

5

Calypso

Book Five

Seven years a captive on Calypso's island, Odysseus is released at last by the will of Zeus. He builds a raft with his own hands and sets out alone across the open sea, only for Poseidon, his old enemy, to catch him far from land and break a storm over his head. Shipwrecked and half-drowned, he must endure the sea's fury to win the shore.

NAME

SET

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BOOK FIVE

Calypso

Calypso's island of Ogygia, seven years into Odysseus' captivity, and the open sea beyond it.

WHAT HAPPENS

- A second council of the gods sends Hermes to order Calypso to release Odysseus.
- Calypso protests the gods' double standard but obeys, and helps Odysseus build a raft.
- He refuses her offer of immortality, choosing his mortal home and wife, and sets sail alone.
- Poseidon spots him and wrecks his raft in a great storm; the sea-goddess Ino gives him a saving veil.
- After days in the water he struggles ashore on the Phaeacian coast, naked and exhausted, and sleeps.

WHO WE MEET

Odysseus

seen at last, weeping for home

Calypso

the nymph who must let him go

Hermes

the messenger of Zeus

Poseidon

his divine enemy, god of the sea

Ino & Athene

who rescue him from the waves

WHY IT MATTERS FOR ESSAYS

Book 5 brings Odysseus on stage for the first time and defines his heroism as endurance. It holds the great set-pieces of the gods driving events and of the storm, and the central choice of mortality over immortality. A **prescribed** book, examined in context, so know it closely.

Calypso

— THE GODS IN COUNCIL

When **Dawn** had risen from the bed where she sleeps beside illustrious Tithonus, to bring daylight to immortals and to mortals, the gods sat down in assembly, and among them Zeus the Thunderer, the greatest of them all. The imprisonment of Odysseus in **Calypso's**

5 home was heavy on Athene's heart, and she now recalled the tale of his misfortunes to their minds. 'Father Zeus, and you other blessed gods who live for ever, kindness, generosity and justice should no longer be the aims of any man who **wields a royal sceptre** – in fact he might just as well devote his days to tyranny and lawless deeds.
10 Look at Odysseus, that admirable King! Today, not one of the people he once ruled like a loving father gives him a single thought. He is left to languish in misery in the island home of the Nymph Calypso, who keeps him captive there. Not that he could reach Ithaca in any case, for he has neither ships fitted with oars nor crew to carry him
15 so far across the sea. Meanwhile his beloved son has gone to sacred Pylos and blessed Lacedaemon for news of his father, and **they mean to murder him** on the way back.'

'My child,' replied **the Gatherer of the Clouds**, 'what are you saying? Did you not plan all this yourself? Was it not your idea that Odysseus
20 should return and take revenge on these men? As for Telemachus, use your own skill – you have the power – to bring him back to Ithaca safe and sound, and let the Suitors sail home again in their ship with nothing accomplished.'

— ZEUS SENDS HERMES

Zeus now turned to **Hermes**, his beloved son. 'Hermes,' he said, 'as
25 you are our usual Messenger, convey our final decision to that Nymph of the plaited tresses. The long-enduring Odysseus must now set out for home. On the journey he shall have neither gods nor men to help him. He shall set out on a raft put together by his own hands, and on the twentieth day, after great hardship, reach **Scherie**,
30 the rich country of the Phaeacians, who are close to the gods. They will take him to their hearts and treat him like a god. They will convey him by ship to his own land, giving him bronze, gold and woven materials in such quantities **as he could never have won** for himself from Troy, even if he had come away with his fair share of the
35 spoil. This is how it is ordained that he shall see his friends and come to his high-roofed house and his native land once more.'

— HERMES' FLIGHT

Zeus had spoken. His Messenger, the Giant-killer, obeyed.

LINE 1

Dawn Homer loves to start a scene with a sunrise, and he always describes it the same way – 'rosy-fingered Dawn' getting up from beside her sleeping lover. That lover was **Tithonus**, an ordinary mortal man. Dawn got him eternal life but forgot to ask for eternal youth too, so he just kept ageing, shrivelling away, and could never die.

LINE 4

Calypso Calypso is a nymph – a minor goddess. She's kept Odysseus stuck on her island, Ogygia, for seven years. This scene is the second time the gods have met to talk about him; the first was way back in Book 1.

