"My mother answered, ‘Your wife still remains in your house, but she is in great distress of mind and spends her whole time in tears both night and day. No one as yet has got possession of your fine property, and Telemachus still holds your lands undisturbed. He has to entertain largely, as of course he must, considering his position as a magistrate, and how everyone invites him; your father remains at his old place in the country and never goes near the town. He has no comfortable bed nor bedding; in the winter he sleeps on the floor in front of the fire with the men and goes about all in rags, but in summer, when the warm weather comes on again, he lies out in the vineyard on a bed of vine leaves thrown anyhow upon the ground. He grieves continually about your never having come home, and suffers more and more as he grows older. As for my own end it was like this: heaven did not take me swiftly and painlessly in my own house, nor was I attacked by any illness such as those that generally wear people out and kill them, but my longing to know what you were doing and the force of my affection for you—this it was that was the death of me.’

"Then I tried to find some way of embracing my mother’s ghost. Thrice I sprang towards her and tried to clasp her in my arms, but each time she flitted from my embrace as it were a dream or phantom, and being touched to the quick I said to her, ‘Mother, why do you not stay still when I would embrace you? If we could throw our arms around one another we might find sad comfort in the sharing of our sorrows even in the house of Hades; does Persephone want to lay a still further load of grief upon me by mocking me with a phantom only?’

"‘My son,’ she answered, ‘most ill-fated of all mankind, it is not Persephone that is beguiling you, but all people are like this when they are dead. The sinews no longer hold the flesh and bones together; these perish in the fierceness of consuming fire as soon as life has left the body, and the soul flits away as though it were a dream. Now, however, go back to the light of day as soon as you can, and note all these things that you may tell them to your wife hereafter.’

"Thus did we converse, and soon Persephone sent up the ghosts of the wives and daughters of all the most famous men. They gathered in crowds about the blood, and I considered how I might question them severally. In the end I deemed that it would be best to draw the keen blade that hung by my sturdy thigh, and keep them from all drinking the blood at once. So they came up one after the other, and each one as I questioned he told me her race and lineage.

Before leaving Hades and returning to his ship, Odysseus is visited by many of his fellow Greek warriors who fought with him and died in the Trojan War. Among them are Telemonian Ajax, Patroclus, Agamemnon (who was killed by his wife after returning from Troy), and Achilles. The following passage is a portion of Odysseus’ conversation with the ghost of Achilles:

“And I [Odysseus] said to Achilles…

‘…but you, Achilles,
there’s not a man in the world more blest than you—there never has been, never will be one.
Time was, when you were alive, we Argives honored you as a god, and now down here, I see, you lord it over the dead in all your power.
So grieve no more at dying, great Achilles.’

“I reassured the ghost, but he broke out, protesting, ‘No winning words about death to me, shining Odysseus!
By god, I’d rather slave on earth for another man—Some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scaves to keep alive—than rule down here over all the breathless dead…’”

After speaking with the Greek heroes, Odysseus returns to his ship, where his tale of his travels continues.

MONSTERS AND SHIPWRECK
“After we were clear of the river Oceanus, and had got out into the open sea, we went on till we reached the Aeanean island where there is dawn and sunrise as in other places. We then drew our ship on to the sands and got out of her on to the shore, where we went to sleep and waited till day should break.

“Then, when the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, I sent some men to Circe’s house to fetch the body of Elpenor. We cut firewood from a wood where the headland jutted out into the sea, and after we had wept over him and lamented him we performed his funeral rites. When his body and armor had been burned to ashes, we raised a cairn, set a stone over it, and at the top of the cairn we fixed the oar that he had been used to row with.

“While we were doing all this, Circe, who knew that we had got back from the house of Hades, dressed herself and came to us as fast as she could; and her maid servants came with her bringing us bread, meat, and wine. Then she stood in the midst of us and said, ‘You have done a bold thing in going down alive to the house of Hades, and you will have died twice, to other people’s once; now, then, stay here for the rest of the day, feast your fill, and go on with your voyage at daybreak tomorrow morning. In the meantime I will tell Odysseus about your course, and will explain everything to him so as to prevent your suffering from misadventure either by land or sea.’

“We agreed to do as she had said, and feasted through the livelong day to the going down of the sun, but when the sun had set and it came on dark, the men laid themselves down to sleep by the stern cables of the ship. Then Circe took me by the hand and bade me be seated away from the others, while she reclined by my side and asked me all about our adventures.

“‘So far so good,’ said she, when I had ended my story, ‘and now pay attention to what I am about to tell you—heaven itself, indeed, will recall it to your recollection. First you will come to the Sirens who enchant all who come near them. If anyone unwarily draws in too close and hears the singing of the Sirens, his wife and children will never welcome him home

45 cairn: a mound of rough stones built as a memorial (such as a burial mound) or landmark
again, for they sit in a green field and warble him to death with the sweetness of their song. There is a great heap of dead men’s bones lying all around, with the flesh still rotting off them. Therefore pass these Sirens by, and stuff your men’s ears with wax that none of them may hear; but, if you like, you can listen yourself, for you may get the men to bind you as you stand upright on a crosspiece halfway up the mast, and they must lash the rope’s ends to the mast itself, that you may have the pleasure of listening. If you beg and pray the men to unloose you, then they must bind you faster.

