

For Hirsh W. Stalberg,
voyager on other seas

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CANNIBAL BEACH

Ulysses wished to put as much open water as possible between him and the Island of the Winds, but after six days he realized he would have to put into harbor. His ships were in very poor trim. Their hulls were gashed and splintered, the sails tattered, and the men themselves cut and bruised and half dead with fatigue. It was a terrible punishment his fleet had taken from the brawling winds.

As dusk was thickening they made a landfall. The sight of the island pleased Ulysses; it seemed perfect for his purpose. It had a natural basin of tideless water cupped by a smoothly curved outcropping of rock. And as they sailed through the narrow throat of rock into the harbor they saw a marvelous sight. The purple sky deepened to inky blue, to black, then swiftly paled. Orange bars of fire stood in the sky, then a great flooding of golden light, which purpled again, and went dark. Ulysses searched the sky; he had never seen anything like this before. For night followed day upon this island like a hound hunting a deer. The sun chased the moon across the bowl of the sky, and the beach darkened and went light again, moved from bright day to blackest night in the time that it takes to eat a meal.

"This is a wonder," said Ulysses to himself. "And truly, all my life I have sought wonders. But just now I would wish for a more ordinary course of events. All strangeness holds



danger now, and we have had our bellyful of adventure for the time. What I pray for now is a space of days without surprise or wild encounter—to have a fair wind and a calm sea and a swift voyage home. Alas, I fear it is not yet to be. I fear this Island of the Racing Sun. And yet I must land here and mend my ships and rest my crew.”

The Greek warriors beached their ships and dragged them onto the shore. But according to his prudent custom, Ulysses beached only two ships, keeping one moored in the harbor in the event of attack. Ulysses spoke his orders; the men broke into groups and began to work. Some built fires and began to cook food, others mended sail, some caulked hulls, and sentries kept watch.

“Climb that tall tree there,” Ulysses said to one of his men. “Climb to the top and look about, then come down and tell me what you see.”

“It’s too dark to see,” said the sailor.

“You forget where we are,” said Ulysses. “Here night chases day, and day pursues night. There will be light enough by the time you reach the top.”

The man went off to climb the tree. Ulysses stalked about inspecting the work being done on the ships. The sky paled; dawn bloomed. But the sailor had not returned.

“Odd,” said Ulysses. “He must be asleep up there.” And he dispatched another sailor to climb the tree to see what had happened to the first one.

The shadows were lengthening. The sky shed its gold; shadows yawned and swallowed the light. It was night, and the second sailor had not returned. Ulysses frowned and sent a third man to climb the tree. Then he kept guard there on the beach, in the firelight, eyes narrowed, beard bristling, like a great cat waiting.

The sun minted itself again in the sky; morning flashed. The third sailor had not returned. Ulysses decided to climb



the tree himself. It was a good half-mile from where he stood, a huge solitary tree stretching up, up. When he reached it he saw that its bark was wrinkled in a most curious way; it fell in soft brown folds unlike any bark he had ever seen. And when he grasped the tree to climb it, the bark felt like a heavy cloth beneath his hands. But it made climbing easy. Up and up he went; up, up in the thickening darkness, climbing with the ease of a man of the Middle Sea who had begun to climb masts as soon as he could walk.

He climbed and climbed, rested, and climbed again. Suddenly he heard a mumbling, chuckling sound as if some beast were crouching in the branches above. He stopped climbing and peered upward. He could see no branches. Reaching up he felt a hairy foliage grazing his fingers. He clung there to the branch, right where he was, not moving, until the blackness thinned, and he began to see.

He had been climbing through darkness; now he saw against the paler sky toward what he had been climbing. The hairy foliage was a beard. A huge bushy beard, hanging some forty feet above the ground. Above that beard was a grinning of enormous teeth; above the teeth the muddy gleam of eyes as large as portholes. Ulysses’ head swam with fear. Fear pried at his legs and arms, and he had to clutch the trunk with all his strength to keep from falling. But it was no trunk. He had been climbing no tree. It was a giant’s leg he had been climbing, and the clothlike bark was cloth indeed, the stuff of its garment. And he realized then that the three sailors he had sent aloft had climbed to a mumbling death.

Ulysses thanked the gods then that he had begun his climb in darkness, for he understood that the giant slept standing, like a horse, and that his eyes were not yet adjusted to the new light. That is why the huge slab of hand he saw swinging there now had not trapped him like a fly. He loosened his grasp and slid down so swiftly that he tore the skin off his



hands. But he was mindless of pain. He hit the ground and raised a great shout. "To the ships!" he cried. "To the ships!"

But it was too late. The sun was burning in the sky and there was too much light. A brutal bellowing yell shattered the air, and the men, paralyzed with fear, whimpering like puppies, saw a mob of giants, tall as trees, trooping toward them over the hills. And before Ulysses could rally his terrified men, the giants were upon them, trampling the ships like twigs, scooping the men up and popping them into their great mouths like children eating berries.

Ulysses did not lose his wits. Fear turned to anger in him, and anger became an icy flame that quickened him. His sword was scything the air; he hacked away at the giant hands that came at him like a flock of huge meaty gulls. He whipped his blade at their fingers, hacking them off at the knuckle joints. His sword smoked with blood.

Inspired by the sight of him fencing with the giant fingers, a small group of his men gathered around and made a hedge of steel. They hacked their way through the great grasping hands to the edge of the sea, then followed Ulysses into the water and swam to the single ship that they had left moored in the harbor. Luckily the swift night was falling again, and they were shielded by darkness. They heard the huge snuffing noise of the giants feasting upon their shipmates, but there was nothing they could do except try to save themselves. The night had brought an offshore wind. Swiftly they raised sail and darted through the throat of rock out into the open sea.

