



BOOK

THE GRACE OF THE WITCH



TEN



ODYSSEUS AND HIS MEN next land on the island of Aeolus, the wind king, and stay with him a month. To extend his hospitality, Aeolus gives Odysseus two parting gifts, a fair west wind blowing the ships toward Ithaca and a great bag holding all the unfavorable, stormy winds. Within sight of home, and while Odysseus is sleeping, the men open the bag, thinking it contains gold and silver. The bad winds thus escape and blow the ships back to Aeolus' island. The king refuses to help them again, believing now that their voyage has been cursed by the gods.

The discouraged mariners next stop briefly in the land of the Laestrygonians, fierce cannibals, who bombard their ships with boulders. Only Odysseus, his ship, and its crew of 45 survive the shower of boulders. The lone ship then sails to Aeaëa, home of the goddess Circe, considered by many to be a witch. There, Odysseus divides his men into two groups. Eurylochus leads one platoon to explore the island, while Odysseus stays behind on the ship with the remaining crew.

“In the wild wood they found an open glade,
around a smooth stone house—the hall of Circe—
and wolves and mountain lions lay there, mild
in her soft spell, fed on her drug of evil.

- 5 None would attack—oh, it was strange, I tell you—
but switching their long tails they faced our men
like hounds, who look up when their master comes
with tidbits for them—as he will—from table.
Humbly those wolves and lions with mighty paws
10 fawned on our men—who met their yellow eyes
and feared them.

In the entrance way they stayed
to listen there: inside her quiet house
they heard the goddess Circe.

- Low she sang
in her beguiling voice, while on her loom
15 she wove ambrosial fabric sheer and bright,
by that craft known to the goddesses of heaven.
No one would speak, until Polites—most
faithful and likable of my officers, said:

- ‘Dear friends, no need for stealth: here’s a young weaver
20 singing a pretty song to set the air
a-tingle on these lawns and paven courts.
Goddess she is, or lady. Shall we greet her?’

- So reassured, they all cried out together,
and she came swiftly to the shining doors
25 to call them in. All but Eurylochus—
who feared a snare—the innocents went after her.
On thrones she seated them, and lounging chairs,
while she prepared a meal of cheese and barley
and amber honey mixed with Pramnian wine,
30 adding her own vile pinch, to make them lose
desire or thought of our dear father land.
Scarce had they drunk when she flew after them
with her long stick and shut them in a pigsty—
bodies, voices, heads, and bristles, all
35 swinish now, though minds were still unchanged.
So, squealing, in they went. And Circe tossed them

WORDS
TO
KNOW

beguiling (bĭ-gĭ'ĭŋ) *adj.* charming; pleasing **beguile** *v.*
stealth (stēlth) *n.* quiet, secret, or sneaky behavior
snare (snār) *n.* a trap
vile (vīl) *adj.* evil; disgusting

Guide for Reading

1–11 What is unusual about
hall?

10 **fawned on**: showed affection
for

15 **ambrosial**: fit for the gods.

17 **Polites** (pə-lī'tēz).

23–26 If you were among this
group, whom would you follow—
Polites or Eurylochus? Why?

27–36 What happens to the men
after they drink Circe's magic
potion?

acorns, mast, and cornel berries—fodder
for hogs who rut and slumber on the earth.

40 Down to the ship Eurylochus came running
to cry alarm, foul magic doomed his men!
But working with dry lips to speak a word
he could not, being so shaken; blinding tears
welled in his eyes; foreboding filled his heart.
45 When we were frantic questioning him, at last
we heard the tale: our friends were gone.”

43 foreboding: a sense of
approaching evil.

EURYLOCHUS TELLS ODYSSEUS *what has happened and begs his captain to sail away from Circe's island. Against Eurylochus' advice, however, Odysseus rushes to save his men from the enchantress. On the way, he meets the god Hermes, who gives him a magical plant—called moly—to protect him from Circe's power. Still, Hermes warns, Odysseus must make the goddess swear that she will play no "witches' tricks." Armed with the moly and Hermes' warning, Odysseus arrives at Circe's palace. Circe welcomes him and leads him to a magnificent silver-studded chair.*

“The lady Circe
mixed me a golden cup of honeyed wine,
adding in mischief her unholy drug.
I drank, and the drink failed. But she came forward
50 aiming a stroke with her long stick, and whispered:

‘Down in the sty and snore among the rest!’

Without a word, I drew my sharpened sword
and in one bound held it against her throat.
She cried out, then slid under to take my knees,
55 catching her breath to say, in her distress:

‘What champion, of what country, can you be?
Where are your kinsmen and your city?
Are you not sluggish with my wine? Ah, wonder!
Never a mortal man that drank this cup



60 but when it passed his lips he had succumbed.
 Hale must your heart be and your tempered will.
 Odysseus then you are, O great contender,
 of whom the glittering god with golden wand
 spoke to me ever, and foretold

65 the black swift ship would carry you from Troy.
 Put up your weapon in the sheath. We two
 shall mingle and make love upon our bed.
 So mutual trust may come of play and love.'

