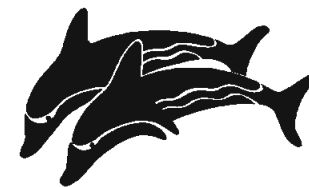


he saddled me with the worst heartbreaking labors.
 Why, he sent me down here once, to retrieve the hound
 that guards the dead—no harder task for me, he thought—
 but I dragged the great beast up from the underworld to earth
 and Hermes and gleaming-eyed Athena blazed the way!’

With that he turned and back he went to the House of Death
 but I held fast in place, hoping that others might still come,
 shades of famous heroes, men who died in the old days
 and ghosts of an even older age I longed to see,
 Theseus and Pirithous, the gods’ own radiant sons.
 But before I could, the dead came surging round me,
 hordes of them, thousands raising unearthly cries,
 and blanching terror gripped me—panicked now
 that Queen Persephone might send up from Death
 some monstrous head, some Gorgon’s staring face!
 I rushed back to my ship, commanded all hands
 to take to the decks and cast off cables quickly.
 They swung aboard at once, they sat to the oars in ranks
 and a strong tide of the Ocean River swept her on downstream,
 sped by our rowing first, then by a fresh fair wind.”

720

730



The Cattle of the Sun

“**N**ow when our ship had left the Ocean River rolling in her wake
 and launched out into open sea with its long swells to reach
 the island of Aeaea—east where the Dawn forever young
 has home and dancing-rings and the Sun his risings—
 heading in we beached our craft on the sands,
 the crews swung out on the low sloping shore
 and there we fell asleep, awaiting Dawn’s first light.

As soon as Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone again
 I dispatched some men to Circe’s halls to bring
 the dead Elpenor’s body. We cut logs in haste
 and out on the island’s sharpest jutting headland
 held his funeral rites in sorrow, streaming tears.
 Once we’d burned the dead man and the dead man’s armor,
 heaping his grave-mound, hauling a stone that coped it well,

10

we planted his balanced oar aloft to crown his tomb.

And so we saw to his rites, each step in turn.
Nor did our coming back from Death escape Circe—
she hurried toward us, decked in rich regalia,
handmaids following close with trays of bread
and meats galore and glinting ruddy wine. 20
And the lustrous goddess, standing in our midst,
hailed us warmly: 'Ah my daring, reckless friends!
You who ventured down to the House of Death alive,
doomed to die twice over—others die just once.
Come, take some food and drink some wine,
rest here the livelong day
and then, tomorrow at daybreak, you must sail.
But I will set you a course and chart each seamark,
so neither on sea nor land will some new trap
ensnare you in trouble, make you suffer more.' 30

Her foresight won our fighting spirits over.
So all that day till the sun went down we sat
and feasted on sides of meat and heady wine,
and then when the sun had set and night came on
the men lay down to sleep by the ship's stern-cables.
But Circe, taking me by the hand, drew me away
from all my shipmates there and sat me down
and lying beside me probed me for details.
I told her the whole story, start to finish, 40
then the queenly goddess laid my course:
'Your descent to the dead is over, true,
but listen closely to what I tell you now
and god himself will bring it back to mind.
First you will raise the island of the Sirens,
those creatures who spellbind any man alive,
whoever comes their way. Whoever draws too close,
off guard, and catches the Sirens' voices in the air—
no sailing home for him, no wife rising to meet him,
no happy children beaming up at their father's face.
The high, thrilling song of the Sirens will transfix him, 50

lolling there in their meadow, round them heaps of corpses
rotting away, rags of skin shriveling on their bones . . .
Race straight past that coast! Soften some beeswax
and stop your shipmates' ears so none can hear,
none of the crew, but if *you* are bent on hearing,
have them tie you hand and foot in the swift ship,
erect at the mast-block, lashed by ropes to the mast
so you can hear the Sirens' song to your heart's content.
But if you plead, commanding your men to set you free,
then they must lash you faster, rope on rope. 60