Of the three ships that had gone in, only one sailed away. Of the three crews, but one was left. The others had gone down the gullets of the giants who lived on that strange island where night hounds the golden stag of the day across the indifferent sky.



CIRCE

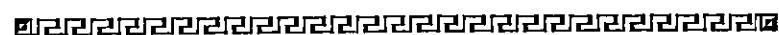
Now, after battling the giant cannibals on the Island of the Racing Sun, Ulysses found himself with only forty-five men left from his crew of one hundred. He was determined to bring these men home safely, or die himself.

They were sailing northward again, and on the third day came in sight of land, low lying, heavily wooded, with a good sheltering harbor. Although they had met terrible treatment everywhere they had landed since leaving Troy, they were out of food, water was running low, and once again they would have to risk the perils of the land.

Ulysses was very cautious. He moored the ship off shore, and said to the crew:

"I shall go ashore myself—alone—to see what there is to see, and make sure there are no terrible hosts, giants, man-eating ogres, or secret sorceries. If I am not back by nightfall, Eurylochus will act as captain. Then he will decide whether to seek food and water here, or sail onward. Farewell."

He lowered a small boat and rowed toward the island, all alone. He beached his skiff and struck inland. The first thing he wanted to do was find out whether he was on an island, or the spur of a mainland. He climbed a low hill, then climbed to the top of a tree that grew on the hill. He was high enough now for a clear view, and he turned slowly, marking the flash



of the sea on all sides. He knew that once again they had landed on an island and that the ship was their only means of escape if danger should strike.

Something caught his eye. He squinted thoughtfully at what looked like a feather of smoke rising from a grove of trees. The trees were too thick for him to see through. He climbed down and picked his way carefully toward the smoke, trying to make as little noise as possible. He came to a stand of mighty trees—oak trees, thick and tall with glossy leaves. Glimmering through the trees he saw what looked like a small castle made of polished gray stone. He did not dare go near, for he heard strange howling sounds, a pack of dogs, perhaps, but different from any dogs he had ever heard. So he left the grove and made his way back toward the beach, thinking hard, trying to decide whether to sail away immediately or take a chance on the inhabitants being friendly. He did not like the sound of that howling. There was something in it that froze his marrow. He decided that he would not risk his men on the island, but that he would return to the ship, raise anchor, and sail away to seek food elsewhere.

Just then a tall white deer with mighty antlers stepped across his path. The great stag had a bearing proud as a king, and did not deign to run, but walked on haughtily as if he knew no one would dare to attack him. Unfortunately for the stag, however, Ulysses was too hungry to be impressed by any animal's own opinion of himself. The warrior raised his bronze spear and flung it with all the power of his knotted arm. It sang through the air, pierced the stag's body, and nailed him to a tree. The stag died standing up, still in his pride. He was a huge animal, so large that Ulysses feared he could not carry him back to the ship unaided. But then he remembered how hungry his men were, and he decided to try. He picked weeds and wove a rope which he twisted and twisted again until it was as strong as a ship's line. Then he



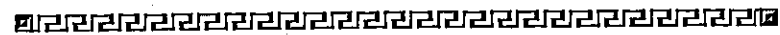
bound the stag's legs together, swung the great carcass up onto his back, and staggered off using his spear as a cane.

He was at the end of his strength when he reached the beach, and let the deer slip to the sand. He signaled to his men, who left the ship moored and came ashore on five small boats. They raised a mighty shout of joy when they saw the dead stag. All hands fell to. In a twinkling the deer was skinned and cut up. Fires were lighted, and the delicious smell of roasting meat drew the gulls to the beach, screaming and dipping, begging for scraps.

The men gorged themselves, then lay on the sand to sleep. Ulysses, himself, kept guard. All that night he stood watch, leaning on his spear, looking at the moon which hung in the sky like an orange, and paled as it climbed. As he watched, he turned things over in his mind, trying to decide what to do. While he was still bothered by the eerie howling of the mysterious animals at the castle, now, with his belly full, he felt less gloomy. The more he thought about it the wiser it seemed to explore the island thoroughly and try to determine whether it was a friendly place or not. For never before had he seen a deer so large. If there was one, there must be more; and with game like that the ship could be provisioned in a few days. Also the island was full of streams from which they could fill their dry casks with pure water.

"Yes," he said to himself, "perhaps our luck has changed. Perhaps the god that was playing with us so spitefully has found other amusements. Yes, we will explore this island, and see what there is to see."

Next morning he awakened his men and divided them into two groups, one led by himself, the other by Eurylochus. He said to Eurylochus, "There is a castle on this island. We must find out who lives there. If he be friendly, or not too strong a foe, we will stay here and hunt and lay in water until the hold be full; then we will depart. Now choose, Eurylochus.



Would you rather stay here with your men and guard the ship while I visit the castle—or would you rather I keep the beach? Choose.”

“O Ulysses,” Eurylochus said. “I am sick of the sight of the sea. Even as my belly hungers for food, so do my eyes hunger for leaves and trees which might recall our dear Ithaca. And my foot longs to tread something more solid than a deck—a floor that does not pitch and toss and roll. Pray, gentle Ulysses, let me and my men try the castle.”

“Go,” said Ulysses. “May the gods go with you.”

