

And carried them back for their ghastly meal.

~~While this was happening I drew my sword  
And cut the cables of my dark-prowed ship,  
Barking out orders for the crew to start rowing  
And get us out of there. They rowed for their lives,  
Ripping the sea, and my ship sped joyfully  
Out and away from the heaving rocks,  
But all of the others were destroyed as they lay~~

145

We sailed on in shock, glad to get out alive  
But grieving for the comrades we'd lost.

150

And we came to Aeaëa, the island that is home  
To Circe, a dread goddess with richly coiled hair  
And a human voice. She is the sister

Of dark-hearted Aeetes, and they are both sprung

From Helios and Perse, daughter of Ocean.

155

Some god guided us into a harbor

And we put in to shore without a sound.

We disembarked and lay there for two days and two nights,  
Eating our hearts out with weariness and grief.

160

But when Dawn combed her hair in the third day's light,  
I took my sword and spear and went up

From the ship to open ground, hoping to see  
Plowed fields, and to hear human voices.

So I climbed to a rugged lookout point

And surveyed the scene. What I saw was smoke

165

Rising up from Circe's house. It curled up high

Through the thick brush and woods, and I wondered

Whether I should go and have a closer look

I decided it was better to go back to the ship

170

And give my crew their meal, and then

Send out a party to reconnoiter.

I was on my way back and close to the ship

When some god took pity on me,  
Walking there alone, and sent a great antlered stag

175

Right into my path. He was on his way

Down to the river from his pasture in the woods,  
Thirsty and hot from the sun beating down,

And as he came out I got him right on the spine

In the middle of his back. The bronze spear bored  
All the way through, and he fell in the dust  
With a groan, and his spirit-flew away.

180

Planting my foot on him, I drew the bronze spear  
Out of the wound and laid it down on the ground.

Then I pulled up a bunch of willow shoots

And twisted them together to make a rope

About a fathom long. I used this to tie

The stag's feet together so I could carry him

185

Across my back, leaning on my spear

As I went back to the ship. There was no way

An animal that large could be held on one shoulder.

190

I flung him down by the ship and roused my men,

Going up to each in turn and saying to them:

'We're not going down to Hades, my friends,  
Before our time. As long as there is still

Food and drink in our ship, at least

We don't have to starve to death.'

195

When they heard this, they drew their cloaks

From their faces, and marveled at the size

Of the stag lying on the barren seashore.

When they had seen enough, they washed their hands

200

And prepared a glorious feast. So all day long

Until the sun went down we sat there feasting

On all that meal, washing it down with wine.

When the sun set and darkness came on,

We lay down to sleep on the shore of the sea.

205

When Dawn brushed the eastern sky with rose,  
I called my men together and spoke to them:

'Listen to me, men. It's been hard going.

We don't know east from west right now,

But we have to see if we have any good ideas left.

210

We may not. I climbed up to a lookout point.

We're on an island, ringed by the endless sea.

The land lies low, and I was able to see

Smoke rising up through the brushy woods:

This was too much for them. They remembered  
 What Antiphates, the Laestrygonian, had done,  
 And how the Cyclops had eaten their comrades.  
 They waited and cried, but it did them no good.  
 I counted off the crew into two companies  
 And appointed a leader for each. Eurylochus  
 Headed up one group and I took the other,  
 And then we shook lots in a bronze helmet.  
 Out jumped the lot of Eurylochus, brave heart,  
 And so off he went, with twenty-two men,  
 All in tears, leaving us behind in no better mood. 225

They went through the woods and found Circe's house  
 In an upland clearing. It was built of polished stone  
 And surrounded by mountain lions and wolves,  
 Creatures Circe had drugged and bewitched.  
 These beasts did not attack my men, but stood  
 On their hind legs and wagged their long tails,  
 Like dogs fawning on their master who always brings  
 Treats for them when he comes home from a feast.  
 So these clawed beasts were fawning around my men,  
 Who were terrified all the same by the huge animals.  
 While they stood like this in the gateway  
 They could hear Circe inside, singing in a lovely voice  
 As she moved about weaving a great tapestry,  
 The unfading handiwork of an immortal goddess,  
 Finely woven, shimmering with grace and light.  
 Polite, a natural leader, and of all the crew  
 The one I loved and trusted most, spoke up then: 240

'Someone inside is weaving a great web,  
 And singing so beautifully the floor thrums with the sound.  
 Whether it's a goddess or a woman, let's call her out now.' 245

And so they called to her, and she came out  
 And flung open the bright doors and invited them in.

