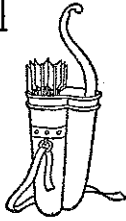


## BOOK XII



'Now when our ship had left the stream of the Ocean river,  
and come back to the wide crossing of the sea's waves, and to the island  
of Aiaia, where lies the house of the early Dawn, her dancing  
spaces, and where Helios, the sun, makes his uprising,  
5 making this point we ran our ship on the sand and beached her,  
and we ourselves stepped out onto the break of the sea beach,  
and there we fell asleep and waited for the divine Dawn.

'But when the young Dawn showed again with her rosy fingers,  
then I sent my companions away to the house of Circe  
10 to bring back the body of Elpenor, who had died there.  
Then we cut logs, and where the extreme of the foreland jutted  
out, we buried him, sorrowful, shedding warm tears for him.  
But when the dead man had burned and the dead man's armor, piling  
the grave mound and pulling the gravestone to stand above it,  
15 we planted the well-shaped oar in the very top of the grave mound.

'So we were busy each with our various work, nor was Circe  
unaware that we had come back from Hades'. Presently  
she came, attired, and her attendants following carried  
bread at her will and many meats and the shining red wine.  
20 Bright among goddesses she stood in our midst and addressed us:  
"Unhappy men, who went alive to the house of Hades,  
so dying twice, when all the rest of mankind die only  
once, come then eat what is there and drink your wine, staying  
here all the rest of the day, and then tomorrow, when dawn shows,

*Instructions from Circe*

25 you shall sail, and I will show you the way and make plain  
all details, so that neither by land nor on the salt water  
you may suffer and come to grief by unhappy bad designing."  
"So she spoke, and the proud heart in us was persuaded.  
So for the whole length of the day until the sun's setting,  
30 we sat there feasting on unlimited meat and sweet wine.  
But when the sun went down and the sacred darkness came over,  
the men lay down to sleep all by the ship's stern cables,  
but she, taking me by the hand, made me sit down away from  
my dear companions, and talked with me, and asked me the details  
35 of everything, and I recited all, just as it had happened.  
Then the queenly Circe spoke in words and addressed me:  
"So all that has been duly done. Listen now, I will tell you  
all, but the very god himself will make you remember.  
You will come first of all to the Sirens, who are enchanters  
40 of all mankind and whoever comes their way; and that man  
who unsuspecting approaches them, and listens to the Sirens  
singing, has no prospect of coming home and delighting  
his wife and little children as they stand about him in greeting,  
but the Sirens by the melody of their singing enchant him.  
45 They sit in their meadow, but the beach before it is piled with boneheaps  
of men now rotted away, and the skins shrivel upon them.  
You must drive straight on past, but melt down sweet wax of honey  
and with it stop your companions' ears, so none can listen;  
the rest, that is, but if you yourself are wanting to hear them,  
50 then have them tie you hand and foot on the fast ship, standing  
upright against the mast with the ropes' ends lashed around it,  
so that you can have joy in hearing the song of the Sirens;  
but if you supplicate your men and implore them to set you  
free, then they must tie you fast with even more lashings.  
55 "Then, for the time when your companions have driven you past  
them,  
for that time I will no longer tell you in detail which way  
of the two your course must lie, but you yourself must consider  
this in your own mind. I will tell you the two ways of it.  
On one side there are overhanging rocks, and against them  
60 crashes the heavy swell of dark-eyed Amphitrite.  
The blessed gods call these rocks the Rovers. By this way  
not even any flying thing, not even the tremulous