So Eurylochus and twenty-two men set out, while Ulysses guarded the ship. As the band of warriors approached the castle, they too heard a strange howling. Some of them drew their swords. Others notched arrows to their bowstrings. They pressed on, preparing to fight. They passed through the grove of oak trees, and came to where the trees thinned. Here the howling grew louder and wilder. Then, as they passed the last screen of trees and came to the courtyard of the shining gray castle, they saw an extraordinary sight—a pack of wolves and lions running together like dogs—racing about the courtyard, howling.

When they caught sight of the men, the animals turned and flung themselves upon the strangers, so swiftly that no man had time to use his weapon. The great beasts stood on their hind legs and put their forepaws on the men’s shoulders, and fawned on them, and licked their faces. They voiced low muttering growling whines. Eurylochus, who stood half-embracing a huge tawny lion, said, “Men, it is most strange. For these fearsome beasts greet us as though we were lost friends. They seem to be trying to speak to us. And look—look—at their eyes! How intelligently they gleam, how sadly they gaze. Not like beasts’ eyes at all.”

“It is true,” said one of the men. “But perhaps there is noth-



ing to fear. Perhaps there is reason to take heart. For if wild beasts are so tame and friendly, then perhaps the master of the castle, whoever he is or whatever he is, will be friendly too, and welcome us, and give us good cheer.”

“Come,” said Eurylochus.

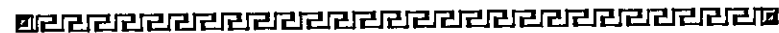
When they reached the castle gate, they stopped and listened. For they heard a woman singing in a lovely deep full-throated voice, so that without seeing the woman they knew she was beautiful.

Eurylochus said, “Men, you go into the castle and see what is to be seen. I will stay here, and make sure you are not surprised.”

“What do you mean? You come with us. Listen to that. There can be no danger where there is such song.”

“Yes, everything seems peaceful,” said Eurylochus. “The wild animals are friendly. Instead of the clank of weapons, we hear a woman singing. And it may be peaceful. But something says to me, be careful, take heed. Go you, then. I stay on guard. If I am attacked, and you are unharmed, come to my aid. If anything happens to you, then I shall take word back to Ulysses.”

So Eurylochus stood watch at the castle gate—sword in one hand, dagger in the other, bow slung across his back—and the rest of the men entered the castle. They followed the sound of singing through the rooms and out onto a sunny terrace. There sat a woman weaving. She sat at a huge loom, larger than they had ever seen, and wove a gorgeous tapestry. As she wove, she sang. The bright flax leaped through her fingers as if it were dancing to the music in her voice. The men stood and stared. The sun seemed to be trapped in her hair, so bright it was; she wore it long, falling to her waist. Her dress was as blue as the summer sky, matching her eyes. Her long white arms were bare to the shoulders. She stood



up and greeted them. She was very tall. And the men, looking at her, and listening to her speak, began to believe that they were in the presence of a goddess.

She seemed to read thoughts too, for she said, "No, I am not a goddess. But I am descended from the Immortals. I am Circe, granddaughter of Helios, a sun-god, who married Perse, daughter of Oceanus. So what am I—wood nymph, sea nymph, something of both? Or something more? I can do simple magic and prophecy, weave certain homely enchantments and read dreams. But let us not speak of me, but of you, strangers. You are adventurers, I see, men of the sword, men of the black-prowed ships, the hawks of the sea. And you have come through sore, sad times, and seek a haven here on this western isle. So be it. I welcome you. For the sweetest spell Circe weaves is one called hospitality. I will have baths drawn for you, clean garments laid out. And when you are refreshed, you shall come and dine. For I love brave men and the tales they tell."

When the men had bathed and changed, Circe gave them each a red bowl. And into each bowl she put yellow food—a kind of porridge made of cheese, barley, honey, and wine plus a few secret things known only to herself. The odor that rose from the red bowls was more delicious than anything they had ever smelled before. And as each man ate, he felt himself sinking into his hunger, *becoming* his hunger—lapping, panting, grunting, snuffling. Circe passed among them, smiling, filling the bowls again and again. And the men, waiting for their bowls to be filled, looking about, seeing each other's face smeared with food, thought, "How strange. We're eating like pigs."

Even as the thought came, it became more true. For as Circe passed among them now she touched each one on the shoulder with a wand, saying: "Glut and swink, eat and



drink, gobble food and guzzle wine. Too rude, I think, for humankind, quite right, I think, for *swine!*"

As she said these words in her lovely laughing voice, the men dwindled. Their noses grew wide and long, became snouts. Their hair hardened into bristles; their hands and feet became hooves, and they ran about on all fours, sobbing and snuffling, searching the floor for bones and crumbs. But all the time they cried real tears from their little red eyes, for they were pigs only in form; their minds remained unchanged, and they knew what was happening to them.

Circe kicked them away from the table. "To the sties!" she cried. She struck them with her wand, herding them out of the castle into a large sty. And there she flung them acorns and chestnuts and red berries, and watched them grubbing in the mud for the food she threw. She laughed a wild, hard, bright laugh, and went back into the castle.

While all this was happening, Eurylochus was waiting at the gate. When the men did not return he crept up to a bow slit in the castle wall and looked in. It was dark now. He saw the glimmer of torchlight, and the dim shape of a woman at a loom, weaving. He heard a voice singing, the same enchanting voice he had heard before. But of his men he saw nothing. Nor did he hear their voices. A great fear seized him. He raced off as fast as he could, hoping against hope that the beasts would not howl. The wolves and lions stood like statues, walked like shadows. Their eyes glittered with cold moonlight, but none of them uttered a sound.