“When your crew have taken you past these Sirens, I cannot give you coherent directions as to which of two courses you are to take; I will lay the two alternatives before you, and you must consider them for yourself. On the one hand there are some overhanging rocks against which the deep blue waves of Amphitrite⁴⁶ beat with terrific fury; the blessed gods call these rocks the Clashing Rocks. Here not even a bird may pass, no, not even the timid doves that bring ambrosia to Father Zeus, but the sheer rock always carries off one of them, and Father Zeus has to send another to make up their number; no ship that ever yet came to these rocks has got away again, but the waves and whirlwinds of fire are freighted with wreckage and with the bodies of dead men. The only vessel that ever sailed and got through was the famous Argo on her way to the house of Aeëtes, and she too would have gone against these great rocks, only that Hera piloted her past them for the love she bore to Jason⁴⁷.

“Of these two rocks, one reaches heaven and its peak is lost in a dark cloud. This never leaves it so that the top is never clear not even in summer and early autumn. No man, though he had twenty hands and twenty feet, could get a foothold on it and climb it, for it runs sheer up, as smooth as though it had been polished. In the middle of it there is a large cavern, looking west and turned towards Hades; you must take your ship this way, but the cave is so high up that not even the stoutest archer could send an arrow into it. Inside it Scylla⁴⁸ sits and yelps with a voice that you might take to be that of a young hound, but in truth she is a dreadful monster and no one—not even a god—could face her without being terror-struck. She has twelve misshapen feet, and six necks of the most prodigious length; and at the end of each neck she has a frightful head with three rows of teeth in each, all set very close together, so that they would crunch anyone to death in a moment, and she sits deep within her shady cell thrusting out her heads and peering all round the rock, fishing for dolphins or dogfish or any larger monster that she can catch, of the thousands with which Amphitrite teems. No ship ever yet got past her without losing some men, for she shoots out all her heads at once, and carries off a man in each mouth.

“You will find the other rocks lie lower, but they are so close together that there is not more than a bowshot between them. A large fig tree in full leaf grows upon it, and under it lies the sucking whirlpool of Charybdis⁴⁹. Three times in the day does she vomit forth her waters, and three times she sucks them down again; see that you be not there when she is

---

⁴⁶ Amphitrite: a sea goddess, wife of Poseidon
⁴⁷ The only vessel that…the love she bore to Jason: a reference to the Quest for the Golden Fleece, a journey undertaken by the Thessalian hero Jason and an impressive group of Greek heroes known as the Argonauts, who piloted their boat, the Argo, through the narrow cliffs of the Clashing Rocks with the help of the goddess Hera
⁴⁸ Scylla: (SILL-uh) a six-headed monster
⁴⁹ Charybdis: (ka-RIB-dis) a massive whirlpool
sucking, for if you are, Poseidon himself could not save you; you must hug the Scylla side and drive your ship by as fast as you can, for you had better lose six men than your whole crew.’

‘Is there no way,’ said I, ‘of escaping Charybdis, and at the same time keeping Scylla off when she is trying to harm my men?’

‘You daredevil,’ replied the goddess, ‘you are always wanting to fight somebody or something; you will not let yourself be beaten even by the immortals. For Scylla is not mortal; moreover she is savage, extreme, rude, cruel, and invincible. There is no help for it; your best chance will be to get by her as fast as ever you can, for if you dawdle about her rock while you are putting on your armor, she may catch you with a second cast of her six heads, and snap up another half dozen of your men; so drive your ship past her at full speed, and roar out lustily to Crataias who is Scylla’s dam, bad luck to her; she will then stop her from making a second raid upon you.

‘You will now come to the Thrinacian island, and here you will see many herds of cattle and flocks of sheep belonging to Helios, the sun-god: seven herds of cattle and seven flocks of sheep, with fifty head in each flock. They do not breed, nor do they become fewer in number, and they are tended by the goddesses Phaethusa and Lampetie, who are children of Helios by Neaera. Their mother when she had borne them and had done suckling them sent them to the Thrinacian island, which was a long way off, to live there and look after their father’s flocks and herds. If you leave these flocks unharmed, and think of nothing but getting home, you may yet after much hardship reach Ithaca; but if you harm them, then I forewarn you of the destruction both of your ship and of your comrades; and even though you may yourself escape, you will return late, in bad plight, after losing all your men.’

‘Here she ended, and dawn enthroned in gold began to show in heaven, whereon she returned inland. I then went on board and told my men to loose the ship from her moorings; so they at once got into her, took their places, and began to smite the gray sea with their oars. Presently the great and cunning goddess Circe befriended us with a fair wind that blew dead aft, and stayed steadily with us, keeping our sails well filled, so we did whatever wanted doing to the ship’s gear, and let her go as wind and helmsman headed her.