But once your crew has rowed you past the Sirens
a choice of routes is yours. I cannot advise you
which to take, or lead you through it all—
you must decide for yourself—
but I can tell you the ways of either course.
On one side beetling cliffs shoot up, and against them
pound the huge roaring breakers of blue-eyed Amphitrite—
the Clashing Rocks they're called by all the blissful gods.
Not even birds can escape them, no, not even the doves
that veer and fly ambrosia home to Father Zeus: 70
even of those the sheer Rocks always pick off one
and Father wings one more to keep the number up.
No ship of men has ever approached and slipped past—
always some disaster—big timbers and sailors' corpses
whirled away by the waves and lethal blasts of fire.
One ship alone, one deep-sea craft sailed clear,
the *Argo*, sung by the world, when heading home
from Aeetes' shores. And *she* would have crashed
against those giant rocks and sunk at once if Hera,
for love of Jason, had not sped her through. 80

On the other side loom two enormous crags . . .
One thrusts into the vaulting sky its jagged peak,
hooded round with a dark cloud that never leaves—
no clear bright air can ever bathe its crown,
not even in summer's heat or harvest-time.
No man on earth could scale it, mount its crest,

not even with twenty hands and twenty feet for climbing,
 the rock's so smooth, like dressed and burnished stone.
 And halfway up that cliffside stands a fog-bound cavern
 gaping west toward Erebus, realm of death and darkness—
 90 past it, great Odysseus, you should steer your ship.
 No rugged young archer could hit that yawning cave
 with a winged arrow shot from off the decks.
 Scylla lurks inside it—the yelping horror,
 yelping, no louder than any suckling pup
 but she's a grisly monster, I assure you.
 No one could look on her with any joy,
 not even a god who meets her face-to-face . . .
 She has twelve legs, all writhing, dangling down
 and six long swaying necks, a hideous head on each,
 100 each head barbed with a triple row of fangs, thickset,
 packed tight—and armed to the hilt with black death!
 Holed up in the cavern's bowels from her waist down
 she shoots out her heads, out of that terrifying pit,
 angling right from her nest, wildly sweeping the reefs
 for dolphins, dogfish or any bigger quarry she can drag
 from the thousands Amphitrite spawns in groaning seas.
 No mariners yet can boast they've raced their ship
 past Scylla's lair without some mortal blow—
 110 with each of her six heads she snatches up
 a man from the dark-prowed craft and whisks him off.

The other crag is lower—you will see, Odysseus—
 though both lie side-by-side, an arrow-shot apart.
 Atop it a great fig-tree rises, shaggy with leaves,
 beneath it awesome Charybdis gulps the dark water down.
 Three times a day she vomits it up, three times she gulps it down,
 that terror! Don't be there when the whirlpool swallows down—
 not even the earthquake god could save you from disaster.
 No, hug Scylla's crag—sail on past her—top speed!
 Better by far to lose six men and keep your ship
 120 than lose your entire crew.'

'Yes, yes,
 but tell me the truth now, goddess,' I protested.

'Deadly Charybdis—can't I possibly cut and run from *her*
 and still fight Scylla off when Scylla strikes my men?'

'So stubborn!' the lovely goddess countered.
 'Hell-bent yet again on battle and feats of arms?
 Can't you bow to the deathless gods themselves?
 Scylla's no mortal, she's an immortal devastation,
 terrible, savage, wild, no fighting her, no defense—
 just flee the creature, that's the only way. 130
 Waste any time, arming for battle beside her rock,
 I fear she'll lunge out again with all of her six heads
 and seize as many men. No, row for your lives,
 invoke Brute Force, I tell you, Scylla's mother—
 she spawned her to scourge mankind,
she can stop the monster's next attack!

Then you will make the island of Thrinacia . . .
 where herds of the Sungod's cattle graze, and fat sheep
 and seven herds of oxen, as many sheepflocks, rich and woolly,
 fifty head in each. No breeding swells their number, 140
 nor do they ever die. And goddesses herd them on,
 nymphs with glinting hair, Phaëthousa, Lampetie,
 born to the Sungod Helios by radiant Neaera.
 Their queenly mother bred and reared them both
 then settled them on the island of Thrinacia—
 their homeland seas away—
 to guard their father's sheep and longhorn cattle.
 Leave the beasts unharmed, your mind set on home,
 and you all may still reach Ithaca—bent with hardship,
 true—but harm them in any way, and I can see it now: 150
 your ship destroyed, your men destroyed as well!
 And even if *you* escape, you'll come home late,
 all shipmates lost, and come a broken man.'