*The Sirens—Skylia and Charybdis*

doves, which carry ambrosia to Zeus the father, can pass through,  
but every time the sheer rock catches away one even  
65 of these; but the Father then adds another to keep the number  
right. No ship of men that came here ever has fled through,  
but the waves of the sea and storms of ravening fire carry  
away together the ship's timbers and the men's bodies.  
That way the only seagoing ship to get through was Argo,  
70 who is in all men's minds, on her way home from Aietes;  
and even she would have been driven on the great rocks that time,  
but Hera saw her through, out of her great love for Jason.  
"But of the two rocks, one reaches up into the wide heaven  
with a pointed peak, and a dark cloud stands always around it,  
75 and never at any time draws away from it, nor does the sunlight  
ever hold that peak, either in the early or the late summer,  
nor could any man who was mortal climb there, or stand mounted  
on the summit, not if he had twenty hands and twenty  
feet, for the rock goes sheerly up, as if it were polished.  
80 Halfway up the cliff there is a cave, misty-looking  
and turned toward Erebos and the dark, the very direction  
from which, O shining Odysseus, you and your men will be steering  
your hollow ship; and from the hollow ship no vigorous  
young man with a bow could shoot to the hole in the cliffside.  
85 In that cavern Skylia lives, whose howling is terror.  
Her voice indeed is only as loud as a new-born puppy  
could make, but she herself is an evil monster. No one,  
not even a god encountering her, could be glad at that sight.  
She has twelve feet, and all of them wave in the air. She has six  
90 necks upon her, grown to great length, and upon each neck  
there is a horrible head, with teeth in it, set in three rows  
close together and stiff, full of black death. Her body  
from the waist down is holed up inside the hollow cavern,  
but she holds her heads poked out and away from the terrible hollow,  
95 and there she fishes, peering all over the cliffside, looking  
for dolphins or dogfish to catch or anything bigger,  
some sea monster, of whom Amphitrite keeps so many;  
never can sailors boast aloud that their ship has passed her  
without any loss of men, for with each of her heads she snatches  
100 one man away and carries him off from the dark-prowed vessel.  
"The other cliff is lower; you will see it, Odysseus,

*Warning about the cattle of Helios*

for they lie close together, you could even cast with an arrow across. There is a great fig tree grows there, dense with foliage, and under this shining Charybdis sucks down the black water.

105 For three times a day she flows it up, and three times she sucks it terribly down; may you not be there when she sucks down water, for not even the Earthshaker could rescue you out of that evil. But sailing your ship swiftly drive her past and avoid her, and make for Skylla's rock instead, since it is far better

110 to mourn six friends lost out of your ship than the whole company." "So she spoke, but I in turn said to her in answer: "Come then, goddess, answer me truthfully this: is there some way for me to escape away from deadly Charybdis, but yet fight the other one off, when she attacks my companions?"

115 "So I spoke, and she, shining among goddesses, answered: "Hardy man, your mind is full forever of fighting and battle work. Will you not give way even to the immortals? She is no mortal thing but a mischief immortal, dangerous difficult and bloodthirsty, and there is no fighting against her,

120 nor any force of defense. It is best to run away from her. For if you arm for battle beside her rock and waste time there, I fear she will make another outrush and catch you with all her heads, and snatch away once more the same number of men. Drive by as hard as you can, but invoke Krataiis.

125 She is the mother of Skylla and bore this mischief for mortals, and she will stay her from making another sally against you. "Then you will reach the island Thrinakia, where are pastured the cattle and the fat sheep of the sun god, Helios,

130 seven herds of oxen, and as many beautiful sheepflocks, and fifty to each herd. There is no giving birth among them, nor do they ever die away, and their shepherdesses are gods, nymphs with sweet hair, Lampetia and Phaethousa, whom shining Neaira bore to Hyperion the sun god. These, when their queenly mother had given them birth and reared them,

135 she settled in the island Thrinakia, far away, to live there and guard their father's sheep and his horn-curved cattle. Then, if you keep your mind on homecoming and leave these unharmed, you might all make your way to Ithaka, after much suffering; but if you do harm them, then I testify to the destruction

140 of your ship and your companions, but if you yourself get clear,

*Departure—the Sirens*

you will come home in bad case with the loss of all your companions." "So she spoke, and Dawn of the golden throne came on us. She, shining among goddesses, went away, up the island. Then, going back on board my ship, I told my companions

145 also to go aboard, and to cast off the stern cables, and quickly they went aboard the ship and sat to the oarlocks, and sitting well in order dashed the oars in the gray sea; but fair-haired Circe, the dread goddess who talks with mortals, sent us an excellent companion, a following wind, filling the sails, to carry from astern the ship with the dark prow.