‘Then, being much troubled in mind, I said to my men, ‘My friends, it is not right that one or two of us alone should know the prophecies that Circe has made me, I will therefore tell you about them, so that whether we live or die we may do so with our eyes open. First she said we were to keep clear of the Sirens, who sit and sing most beautifully in a field of flowers; but she said I might hear them myself so long as no one else did. Therefore, take me and bind me to the crosspiece half way up the mast; bind me as I stand upright, with a bond so fast that I cannot possibly break away, and lash the rope’s ends to the mast itself. If I beg and pray you to set me free, then bind me more tightly still.’

‘I had hardly finished telling everything to the men before we reached the island of the two Sirens, for the wind had been very favorable. Then all of a sudden it fell dead calm; there was not a breath of wind nor a ripple upon the water, so the men furled the sails and stowed them; then taking to their oars they whitened the water with the foam they raised in rowing. Meanwhile I took a large wheel of wax and cut it up small with my sword. Then I kneaded the wax in my strong hands till it became soft, which it soon did between the kneading and the rays of the sun-god Helios. Then I stopped the ears of all my men, and they bound my hands and feet to the mast as I stood upright on the crosspiece; but they went on rowing
themselves. When we had got within earshot of the land, and the ship was going at a good rate, the Sirens saw that we were getting near shore and began with their singing.

“‘Come here,’ they sang, ‘renowned Odysseus, honor to the Achaeian name, and listen to our two voices. No one ever sailed past us without staying to hear the enchanting sweetness of our song and he who listens will go on his way not only charmed, but wiser, for we know all the ills that the gods laid upon the Argives and Trojans before Troy, and can tell you everything that is going to happen over the whole world.’

“They sang these words most musically, and as I longed to hear them further I made by frowning to my men that they should set me free; but they quickened their stroke, and Eurylochus and Perimedes bound me with still stronger bonds till we had got out of hearing of the Sirens’ voices. Then my men took the wax from their ears and unbound me.

“Immediately after we had got past the island I saw a great wave from which spray was rising, and I heard a loud roaring sound. The men were so frightened that they loosed hold of their oars, for the whole sea resounded with the rushing of the waters, but the ship stayed where it was, for the men had left off rowing. I went round, therefore, and exhorted them man by man not to lose heart.

“‘My friends,’ said I, ‘this is not the first time that we have been in danger, and we are in nothing like so bad a case as when the Cyclops shut us up in his cave; nevertheless, my courage and wise counsel saved us then, and we shall live to look back on all this as well. Now, therefore, let us all do as I say, trust in Zeus and row on with might and main. As for you, coxswain, these are your orders; attend to them, for the ship is in your hands; turn her head away from these steaming rapids and hug the rock, or she will give you the slip and be over yonder before you know where you are, and you will be the death of us.’

“So they did as I told them; but I said nothing about the awful monster Scylla, for I knew the men would not go on rowing if I did, but would huddle together in the hold. In one thing only did I disobey Circe’s strict instructions—I put on my armor. Then seizing two strong spears I took my stand on the ship’s bows, for it was there that I expected first to see the monster of the rock, who was to do my men so much harm; but I could not make her out anywhere, though I strained my eyes with looking the gloomy rock all over and over.

“Then we entered the Straits in great fear of mind, for on the one hand was Scylla, and on the other dread Charybdis kept sucking up the salt water. As she vomited it up, it was like the water in a cauldron when it is boiling over upon a great fire, and the spray reached the top of the rocks on either side. When she began to suck again, we could see the water all inside whirling round and round, and it made a deafening sound as it broke against the rocks. We could see the bottom of the whirlpool all black with sand and mud, and the men were at their wit’s ends for fear. While we were taken up with this, and were expecting each moment to be our last, Scylla pounced down suddenly upon us and snatched up my six best men. I was looking at once after both ship and men, and in a moment I saw their hands and feet ever so high above me, struggling in the air as Scylla was carrying them off, and I heard them call out my name in one last despairing cry. As a fisherman, seated, spear in hand, upon some jutting rock throws bait into the water to deceive the poor little fishes, and spears them with the ox’s horn with which his spear is shod, throwing them gasping on to the land as he catches them one by one, even so did Scylla land these panting creatures on her rock and

---

50 coxswain: the steersman of a ship
munch them up at the mouth of her den, while they screamed and stretched out their hands to me in their mortal agony. This was the most sickening sight that I saw throughout all my voyages.

THE CATTLE OF THE SUN-GOD

“When we had passed the Wandering rocks, with Scylla and terrible Charybdis, we reached the noble island of the sun-god, where were the goodly cattle and sheep belonging to the sun Hyperion. While still at sea in my ship I could hear the cattle lowing as they came home to the yards, and the sheep bleating. Then I remembered what the blind Theban prophet Tiresias had told me, and how carefully Circe had warned me to shun the island of the blessed sun-god. So being much troubled I said to the men, ‘My men, I know you are hard pressed, but listen while I tell you the prophecy that Tiresias made me, and how carefully Circe warned me to shun the island of the blessed sun-god, for it was here, she said, that our worst danger would lie. Head the ship, therefore, away from the island.’