LINE 8

wields a royal sceptre A **sceptre** is the staff a king carries to show he's the rightful ruler. When Homer calls someone a 'sceptred king', he means a proper, lawful one.

LINES 16–17

they mean to murder him This points back to Book 4: the Suitors have set a trap at sea to kill Telemachus on his way home.

LINE 18

the Gatherer of the Clouds This is just a nickname for **Zeus**, the king of the gods. These fixed nicknames have a name of their own – they're called **epithets**.

LINE 24

Hermes **Hermes** is the messenger god – the one who carries messages and orders from the gods down to people. And here's a key word: *nostos* means 'homecoming', the long journey home after a war. It's basically what the whole poem is about.

LINE 29

Scherie **Scherie** is the home of the **Phaeacians**, a magical people who are brilliant sailors. They're the ones who'll take Odysseus in and finally ferry him home, across Books 6 to 13.

LINE 33

as he could never have won When a guest left, it was good manners to send them off loaded with expensive presents – part of the hospitality code (*xenia*). The Phaeacians' gifts to Odysseus are going to be especially generous.

Immediately he bound on his feet the lovely sandals of untarnishable gold that carried him with the speed of the wind over the water or the boundless earth; and he picked up the wand which he can use at will to cast a spell upon men's eyes or waken them from sleep. With this wand in his hand, the mighty Giant-killer made his flight. From the upper air he dropped to the Pierian range, and from there swooped down on the sea, and skimmed the waves like a sea-gull drenching the feathers of its wings with spray as it pursues the fish down fearsome troughs of the unharvested deep. So Hermes rode wave after wave, till at length he reached the remote island, where, leaving the blue waters of the sea, he came to the great cavern where the Nymph of the lovely locks was living.

— CALYPSO'S CAVE

He found her at home. A large fire was blazing on the hearth and the scent from burning logs of juniper and cedar was wafted far across the island. Inside, Calypso was singing with her beautiful voice as she went to and fro at her loom, weaving with a golden shuttle. The cave was sheltered by a copse of alders and fragrant cypresses, which was the roosting-place of wide-winged birds, horned owls and falcons and cormorants with long tongues, birds of the coast, whose business takes them down to the sea. Trailing round the mouth of the cavern was a thriving garden vine, with great bunches of grapes; from four separate but neighbouring springs four crystal rivulets were channelled to run this way and that; and in soft meadows on either side iris and wild celery flourished. It was indeed a spot where even an immortal visitor must pause to gaze in wonder and delight.

— HERMES AND CALYPSO

The Messenger, the Giant-killer, stood and gazed at the scene. When he had gazed at it all to his heart's content he passed into the great cavern. The goddess Calypso knew him the moment she raised her eyes to his face, for none of the immortal gods is a stranger to his fellows, even though his home may be remote from theirs. As for the lion-hearted Odysseus, Hermes did not find him in the cave, for he was sitting disconsolate on the shore in his accustomed place, tormenting himself with tears and sighs and heartache, and looking out across the barren sea with streaming eyes.

The divine Calypso seated Hermes on a brightly polished chair, and asked him: 'Hermes of the golden wand, what brings you here? You are an honoured and welcome guest, though in the past your visits have been few. Tell me what is in your mind, and I will gladly do what you ask of me, if I can and if it must be so. But first follow me inside and let me offer you hospitality.'

The goddess now put some ambrosia on a table, drew it to his side,

LINES 38–39

sandals of untarnishable gold These are the same golden sandals Hermes wore back in Book 1. When Homer repeats a description word for word like this, it's called a **formula** – a ready-made phrase poets reused to help them perform from memory.

LINE 44

skimmed the waves like a sea-gull A **simile** is a comparison using 'like' or 'as' (here, Hermes flying 'like a gull'). They're one of Homer's favourite tricks, and this book is packed with them.

LINE 62

even an immortal visitor must pause When Homer stops to describe a place or object in loving detail like this, there's a technical word for it: an **ecphrasis**.

LINE 66

none of the immortal gods is a stranger In Homer, the gods always recognise each other instantly, even in disguise – so Calypso knows straight away that her visitor is Hermes.