150 We ourselves, over all the ship making fast the running gear, sat there, and let the wind and the steersman hold her steady. Then, sorrowful as I was, I spoke and told my companions: "Friends, since it is not right for one or two of us only

155 to know the divinations that Circe, bright among goddesses, gave me, so I will tell you, and knowing all we may either die, or turn aside from death and escape destruction. First of all she tells us to keep away from the magical Sirens and their singing and their flowery meadow, but only

160 I, she said, was to listen to them, but you must tie me hard in hurtful bonds, to hold me fast in position upright against the mast, with the ropes' ends fastened around it; but if I supplicate you and implore you to set me free, then you must tie me fast with even more lashings."

165 "So as I was telling all the details to my companions, meanwhile the well-made ship was coming rapidly closer to the Sirens' isle, for the harmless wind was driving her onward; but immediately then the breeze dropped, and a windless calm fell there, and some divinity stilled the tossing

170 waters. My companions stood up, and took the sails down, and stowed them away in the hollow hull, and took their places for rowing, and with their planed oarblades whitened the water. Then I, taking a great wheel of wax, with the sharp bronze cut a little piece off, and rubbed it together in my heavy

175 hands, and soon the wax grew softer, under the powerful stress of the sun, and the heat and light of Hyperion's lordling. One after another, I stopped the ears of all my companions, and they then bound me hand and foot in the fast ship, standing upright against the mast with the ropes' ends lashed around it,

*Passage by Skylla*

180 and sitting then to row they dashed their oars in the gray sea.  
 But when we were as far from the land as a voice shouting  
 carries, lightly plying, the swift ship as it drew nearer  
 was seen by the Sirens, and they directed their sweet song toward us:  
 "Come this way, honored Odysseus, great glory of the Achaians,  
 185 and stay your ship, so that you can listen here to our singing;  
 for no one else has ever sailed past this place in his black ship  
 until he has listened to the honey-sweet voice that issues  
 from our lips; then goes on, well pleased, knowing more than ever  
 he did; for we know everything that the Argives and Trojans  
 190 did and suffered in wide Troy through the gods' despite.  
 Over all the generous earth we know everything that happens."  
 "So they sang, in sweet utterance, and the heart within me  
 desired to listen, and I signaled my companions to set me  
 free, nodding with my brows, but they leaned on and rowed hard,  
 195 and Perimedes and Eurylochos, rising up, straightway  
 fastened me with even more lashings and squeezed me tighter.  
 But when they had rowed on past the Sirens, and we could no longer  
 hear their voices and lost the sound of their singing, presently  
 my eager companions took away from their ears the beeswax  
 200 with which I had stopped them. Then they set me free from my lashings.  
 "But after we had left the island behind, the next thing  
 we saw was smoke, and a heavy surf, and we heard it thundering.  
 The men were terrified, and they let the oars fall out of  
 their hands, and these banged all about in the wash. The ship stopped  
 205 still, with the men no longer rowing to keep way on her.  
 Then I going up and down the ship urged on my companions,  
 standing beside each man and speaking to him in kind words:  
 "Dear friends, surely we are not unlearned in evils.  
 This is no greater evil now than it was when the Cyclops  
 210 had us cooped in his hollow cave by force and violence,  
 but even there, by my courage and counsel and my intelligence,  
 we escaped away. I think that all this will be remembered  
 some day too. Then do as I say, let us all be won over.  
 Sit well, all of you, to your oarlocks, and dash your oars deep  
 215 into the breaking surf of the water, so in that way Zeus  
 might grant that we get clear of this danger and flee away from it.  
 For you, steersman, I have this order; so store it deeply  
 in your mind, as you control the steering oar of this hollow