‘The men were in despair at this, and Eurylochus at once gave me an insolent answer. ‘Odysseus,’ said he, ‘you are cruel; you are very strong yourself and never get worn out; you seem to be made of iron, and now, though your men are exhausted with toil and want of sleep, you will not let them land and cook themselves a good supper upon this island, but bid them put out to sea and go faring fruitlessly on through the watches of the flying night. It is by night that the winds blow hardest and do so much damage; how can we escape should one of those sudden squalls spring up from southwest or west, which so often wreck a vessel when our lords the gods are unfavorable to us? Now, therefore, let us obey the night and prepare our supper here hard by the ship; tomorrow morning we will go on board again and put out to sea.’

‘Thus spoke Eurylochus, and the men approved his words. I saw that heaven meant us mischief and said, ‘You force me to yield, for you are many against one, but at any rate each one of you must take his solemn oath that if he meet with a herd of cattle or a large flock of sheep, he will not be so mad as to kill a single head of either, but will be satisfied with the food that Circe has given us.’

‘They all swore as I bade them, and when they had completed their oath we made the ship fast in a harbor that was near a stream of fresh water, and the men went ashore and cooked their suppers. As soon as they had had enough to eat and drink, they began talking about their poor comrades whom Scylla had snatched up and eaten; this set them weeping and they went on crying till they fell off into a sound sleep.

“In the third watch of the night when the stars had shifted their places, Zeus raised a great gale of wind that flew a hurricane so that land and sea were covered with thick clouds, and night sprang forth out of the heavens. When the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, we brought the ship to land and drew her into a cave wherein the sea-nymphs hold their courts and dances, and I called the men together in council.

“‘My friends,’ said I, ‘we have meat and drink in the ship, let us mind, therefore, and not touch the cattle, or we shall suffer for it; for these cattle and sheep belong to the mighty sun, who sees and gives ear to everything. And again they promised that they would obey.

“For a whole month the wind blew steadily from the south, and there was no other wind, but only south and east. As long as corn and wine held out the men did not touch the cattle when they were hungry; when, however, they had eaten all there was in the ship, they were
forced to go further afield, with hook and line, catching birds, and taking whatever they could lay their hands on; for they were starving. One day, therefore, I went up inland that I might pray heaven to show me some means of getting away. When I had gone far enough to be clear of all my men, and had found a place that was well sheltered from the wind, I washed my hands and prayed to all the gods in Olympus till by and by they sent me off into a sweet sleep.

“Meanwhile Eurylochus had been giving evil counsel to the men, ’Listen to me,’ said he, ‘my poor comrades. All deaths are bad enough but there is none so bad as famine. Why should not we drive in the best of these cows and offer them in sacrifice to the immortal gods? If we ever get back to Ithaca, we can build a fine temple to the sun-god and enrich it with every kind of ornament; if, however, he is determined to sink our ship out of revenge for these homed cattle, and the other gods are of the same mind, I for one would rather drink salt water once for all and have done with it, than be starved to death by inches in such a desert island as this is.’

“Thus spoke Eurylochus, and the men approved his words. Now the cattle, so fair and goodly, were feeding not far from the ship; the men, therefore drove in the best of them, and they all stood round them saying their prayers, and using young oak-shoots instead of barley-meal, for there was no barley left. When they had done praying they killed the cows and dressed their carcasses; they cut out the thigh bones, wrapped them round in two layers of fat, and set some pieces of raw meat on top of them. They had no wine with which to make drink-offerings over the sacrifice while it was cooking, so they kept pouring on a little water from time to time while the inward meats were being grilled; then, when the thigh bones were burned and they had tasted the inward meats, they cut the rest up small and put the pieces upon the spits.

“By this time my deep sleep had left me, and I turned back to the ship and to the seashore. As I drew near I began to smell hot roast meat, so I groaned out a prayer to the immortal gods. ’Father Zeus,’ I exclaimed, ’and all you other gods who live in everlasting bliss, you have done me a cruel mischief by the sleep into which you have sent me; see what fine work these men of mine have been making in my absence.’

“Meanwhile Lampetie went straight off to the sun and told him we had been killing his cows, whereon he flew into a great rage, and said to the immortals, ’Father Zeus, and all you other gods who live in everlasting bliss, I must have vengeance on the crew of Odysseus’ ship: they have had the insolence to kill my cows, which were the one thing I loved to look upon, whether I was going up heaven or down again. If they do not square accounts with me about my cows, I will go down to Hades and shine there among the dead.’

“’Sun,’ said Zeus, ’go on shining upon us gods and upon mankind over the fruitful earth. I will shiver their ship into little pieces with a bolt of white lightning as soon as they get out to sea.’

“I was told all this by Calypso, who said she had heard it from the mouth of Hermes.

“As soon as I got down to my ship and to the seashore I rebuked each one of the men separately, but we could see no way out of it, for the cows were dead already. And indeed the gods began at once to show signs and wonders among us, for the hides of the cattle crawled about, and the joints upon the spits began to low like cows, and the meat, whether cooked or raw, kept on making a noise just as cows do.