LINE 72

brightly polished chair There was a proper order for looking after a guest: give them a seat, then feed them, and only ask who they are and why they've come afterwards. That whole hospitality custom is called *xenia*.

LINE 78

ambrosia Ambrosia and **nectar** are the special food and drink of the gods. Humans aren't able to eat them.

and mixed him a cup of red nectar. The Messenger, the Giant-killer,
 80 began to eat and drink, and when he had dined and refreshed himself, he answered Calypso's questions:

'As one immortal to another, you ask me what has brought me here; **since you command me**, I shall tell you frankly. It was Zeus who sent me; it was no wish of mine to come. For who would choose to race
 85 across that vast expanse of salt water? It seemed unending. And not a city on the way, not a mortal soul to offer a choice sacrifice to a god. But when Zeus, who bears the aegis, makes up his mind, it is impossible for any other god to thwart him or evade his will.

— THE MESSAGE

'He says that you have with you here a man who has been dogged by
 90 misfortune, more so indeed than any of those with whom he shared the nine years of fighting round the walls of Troy and left for home when they had sacked it in the tenth. In setting out they **gave offence to Athene**, who raised a violent gale and heavy seas against them. His noble companions were no lost to a man, but he himself
 95 was swept here by the wind and waves. And now Zeus bids you send him off without delay. He is not doomed to end his days on the island, away from all his friends. **He is destined** to see his friends and come to his high-roofed house and his native land once more.'

At his words the divine Calypso shuddered. Her words winged their
 100 way to him. 'You are hard-hearted, you gods, and unmatched for jealousy. You are outraged if a goddess sleeps openly with a man even if she has chosen him as her husband. You were the same when rosy-fingered **Dawn fell in love with Orion**. Free and easy yourselves, you were outraged at her conduct, and in the end chaste Artemis of the
 105 golden throne rose, attacked him in Ortygie with her gentle arrows and left him dead. And so again, when the lovely Demeter gave way to her desire and made love with her beloved **lasion** in the field of the three ploughed furrows, Zeus heard of it quickly enough and struck him dead with his blinding thunderbolt.

— CALYPSO'S PROTEST

110 'And now it is my turn to incur the envy of you gods for living with a mortal man – a man whom I rescued from death as he was drifting alone astride the keel of his ship, when Zeus had shattered it with his lightning bolt out on the wine-dark sea, and all his fine comrades were lost. But he was driven to this island by the wind and waves and
 115 I welcomed him with open arms; I tended him; I offered to make him immortal and ageless. But now, since no god can evade or thwart the will of aegisbearing Zeus, let him go. If Zeus insists that he should leave, let him be gone across the barren water and good riddance to him! But I will not help him on his way, not I. I have no ship fitted

LINE 83

since you command me Zeus is the top god, the king of them all. Even the other powerful gods have to do what he says.

LINES 92–93

gave offence to Athene During the capture of Troy, the Greeks made **Athene** furious: one of them (the 'lesser' Ajax) dragged the priestess Cassandra out of Athene's own temple. That's why the goddess made their journeys home such a nightmare.

LINE 97

He is destined The Greeks believed some things were *fated* – already fixed, and impossible to change, even for the gods. Odysseus getting home eventually is one of those fixed things.

LINE 103

Dawn fell in love with Orion Orion was a giant hunter that the goddess Dawn fell for – until the goddess Artemis shot him dead. He was later turned into the star constellation that still has his name today.

LINE 107

lasion lasion was a mortal man loved by **Demeter**, the goddess of the harvest. Zeus killed him with a thunderbolt for it. (Rieu prints the name as 'lasion', but it's really lasion.)

120 with oars, no crew to carry him so far across the seas. Yet I do promise with a good grace and unreservedly to give him such directions as will bring him safe and sound to his native land.'

'Then send him off at once,' the Messenger, the Giant-killer, said, 'and so avoid provoking Zeus, or he may be angry and punish you one day.' With this the mighty Giant-killer took his leave.