*with the loss of six men*

ship; you must keep her clear from where the smoke and the breakers  
 220 are, and make hard for the sea rock lest, without your knowing,  
 she might drift that way, and you bring all of us into disaster."  
 "So I spoke, and they quickly obeyed my words. I had not  
 spoken yet of Skylla, a plague that could not be dealt with,  
 for fear my companions might be terrified and give over  
 225 their rowing, and take cover inside the ship. For my part,  
 I let go from my mind the difficult instruction that Circe  
 had given me, for she told me not to be armed for combat;  
 but I put on my glorious armor and, taking up two long  
 spears in my hands, I stood bestriding the vessel's foredeck  
 230 at the prow, for I expected Skylla of the rocks to appear first  
 from that direction, she who brought pain to my companions.  
 I could not make her out anywhere, and my eyes grew weary  
 from looking everywhere on the misty face of the sea rock.  
 "So we sailed up the narrow strait lamenting. On one side  
 235 was Skylla, and on the other side was shining Charybdis,  
 who made her terrible ebb and flow of the sea's water.  
 When she vomited it up, like a caldron over a strong fire,  
 the whole sea would boil up in turbulence, and the foam flying  
 spattered the pinnacles of the rocks in either direction;  
 240 but when in turn again she sucked down the sea's salt water,  
 the turbulence showed all the inner sea, and the rock around it  
 groaned terribly, and the ground showed at the sea's bottom,  
 black with sand; and green fear seized upon my companions.  
 We in fear of destruction kept our eyes on Charybdis,  
 245 but meanwhile Skylla out of the hollow vessel snatched six  
 of my companions, the best of them for strength and hands' work,  
 and when I turned to look at the ship, with my other companions,  
 I saw their feet and hands from below, already lifted  
 high above me, and they cried out to me and called me  
 250 by name, the last time they ever did it, in heart's sorrow:  
 And as a fisherman with a very long rod, on a jutting  
 rock, will cast his treacherous bait for the little fishes,  
 and sinks the horn of a field-ranging ox into the water,  
 then hauls them up and throws them on the dry land, gasping  
 255 and struggling, so they gasped and struggled as they were hoisted  
 up the cliff. Right in her doorway she ate them up. They were screaming  
 and reaching out their hands to me in this horrid encounter.

*Landing on Thrinakia*

That was the most pitiful scene that these eyes have looked on  
in my sufferings as I explored the routes over the water.

- 260 Now when we had fled away from the rocks and dreaded Charybdis  
and Skylla, next we made our way to the excellent island  
of the god, where ranged the handsome wide-browed oxen, and many  
fat flocks of sheep, belonging to the Sun God, Hyperion.  
While I was on the black ship, still out on the open water,  
265 I heard the lowing of the cattle as they were driven  
home, and the bleating of sheep, and my mind was struck by the saying  
of the blind prophet, Teiresias the Theban, and also  
Aiaian Circe. Both had told me many times over  
to avoid the island of Helios who brings joy to mortals.  
270 Then sorrowful as I was I spoke and told my companions:  
"Listen to what I say, my companions, though you are suffering  
evils, while I tell you the prophecies of Teiresias  
and Aiaian Circe. Both have told me many times over  
to avoid the island of Helios who brings joy to mortals,  
275 for there they spoke of the most dreadful disaster that waited  
for us. So drive the black ship onward, and pass the island."  
"So I spoke, and the inward heart in them was broken.  
At once Eurylochos answered me with a bitter saying:  
"You are a hard man, Odysseus. Your force is greater,  
280 your limbs never wear out. You must be made all of iron,  
when you will not let your companions, worn with hard work and  
wanting  
sleep, set foot on this land, where if we did, on the seagirt  
island we could once more make ready a greedy dinner;  
but you force us to blunder along just as we are through the running  
285 night, driven from the island over the misty face of the water.  
In the nights the hard stormwinds arise, and they bring damage  
to ships. How could any of us escape sheer destruction,  
if suddenly there rises the blast of a storm from the bitter  
blowing of the South Wind or the West Wind, who beyond others  
290 hammer a ship apart, in despite of the gods, our masters?  
But now let us give way to black night's persuasion; let us  
make ready our evening meal, remaining close by our fast ship,  
and at dawn we will go aboard and put forth onto the wide sea."  
"So spoke Eurylochos, and my other companions assented.  
295 I saw then what evil the divinity had in mind for us,