“For six days my men kept driving in the best cows and feasting upon them, but when
Zeus the son of Kronos had added a seventh day, the fury of the gale abated; we therefore went on board, raised our masts, spread sail, and put out to sea. As soon as we were well away from the island, and could see nothing but sky and sea, Zeus raised a black cloud over our ship, and the sea grew dark beneath it. We did not get on much further, for in another moment we were caught by a terrific squall from the west that snapped the forestays of the mast so that it fell aft, while all the ship’s gear tumbled about at the bottom of the vessel. The mast fell upon the head of the helmsman in the ship’s stern, so that the bones of his head were crushed to pieces, and he fell overboard as though he were diving, with no more life left in him.

“Then Zeus let fly his thunderbolts, and the ship went round and round, and was filled with fire and brimstone as the lightning struck it. The men all fell into the sea; they were carried about in the water round the ship, looking like so many sea-gulls, but the god presently deprived them of all chance of getting home again.

“I stuck to the ship till the sea knocked her sides from her keel, which drifted about by itself, and struck the mast out of her in the direction of the keel; but there was a backstay of stout ox-thong still hanging about it, and with this I lashed the mast and keel together, and getting astride of them was carried wherever the winds chose to take me.

“The gale from the west had now spent its force, and the wind got into the south again, which frightened me lest I should be taken back to the terrible whirlpool of Charybdis. This indeed was what actually happened, for I was borne along by the waves all night, and by sunrise had reached the rock of Scylla, and the whirlpool. She was then sucking down the seawater, but I was carried aloft toward the fig tree, which I caught hold of and clung on to like a bat. I could not plant my feet anywhere so as to stand securely, for the roots were a long way off and the boughs that overshadowed the whole pool were too high, too vast, and too far apart for me to reach them; so I hung patiently on, waiting till the pool should discharge my mast and raft again. A very long while it seemed. A juryman is not more glad to get home to supper after having been long detained in court by troublesome cases, than I was to see my raft beginning to work its way out of the whirlpool again. At last I let go with my hands and feet, and fell heavily into the sea, colliding against my raft on to which I then got, and began to row with my hands. As for Scylla, the father of gods and men would not let her get further sight of me—otherwise I should have certainly been lost.

“Hence I was carried along for nine days till on the tenth night the gods stranded me on the Ogygian island, where dwells the great and powerful goddess Calypso. She took me in and was kind to me, but I need say no more about this, for I told you and your noble wife all about it yesterday, and I hate saying the same thing over and over again.”

ODYSSEUS RETURNS TO ITHACA
The long account of Odysseus’ wanderings had ended. The Phaeacian audience sat silent, entranced by the tale. At last King Alcinous spoke: “Your troubles are over, Odysseus. We shall send you home this very day, and every man present will present you with a parting gift.”

So the ship was made ready for Odysseus and the many gifts from the Phaeacians were stowed within it. After humbly thanking his gracious hosts for their hospitality, Odysseus embarked and set out to sea toward Ithaca with a small crew of Phaeacians. He was on his
way home again. Beneath a fair wind, he laid himself out upon the deck and fell into a deep sleep.

The next morning, when Odysseus awoke, he found himself on dry land, lying on a beach. The Phaeacian sailors had set him ashore just as he was, ranged his belongings beside him, and departed. He started up cold and stood staring around him. He did not recognize his own country. After all, it had been twenty years since last his eyes had spied it.

A young man approached him—a shepherd lad, but fine and well-mannered like the sons of kings when they tend sheep. So this sturdy youth seemed to Odysseus, but really it was Athena in another disguise. She explained to Odysseus that he was in Ithaca. Even in his joy at this news Odysseus kept his caution. He spun her a long tale about who he was and why he had come, with not a word of truth in it, at the end of which the goddess smiled and patted him. Then Athena transformed into her true goddess form, divinely tall and beautiful.

“You crooked, shifty rogue!” she laughed. “Anyone who could keep pace with your craftiness must be one marvelous fellow indeed.”

Odysseus greeted her with rapture, but she bade him remember how much there was to do and the two settled down to work out a plan. Athena told him how things were in his house and promised she would help him clear it of the suitors. For the present she would change him into an old beggar so that he could go everywhere unrecognized. That night he must spend with his swineherd, Eumaeus, a man faithful and trustworthy beyond praise. When they had hidden the treasures from the Phaeacians in a nearby cave, Odysseus and Athena separated. Athena went to summon Telemachus home from Sparta, while Odysseus, whom Athena’s magic had turned into a shambling ragged old man, went to seek the swineherd. Eumaeus welcomed the poor stranger (Odysseus), fed him well and lodged him for the night, giving him his own thick mantle to cover the beggar.

Meanwhile, at Athena’s prompting, Telemachus took leave of Helen and Menelaus in Sparta, and as soon as he reached his ship embarked, eager to get home with all speed. He planned—and again Athena had put the thought in his mind while disguised as Mentor on the return journey to Ithaca—not to go directly to the house on landing, but first to see the swineherd to learn if anything happened in his absence.