The Nymph at once went to the valiant Odysseus, for the message from Zeus had not fallen on deaf ears. She found him sitting on the shore. His eyes were wet with weeping, as they always were. Life with its sweetness was ebbing away in the tears he shed for his lost home. For the Nymph had long since ceased to please. At nights, it is true, he had to sleep with her in the vaulted cavern, cold lover, ardent lady. But the days found him sitting on the rocks or sands, torturing himself with tears, groans and heartache, and looking out with streaming eyes across the watery wilderness.

135 The goddess came and stood beside him now. 'My unhappy friend,' she said, 'don't go on grieving, don't waste any more of your life on this island. For I am ready with all my heart to help you leave it. Come now, fell some tall trees with an axe, make a wide raft and fit half-decks on top so that it can carry you across the misty seas. I will stock it myself with bread and water and red wine to your liking, so that you need be in no fear of starvation; and I'll give you clothing too, and send you a following wind, so that you may reach your own country safe and sound, if it please the gods of the broad sky, who have more power to plan and to ordain than I have.'

— CALYPSO AND ODYSSEUS

145 The stalwart good Odysseus shuddered at this and addressed her with words that flew. 'Goddess, it is surely **not my safety you are thinking about** but something else, when you tell me to cross this formidable sea in such a craft. Even the fastest sailing-ships do not cross it, though they like nothing better than the winds of heaven. So I shall not entrust myself to a raft unless I can count on your goodwill, and you give me your solemn oath that you will not plot some other mischief against me.'

Calypso, the divine goddess, smiled and stroked him with her hand. 'Odysseus,' she protested, 'what a rogue you are to say such a thing! It shows the crafty way your mind works. Now **let Earth be my witness**, with the broad Sky above, and the **waters of Styx** that flow below – the greatest and most solemn oath the blessed gods can take – that I plot no other mischief against you but am considering only what I should do on my own behalf if I found myself in such a plight. For I have some sense of what is fair; and my heart is not made of iron. I know what pity is.'

LINES 146–147

not my safety you are thinking about *Metis* is the clever, crafty, always-thinking-ahead intelligence Odysseus is famous for. He's naturally cautious and never takes anything at face value.

LINES 155–156

let Earth be my witness Swearing by huge powers like Earth, Sky and the underworld river Styx made an oath completely unbreakable – even a god couldn't wriggle out of it.

LINE 156

waters of Styx The **Styx** is the great river of the underworld. An oath sworn on it was the most serious promise going – not even a god could break one.

With these words the gracious goddess moved swiftly away, and he followed her. The goddess and the man reached the great cavern together and Odysseus seated himself on the chair that Hermes had just left. The Nymph placed at his side the various kinds of food and drink that mortal men consume, and sat down facing the noble Odysseus. Her maids set ambrosia and nectar beside her, and the two helped themselves to the meal spread before them.

— THE OATH

When they had enjoyed the food and drink, the goddess Calypso began to speak. 'So you are determined, **son of Laertes**, favourite of Zeus, ingenious Odysseus, to leave at once for home and your beloved Ithaca? Even so I wish you happiness. Yet had you any inkling of the full measure of misery you are bound to endure before you reach your native land, you would stay and share this home with me, and **take on immortality**, however much you long to see that wife of yours, who is never out of your thoughts. And yet I claim to be by no means her inferior in looks or figure, for surely it would be most unseemly for a woman to compete with a goddess in form and face.'

To this the nimble-witted Odysseus replied: 'My lady goddess, do not be angry at what I am about to say. I too know well enough that my wise Penelope's looks and stature are insignificant compared with yours. For she is mortal, while you have immortality and unfading youth. Nevertheless I long to reach my home and see the day of my return. It is my never-failing wish. And what if one of the gods does wreck me out on the wine-dark sea? I have a heart that is inured to suffering and I shall steel it to endure that too. For in my day I have had many bitter and painful experiences in war and on the stormy seas. So let this new disaster come. It only makes one more.'

— THE LAST TEMPTATION

By now the sun had set and it grew dark. So the two retired to a recess in the cavern and there in each other's arms they found pleasure in making love.