*and ordeal by hunger*

- and so I spoke aloud to him and addressed him in winged words:  
"Eurylochos, I am only one man. You force me to it.  
But come then all of you, swear a strong oath to me, that if  
we come upon some herd of cattle or on some great flock  
300 of sheep, no one of you in evil and reckless action  
will slaughter any ox or sheep. No, rather than this, eat  
at your pleasure of the food immortal Circe provided."  
"So I spoke, and they all swore me the oath that I asked them.  
But after they had sworn me the oath and made an end of it,  
305 we beached the well-made ship inside of the hollow harbor,  
close to sweet water, and my companions disembarked also  
from the ship, and expertly made the evening meal ready.  
But when they had put away their desire for eating and drinking,  
they remembered and they cried for their beloved companions  
310 whom Skylla had caught out of the hollow ship and eaten,  
and on their crying a quiet sleep descended; but after  
the third part of the night had come, and the star changes,  
Zeus the cloud gatherer let loose on us a gale that blustered  
in a supernatural storm, and huddled under the cloud scuds.  
315 land alike and the great water. Night sprang from heaven.  
But when the young Dawn showed again with her rosy fingers,  
we berthed our ship, dragging her into a hollow sea cave  
where the nymphs had their beautiful dancing places and sessions.  
Then I held an assembly and spoke my opinion before them:  
320 "Friends, since there is food and drink stored in the fast ship,  
let us then keep our hands off the cattle, for fear that something  
may befall us. These are the cattle and fat sheep of a dreaded  
god, Helios, who sees all things and listens to all things."  
"So I spoke, and the proud heart in them was persuaded.  
325 But the South Wind blew for a whole month long, nor did any other  
wind befall after that, but only the South and the East Wind.  
As long as they still had food to eat and red wine, the men kept  
their hands off the cattle, striving as they were for sustenance. Then,  
when  
all the provisions that had been in the ship had given  
330 out, they turned to hunting, forced to it, and went ranging  
after fish and birds, anything that they could lay hands on,  
and with curved hooks, for the hunger was exhausting their stomachs.  
Then I went away along the island in order

335 to pray to the gods, if any of them might show me some course  
to sail on, but when, crossing the isle, I had left my companions  
behind, I washed my hands, where there was a place sheltered  
from the wind, and prayed to all the gods whose hold is Olympos;  
but what they did was to shed a sweet sleep on my eyelids,  
and Eurylochos put an evil counsel before his companions:  
340 "Listen to what I say, my companions, though you are suffering  
evils. All deaths are detestable for wretched mortals,  
but hunger is the sorriest way to die and encounter  
fate. Come then, let us cut out the best of Helios' cattle,  
and sacrifice them to the immortals who hold wide heaven,  
345 and if we ever come back to Ithaka, land of our fathers,  
presently we will build a rich temple to the Sun God Helios  
Hyperion, and store it with dedications, many  
and good. But if, in anger over his high-horned cattle,  
he wishes to wreck our ship, and the rest of the gods stand by him,  
350 I would far rather gulp the waves and lose my life in them  
once for all, than be pinched to death on this desolate island."  
'So spoke Eurylochos, and the other companions assented.  
At once, cutting out from near at hand the best of Helios'  
cattle; for the handsome broad-faced horn-curved oxen  
355 were pasturing there, not far from the dark-prowed ship; driving  
these, they stationed themselves around them, and made their prayers  
to the gods, pulling tender leaves from a deep-leaved oak tree;  
for they had no white barley left on the strong-benched vessel.  
When they had made their prayer and slaughtered the oxen and skinned  
them,  
360 they cut away the meat from the thighs and wrapped them in fat,  
making a double fold, and laid shreds of flesh upon them;  
and since they had no wine to pour on the burning offerings,  
they made a libation of water, and roasted all of the entrails;  
but when they had burned the thigh pieces and tasted the vitals,  
365 they cut all the remainder into pieces and spitted them.  
'At that time the quiet sleep was lost from my eyelids,  
and I went back down to my fast ship and the sand of the seashore,  
but on my way, as I was close to the oar-swept vessel,  
the pleasant savor of cooking meat came drifting around me,  
370 and I cried out my grief aloud to the gods immortal:  
'Father Zeus, and you other everlasting and blessed

