

Excerpts from Homer's *Odyssey*: Visit to Circe's Island

Odysseus relates some of the adventures he and his crew had during their long voyage home.

1 Within the forest glades my crew found the house of Circe, built of polished stone in a place of wide outlook, and round about it were mountain wolves and lions, whom Circe herself had bewitched; for she gave them evil drugs. **2** Yet these beasts did not rush upon my men, but pranced about them fawningly, wagging their long tails. **3** And as when hounds fawn around their master as he comes from a feast, for he ever brings them bits to soothe their temper, so about them fawned the stout-clawed wolves and lions; but they were seized with fear, as they saw the dread monsters.

4 So they stood in the gateway of the fair-tressed goddess, and within they heard Circe singing with sweet voice, as she went to and fro before a great imperishable web, such as is the handiwork of goddesses, finely-woven and beautiful, and glorious. **5** Then among them spoke Polites, a leader of men, dearest to me of my comrades, and trustiest: "Friends, within someone goes to and fro before a great web, singing sweetly, so that all the floor echoes; some goddess it is, or some woman, so let us quickly call to her." **6** So he spoke, and they cried aloud, and called to her. And she straightway came forth and opened the bright doors, and bade them in; and all went with her in their folly. **7** Only Eurylochus remained behind, for he suspected that there was a snare. **8** She brought them in and made them sit on chairs and seats, and made for them a potion of cheese and barley meal and yellow honey with Pramnian wine; but in the food she mixed baneful drugs, that they might utterly forget their native land. **9** Now when she had given them the potion, and they had drunk it off, then she presently smote them with her wand, and penned them in the sties. **10** And they had the heads, and voice, and bristles, and shape of swine, but their minds remained unchanged even as before. **11** So they were penned there weeping, and before them Circe flung mast and acorns, and the fruit of the cornel tree, to eat, such things as wallowing swine are wont to feed upon.

12 But Eurylochus came back straightway to the swift, black ship, to bring tidings of his comrades and their shameful doom. Not a word could he utter, for all his desire, so stricken to the heart was he with great distress, and his eyes were filled with tears, and his spirit was set on lamentation. **13** But when we questioned him in amazement, then he told the fate of the others, his comrades: **14** "We went through the thickets, as thou badest, noble Odysseus. We found in the forest glades a fair palace, built of polished stones, in a place of wide outlook. There someone was going to and fro before a great web, and singing with clear voice, some goddess or some woman, and they cried aloud, and called to her. And she came forth straightway, and opened the bright doors, and bade them in; and they all went with her in their folly. But I remained behind, for I suspected that there was a snare. Then they all vanished together, nor did one of them appear again, though I sat long and watched." **15** So he spoke, and I cast my silver-studded sword about my shoulders, a great sword of bronze, and slung my bow about me, and bade him lead me back by the self-same road. **16** But he clasped me with both hands, and besought me by my knees, and with wailing he spoke to me winged words: "Lead me not thither against my will, O thou fostered of Zeus, but leave me here; for I know that thou wilt neither come back thyself, nor bring anyone of thy comrades. Nay, with these that are here let us flee with all speed, for still we may haply escape the evil day." **17** So he spoke, but I answered him, and said: "Eurylochus, do thou stay here in this place, eating and drinking by the hollow, black ship; but I will go, for strong necessity is laid upon me."

26 So saying, I went up from the ship and the sea. **27** But when, as I went through the sacred glades, I was about to come to the great house of the sorceress, Circe, then Hermes, of the golden wand, met me as I went toward the house, in the likeness of a young man with the first down upon his lip, in whom the charm of youth is fairest. **28** He clasped my hand, and spoke, and addressed me: "Whither now again, hapless man, dost thou go alone through the hills, knowing naught of the country? **29** Lo, thy comrades yonder in the house of Circe are penned like swine in close-barred sties. And art thou come to release them? **30** Nay, I tell thee, thou shalt not thyself return, but shalt remain there with the others. **31** But come, I will free thee from harm, and save thee. **32** Here, take this potent herb, and go to the house of Circe, and it shall ward off from thy head the evil day. **33** And I will tell thee all the baneful wiles of Circe. **34** She will