He ran until the breath strangled in his throat, until his heart tried to crack out of his ribs, but he kept running, stumbling over roots, slipping on stones. He ran and ran until he reached the beach and fell swooning in Ulysses' arms. Then with his last breath he gasped out the story, told Ulysses of the lions and the wolves, of the woman singing



in the castle, and how the men had gone in and not come out. And then he slipped into blackness.

Ulysses said to his men, "You hear the story Eurylochus tells. I must go to the castle and see what has happened to your companions. But there is no need for you to risk yourselves. You stay here. And if I do not return by sunfall tomorrow, then you must board the ship and sail away, for you will know that I am dead."

The men wept and pleaded with him not to go, but he said, "I have sworn an oath that I will never leave another man behind if there is any way I can prevent it. Farewell, dear friends."

It was dawn by the time he found himself among the oak trees near the castle. He heard the first faint howling of the animals in the courtyard. And as he walked through the rose and gray light, a figure started up before him—a slender youth in golden breastplates and golden hat with wings on it, holding a golden staff. Ulysses fell to his knees.

"Why do you kneel, venerable sir?" said the youth. "You are older than I, and a mighty warrior. You should not kneel."

"Ah, pardon," cried Ulysses. "I have sharp eyes for some things. Behind your youth—so fair—I see time itself stretching to the beginning of things. Behind your slenderness I sense the power of a god. Sweet youth, beautiful lad, I know you. You are Hermes, the swift one, the messenger god. I pray you have come with good tidings for me because I fear that I have offended the gods, or one of them anyway, and he has vowed vengeance upon me."

"It is true," said Hermes. "Somebody up there doesn't like you. Can't say who, not ethical, you know. But if you *should* suspect that he may have something to do with the management of sea matters, well, you're a good guesser, that's all."

“Poseidon . . . I have offended Poseidon,” muttered Ulysses, “the terrible one, the earth-shaker.”

“Well,” said Hermes, “what do you expect? That unpleasant Cyclops whom you first blinded, then taunted is Poseidon’s son, you know. Not a son to be proud of, but blood is thicker than water, as they say, even in the god of the sea. So Polyphemus tattled to his father, and asked him to do dreadful things to you, which, I’m afraid, he’s been doing. Now, this castle you’re going to is Circe’s and she is a very dangerous person to meet—a sorceress, a doer of magical mischief. And she is waiting for you, Ulysses. She sits at her loom, weaving, waiting. For you. She has already entertained your shipmates. Fed them. Watched them making pigs of themselves. And, finally, helped them on their way a bit. In brief, they are now in a sty, being fattened. And one day they will make a most excellent meal for someone not too fussy. Among Circe’s guests are many peculiar feeders.”

“Thunder and lightning!” cried Ulysses. “What can I do!”

“Listen and learn,” said Hermes. “I have come to help you. Poseidon’s wrath does not please all of us, you know. We gods have our moods, and they’re not always kind, but somehow or other we must keep things balanced. And so I have come to help you. You must do exactly as I say, or nothing can help you. Now listen closely. First, take this.”

He snapped his fingers and a flower appeared between them. It was white and heavily scented, with a black and yellow root. He gave it to Ulysses.

“It is called *moly*,” he said. “It is magical. So long as you carry it, Circe’s drugs will not work. You will go to the castle. She will greet you and feed you. You will eat the food which, to her amazement, will leave you unharmed. Then you will draw your sword and advance upon her as though you meant to kill her. Then she will see that you have certain powers, and will begin to plead with you. She will unveil enchant-

ments more powerful than any she has yet used. Resist them you cannot, nor can any man, nor any god. Nor is there any counterspell that will work against such beauty. But if you wish to see your home again, if you wish to rescue your shipmates from the sty, you must resist her long enough to make her swear the great oath of the immortals—that she will not do you any harm as long as you are her guest. That is all I can do for you. From now on, it is up to you. We shall be watching you with interest. Farewell.”

The golden youth disappeared just as a ray of sunlight does when a cloud crosses the face of the sun. Ulysses shook his head, wondering whether he had really seen the god, or imagined him, but then he saw that he was still holding the curious flower, and he knew that Hermes had indeed been there. So he marched on toward the castle, through the pack of lions and wolves, who leaped about him, fawning, looking at him with their great intelligent eyes, and trying to warn him in their snarling, growling voices. He stroked their heads, and passed among them, and went into the castle.

And here, he found Circe, sitting at her loom, weaving and singing. She wore a white tunic now and a flame-colored scarf, and was as beautiful as the dawn. She stood up and greeted him, saying, “Welcome, stranger. I live here alone, and seldom see anyone, and almost never have guests. So you are triply welcome, great sea-stained warrior, for I know that you have seen battle and adventure and have tales to tell.”

She drew him a warm perfumed bath, and her servants bathed and anointed him, and gave him clean garments to wear. When he came to her, she gave him a red bowl full of yellow food, and said, “Eat.” The food smelled delicious; its fragrance was intoxicating. Ulysses felt that he wanted to plunge his face into it and grub it up like a pig, but he held the flower tightly, kept control of himself, and ate slowly. He did not quite finish the food.



"Delicious," he said. "Your own recipe?"

"Yes," she said. "Will you not finish?"

"I am not quite so hungry as I thought."

"Then, drink. Here's wine."

She turned her back to him as she poured the wine, and he knew that she was casting a powder in it. He smiled to himself and drank off the wine, then said: "Delicious. Your own grapes?"

"You look weary, stranger," she said. "Sit and talk with me."