gods, with a pitiless sleep you lulled me, to my confusion,  
and my companions staying here dared a deed that was monstrous."  
'Lampetia of the light robes ran swift with the message  
375 to Hyperion the Sun God, that we had killed his cattle,  
and angered at the heart he spoke forth among the immortals:  
'Father Zeus, and you other everlasting and blessed  
gods, punish the companions of Odysseus, son of Laertes;  
for they outrageously killed my cattle, in whom I always  
380 delighted, on my way up into the starry heaven,  
or when I turned back again from heaven toward earth. Unless  
these are made to give me just recompense for my cattle,  
I will go down to Hades' and give my light to the dead men."  
'Then in turn Zeus who gathers the clouds answered him:  
385 "Helios, shine on as you do, among the immortals  
and mortal men, all over the grain-giving earth. For my part  
I will strike these men's fast ship midway on the open  
wine-blue sea with a shining bolt and dash it to pieces."  
'All this I heard afterward from fair-haired Kalypso,  
390 and she told me she herself had heard it from the guide, Hermes.  
'But when I came back again to the ship and the seashore,  
they all stood about and blamed each other, but we were not able  
to find any remedy, for the oxen were already dead. The next thing  
was that the gods began to show forth portents before us.  
395 The skins crawled, and the meat that was stuck on the spits bellowed,  
both roast and raw, and the noise was like the lowing of cattle.  
'Six days thereafter my own eager companions feasted  
on the cattle of Helios the Sun God, cutting the best ones  
out; but when Zeus the son of Kronos established the seventh  
400 day, then at last the wind ceased from its stormy blowing,  
and presently we went aboard and put forth on the wide sea,  
and set the mast upright and hoisted the white sails on it.  
'But after we had left the island and there was no more  
land in sight, but only the sky and the sea, then Kronian  
405 Zeus drew on a blue-black cloud, and settled it over  
the hollow ship, and the open sea was darkened beneath it;  
and she ran on, but not for a very long time, as suddenly  
a screaming West Wind came upon us, stormily blowing,  
and the blast of the stormwind snapped both the forestays that were  
holding

*Loss of the ship and crew*

- 410 the mast, and the mast went over backwards, and all the running gear collapsed in the wash; and at the stern of the ship the mast pole crashed down on the steersman's head and pounded to pieces all the bones of his head, so that he like a diver dropped from the high deck, and the proud life left his bones there.
- 415 Zeus with thunder and lightning together crashed on our vessel, and, struck by the thunderbolt of Zeus, she spun in a circle, and all was full of brimstone. My men were thrown in the water, and bobbing like sea crows they were washed away on the running waves all around the black ship, and the god took away their homecoming.
- 420 'But I went on my way through the vessel, to where the high seas had worked the keel free out of the hull, and the bare keel floated on the swell, which had broken the mast off at the keel; yet still there was a backstay made out of oxhide fastened to it. With this I lashed together both keel and mast, then
- 425 rode the two of them, while the deadly stormwinds carried me. 'After this the West Wind ceased from its stormy blowing, and the South Wind came swiftly on, bringing to my spirit grief that I must measure the whole way back to Charybdis. All that night I was carried along, and with the sun rising
- 430 I came to the sea rock of Skylla, and dreaded Charybdis. At this time Charybdis sucked down the sea's salt water, but I reached high in the air above me, to where the tall fig tree grew, and caught hold of it and clung like a bat; there was no place where I could firmly brace my feet, or climb up it,
- 435 for the roots of it were far from me, and the branches hung out far, big and long branches that overshadowed Charybdis. Inexorably I hung on, waiting for her to vomit the keel and mast back up again. I longed for them, and they came late; at the time when a man leaves the law court, for dinner,
- 440 after judging the many disputes brought him by litigious young men; that was the time it took the timbers to appear from Charybdis. Then I let go my hold with hands and feet, and dropped off, and came crashing down between and missing the two long timbers, but I mounted these, and with both hands I paddled my way out.
- 445 But the Father of Gods and men did not let Skylla see me again, or I could not have escaped from sheer destruction. 'From there I was carried along nine days, and on the tenth night

*Odysseus escapes to Kalypso's island*

- the gods brought me to the island Ogygia, home of Kalypso with the lovely hair, a dreaded goddess who talks with mortals.
- 450 She befriended me and took care of me. Why tell the rest of this story again, since yesterday in your house I told it to you and your majestic wife? It is hateful to me to tell a story over again, when it has been well told.'