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mix thee a potion, and cast drugs into the food; but even so she shall not be able to bewitch thee, for the potent herb that I shall give thee will not suffer it. **35** And I will tell thee all. **36** When Circe shall smite thee with her long wand, then do thou draw thy sharp sword from beside thy thigh, and rush upon Circe, as though thou wouldst slay her. **37** And she will be seized with fear, and will bid thee lie with her. **38** Then do not thou thereafter refuse the couch of the goddess, that she may set free thy comrades, and give entertainment to thee. **39** But bid her swear a great oath by the blessed gods, that she will not plot against thee any fresh mischief to thy hurt, lest when she has thee stripped she may render thee a weakling and unmanned." **40** So saying, Hermes gave me the herb, drawing it from the ground, and showed me its nature. **41** At the root it was black, but its flower was like milk: Moly the gods call it; it is hard for mortal men to dig, but with the gods all things are possible. **42** Hermes then departed to high Olympus through the wooded isle, and I went my way to the house of Circe, and many things did my heart darkly ponder as I went.

43 So I stood at the gates of the fair-tressed goddess. There I stood and called, and the goddess heard my voice. **44** Straightway then she came forth, and opened the bright doors, and bade me in; and I went with her, my heart sore troubled. **45** She brought me in and made me sit on a silver-studded chair, a beautiful chair, richly wrought, and beneath was a foot-stool for the feet. **46** And she prepared me a potion in a golden cup, that I might drink, and put therein a drug, with evil purpose in her heart. **47** But when she had given it me, and I had drunk it off, yet was not bewitched, she smote me with her wand, and spoke, and addressed me: "Begone now to the sty, and lie with the rest of thy comrades." **48** So she spoke, but I, drawing my sharp sword from beside my thigh, rushed upon Circe, as though I would slay her. **49** But she, with a loud cry, ran beneath, and clasped my knees, and with wailing she spoke to me winged words: "Who art thou among men, and from whence? Where is thy city, and where thy parents? Amazement holds me that thou hast drunk this charm and wast in no wise bewitched. For no man else soever hath withstood this charm, when once he has drunk it, and it has passed the barrier of his teeth. **50** Nay, but the mind in thy breast is one not to be beguiled. **51** Surely thou art Odysseus, the man of ready device, who Hermes of the golden wand ever said to me would come hither on his way home from Troy with his swift, black ship. **52** Nay, come, put up thy sword in its sheath, and let us two then go up into my bed, that couched together in love we may put trust in each other." **53** So she spoke, but I answered her, and said: "Circe, how canst thou bid me be gentle to thee, who hast turned my comrades into swine in thy halls, and now keepest me here, and with guileful purpose biddest me go to thy chamber, and go up into thy bed, that when thou hast me stripped thou mayest render me a weakling and unmanned? **54** Nay, verily, it is not I that shall be fain to go up into thy bed, unless thou, goddess, wilt consent to swear a mighty oath that thou wilt not plot against me any fresh mischief to my hurt." **55** So I spoke, and she straightway swore the oath to do me no harm, as I bade her. But when she had sworn, and made an end of the oath, then I went up to the beautiful bed of Circe....

56 Then she bade me eat, but my heart inclined not thereto. **57** Rather, I sat with other thoughts, and my spirit boded ill. **58** Now when Circe noted that I sat thus, and did not put forth my hands to the food, but was burdened with sore grief, she came close to me, and spoke winged words: **59** "Why, Odysseus, dost thou sit thus like one that is dumb, eating thy heart, and dost not touch food or drink? Dost thou haply forbode some other guile? Nay, thou needest in no wise fear, for already have I sworn a mighty oath to do thee no harm." **60** So she spoke, but I answered her, and said: "Circe, what man that is right-minded could bring himself to taste of food or drink, ere yet he had won freedom for his comrades, and beheld them before his face? But if thou of a ready heart dost bid me eat and drink, set them free, that mine eyes may behold my trusty comrades." **61** So I spoke, and Circe went forth through the hall holding her wand in her hand, and opened the doors of the sty, and drove them out in the form of swine of nine years old. **62** So they stood there before her, and she went through the midst of them, and anointed each man with another charm. **63** Then from their limbs the bristles fell away which the baneful drug that queenly Circe gave them had before made to grow.

Circe proves to be such an excellent host and companion to Odysseus that his men must convince him to resume his journey home a full year later.