"Gladly," said Ulysses. "We have much to speak of, you and I. I'm something of a farmer myself. I breed cattle on my own little island of Ithaca, where I'm king—when I'm home. Won't you show me your livestock?"

"Livestock? I keep no cattle here."

"Oh, do you not? I fancied I heard pigs squealing out there. Must have been mistaken."

"Yes," said Circe. "Badly mistaken."

"But you do have interesting animals. I was much struck by the wolves and lions who course in a pack like dogs—very friendly for such savage beasts."

"I have taught them to be friendly," said Circe. "I am friendly myself, you see, and I like all the members of my household to share my goodwill."

"Their eyes," said Ulysses. "I was stuck by their eyes—so big and sad and clever. You know, as I think of it, they looked like . . . human eyes."

"Did they?" said Circe. "Well—the eyes go last."

She came to him swiftly, raised her wand, touched him on the shoulder, and said: "Change, change, change! Turn, turn, turn!"

Nothing happened. Her eyes widened when she saw him sitting there, unchanged, sniffing at the flower he had taken from his tunic. He took the wand from her gently, and



snapped it in two. Then drawing his sword he seized her by her long golden hair and forced her to her knees, pulling her head until her white throat was offered the blade of the sword. Then he said, "You have not asked me my name. It is Ulysses. I am an unlucky man, but not altogether helpless. You have changed my men into pigs. Now I will change you into a corpse."

She did not flinch before the blade. Her great blue eyes looked into his. She took the sharp blade in her hand, stroked it gently, and said, "It is almost worth dying to be overcome by so mighty a warrior. But I think living might be interesting too, now that I have met you."

He felt her fingers burning the cold metal of the sword as if the blade had become part of his body. He tried to turn his head, but sank deeper into the blueness of her eyes.

"Yes, I am a sorceress," she murmured, "a wicked woman. But you are a sorcerer too, are you not? Changing me more than I have changed your men, for I changed only their bodies and you have changed my soul. It is no longer a wicked plotting soul, but soft and tender and womanly, full of love for you."

Her voice throbbed. She stroked the sword blade. He raised her to her feet, and said, "You are beautiful enough to turn any man into an animal. I will love you. But even before I am a man, I am a leader. My men are my responsibility. Before we can love each other I must ask you to swear the great oath that you will not harm me when I am defenseless, that you will not wound me and suck away my blood as witches do, but will treat me honestly. And that, first of all, you will restore my men to their own forms, and let me take them with me when I am ready to leave."

"I will try to see that you are never ready," said Circe softly.

Circe kept her promise. The next morning she took Ulys-



ses out to the sty and called the pigs. They came trotting up, snuffing and grunting. As they streamed past her, rushing to Ulysses, she touched each one on the shoulder with her wand. As she did so, each pig stood up, his hind legs grew longer, his front hooves became hands, his eyes grew, his nose shrank, his quills softened into hair, and he was his human self once more, only grown taller and younger.

The men crowded around Ulysses, shouting and laughing. He said to them: "Welcome, my friends. You have gone a short but ugly voyage to the animal state. And while you have returned—looking very well—it is clear that we are in a place of sorceries and must conduct ourselves with great care. Our enchanting hostess, Circe, has become so fond of our company that she insists we stay awhile. This, indeed, is the price of your release from hogdom. So you will now go down to your shipmates on the beach, and tell them what has happened. Ask them to secure the ship and then return here with you to the castle. It is another delay in our journey, but it is far better than what might have been. Go, then."

The men trooped happily down to the harbor and told the others what had happened. At first, Eurylochus protested. "How do I know," he said, "that you are not still under enchantment? How do I know that this is not some new trick of the sorceress to get us all into her power, turn us all to pigs, and keep us in the sty forever?"

But the other men paid no heed to his warning. They were eager to see the castle and the beautiful witch, to taste the delicious food, and enjoy all the luxuries their friends had described. So they obeyed Ulysses' commands. They dragged the ship up on the beach, beyond reach of the tide, unstepped its mast, then marched off laughing and singing toward the castle, carrying mast and oars and folded sail. Eurylochus followed, but he was afraid.

For some time, things went well. Ulysses and Circe lived as husband and wife. The men were treated as welcome



guests. They feasted for hours each night in the great dining hall. And as they ate, they were entertained by minstrels singing, by acrobats, dancing bears, and dancing girls. During the day they swam in the ocean, hunted wild boar, threw the discus, had archery and spear-throwing contests, raced, jumped, and wrestled. Then as dusk drew in they returned to the castle for their warm perfumed baths and bowls of hot wine before the feasting began again.

As for Ulysses he found himself falling deeper under Circe's spell every day. Thoughts of home were dim now. He barely remembered his wife's face. Sometimes he would think of days gone by and wonder when he could shake off this enchantment and resume his voyage. Then she would look at him. And her eyes, like blue flame, burned these pictures out of his head. Then he could not rest until he was within the scent of her hair, the touch of her hand. And he would whimper impatiently like a dog dreaming, shake his head, and go to her.

"It is most curious," she said. "But I love you more than all my other husbands."

"In the name of heaven how many have you had?" he cried.

"Ah, don't say it like that. Not so many, when you consider. I have been a frequent widow, it is true. But, please understand, I am god-descended on both sides. I am immortal and cannot die. I have lived since the beginning of things."

"Yes. How many husbands have you had?"

"Please, my dear, be fair. Gods have loved me, and satyrs and fauns and centaurs, and other creatures who do not die. But I, I have always had a taste for humankind. My favorite husbands have been men, human men. They, you see, grow old so quickly, and I am alone again. And time grows heavy, and breeds mischief."