FATHER AND SON REUNITED

So Telemachus touched down on the island of Ithaca and immediately made his way to the swineherd’s shack. Odysseus was helping prepare breakfast when the young man appeared at the door. Eumaeus greeted Telemachus with tears of joy and begged him to sit and eat. Before he could do so, however, Telemachus asked the swineherd to hurry to his house and inform his mother, Penelope, of his return. So Eumaeus hurried off as commanded.

Once father and son were alone, Odysseus saw Athena standing just beyond the doorway of the shack beckoning to him. He went out to her and in a flash she turned him into his own form and instructed him to tell Telemachus who he was.

So Odysseus reentered the swineherd’s shack as the sturdy, majestic warrior-king that he was. Telemachus stood up in an instant amazed, believing he was now seeing a god. “Telemachus,” Odysseus began, “I am your father.” There was no doubt in Telemachus’
mind: this was King Odysseus, the man he had heard about all his life, yet had never set eyes upon. So father and son embraced and wept for joy.

But the time was short and there was much to plan. An anxious conversation between the two followed. Odysseus was determined to drive the suitors away by force, but how could two men take on a whole company? At last it was decided that the next morning they should go to the house together, with Odysseus disguised as a beggar. Telemachus would hide all of the weapons of war, leaving only enough for the two of them where they could easily get at them. Athena joined the talk and was quick to offer help. With their plans now determined, Athena transformed Odysseus back into a beggar. When the swineherd Eumaeus returned to his shack that evening, he found only Telemachus and the beggar sitting around the table.

RETURN OF THE KING
The next day, Telemachus went on alone to his house, leaving Eumaeus and the beggar (Odysseus) to follow not far behind him. They reached the town, came to the palace, and at last after twenty years Odysseus entered his dear home. As he did so, an old dog lying there lifted his head and pricked his ears. It was Argos, whom Odysseus had bred before he went to Troy. Yet the moment his master appeared, he knew him and wagged his tail, but he had no strength to drag himself even a little toward him. Odysseus recognized him too and brushed away a tear. He dared not go to him for fear of arousing suspicion in the swineherd, and as he turned away that moment the old dog died. The hound had finally been reunited with his master and could now move on.

Within the hall of the palace, the suitors, idly loafing after their meal, were in a mood to make fun of the miserable old beggar who entered, and Odysseus listened to all their mocking words with submissive patience. Odysseus approached the abusive suitors and asked them humbly for some food. One man, Antinous, berated Odysseus and refused him so much as a crust. He even went so far to hurl his footstool at him, hitting him in the back. Antinous’ rash act unsettles the other suitors, for sometimes the gods masquerade as mortals to test their righteousness.

Then a real beggar, named Irus, showed up at the palace and warned Odysseus off his turf. Over the years, Irus had found a niche always running errands for the suitors. “There are pickings enough here for the two of us, friend,” Odysseus said. “Why don’t you just calm yourself.” But Irus threatened to fight Odysseus if he did not leave immediately. The suitors, eager to see the two beggars spar, egged Irus on. Odysseus accepted Irus’ challenge. He rose to his feet and rolled up his tunic into a boxer’s belt, revealing the hero’s brawny body. The suitors goggled at Odysseus’ muscles.

Odysseus knew he could kill Irus with one blow; but he also knew this was an unfair fight, so he chose only to break the man’s jaw with a sock to the face, just to make a point to both Irus and the suitors. One of the more cruel suitors, Eurymachus, swore revenge against Odysseus for assaulting their errand boy and threw a footstool at Odysseus. This was an outrageous act, for he dared to strike a stranger who was asking for hospitality.

Penelope heard of the outrage and declared that she would herself speak with the ill-treated man, but she decided first to pay a visit to the banqueting hall. She wanted to see Telemachus, and also it seemed wise to her to show herself to the suitors. She was as prudent as her son, and had an idea that seemed to promise very well. So she went down from her room into the hall, attended by two maids and holding a veil before her face, looking so
lovely her suitors trembled to see her. One and another arose to compliment her, but the discreet lady answered she knew very well that she had lost all her looks by now, what with her grieving and her many cares. Her purpose in coming to speak to them was a serious one. No doubt her husband would never come back. Why then did they not court her in the proper way for a lady of family and fortune by giving her costly gifts? The suggestion was acted upon at once. All had their servants bring and present her with most lovely things: robes, jewels, and golden chains. Her maids carried them upstairs and demure Penelope retired with great contentment in her heart.