They all filed in naively behind her,  
 Except Eurylochus, who suspected a trap.  
 When she had led them in and seated them  
 She brewed up a potion of Pramnian wine  
 With cheese, barley, and pale honey stirred in,  
 And she laced this potion with insidious drugs  
 That would make them forget their own native land.  
 When they had eaten and drunk, she struck them  
 With her wand and herded them into the sties outside.  
 Grunting, their bodies covered with bristles,  
 They looked just like pigs, but their minds were intact.  
 Once in the pens, they squealed with dismay,  
 And Circe threw them acorns and berries—  
 The usual fare for wallowing swine. 260

Eurylochus at once came back to the ship  
 To tell us of our comrades' unseemly fate,  
 But, hard as he tried, he could not speak a word.  
 The man was in shock. His eyes welled with tears,  
 And his mind was filled with images of horror.  
 Finally, under our impatient questioning,  
 He told us how his men had been undone: 265

'We went through the woods, as you told us to,  
 Glorious Odysseus, and found a beautiful house  
 In an upland clearing, built of polished stone.  
 Someone inside was working a great loom  
 And singing in a high, clear voice, some goddess  
 Or a woman, and they called out to her,  
 And she came out and opened the bright doors  
 And invited them in, and they naively  
 Filed in behind her. But I stayed outside,  
 Suspecting a trap. And they all disappeared,  
 Not one came back. I sat and watched  
 For a long, long time, and not one came back.' 275

He spoke, and I threw my silver-studded sword  
 Around my shoulders, slung on my bow, 280

And ordered Eurylochus to retrace his steps  
And lead me back there. But he grabbed me by the knees  
And pleaded with me, wailing miserably:

285

'Don't force me to go back there. Leave me here,  
Because I know that you will never come back yourself  
Or bring back the others. Let's just get out of here  
With those that are left. We might still make it.'

Those were his words, and I answered him:

290

'All right, Eurylochus, you stay here by the ship.  
Get yourself something to eat and drink.  
I'm going, though. We're in a really tight spot.'

And so I went up from the ship and the sea  
Into the sacred woods. I was closing in

295

On Circe's house, with all its bewitchment,  
When I was met by Hermes. He had a golden wand  
And looked like a young man, a hint of a moustache  
Above his lip—youth at its most charming.  
He clasped my hand and said to me:

300

'Where are you off to now, unlucky man,  
Alone, and in rough, uncharted terrain?  
Those men of yours are up in Circe's house,  
Penned like pigs into crowded little sties.

305

And you've come to free them? I don't think so.  
You'll never return; you'll have to stay there, too.  
Oh well, I will keep you out of harm's way.  
Take this herb with you when you go to Circe,  
And it will protect you from her deadly tricks.  
She'll mix a potion and spike it with drugs,  
But she won't be able to cast her spell

310

Because you'll have a charm that works just as well—  
The one I'll give you—and you'll be forewarned.  
When Circe strikes you with her magic wand,  
Draw your sharp sword from beside your thigh  
And rush at her with murder in your eye.

315

She'll be afraid and invite you to bed.  
Don't turn her down—that's how you'll get  
Your comrades freed and yourself well loved.  
But first make her swear by the gods above  
She will not unsex you when you are nude,  
Or drain you of your manly fortitude.'

320

So saying, Hermes gave me the herb,  
Pulling it out of the ground, and showed it to me.  
It was black at the root, with a milk-white flower.  
Moly, the gods call it, hard for mortal men to dig up,  
But the gods can do anything. Hermes rose  
Through the wooded island and up to Olympus,  
And I went on to Circe's house, brooding darkly  
On many things. I stood at the gates  
Of the beautiful goddess's house and gave a shout.  
She heard me call and came out at once,  
Opening the bright doors and inviting me in.  
I followed her inside, my heart pounding.  
She seated me on a beautiful chair  
Of finely wrought silver, and prepared me a drink  
In a golden cup, and with evil in her heart  
She laced it with drugs. She gave me the cup  
And I drank it off, but it did not bewitch me.  
So she struck me with her wand and said:

330

335

340

'Off to the sty, with the rest of your friends.'