"How many husbands have you buried, dear widow?"

“To the Land of the Dead. To Tartarus. This is the decree. You must go there with all your men. And there you must consult certain ghosts, of whom you will be told, and they will prophesy for you, and plan your homeward journey. And theirs is the route you must follow if you wish to see Ithaca again.”

“The Land of the Dead, dark Tartarus, the realm of torment from which no mortal returns. Must I go there?”

“Unless you stay with me here, in peace, in luxury, in every pleasure but that of adventure.”

“It cannot be,” said Ulysses. “As you, beautiful sorceress, choose a form for your lovers that matches their natures, and which they must wear when they are no longer men, so the Fates, with their shears, have cut out my destiny. It is danger, toil, battle, uncertainty. And, though I stop and refresh myself now and again, still must I resume my voyage, for that is my nature. And to fit my nature has fate cut the pattern of my days.”

“Go quickly,” said Circe. “Call your men and depart. For if you stay here any longer, I shall forget all duty. I shall break my oath and keep you here by force and never let you go. Quickly then, brave one, quickly!”

Ulysses summoned his men and led them down to the beach. They stepped the mast, rigged the sails, and sailed away. They caught a northwest puff. The sails filled and the black ship ran out of the harbor. Ulysses' face was wet with Circe's last tears and his heart was very heavy. But then spray dashed into his face with the old remembered bright shock, and he laughed.

The last sound the men heard as the ship threaded through the mouth of the harbor and ran for the open sea, was the howling of the lions and wolves who had followed them down to the beach. They stood now breast-deep in the surf, gazing after the white sail, crying their loneliness.

THE LAND OF THE DEAD

In those days men knew that the Ocean Stream was a huge river girdling the earth. Hades' kingdom, dark Tartarus, was presumed to be on the farther shore, over the edge of the visible world. But no one could be certain, for those who went there did not return.

Now it had been foretold by Circe that Ulysses would have to visit the Land of the Dead, and be advised by wise ghosts before he could resume his journey and find his way back to Ithaca. So he turned his bow westward; and a strong east wind caught his white sails and sent the ship skimming toward waters no ship had sailed before.

Night tumbled from the sky and set its blackness on the sea and would not lift. The ship sailed blindly. The men were clamped in a nameless grief. They could hardly bear the sound of their own voices, but spoke to each other in whispers. The night wore on and did not give way to dawn. There were no stars, no moon. They sailed westward and waited for dawn, but no crack of light appeared in the sky. The darkness would not lift.

Once again Ulysses lashed himself to the tiller, and stuck splinters of wood in his eye sockets to prop the weary lids. And, finally, after a week of night, a feeble light did curdle the sky—not a regular dawn, no joyous burst of sun, but a grudging milky grayness that floated down and thickened into fog. Still Ulysses did not dare to sleep, for day was no



better than night; no man could see in the dense woolly folds of fog.

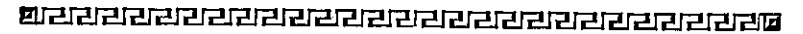
Still the east wind blew, pushing them westward through the curdling mist, and still Ulysses did not dare give over the helm. For he had heard that the westward rim of the world was always fog-girt, and was studded by murderously rocky islets, where dwelt the Cimmerians, who waited quietly in the fog for ships to crack upon their shores and deliver to them their natural food, shipwrecked sailors. Finally, Ulysses knew he could not keep awake any longer; yet he knew too that to give over the helm to anyone else meant almost certain death for them all. So he sent a sailor named Elpenor to climb the mast and try to see some distance ahead. No sooner had Elpenor reached the top of the mast than the ship yawed sharply. Ulysses lost his footing and stumbled against the mast.

No one saw Elpenor fall. The fog was too thick. But they heard his terrible scream turned into a choking gurgle. And they knew that he had been shaken from the mast and had fallen into the sea and been drowned. No sooner had his voice gone still than the fog thinned. They could see from one end of the ship to the other—the wet sails, the shining spar, each other's wasted faces. A white gull rose screaming and flew ahead of them.

"Follow that gull," said Ulysses. "He will lead us where we must go."

Then he stretched himself on the deck and went to sleep. Whereupon the crew began to whisper among themselves that the gull was the spirit of their shipmate, Elpenor, and that Ulysses had shaken him from the mast purposely, as you shake fruit from a tree, so that he might fall in the water and be drowned, giving them the white flight of his spirit to follow to Tartarus.

"He has murdered our shipmate," they whispered to each other, "as he will murder us all to gain his ends."



But they did not dare say it loud enough to awaken Ulysses.

All day they sailed, following the white flash of the gull, and when night came there were no stars and no moon, nothing but choking blackness. Ulysses took the helm again. But now the bow tipped forward and the stern arose, and the ship slipped through the water with a rushing rustling speed as if it were sailing downhill. The men clung to the shrouds, and wept and groaned, and pleaded with Ulysses to change course. But he answered them not at all. He planted his feet and gripped the tiller with all his strength, as the deck tilted and the ship slipped down, down. . . .

"Who has ever heard of the sea sloping?" he said to himself. "Truly this must be the waterway to the underworld, and we are the first keel to cut these fathoms. May the gods grant we cross them again going the other way."

There was a roaring of waters. The deck leveled. They sailed out of darkness as through a curtain, and found themselves in a strange place. The sea had narrowed to a river, the water was black, and the sky was black, curving downward like the inside of a bowl; the light was gray. Tall trees grew along the bank of the river—black poplars and white birches. And Ulysses knew that the black river was the Styx, and that he had sailed his ship into the Kingdom of the Dead.