As soon as Dawn appeared, fresh and rosy-fingered, Odysseus put on his tunic and cloak, and the Nymph dressed herself in a long silvery mantle of a fine and elegant material, with a splendid golden belt round her waist, and a scarf over her head. Then she planned her noble guest's departure. First she gave him **a great axe of bronze**. Its double blade was sharp, and the shapely handle of **olive-wood** fixed firmly to its head was comfortable to hold. Next she handed him an adze of polished metal, and led the way to the farthest part of the island, where the trees grew tall, alders and poplars and towering firs, all dry timber that had long since lost its sap and would make

LINE 170

son of Laertes A formal, respectful way to address a hero was to name his dad. So Odysseus is 'son of **Laertes**' – Laertes being his elderly father, still alive back home in Ithaca.

LINE 175

take on immortality Never growing old and never dying was the one big thing that separated gods from humans. And that's exactly what Calypso is offering Odysseus if he'll stay with her.

LINE 197

a great axe of bronze An **adze** (one of the tools listed here) is a bit like an axe, but with the blade turned sideways. It was used for shaping and smoothing wood.

LINE 198

olive-wood The **olive** was the tree sacred to **Athene**, the goddess who looks out for Odysseus.

buoyant material for his raft.

— BUILDING THE RAFT

When she had shown him the place where the trees were tallest the
 205 gracious goddess went home, and Odysseus began to cut down the
 trees. He worked fast and felled twenty in all and lopped their
 branches with his axe, then trimmed them in a workmanlike manner
 and with a line made their edges straight.

Presently Calypso brought him boring-tools. With these he drilled
 210 through all his planks, cut them to fit each other, and fixed this
 flooring together by means of dowels driven through the
 interlocking joints, giving the same width to his raft as a skilled
 shipwright would choose in rounding out the hull for a broad-
 bottomed trading vessel. He next put up the decking, which he fitted
 215 to ribs at short intervals, finishing with long gunwales down the
 sides. He made a mast to go in the raft, and constructed a half-deck
 and a rudder to keep it on its course. And from stem to stern he
 fenced its sides with plaited osier twigs and a plentiful backing of
 brushwood, as some protection against the heavy seas.

Meanwhile the goddess Calypso had brought him cloth with which to
 220 make the sail. This too he skilfully made; then lashed the braces,
 halyards and sheets in their places on board. Finally he dragged it
 down on rollers into the bright sea. By the end of the fourth day all
 his work was done, and on the fifth the goddess Calypso **saw him off**
 225 **from the island**. She bathed him first and dressed him in sweet-
 smelling clothes. She had also stowed two skins in his boat, one full
 of dark wine, the other larger one of water, as well as a leather sack of
 grain and quantities of appetizing meats. And now a warm and
 gentle breeze sprang up at her command.

— THE VOYAGE

It was with a happy heart that the noble Odysseus spread his sail to
 230 catch the wind and skilfully kept the raft on course with the rudder.
 There he sat and never closed his eyes in sleep, but **kept them on**
the Pleiads, or watched the late-setting Bootes slowly fade, or the
 Great Bear, sometimes called the Wain, which always wheels round
 235 in the same place and looks across at Orion the Hunter with a wary
 eye. It was this constellation, the only one which never sinks below
 the horizon to bathe in Ocean's Stream, that the wise goddess
 Calypso had told him to keep on his left hand as he sailed across the
 sea. So for seventeen days he sailed on his course, and on the
 240 eighteenth there came into view the shadowy mountains of the
 Phaeacians' country, which jutted out to meet him. The land looked
 like a shield laid on the misty sea.

LINES 224–225

saw him off from the island Giving a departing guest a wash, fresh clothes and a boat stocked with food and drink was the proper way to see them off – part of the hospitality code (*xenia*).

LINES 232–233

kept them on the Pleiads Before compasses, sailors found their way by the stars. Homer names real constellations here – the **Pleiads**, the Great Bear (which he calls 'the Wain') and Boötes – and how Odysseus keeps them in the right spot to stay on course.

— POSEIDON'S STORM

But now Poseidon, Lord of the Earthquake, who was on his way **back from his visit to the Ethiopians**, observed him from the distant
 245 mountains of the Solymi. The sight of Odysseus sailing over the seas enraged him. He shook his head and said to himself:

‘Damnation! I had only to go to Ethiopia for the gods to change their minds about Odysseus! And there he is, close to the Phaeacians’ land, where he is destined to bring his long ordeal to an end. Nevertheless
 250 I mean to let him have a bellyful of trouble yet.’