Then she sent for the stranger who had been ill-treated. She spoke graciously to him, and Odysseus told her a tale of meeting her husband on his way to Troy, which made her weep until he pitied her. Still he did not reveal himself, but kept his face hard as iron. By and by, Penelope remembered her duties as hostess. She summoned an old nurse, Eurycleia, who had cared for Odysseus when he was an infant, and bade her wash the stranger’s feet. Odysseus was frightened, for on one foot was a scar made in boyhood days by a wild boar he had hunted, and he thought she would recognize it. She did, and she let the foot fall so that the water in the bathtub was upset. Odysseus caught her hand and muttered, “Dear nurse, you know who I am. But not a word to another soul.” She whispered her promise, and Odysseus took his leave. He found a bed in the entrance hall, but he could not sleep for wondering how he could overcome so many shameless fellows. At last he reminded himself that his state in the Cyclops’ cave had been still worse and that with Athena’s help he could hope here too to be successful, and then he slept.

Morning brought the suitors back, more insolent even than before. Carelessly and at ease they sat down to the rich feast spread for them, not knowing that the goddess Athena and the much-enduring Odysseus were preparing a ghastly banquet for them.

But Penelope also had her own secret plan for dealing with the suitors when she awoke that morning. After rising from bed, she went to her store-chamber where among many treasures was a great bow and a quiver full of arrows. They belonged to Odysseus and no hand but his had ever strung the bow or used it. Carrying them herself, she descended to where the suitors were gathered. “Hear me, my lords,” she said. “I set before you the bow of godlike Odysseus. He who strings this bow and shoots an arrow straight through twelve rings in a line, I will take as my husband.”

Telemachus instantly saw how this could be turned to their advantage, and was quick to play along in the game. “Come on, suitors all” he yelled. “No holding back or excuses. But stay. I will try first and see if I am man enough to bear my father’s arms.”

With this he set the rings in order, placing them exactly in line. Then he took the bow and tried his best to string it. Perhaps he might in the end have succeeded if Odysseus had not gestured to him to give up. “I have failed,” said Telemachus. “Who will be the next to try?”

Then each of the suitors came up one by one and took their turn attempting to string Odysseus’ bow, but the bow was too stiff for them to bend, and each man failed, one after the other. The strongest of them could not bend it even a little.

Certain that no one would be successful, Odysseus left the contest and stepped out into the courtyard where the swineherd was talking to the keeper of the cattle, a fellow as trustworthy as Eumaeus. Odysseus needed their help, and so he revealed to them his true

---

53 Eurycleia: (oo-ree-CLAY-uh)
identity. As proof, he showed them the scar on his foot that in other years they had both seen many a time. They recognized it and burst out weeping for joy. But Odysseus hushed them quickly. “None of that now,” he said. “Listen to what I want of you. Eumaeus, find some way to put the bow and arrows into my hands; then see that the women’s quarters are closed so that no one can enter. And you, O herder of cattle, must shut and bar the gates of the court here.” Both men nodded in consent, and they followed Odysseus back into the hall.

When they entered, the last of the suitors had just failed in his attempt to string the bow. Odysseus said to the suitors, “Pass me the bow and let me see if the strength I once had is still mine.” An angry clamor broke out at the words. “A foreign beggar should never touch the bow,” the suitors cried.

But Telemachus spoke sternly to them: “This is the house of my father, Odysseus. It is I, not you, to say who should handle my father’s arms. Good Eumaeus, please pass the bow to our guest.” Eumaeus did as commanded and took the bow from the suitors and gave it to Odysseus.

All watched intently as he took it and examined it. Then, with effortless ease, as a skilled musician fits a bit of catgut to his lyre, he bent the bow and strung it. He notched an arrow to the string and drew, and not moving from his seat he sent it straight through the twelve rings.

“Your guest has not disgraced you, Telemachus,” said Odysseus. “I did not miss what I aimed at, and I was not long in stringing my bow. I am still strong. Now, however, it is time for the Greeks to prepare supper while there is still daylight, and then otherwise to disport themselves with song and dance, which are the crowning ornaments of a banquet.” As he spoke, he made a sign with his eyebrows, and Telemachus gripped his sword, grasped his spear, and stood armed beside his father’s seat.

Then Odysseus tore off his rags and sprang on to the broad pavement with his bow and his quiver full of arrows. He shed the arrows on to the ground at his feet and shouted, “The mighty contest is at an end. I will now see whether Apollo will vouchsafe it to me to hit another mark that no man has yet hit.”

Odysseus then aimed a deadly arrow at the surly Antinous, who was about to take up a two-handled gold cup to drink his wine. He had no thought of death—who amongst all the suitors would think that one man, however brave, would stand alone among so many and kill him? Odysseus let loose his arrow and it struck Antinous in the throat, and the point went clean through his neck, so that he fell over and the cup dropped from his hand, while a thick stream of blood gushed from his nostrils.

The suitors were outraged. “Stranger,” they said, “you shall pay for shooting people in this way. You shall see no other contest; you are a doomed man. Antinous was the foremost youth in Ithaca, and the vultures shall devour you for having killed him.”

Odysseus replied: “Dogs, did you think I would not come back from Troy? You have wasted my possessions, have forced my servants to bend their backs for you, and have wooed my wife while I was still living. You have feared neither god nor man, and now you shall die.”