61 tempered: strengthened and hardened, like steel.

63 The "glittering god with golden wand" is Hermes.

To this I said:

'Circe, am I a boy,

70 that you should make me soft and doting now?
 Here in this house you turned my men to swine;
 now it is I myself you hold, enticing
 into your chamber, to your dangerous bed,
 to take my manhood when you have me stripped.

75 I mount no bed of love with you upon it.
 Or swear me first a great oath, if I do,
 you'll work no more enchantment to my harm.'

70 doting: fond; loving.

75-78 How does Odysseus protect himself from Circe?

80 She swore at once, outright, as I demanded,
 and after she had sworn, and bound herself,
 I entered Circe's flawless bed of love."



CIRCE'S MAIDENS BATHE ODYSSEUS and offer him a tempting meal, yet his mind remains on his captive men.



"Circe regarded me, as there I sat
disconsolate, and never touched a crust.
 Then she stood over me and chided me:

81-106 Why does Circe free Odysseus' men from her spell?

'Why sit at table mute, Odysseus?
 85 Are you mistrustful of my bread and drink?
 Can it be treachery that you fear again,
 after the gods' great oath I swore for you?'

I turned to her at once, and said:

WORDS TO KNOW

succumb (sə-kŭm') *v.* to be overpowered; surrender
contender (kən-tĕn'dər) *n.* a fighter
enticing (ĕn-tĭ'sĭng) *adj.* luring; tempting **entice** *v.*
disconsolate (dĭs-kŏn'se-lĭt) *adj.* extremely sad
chide (chĭd) *v.* to scold mildly



‘Circe,

90 where is the captain who could bear to touch
this banquet, in my place? A decent man
would see his company before him first.
Put heart in me to eat and drink—you may,
by freeing my companions. I must see them.’

But Circe had already turned away.
95 Her long staff in her hand, she left the hall
and opened up the sty. I saw her enter,
driving those men turned swine to stand before me.
She stroked them, each in turn, with some new chrism;
and then, behold! their bristles fell away,
100 the coarse pelt grown upon them by her drug
melted away, and they were men again,
younger, more handsome, taller than before.
Their eyes upon me, each one took my hands,
and wild regret and longing pierced them through,
105 so the room rang with sobs, and even Circe
pitied that transformation. Exquisite
the goddess looked as she stood near me, saying:

‘Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
110 go to the sea beach and sea-breasting ship;
drag it ashore, full length upon the land;
stow gear and stores in rock-holes under cover;
return; be quick; bring all your dear companions.’

Now, being a man, I could not help consenting.
115 So I went down to the sea beach and the ship,
where I found all my other men on board,
weeping, in despair along the benches.
Sometimes in farmyards when the cows return
well-fed from pasture to the barn, one sees
120 the pens give way before the calves in tumult,
breaking through to cluster about their mothers,
bumping together, bawling. Just that way
my crew poured round me when they saw me come—
their faces wet with tears as if they saw
125 their homeland, and the crags of Ithaca,
even the very town where they were born.
And weeping still they all cried out in greeting:

98 *chrism* (kríz'em): ointment.

108–110 Notice these epithets, which Circe will use repeatedly in addressing Odysseus.

114 Odysseus says that “being a man,” he had to go along with Circe’s request. What do you think he means by this statement?

118–126 What two things are compared in this epic simile? How does the simile help you picture the scene that Odysseus is describing?



‘Prince, what joy this is, your safe return!
Now Ithaca seems here, and we in Ithaca!
130 But tell us now, what death befell our friends?’

And, speaking gently, I replied:

‘First we must get the ship high on the shingle,
and stow our gear and stores in clefts of rock
for cover. Then come follow me, to see
135 your shipmates in the magic house of Circe
eating and drinking, endlessly regaled.’

They turned back, as commanded, to this work;
only one lagged, and tried to hold the others:
Eurylochus it was, who blurted out:

140 ‘Where now, poor remnants? Is it devil’s work

132 **shingle**: pebbly beach.

133 **clefts**: openings; cracks.

140 **remnants**: a small group of survivors.

WORDS
TO
KNOW

regaled (rĭ-gāld') *adj.* entertained or amused **regale** *v.*

you long for? Will you go to Circe's hall?
Swine, wolves, and lions she will make us all,
beasts of her courtyard, bound by her enchantment.
Remember those the Cyclops held, remember
145 shipmates who made that visit with Odysseus!
The daring man! They died for his foolishness!