With that he marshalled the clouds and, seizing his trident in his hands, stirred up the sea. He roused the stormy blasts of every wind that blows, and covered land and water alike with a canopy of cloud. Darkness swooped down from the sky. **The East Wind and the South**
 255 **Wind** and the tempestuous West Wind clashed together, and the North Wind came from the upper sky, rolling a great wave in front of it. **Odysseus’ knees shook** and his spirit failed. In anguish he communed with his great heart:

— ODYSSEUS' DESPAIR

‘**Poor wretch that I am**, what will become of me after all? I fear the
 260 goddess prophesied all too well when she told me I should have my full measure of misery on the sea before I reached my native land. Every word she said is coming true. At Zeus’ command the whole sky is heavy with clouds, the sea is seething, squalls from every quarter hurtle together. There is nothing for me now but sudden death.
 265 Three and four times blessed are those countrymen of mine who fell long ago on the broad plains of Troy in loyal service to the sons of Atreus. If only I too could have met my fate and **died the day the Trojan hordes** let fly at me with their bronze spears over Achilles’ corpse! I should at least have had my burial rites and the Achaeans
 270 would have spread my fame abroad. But now it seems I was predestined to an ignoble death.’

— THE WRECK

As he spoke, a mountainous wave, advancing with awesome speed, crashed down upon him from above and whirled his raft around. The rudder was torn from his hands, and he himself was tossed off the
 275 raft; at the same moment the warring winds joined forces in one tremendous gust, which snapped the mast in two and flung the sail and half-deck far out into the sea. For a long time the water kept him under. Weighed down by the clothes which the goddess Calypso had given him, he could not quickly fight his way up against the
 280 downrush of that mighty wave. But at last he reached the air and spat out the bitter brine that poured down his face. Exhausted though he

LINE 243

But now Poseidon Poseidon is the god of the sea, and Odysseus’ number-one enemy among the gods. Why? Because Odysseus blinds his son, the one-eyed giant Polyphemus, in Book 9 – and Poseidon never forgives him for it.

LINES 243–244

back from his visit to the Ethiopians In Homer, the **Ethiopians** are a people who live at the very edge of the world. The gods like to travel out there to enjoy their feasts and sacrifices.

LINES 254–255

The East Wind and the South Wind The four winds – North, South, East and West – were treated as named powers, almost like minor gods. Homer has all four of them crash together at once.

LINE 257

Odysseus’ knees shook Describing fear hitting someone’s knees is a stock Homeric way of saying they’re terrified – the Greeks imagined your strength and courage as sitting in your arms and legs.

LINE 259

Poor wretch that I am *Kleos* means ‘glory’ or ‘fame’ – the lasting reputation a hero earns through brave deeds and a noble death, which then lives on in songs about him. Dying gloriously at Troy would have won Odysseus *kleos* and a proper burial; drowning at sea gets him neither.

LINES 267–268

died the day the Trojan hordes He’s remembering the battle over the dead body of **Achilles**, the greatest Greek warrior of all, who was killed near the end of the Trojan War.

was, he did not forget his raft, but struck out after it through the surf, scrambled up, and sitting in the middle of it avoided the finality of death.

285 The heavy seas thrust him with the current this way and that. Like the North Wind at harvest-time tossing about the fields a ball of thistles that have stuck together, the gusts drove his craft hither and thither over the sea. Now the South Wind would toss it to the North to play with, and now the East would leave it for the West to chase.

— INO'S RESCUE

290 But there was a witness of Odysseus' plight. This was the daughter of Cadmus, **Ino of the slim ankles**, who was once a mortal woman speaking like ourselves, but now lives in the salt depths of the sea, and, as Leucothoe the White Goddess, has been acknowledged by the gods. She took pity on the forlorn and afflicted Odysseus, rose
295 from the water like a sea-gull on the wing, and settled on his raft.

'Poor man,' she said to him, 'why is Poseidon, Lord of the Earthquake, so violently at odds with you that he puts all these disasters in your path? At any rate he shall not kill you, however hard he tries. Now do exactly what I say, like the sensible man you seem to be. Take off
300 those clothes, leave your raft for the winds to play with, and swim for your life to the Phaeacian coast, where deliverance awaits you. Here; take this veil and wind it round your waist. With its divine protection you need not be afraid of injury or death. But directly you touch the dry land with your hands, undo the veil and throw it far out
305 from the shore into the wine-dark sea; and as you do so turn your eyes away.'