At this, I drew the sharp sword that hung by my thigh  
And lunged at Circe as if I meant to kill her.  
The goddess shrieked and, running beneath my blade,  
Grabbed my knees and said to me wailing:

345

'Who are you, and where do you come from?  
What is your city and who are your parents?  
I am amazed that you drank this potion  
And are not bewitched. No other man  
Has ever resisted this drug once it's past his lips.  
But you have a mind that cannot be beguiled.'

350

You must be Odysseus, the man of many wiles,  
 Who Quicksilver Hermes always said would come here  
 In his swift black ship on his way home from Troy.  
 Well then, sheath your sword and let's  
 Climb into my bed and tangle in love there,  
 So we may come to trust each other.'

355

She spoke, and I answered her:

'Circe, how can you ask me to be gentle to you  
 After you've turned my men into swine?  
 And now you have me here and want to trick me  
 Into going to bed with you, so that you can  
 Unman me when I am naked. No, Goddess,  
 I'm not getting into any bed with you  
 Unless you agree first to swear a solemn oath  
 That you're not planning some new trouble for me.'

365

Those were my words, and she swore an oath at once  
 Not to do me any harm, and when she finished  
 I climbed into Circe's beautiful bed.

Meanwhile, her serving women were busy,  
 Four maidens who did all the housework,

370

Spirit women born of the springs and groves  
 And of the sacred rivers that flow to the sea.

One of them brought rugs with a purple sheen  
 And strewed them over chairs lined with fresh linen.

375

Another drew silver tables up to the chairs  
 And set golden baskets upon them. The third

Mixed honey-hearted wine in a silver bowl  
 And set out golden cups. The fourth

380

Filled a cauldron with water and lit a great fire  
 Beneath it, and when the water was boiling  
 In the glowing bronze, she set me in a tub

And bathed me, mixing in water from the cauldron  
 Until it was just how I liked it, and pouring it over  
 My head and shoulders until she washed from my limbs  
 The weariness that had consumed my soul.

385

When she had bathed me and rubbed me  
 With rich olive oil, and had thrown about me  
 A beautiful cloak and tunic, she led me to the hall  
 And had me sit on a silver-studded chair,  
 Richly wrought and with a matching footstool.  
 A maid poured water from a silver pitcher  
 Over a golden basin for me to wash my hands  
 And then set up a polished table nearby.  
 And the housekeeper, grave and dignified,  
 Set out bread and generous helpings  
 From all the dishes she had. She told me to eat,  
 But nothing appealed. I sat there with other thoughts  
 Occupying my mind, and my mood was dark.  
 When Circe noticed I was just sitting there,  
 Depressed, and not reaching out for food,  
 She came up to me and spoke winged words:

395

'Why are you just sitting there, Odysseus,  
 Eating your heart out and not touching your food?  
 Are you afraid of some other trick? You need not be.  
 I have already sworn I will do you no harm.'

405

So she spoke, and I answered her:

'Circe, how could anyone bring himself—  
 Any decent man—to taste food and drink  
 Before seeing his comrades free?  
 If you really want me to eat and drink,  
 Set my men free and let me see them.'

410

So I spoke, and Circe went outside  
 Holding her wand and opened the sty

And drove them out. They looked like swine  
 Nine or ten years old. They stood there before her

415

And she went through them and smeared each one  
 With another drug. The bristles they had grown  
 After Circe had given them the poisonous drug  
 All fell away, and they became men again,  
 Younger than before, taller and far handsomer.

420

They knew me, and they clung to my hands,  
And the house rang with their passionate sobbing.  
The goddess herself was moved to pity.

Then she came to my side and said:

425

'Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,  
My wily Odysseus, go to your ship now  
Down by the sea and haul it ashore.  
Then stow all the tackle and gear in caves  
And come back here with the rest of your crew.'