At those words Dawn rose on her golden throne
 and lustrous Circe made her way back up the island.
 I went straight to my ship, commanding all hands
 to take to the decks and cast off cables quickly.

They swung aboard at once, they sat to the oars in ranks
 and in rhythm churned the water white with stroke on stroke.
 And Circe the nymph with glossy braids, the awesome one 160
 who speaks with human voice, sent us a hardy shipmate,
 yes, a fresh following wind ruffling up in our wake,
 bellying out our sail to drive our blue prow on as we,
 securing the running gear from stem to stern, sat back
 while the wind and helmsman kept her true on course.
 At last, and sore at heart, I told my shipmates,
 'Friends . . . it's wrong for only one or two
 to know the revelations that lovely Circe
 made to me alone. I'll tell you all,
 so we can die with our eyes wide open now 170
 or escape our fate and certain death together.
 First, she warns, we must steer clear of the Sirens,
 their enchanting song, their meadow starred with flowers.
 I alone was to hear their voices, so she said,
 but you must bind me with tight chafing ropes
 so I cannot move a muscle, bound to the spot,
 erect at the mast-block, lashed by ropes to the mast.
 And if I plead, commanding you to set me free,
 then lash me faster, rope on pressing rope.'

So I informed my shipmates point by point, 180
 all the while our trim ship was speeding toward
 the Sirens' island, driven on by the brisk wind.
 But then—the wind fell in an instant,
 all glazed to a dead calm . . .
 a mysterious power hushed the heaving swells.
 The oarsmen leapt to their feet, struck the sail,
 stowed it deep in the hold and sat to the oarlocks,
 thrashing with polished oars, frothing the water white.
 Now with a sharp sword I sliced an ample wheel of beeswax
 down into pieces, kneaded them in my two strong hands 190
 and the wax soon grew soft, worked by my strength
 and Helios' burning rays, the sun at high noon,
 and I stopped the ears of my comrades one by one.
 They bound me hand and foot in the tight ship—

erect at the mast-block, lashed by ropes to the mast—
 and rowed and churned the whitecaps stroke on stroke.
 We were just offshore as far as a man's shout can carry,
 scudding close, when the Sirens sensed at once a ship
 was racing past and burst into their high, thrilling song:
 'Come closer, famous Odysseus—Achaea's pride and glory— 200
 moor your ship on our coast so you can hear our song!
 Never has any sailor passed our shores in his black craft
 until he has heard the honeyed voices pouring from our lips,
 and once he hears to his heart's content sails on, a wiser man.
 We know all the pains that the Greeks and Trojans once endured
 on the spreading plain of Troy when the gods willed it so—
 all that comes to pass on the fertile earth, we know it all!'

So they sent their ravishing voices out across the air
 and the heart inside me throbbed to listen longer.
 I signaled the crew with frowns to set me free— 210
 they flung themselves at the oars and rowed on harder,
 Perimedes and Eurylochus springing up at once
 to bind me faster with rope on chafing rope.
 But once we'd left the Sirens fading in our wake,
 once we could hear their song no more, their urgent call—
 my steadfast crew was quick to remove the wax I'd used
 to seal their ears and loosed the bonds that lashed me.

We'd scarcely put that island astern when suddenly
 I saw smoke and heavy breakers, heard their booming thunder.
 The men were terrified—oarblades flew from their grip, 220
 clattering down to splash in the vessel's wash.
 She lay there, dead in the water . . .
 no hands to tug the blades that drove her on.
 But I strode down the decks to rouse my crewmen,
 halting beside each one with a bracing, winning word:
 'Friends, we're hardly strangers at meeting danger—
 and this danger is no worse than what we faced
 when Cyclops penned us up in his vaulted cave
 with crushing force! But even from there my courage,
 my presence of mind and tactics saved us all, 230

and we will live to remember *this* someday,
 I have no doubt. Up now, follow my orders,
 all of us work as one! You men at the thwarts—
 lay on with your oars and strike the heaving swells,
 trusting that Zeus will pull us through these straits alive.
 You, helmsman, here's your order—burn it in your mind—
 the steering-oar of our rolling ship is in your hands.
 Keep her clear of that smoke and surging breakers,
 head for those crags or she'll catch you off guard,
 she'll yaw over there—you'll plunge us all in ruin!