As she spoke the goddess gave him the veil, and then like a gull she dived back into the turbulent sea and the dark waters swallowed her up. Stalwart Odysseus was left in perplexity and distress, and once
310 more took counsel with his indomitable soul, saying with a groan,

'I'm afraid this is one of the immortals setting a snare to catch me, with her advice to abandon my raft. No, I will not leave the raft for the moment. I saw with my own eyes how far the land is where she promised me salvation. I shall do what I myself think best. As long as
315 the joints of the planks hold fast, I shall stay where I am and endure the suffering. But when the seas break up my raft, I'll swim for it. I cannot think of anything better.'

As Odysseus was turning this over in his heart and mind, Poseidon the Earthshaker sent him another monster wave. Grim and menacing it curled above his head, then hurtled down and scattered the long timbers of his raft, **as a boisterous wind will toss a dry heap of chaff** and scatter it in all directions. Odysseus scrambled on to

LINE 291

Ino of the slim ankles Ino (also known as Leucothea) is a sea-goddess who used to be a mortal woman. She feels sorry for Odysseus and steps in to help.

LINES 321–322

as a boisterous wind will toss a dry heap of chaff In this **simile**, the raft's timbers get scattered like *chaff* – the light, dry husks left over when grain is harvested, which just blow away in the wind.

one of the beams, and sitting astride like a rider on horseback cast off the clothes that the divine Calypso had given him. Then he wound
325 the veil round his waist, and with arms outstretched plunged headlong into the sea and boldly struck out.

The Lord Poseidon saw him, shook his head and said to himself: 'So much for you! Now make your miserable way across the sea, until you come into the hands of a people favoured by the gods. Even so I
330 don't think you'll find any fault with your buffeting!' With this, Poseidon lashed his long-maned horses and drove to Aegae, where he had his famous palace.

— ATHENE INTERVENES

At this point Athene, Daughter of Zeus, decided to intervene. She checked all the other winds in their courses, bidding them calm
335 down and go to sleep. She summoned the strong North Wind with which she flattened the waves in the swimmer's path, so that Odysseus, favourite of Zeus, might be rescued from the jaws of death and come into the hands of the sea-faring Phaeacians.

For two nights and two days he was driven by the heavy seas. Time
340 and again he thought he was doomed. But in the morning of the third day, which Dawn with her beautiful tresses opened in all her beauty, the wind dropped, a breathless calm set in, and Odysseus, keeping a sharp look-out, caught a glimpse of land close by as he was lifted by a mighty wave. He felt all the relief that a man's children feel when
345 their father, who has been in bed wasting away with a long, painful illness, in the grip of some malignant power, passes the crisis by the gods' will and they know that he will live. Odysseus' happiness was like that when he caught that welcome glimpse of earth and trees. He swam quickly on in his eagerness to set foot on solid ground.

— THE ROCKY COAST

350 But when he had come within shouting distance of the shore, he heard the thunder of surf on a rocky coast. With an angry roar the great seas were battering at the rocky land and all was veiled in spray. There were no coves, no harbours that would hold a ship; nothing but headlands jutting out, sheer rock and jagged reefs. When
355 he realized this, Odysseus' knees grew weak and his heart failed. In his misery he communed with his courageous spirit:

'O misery!' he groaned. 'Against all hope Zeus let me see land after I won my way across that vast expanse of water, only to find there is no escape from the foaming sea, and all my efforts will have been in
360 vain. Off shore, the pointed reefs; all around, a raging sea; behind, a smooth sheer cliff; deep water near the shore; no place where a man can touch bottom and scramble to safety. If I try to land, I may be

lifted by a roller, dashed against the solid rock – and I'd have had my trouble for nothing. If I swim further down the coast, on the chance
 365 of finding a natural harbour where the waves strike the beach sideways, I'm afraid another squall will snatch me, and drag me out groaning into the teeming deep. Or some demon may let loose against me one of the many monsters that the great Amphitrite breeds in her seas, and I am well aware that the famed Earthshaker is
 370 at odds with me.'