430

So she spoke, and persuaded my heart.  
I went to the shore and found my crew there  
Wailing and crying beside our sailing ship.  
When they saw me they were like farmyard calves  
Around a herd of cows returning to the yard.  
The calves bolt from their pens and run friskily  
Around their mothers, lowing and mooing.  
That's how my men thronged around me  
When they saw me coming. It was as if  
They had come home to their rugged Ithaca,  
And wailing miserably they said so to me:

435

440

'With you back, Zeus-born, it is just as if  
We had returned to our native Ithaca.  
But tell us what happened to the rest of the crew.'

So they spoke, and I answered them gently:

445

'First let's haul our ship onto dry land  
And then stow all the tackle and gear in caves.  
Then I want all of you to come along with me  
So you can see your shipmates in Circe's house,  
Feasting and drinking all they could ever want.'

450

They heard what I said and quickly agreed.  
Eurylochus, though, tried to hold them back,  
Speaking to them these winged words:

'Why do you want to do this to yourselves,  
Go down to Circe's house? She will turn all of you  
Into pigs, wolves, lions, and make you guard her house.  
Remember what the Cyclops did when our shipmates  
Went into his lair? It was this reckless Odysseus  
Who led them there. It was his fault they died.'

455

When Eurylochus said that, I considered  
Drawing my long sword from where it hung  
By my thigh and lopping off his head,  
Close kinsman though he was by marriage.  
But my crew talked me out of it, saying things like:

460

'By your leave, let's station this man here  
To guard the ship. As for the rest of us,  
Lead us on to the sacred house of Circe.'

465

And so the whole crew went up from the sea,  
And Eurylochus did not stay behind with the ship  
But went with us, in mortal fear of my temper.

470

Meanwhile, back in Circe's house, the goddess  
Had my men bathed, rubbed down with oil,  
And clothed in tunics and fleecy cloaks.  
We found them feasting well in her halls.

475

When they recognized each other, they wept openly  
And their cries echoed throughout Circe's house.  
Then the shining goddess stood near me and said:

'Lament no more. I myself know

All that you have suffered on the teeming sea  
And the losses on land at your enemies' hands.

480

Now you must eat, drink wine, and restore the spirit  
You had when you left your own native land,  
Your rugged Ithaca. You are skin and bones now  
And hollow inside. All you can think of

Is your hard wandering, no joy in your heart,  
For you have, indeed, suffered many woes.'

485

She spoke, and I took her words to heart.  
 So we sat there day after day for a year,  
 Feasting on abundant meat and sweet wine.  
 But when a year had passed, and the seasons turned,  
 And the moons waned and the long days were done,  
 My trusty crew called me out and said:

490

'Good god, man, at long last remember your home,  
 If it is heaven's will for you to be saved  
 And return to your house and your own native land.'

495

They spoke, and I saw what they meant.  
 So all that long day until the sun went down  
 We sat feasting on meat and sweet red wine.  
 When the sun set and darkness came on,  
 My men lay down to sleep in the shadowy hall,  
 But I went up to Circe's beautiful bed  
 And touching her knees I beseeched the goddess:

500

'Circe, fulfill now the promise you made  
 To send me home. I am eager to be gone  
 And so are my men, who are wearing me out  
 Sitting around whining and complaining.  
 Whenever you happen not to be present.'

505

So I spoke, and the shining goddess answered:

'Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,  
 My wily Odysseus—you need not stay  
 Here in my house any longer than you wish.  
 But there is another journey you must make first—  
 To the house of Hades and dread Persephone,  
 To consult the ghost of Theban Tiresias,  
 The blind prophet, whose mind is still strong.  
 To him alone Persephone has granted  
 Intelligence even after his death.  
 The rest of the dead are fitting shadows.'

515

This broke my spirit. I sat on the bed  
 And wept. I had no will to live, nor did I care

520

If I ever saw the sunlight again.  
 But when I had my fill of weeping and writhing,  
 I looked at the goddess and said:

'And who will guide me on this journey, Circe?  
 No man has ever sailed his black ship to Hades.'