There was no wind, but the sails remained strangely taut, and the ship floated easily into harbor, as if some invisible hand had taken the helm.

Ulysses bade his men disembark. He led them past a fringe of trees to a great meadow where black goats cropped black grass. He drew his sword and scraped out a shallow trench, then had his men cut the throats of two black goats and hold them over the trench until it was filled with blood. For it was ghosts he had come to counsel with, and ghosts, he knew, came only where they could find fresh blood to drink, hoping always to fill their dry veins.

“I knew that Penelope was being wooed by other men in your absence,” said Ulysses’ mother. “I knew it well, but I would not speak evil of your wife, not I, not I . . .”

“Thank you, Mother,” said Ulysses.

Then came a ghost so new that his flesh had not quite turned to mist, but quivered on his bones like a pale jelly. He was Elpenor, who had fallen from the mast and had led them to Tartarus. When Ulysses saw who it was, he was taken by a great dread, and cried, “I did not push you, Elpenor. You fell. It was an accident, I swear.”

“Nevertheless,” said Elpenor, “my ghost will trouble you until you make my grave.”

“How will I do that?”

“The first land you come to, build me a barrow and set thereon my oar. If you forget, I shall scratch at your windows and howl down your chimney and dance in your sleep.”

“I will build your grave with my own hands,” said Ulysses. “Have you any counsel for me?”

“Yes. Death has cleared my eyes, and I see things I would not have known. I see your ship now sailing in a narrow place between two huge rocks. Beneath the starboard rock is a cave, and in that cave squats Scylla, an unpleasant lady with twelve legs and six heads who cries with the voice of a new-born puppy. If you sail too near that rock, she will seize six sailors to feed her six mouths—”

“Then I will steer away from Scylla—toward the other rock.”

“Ah, but under the other rock lurks a strange thirsty monster named Charybdis whose habit it is to drink up a whole tide of water in one gulp, and then spit it out again, making a whirlpool of such terrible sucking force that any ship within its swirl must be destroyed.”

“Monster to the right and monster to the left,” cried Ulysses. “What can I do then?”

“You must keep to the middle way. But if you cannot—

and indeed it will be very difficult, for you will be tacking against headwinds—then choose the right-hand rock where hungry Scylla squats. For it is better to lose six men than your ship and your entire crew.”

“Thank you, courteous Elpenor,” said Ulysses. “I will heed your words.”

Then the air grew vaporous as the mob of ghosts shifted and swayed, making way for one who cleaved forward toward the trench of blood, and Ulysses recognized the one he was most eager to see, the blind woman-shaped ghost of Teiresias, sage of Thebes, expert at disasters, master of prophecy.

“Hail, venerable Teiresias,” he cried, “all honor to you. I have journeyed far to make your acquaintance.”

Teiresias came silently to the trench, knelt, and drank. He drank until the trench was empty and the misty bladder of his body was faintly pink.

“You honor me by your visit, Ulysses,” he said. “Many men sought my counsel when I was alive, but you are the first client to make his way down here. You have heard these others tell you of certain petty dangers which you will do well to avoid, but I have a mighty thing to tell.”

“Tell.”

“Your next landfall will be a large island which men shall one day call Sicily. Here the Sun Titan, Hyperion, pastures his herds of golden cattle. Your stores will have been eaten when you reach this place, and your men will be savage with hunger. But no matter how desperate for food they are, you must prevent them from stealing even one beef. If they do, they shall never see home again.”

“I myself will guard the herds of the Sun Titan,” said Ulysses, “and not one beef shall be taken. Thank you, wise Teiresias.”

“Go now. Take your men aboard the ship, and go. Sail up the black river toward the upper air.”

“But now that I am here and have come such a long and

weary way to get here, may I not see some of the famous sights. May I not see Orion hunting, Minos judging? May I not dance with the heroes in the Fields of Asphodel? May I not see Tantalus thirsting, or my own grandfather, Sisyphus, rolling his eternal stone up the hill?"

"No," said Teiresias. "It is better that you go. You have been here too long already, I fear; too long exposed to these bone-bleaching airs. You may already be tainted with death, you and your men, making your fates too heavy for any ship to hold. Embark then. Sail up the black river. Do not look back. Remember our advice and forget our reproaches, and do not return until you are properly dead."

Ulysses ordered his men aboard. He put down the helm. There was still no wind. But the sails stretched taut, and the ship pushed upriver. Heeding the last words of the old sage, he did not look back, but he heard the voice of his mother calling, "Good-bye . . . good-bye . . ." until it grew faint as his own breath.

THE WANDERING ROCKS

They sailed out of darkness into light, and their hearts danced with joy to see blue water and blue sky again. A fair west wind plumped their sails and sped them toward home.

"If this wind keeps blowing," said Ulysses to himself, "perhaps we can skirt the dangerous islands they spoke of; sail right around these Sirens and these tide-drinking man-eating

monsters, and find our way home without further mishap. True, it was foretold differently, but what of that? How reliable are such prophecies, after all? Ajax and Achilles were always better at fighting than thinking—why should they be wiser dead than alive? And Elpenor—my most inept hand? Must I take his word for what is going to happen? Why, that fall from the mast must have scattered the few wits he had. Besides, they were all ghosts down there, advising me, and ghosts are gloomy by nature, as everyone knows. They like to frighten people; it's the way they've been trained. No! By the gods, I will not accept all this evil as inevitable, but will stretch my sails to the following wind, and speed for Ithaca."