240

So I shouted. They snapped to each command.
 No mention of Scylla—how to fight that nightmare?—
 for fear the men would panic, desert their oars
 and huddle down and stow themselves away.
 But now I cleared my mind of Circe's orders—
 cramping my style, urging me not to arm at all.
 I donned my heroic armor, seized long spears
 in both my hands and marched out on the half-deck,
 forward, hoping from there to catch the first glimpse
 of Scylla, ghoulish of the cliffs, swooping to kill my men.
 But nowhere could I make her out—and my eyes ached,
 scanning that mist-bound rock face top to bottom.

250

Now wailing in fear, we rowed on up those straits,
 Scylla to starboard, dreaded Charybdis off to port,
 her horrible whirlpool gulping the sea-surge down, down
 but when she spewed it up—like a cauldron over a raging fire—
 all her churning depths would seethe and heave—exploding spray
 showering down to splatter the peaks of both crags at once!
 But when she swallowed the sea-surge down her gaping maw
 the whole abyss lay bare and the rocks around her roared,
 terrible, deafening—

260

bedrock showed down deep, boiling
 black with sand—

and ashen terror gripped the men.
 But now, fearing death, all eyes fixed on Charybdis—
 now Scylla snatched six men from our hollow ship,

the toughest, strongest hands I had, and glancing
 backward over the decks, searching for my crew
 I could see their hands and feet already hoisted,
 flailing, high, higher, over my head, look—
 wailing down at me, comrades riven in agony,
 shrieking out my name for one last time!
 Just as an angler poised on a jutting rock
 flings his treacherous bait in the offshore swell,
 whips his long rod—hook sheathed in an oxhorn lure—
 and whisks up little fish he flips on the beach-break,
 writhing, gasping out their lives . . . so now they writhed,
 gasping as Scylla swung them up her cliff and there
 at her cavern's mouth she bolted them down raw—
 screaming out, flinging their arms toward me,
 lost in that mortal struggle . . .
 Of all the pitiful things I've had to witness,
 suffering, searching out the pathways of the sea,
 this wrenched my heart the most.

270

280

But now, at last,
 putting the Rocks, Scylla and dread Charybdis far astern,
 we quickly reached the good green island of the Sun
 where Helios, lord Hyperion, keeps his fine cattle,
 broad in the brow, and flocks of purebred sheep.
 Still aboard my black ship in the open sea
 I could hear the lowing cattle driven home,
 the bleating sheep. And I was struck once more
 by the words of the blind Theban prophet, Tiresias,
 and Aeaean Circe too: time and again they told me
 to shun this island of the Sun, the joy of man.
 So I warned my shipmates gravely, sick at heart,
 'Listen to me, my comrades, brothers in hardship,
 let me tell you the dire prophecies of Tiresias
 and Aeaean Circe too: time and again they told me
 to shun this island of the Sun, the joy of man.
 Here, they warned, the worst disaster awaits us.
 Row straight past these shores—race our black ship on!'

290

So I said, and the warnings broke their hearts.

300

But Eurylochus waded in at once—with mutiny on his mind:
 ‘You’re a hard man, Odysseus. Your fighting spirit’s
 stronger than ours, your stamina never fails.
 You must be made of iron head to foot. Look,
 your crew’s half-dead with labor, starved for sleep,
 and you forbid us to set foot on land, this island here,
 washed by the waves, where we might catch a decent meal again.
 Drained as we are, night falling fast, you’d have us desert
 this haven and blunder off, into the mist-bound seas?
 Out of the night come winds that shatter vessels—
 310 how can a man escape his headlong death
 if suddenly, out of nowhere, a cyclone hits,
 bred by the South or stormy West Wind? They’re the gales
 that tear a ship to splinters—the gods, our masters,
 willing or not, it seems. No, let’s give way
 to the dark night, set out our supper here.
 Sit tight by our swift ship and then at daybreak
 board and launch her, make for open sea!’