54 **catgut**: *n.* a material used for the strings of musical instruments and for surgical sutures, made of the dried twisted intestines of sheep or horses, but not cats.
The next instant with one leap he was at the door and Telemachus was beside him—the suitors had no way out of the hall except through Odysseus. He drew an arrow from his quiver and unleashed a devastating attack on the suitors. One by one, they fell as Odysseus shot them down. In a panic, the suitors searched for their weapons, but none could be found.

Meanwhile, Odysseus was shooting steadily. As each arrow whistled through the hall a man fell dead. Telemachus, on guard with his long spear, kept the crowd back so that they could not rush out through the door either to escape or to attack Odysseus from the rear. They made an easy target, gathered there together, and as long as the supply of arrows held out they were slaughtered without a chance to defend themselves. Even with the arrows gone they fared little better, for Athena had now come to take a part in the great deeds being done and she made each attempt to reach Odysseus miscarry. But his flashing spear never missed its stroke and the dreadful sound of cracking skulls was heard and the floor flowed with blood.

At last, only two of the men were left: the priest of the suitors and their bard. Both of them cried for mercy, but the priest, clasping Odysseus’ knees in his agony of supplication, was met with none. Odysseus ran his sword through him and he died in the midst of his prayer. The bard was fortunate. Odysseus withheld from killing such a man, taught by the gods to sing divinely, and he spared him for further song.

The battle—slaughter, rather—was ended. The old nurse Eurykleia and her maids were summoned to cleanse the place and restore all to order. They surrounded Odysseus, weeping and laughing and welcoming him home until they stirred within his own heart the desire to weep. At last they set to work, but Eurykleia climbed the staiers to her mistress’s chamber. She stood by her bed. “Awake, my dear,” she said, “for Odysseus has come home and all the suitors are dead.”

“O crazy old woman,” Penelope said. “And I was sleeping so sweetly. Off with you and be glad you are not smartly slapped as anyone else would have been who waked me.”

But Eurykleia persisted, “Indeed, indeed Odysseus is here. He showed me the scar. It is his very self.” Still Penelope could not believe her. She hurried down to the hall to see with her own eyes.

A man tall and princely-looking was sitting by the hearth where the firelight fell full on him. She sat down opposite him and looked at him in silence. She was bewildered. At one moment she seemed to recognize him, the next, he was a stranger to her. Could this be Odysseus? He was indeed strong and handsome, but his skin was darker, his eyes deeper. Telemachus cried out at her: “Mother, mother, oh, cruel! What other woman would hold herself aloof when her man came home after twenty years?”

“My son,” she answered, “I have no strength to move. If this is in truth Odysseus, then we have only one way of knowing each other.” Penelope then turned to Eurykleia and said, “Go to our bed in the hall and prepare it for this man and myself. If he is indeed Odysseus, he will prove it there to me.”

“In the hall!” said Odysseus, clearly shocked by what he heard. “Our bed, my bed in the hall! By what magic did you move my bed? I carved the bedpost myself from the living trunk of an olive tree and built the bedroom around it.”

Penelope then rushed into Odysseus’ arms and smothered him with her kisses. He had past her test by not falling for her deception. Only Odysseus would have known that their bed could never be moved, for it was indeed carved from an olive tree that the entire house
had been designed around. And so they held each other tightly, sharing the joy a drowning man experiences when he feels solid ground beneath his feet once more.

Then the well-ordered hall was filled with rejoicing. The minstrel drew sweet sounds from his lyre and waked in all the longing for the dance. Gaily they trod a measure, men and fair-robed women, till the great house around them rang with their footfalls. For Odysseus at last after long wandering had come home and every heart was glad.

A RETURN TO PEACE
The next morning, Odysseus traveled upcountry to the vineyard where his father, the aged Laertes, labored like a peasant. Every since his wife died of heartbreak for Odysseus during his long absence, miserable old Laertes had lived with his fieldhands. When his father welcomed him and Telemachus into his house, Odysseus, ever the trickster, could not resist testing his father with a tall tale before revealing his true identity. Laertes rejoiced when he discovered his visitor was his son, whom he had not seen in twenty years.

Meanwhile, the families of the slain suitors tracked Odysseus down to the house of Laertes and gathered at the assembly ground. The father of the suitor Antinous roused the crowd’s outrage, firing them up in vengeful bloodlust for Odysseus. Odysseus, Telemachus, the loyal herdsmen, Laertes, and his fieldhands armed themselves for the fight that was surely to take place.

Inspired by Athena, Laertes threw his lance at the father of Antinous. It pierced his helmet and stuck out the other side of his head. The surly man fell to the ground in a clatter of armor. It seemed that battle was now inevitable.

But a thunderbolt suddenly flashed in the sky. Athena saw it and said, “Men of Ithaca! Cease this dreadful war. Great cloud-gatherer Zeus demands you settle this matter without further bloodshed.”

Not wanting to offend Zeus, king of gods, both sides dropped their weapons and agreed to drop the matter. Athena gathered both parties together and sealed the peace agreement with a sacrifice to Zeus. The conflict was no more. Odysseus returned to his house and family, and for the first time in twenty years was free to live in peace.