525

And the goddess, shining, answered at once:

'Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,  
 My wily Odysseus—do not worry about  
 A pilot to guide your ship. Just set up the mast,  
 Spread the white sail, and sit yourself down.  
 The North Wind's breath will bear her onwards.  
 But when your ship crosses the stream of Ocean  
 You will see a shelving shore and Persephone's groves,  
 Tall poplars and willows that drop their fruit.  
 Beach your ship there by Ocean's deep eddies,  
 And go yourself to the dank house of Hades.  
 There into Acheron flow Porphyrion  
 And Cocytus, a branch of the water of Styx.  
 And there is a rock where the two roaring rivers  
 Flow into one. At that spot, hero, gather yourself  
 And do as I say.

535

540

Dig an ell-square pit,  
 And around it pour libation to all the dead,  
 First with milk and honey, then with sweet wine,  
 And a third time with water. Then sprinkle barley  
 And pray to the looming, feeble death-heads,  
 Vowing sacrifice on Ithaca, a barren heifer,  
 The herd's finest, and rich gifts on the altar,  
 And to Tiresias alone a great black ram.  
 After these supplications to the spirits,  
 Slaughter a ram and a black ewe, turning their heads  
 Toward Erebus, yourself turning backward  
 And leaning toward the streams of the river.  
 Then many ghosts of the dead will come forth.  
 Call to your men to flay the slaughtered sheep  
 And burn them as a sacrifice to the gods below,

545

550

555

To mighty Hades and dread Persephone.

You yourself draw your sharp sword and sit there,

Keeping the feeble death-heads from the blood

Until you have questioned Tiresias.

Then, and quickly, the great seer will come.

He will tell you the route and how long it will take

For you to reach home over the treeming deep.'

560

Dawn rose in gold as she finished speaking.

Circe gave me a cloak and tunic to wear

And the nymph slipped on a long silver robe

Shimmering in the light, cinched it at the waist

With a golden belt and put a veil on her head.

I went through the halls and roused my men,

Going up to each with words soft and sweet:

565

'Time to get up! No more sleeping late.

We're on our way. Lady Circe has told me all.'

570

So I spoke, and persuaded their heroes' hearts.

But not even from Circe's house could I lead my men

Unscathed. One of the crew, Elpenor, the youngest,

Not much of a warrior nor all that smart,

Had gone off to sleep apart from his shipmates,

Seeking the cool air on Circe's roof

Because he was heavy with wine.

He heard the noise of his shipmates moving around

And sprang up suddenly, forgetting to go

To the long ladder that led down from the roof.

He fell headfirst, his neck snapped at the spine,

And his soul went down to the house of Hades.

580

As my men were heading out I spoke to them:

'You think, no doubt, that you are going home,

But Circe has plotted another course for us,

To the house of Hades and dread Persephone,

To consult the ghost of Theban Tiresias.'

585

This broke their hearts. They sat down

Right where they were and wept and tore their hair,

But no good came of their lamentation.

590

While we were on our way to our swift ship

On the shore of the sea, weeping and crying,

Circe had gone ahead and tethered a ram and a black ewe

By our tarred ship. She had passed us by

Without our ever noticing. Who could see

A god on the move against the god's will?"

595

## ODYSSEY 11

~~"When we reached our black ship~~

~~We hauled her onto the bright saltwater,~~

~~Set up the mast and sail, loaded on~~

~~The sheep, and boarded her ourselves,~~

~~Heartick and weeping openly by now.~~

~~The dark prow cut through the waves~~

~~And a following wind belled the canvas,~~

~~A good sailing breeze sent by Circe,~~

~~The dread goddess with a human voice.~~

~~We lashed everything down and sat tight,~~

~~Leaving the ship to the wind and helmsman.~~

~~All day long she surged on with taut sails,~~

~~Then the sun set, and the sea grew dark.~~

10

~~The ship took us to the deep, outermost Ocean~~

~~And the land of the Cimmerians, a people~~

~~Shrouded in mist. The sun never shines there,~~

~~Never climbs the starry sky to beam down at them,~~

~~Nor bathes them in the glow of its last golden rays;~~

~~Their wretched sky is always racked with night's gloom.~~

15