At that very moment he heard a strange sound, not a sound the wind makes, or the water, nor the voice of man or gull. He looked about, searched sky and water. He saw nothing. Then he turned over the helm to one of the sailors and climbed the mast. There he could see for miles over the dancing water. And far to the south he saw tiny black things floating, so small he could not tell whether he was imagining them or not. But they grew larger even as he watched. And as they came near, the strange moaning grinding sound grew louder and louder.

"What are they?" he said to himself. "They look like rocks, but rocks don't float. Can they be dolphins? Not whales, surely—whales spout. And all fish are voiceless. What is it then that comes and cries upon the silence of the seas? Another evil spawned by the stubborn god who pursues me? But what?"

By now the objects were close enough to see, and he saw that they were indeed rocks. A floating reef of rocks. Jagged boulders bobbing on the waves like corks. Rubbing against each other and making that moaning, grinding sound. And coming fast, driving purposefully toward the ship.



"Port the helm!" roared Ulysses.

The ship swung northward as the rocks pressed from the south.

"Floating rocks," said Ulysses. "Who has seen their like? This is a wonder unreported by any traveler. We see a new thing today, and I should like to see the last of it. Are they following us? Are they driven by some intelligence? Or are we caught in a trick of tide that moves them so? I shall soon see."

He took the helm himself then and sailed the ship in a circle to give the rocks a chance to pass by. But to his horror he saw the rocks begin to circle also, keeping always between him and the open sea to the south. They held the same distance now. He sheared off northward; they followed, keeping the same distance. But when he turned and headed south, they held their place. He saw them loom before his bow, jagged and towering, ready to crush his hull like a walnut. And he had to swing off again and dart away northward, as the crew raised a shout of terror.

So he set his course north by northwest, thinking sadly: "I see that I can avoid nothing that was foretold. I cannot bear southward around the Isle of the Sun where lurk the demons and monsters I have been warned against, but must speed toward them as swiftly as toward a rendezvous with loved ones. These rocks shepherd me; they herd this vessel as a stray sheep is herded by the shepherd's dog, driving me toward that which the vengeful gods have ordained. So be it then. If I cannot flee, then I must dare. Heroes are made, I see, when retreat is cut off. So be it."

He set his course for the Isle of the Sun Titan, which men called Thrinacia, and which we know now as Sicily.

All through the night they sailed. In the darkness they lost sight of the rocks. But they could hear them clashing and moaning, keeping pace with the ship.



THE SIRENS

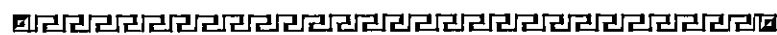
In the first light of morning Ulysses awoke and called his crew about him.

"Men," he said. "Listen well, for your lives today hang upon what I am about to tell you. That large island to the west is Thrinacia, where we must make a landfall, for our provisions run low. But to get to the island we must pass through a narrow strait. And at the head of this strait is a rocky islet where dwell two sisters called Sirens, whose voices you must not hear. Now I shall guard you against their singing which would lure you to shipwreck, but first you must bind me to the mast. Tie me tightly, as though I were a dangerous captive. And no matter how I struggle, no matter what signals I make to you, *do not release me*, lest I follow their voices to destruction, taking you with me."

Thereupon Ulysses took a large lump of the beeswax which was used by the sail mender to slick his heavy thread, and kneaded it in his powerful hands until it became soft. Then he went to each man of the crew and plugged his ears with soft wax; he caulked their ears so tightly that they could hear nothing but the thin pulsing of their own blood.

Then he stood himself against the mast, and the men bound him about with rawhide, winding it tightly around his body, lashing him to the thick mast.

They had lowered the sail because ships cannot sail through a narrow strait unless there is a following wind, and



they had been children. But they had held him long enough to give the crew time to swarm about him. He was overpowered—crushed by their numbers—and dragged back to the mast. This time he was bound with the mighty hawser that held the anchor.

The men returned to their rowing seats, unable to hear the voices because of the wax corking their ears. The ship swung about and headed for the strait again.

Louder now, and clearer, the tormenting voices came to Ulysses. Again he was aflame with a fury of desire. But try as he might he could not break the thick anchor line. He strained against it until he bled, but the line held.

The men bent to their oars and rowed more swiftly, for they saw the mast bending like a tall tree in a heavy wind, and they feared that Ulysses, in his fury, might snap it off short and dive, mast and all, into the water to get at the Sirens.

Now they were passing the rock, and Ulysses could see the singers. There were two of them. They sat on a heap of white bones—the bones of shipwrecked sailors—and sang more beautifully than senses could bear. But their appearance did not match their voices, for they were shaped like birds, huge birds, larger than eagles. They had feathers instead of hair, and their hands and feet were claws. But their faces were the faces of young girls.

When Ulysses saw them he was unable to forget the sweetness of their voices because their look was so fearsome. He closed his eyes against the terrible sight of these bird-women perched on their heap of bones. But when he closed his eyes and could not see their ugliness, then their voices maddened him once again, and he felt himself straining against the bloody ropes. He forced himself to open his eyes and look upon the monsters, so that the terror of their bodies would blot the beauty of their voices.



But the men, who could only see, not hear the Sirens, were so appalled by their aspect that they swept their oars faster and faster, and the black ship scuttled past the rock. The Sirens' voices sounded fainter and fainter and finally died away.

When Perimedes and Eurylochus saw their captain's face lose its madness, they unbound him, and he signaled to the men to unstop their ears. For now he heard the whistling gurgle of a whirlpool, and he knew that they were approaching the narrowest part of the strait, and must pass between Scylla and Charybdis.