This inward debate was cut short by a tremendous wave which swept him forward to the rugged shore, where his skin would have been torn off him and all his bones broken, had not the bright-eyed goddess Athene put it into his head to **grab hold of a rock** with both
 375 hands as he was swept in. He clung there groaning while the great wave swept by. But no sooner had he escaped its fury than its backward rush caught him with full force and flung him far out to sea. Pieces of skin stripped from his sturdy hands were left sticking to the crag, like the pebbles that stick to the suckers of a squid when it
 380 is torn from its lair.

The great surge hid him and there the unhappy man would have come to an unpredestined end, if Athene had not given him a good idea. He struggled to the surface, swam clear of the coastal breakers, and then swam along outside them, keeping an eye on the land, in
 385 the hope of lighting on some natural harbour with shelving beaches.

— THE RIVER

Presently his progress brought him to **the mouth of a fast-running stream**, which seemed to be the best place, because it was clear of rocks and sheltered from the winds. The current told him that he was at a river's mouth, and in his heart he prayed to the god of the stream:

390 'Hear me Lord, whoever you are. I come to you, as many others have come, with a prayer. I am a fugitive from the sea and from Poseidon's malice. Any poor wanderer who comes in supplication is given respect, especially by the immortal gods. I am such a man, and I now turn to you after much suffering and seek the sanctuary of your
 395 stream. Take pity on me, Master. I am your suppliant.'

In answer to his prayer the River checked its current, and holding back its waves made the water smooth in the swimmer's path, and so brought him safely to land at its mouth. Odysseus' knees gave way and his sturdy arms sagged; he was exhausted by his struggle with
 400 the sea. All his flesh was swollen and streams of brine gushed from his mouth and nostrils. Winded and speechless he lay there too weak to stir, overwhelmed by a terrible fatigue. Yet directly he got his wind and breath came into his lungs, he unwound the goddess's veil from his waist and let it drop into the river as it rushed out to sea. The

LINE 374

grab hold of a rock In Homer, the gods often help not by turning up in person, but by quietly dropping a thought or an idea into someone's head. That's what Athene does for Odysseus here.

LINES 386–387

the mouth of a fast-running stream Rivers, like the sea, counted as gods in Greek belief. So Odysseus prays to this river-god, asking to be let ashore safely.

405 strong current swept it downstream and in a moment it was in Ino's hands.

— LANDFALL

Odysseus turned away from the river, threw himself down in the reeds and kissed the bountiful earth. And now in perplexity he communed with his mighty spirit.

410 'Oh, what will happen to me now?' he groaned. 'What will become of me after all? If I stay by the river and keep awake all through the wretched night, bitter frost and drenching dew together may do for me. I'm already at my last gasp. And a cold wind can blow up from a river just before dawn. But if I climb up the slope into the thick
415 woods and lie down in the dense undergrowth and shake off my chill and my exhaustion, and fall into a sound sleep, I'm afraid that I may make a meal for beasts of prey.'

— SHELTER AND SLEEP

However, in the end he decided that this was the better course and set off towards the wooded ground. Not far from the river he found a
420 copse in a clearing. Here he crept under a pair of bushes, one an olive, the other a wild olive, which grew from the same stem with their branches so closely intertwined that when the damp winds blew not a breath could enter, nor the rays of the sun penetrate their shade, nor the rain soak through.

425 Odysseus crawled into his shelter, and at once heaped up the dry leaves into a wide bed – the ground was littered with piles of them, enough to provide covering for two or three men in the hardest winter weather. The noble long-suffering Odysseus was delighted with his bed, and lay down in the middle of it, covering himself with a
430 blanket of leaves. This he did as carefully as a farmer on a lonely farm far away from any neighbours **buries a glowing log** under the black ashes to keep his fire alive and save himself from having to seek a light elsewhere. And now Athene filled his eyes with sleep and sealed their lids – sleep to soothe his pain and utter weariness.

LINE 431

buries a glowing log The last **simile** compares Odysseus to a farmer 'banking' a fire – burying the glowing embers under ash so they stay alight all night, ready to be brought back to life in the morning.