When I heard this I had a mind to draw
the blade that swung against my side and chop him,
bowling his head upon the ground—kinsman
150 or no kinsman, close to me though he was.
But others came between, saying, to stop me,

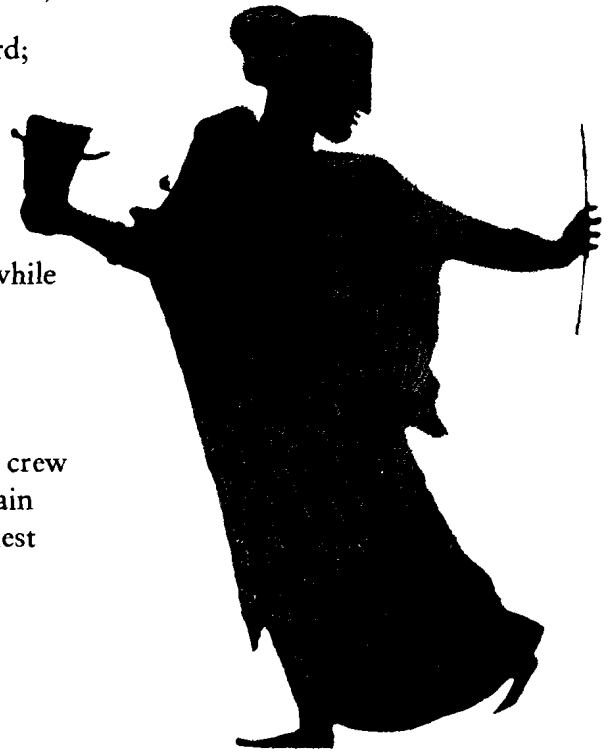
'Prince, we can leave him, if you say the word;
let him stay here on guard. As for ourselves,
show us the way to Circe's magic hall.'

155 So all turned inland, leaving shore and ship,
and Eurylochus—he, too, came on behind,
fearing the rough edge of my tongue. Meanwhile
at Circe's hands the rest were gently bathed,
anointed with sweet oil, and dressed afresh
160 in tunics and new cloaks with fleecy linings.
We found them all at supper when we came.
But greeting their old friends once more, the crew
could not hold back their tears; and now again
the rooms rang with sobs. Then Circe, loveliest
165 of all immortals, came to counsel me:

'Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
enough of weeping fits. I know—I, too—
what you endured upon the inhuman sea,
170 what odds you met on land from hostile men.
Remain with me, and share my meat and wine;
restore behind your ribs those gallant hearts
that served you in the old days, when you sailed
from stony Ithaca. Now parched and spent,
175 your cruel wandering is all you think of,
never of joy, after so many blows.'

As we were men we could not help consenting.
So day by day we lingered, feasting long

140–146 Do you think Eurylochus is right in his harsh criticism of Odysseus? Why or why not?



174 parched and spent: thirsty and worn out.

on roasts and wine, until a year grew fat.

180 But when the passing months and wheeling seasons
brought the long summery days, the pause of summer,
my shipmates one day summoned me and said:

‘Captain, shake off this trance, and think of home—
if home indeed awaits us,

185 your own well-timbered hall on Ithaca.’
if we shall ever see

They made me feel a pang, and I agreed.
That day, and all day long, from dawn to sundown,
we feasted on roast meat and ruddy wine,
and after sunset when the dusk came on

190 my men slept in the shadowy hall, but I
went through the dark to Circe’s flawless bed
and took the goddess’ knees in supplication,
urging, as she bent to hear:

‘O Circe,

195 now you must keep your promise; it is time.
Help me make sail for home. Day after day
my longing quickens, and my company
give me no peace, but wear my heart away
pleading when you are not at hand to hear.’

The loveliest of goddesses replied:

200 ‘Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
you shall not stay here longer against your will;
but home you may not go
unless you take a strange way round and come
205 to the cold homes of Death and pale Persephone.
You shall hear prophecy from the rapt shade
of blind Tiresias of Thebes, forever
charged with reason even among the dead;
to him alone, of all the flitting ghosts,
210 Persephone has given a mind undarkened.’

At this I felt a weight like stone within me,
and, moaning, pressed my length against the bed,
with no desire to see the daylight more.”

180–185 Notice that Odysseus’
men have to remind him of home.

185 well-timbered: well-
constructed.

186 pang: a sharp feeling of
emotional distress. What emotion
do you think Odysseus is feeling?

192 supplication: humble request
or prayer.

200–213 Circe tells Odysseus
that he must go to the under-
world, the land of the dead. The
god of the underworld is Hades
(hā’dēz), referred to here as Death;
Persephone is his wife. One of the
spirits—or “shades”—in the under-
world is that of Tiresias, a blind
prophet who has been allowed to
keep his mental powers. He will
give Odysseus instructions about
returning home. What is Odysseus’
reaction upon hearing all of this?