So Eurylochus urged, and shipmates cheered.
 Then I knew some power was brewing trouble for us,
 320 so I let fly with an anxious plea: ‘Eurylochus,
 I’m one against all—the upper hand is yours.
 But swear me a binding oath, all here, that if
 we come on a herd of cattle or fine flock of sheep,
 not one man among us—blind in his reckless ways—
 will slaughter an ox or ram. Just eat in peace,
 content with the food immortal Circe gave us.’

They quickly swore the oath that I required
 and once they had vowed they’d never harm the herds,
 they moored our sturdy ship in the deep narrow harbor,
 330 close to a fresh spring, and all hands disembarked
 and adeptly set about the evening meal.
 Once they’d put aside desire for food and drink,
 they recalled our dear companions, wept for the men
 that Scylla plucked from the hollow ship and ate alive,
 and a welcome sleep came on them in their tears.

But then,
 at the night’s third watch, the stars just wheeling down,
 Zeus who marshals the stormclouds loosed a ripping wind,
 a howling, demonic gale, shrouding over in thunderheads
 the earth and sea at once—and night swept down from the sky. 340
 When young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone once more
 we hauled our craft ashore, securing her in a vaulted cave
 where nymphs have lovely dancing-rings and hold their sessions.
 There I called a muster, warning my shipmates yet again,
 ‘Friends, we’ve food and drink aplenty aboard the ship—
 keep your hands off all these herds or we will pay the price!
 The cattle, the sleek flocks, belong to an awesome master,
 Helios, god of the sun who sees all, hears all things.’

So I warned, and my headstrong men complied.
 But for one whole month the South Wind blew nonstop, 350
 no other wind came up, none but the South, Southeast.
 As long as our food and ruddy wine held out, the crew,
 eager to save their lives, kept hands off the herds.
 But then, when supplies aboard had all run dry,
 when the men turned to hunting, forced to range
 for quarry with twisted hooks: for fish, birds,
 anything they could lay their hands on—
 hunger racked their bellies—I struck inland,
 up the island, there to pray to the gods.
 If only one might show me some way home! 360
 Crossing into the heartland, clear of the crew,
 I rinsed my hands in a sheltered spot, a windbreak,
 but soon as I’d prayed to all the gods who rule Olympus,
 down on my eyes they poured a sweet, sound sleep . . .
 as Eurylochus opened up his fatal plan to friends:
 ‘Listen to me, my comrades, brothers in hardship.
 All ways of dying are hateful to us poor mortals,
 true, but to die of hunger, starve to death—
 that’s the worst of all. So up with you now,
 let’s drive off the pick of Helios’ sleek herds, 370
 slaughter them to the gods who rule the skies up there.
 If we ever make it home to Ithaca, native ground,

erect at once a glorious temple to the Sungod,
line the walls with hoards of dazzling gifts!
But if the Sun, inflamed for his longhorn cattle,
means to wreck our ship and the other gods pitch in—
I'd rather die at sea, with one deep gulp of death,
than die by inches on this desolate island here!

So he urged, and shipmates cheered again.
At once they drove off the Sungod's finest cattle—
close at hand, not far from the blue-prowed ship they grazed,
those splendid beasts with their broad brows and curving horns.
Surrounding them in a ring, they lifted prayers to the gods,
plucking fresh green leaves from a tall oak for the rite,
since white strewing-barley was long gone in the ship.
Once they'd prayed, slaughtered and skinned the cattle,
they cut the thighbones out, they wrapped them round in fat,
a double fold sliced clean and topped with strips of flesh.
And since they had no wine to anoint the glowing victims,
they made libations with water, broiling all the innards,
and once they'd burned the bones and tasted the organs—
hacked the rest into pieces, piercing them with spits.

That moment soothing slumber fell from my eyes
and down I went to our ship at the water's edge
but on my way, nearing the long beaked craft,
the smoky savor of roasts came floating up around me . . .
I groaned in anguish, crying out to the deathless gods:
'Father Zeus! the rest of you blissful gods who never die—
you with your fatal sleep, you lulled me into disaster.
Left on their own, look what a monstrous thing
my crew concocted!'

Quick as a flash
with her flaring robes Lampetie sped the news
to the Sun on high that we had killed his herds
and Helios burst out in rage to all the immortals:
'Father Zeus! the rest of you blissful gods who never die—
punish them all, that crew of Laertes' son Odysseus—
what an outrage! They, they killed my cattle,

380

390

400

the great joy of my heart . . . day in, day out,
when I climbed the starry skies and when I wheeled
back down from the heights to touch the earth once more.
Unless they pay me back in blood for the butchery of my herds,
down I go to the House of Death and blaze among the dead!

410

But Zeus who marshals the thunderheads insisted,
'Sun, you keep on shining among the deathless gods
and mortal men across the good green earth.
And as for the guilty ones, why, soon enough
on the wine-dark sea I'll hit their racing ship
with a white-hot bolt, I'll tear it into splinters.'

—Or so I heard from the lovely nymph Calypso,
who heard it herself, she said, from Hermes, god of guides.

420

As soon as I reached our ship at the water's edge
I took the men to task, upbraiding each in turn,
but how to set things right? We couldn't find a way.
The cattle were dead already . . .
and the gods soon showed us all some fateful signs—
the hides began to crawl, the meat, both raw and roasted,
bellowed out on the spits, and we heard a noise
like the moan of lowing oxen.

Yet six more days
my eager companions feasted on the cattle of the Sun,
the pick of the herds they'd driven off, but then,
when Cronian Zeus brought on the seventh day,
the wind in its ceaseless raging dropped at last,
and stepping the mast at once, hoisting the white sail
we boarded ship and launched her, made for open sea.

430

But once we'd left that island in our wake—
no land at all in sight, nothing but sea and sky—
then Zeus the son of Cronus mounted a thunderhead
above our hollow ship and the deep went black beneath it.
Nor did the craft scud on much longer. All of a sudden
killer-squalls attacked us, screaming out of the west,

440

a murderous blast shearing the two forestays off
 so the mast toppled backward, its running tackle spilling
 into the bilge. The mast itself went crashing into the stern,
 it struck the helmsman's head and crushed his skull to pulp
 and down from his deck the man flipped like a diver—
 his hardy life spirit left his bones behind.
 Then, then in the same breath Zeus hit the craft
 with a lightning-bolt and thunder. Round she spun,
 reeling under the impact, filled with reeking brimstone,
 shipmates pitching out of her, bobbing round like seahawks
 swept along by the whitecaps past the trim black hull—
 and the god cut short their journey home forever.

450

But I went lurching along our battered hulk
 till the sea-surge ripped the plankings from the keel
 and the waves swirled it away, stripped bare, and snapped
 the mast from the decks—but a backstay made of bull's-hide
 still held fast, and with this I lashed the mast and keel
 together, made them one, riding my makeshift raft
 as the wretched galewinds bore me on and on.

460

At last the West Wind quit its wild rage
 but the South came on at once to hound me even more,
 making me double back my route toward cruel Charybdis.
 All night long I was rushed back and then at break of day
 I reached the crag of Scylla and dire Charybdis' vortex
 right when the dreadful whirlpool gulped the salt sea down.
 But heaving myself aloft to clutch at the fig-tree's height,
 like a bat I clung to its trunk for dear life—not a chance
 for a good firm foothold there, no clambering up it either,
 the roots too far to reach, the boughs too high overhead,
 huge swaying branches that overshadowed Charybdis.
 But I held on, dead set . . . waiting for her
 to vomit my mast and keel back up again—
 Oh how I ached for both! and back they came,
 late but at last, at just the hour a judge at court,
 who's settled the countless suits of brash young claimants,
 rises, the day's work done, and turns home for supper—

470

that's when the timbers reared back up from Charybdis.
 I let go—I plunged with my hands and feet flailing,
 crashing into the waves beside those great beams
 and scrambling aboard them fast
 I rowed hard with my hands right through the straits . . .
 And the father of men and gods did not let Scylla see me,
 else I'd have died on the spot—no escape from death.

480

I drifted along nine days. On the tenth, at night,
 the gods cast me up on Ogygia, Calypso's island,
 home of the dangerous nymph with glossy braids
 who speaks with human voice, and she took me in,
 she loved me . . . Why cover the same ground again?
 Just yesterday, here at hall, I told you all the rest,
 you and your gracious wife. It goes against my grain
 to repeat a tale told once, and told so clearly."

490