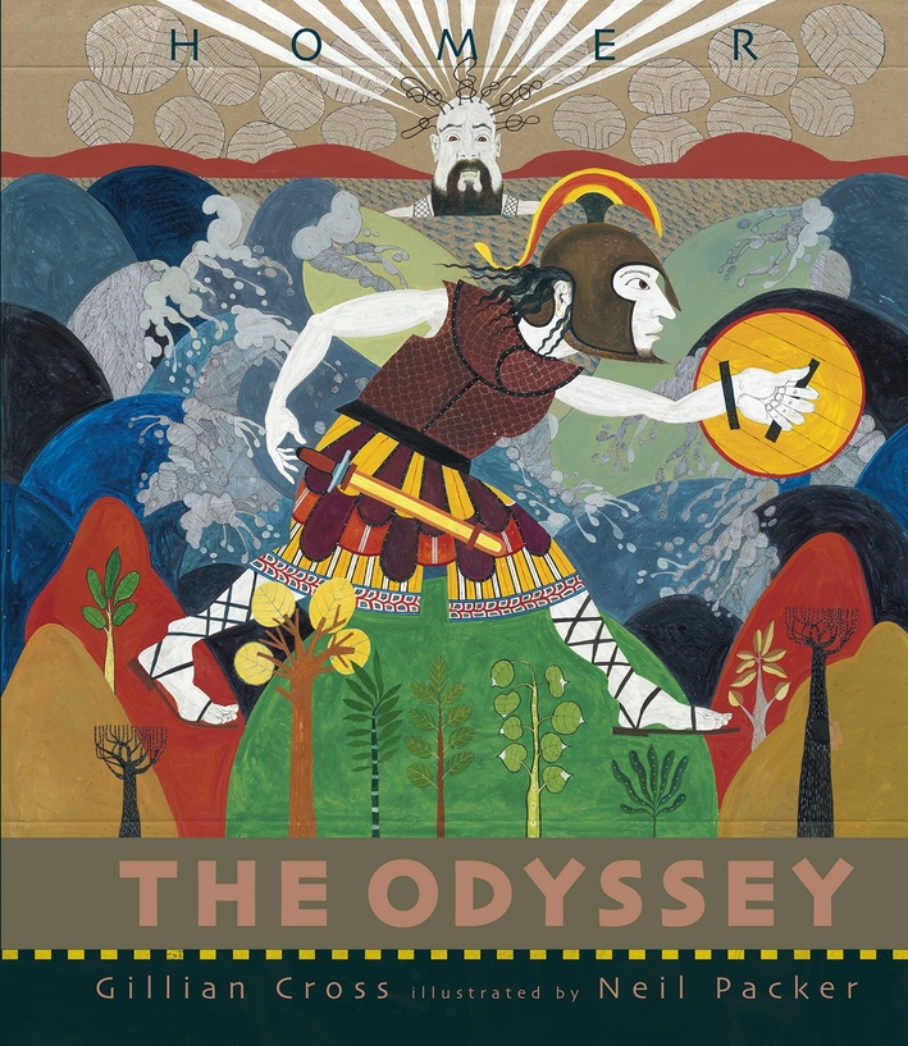

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THE ODYSSEY
Gillian Cross illustrated by Neil Packer



THE ODYSSEY





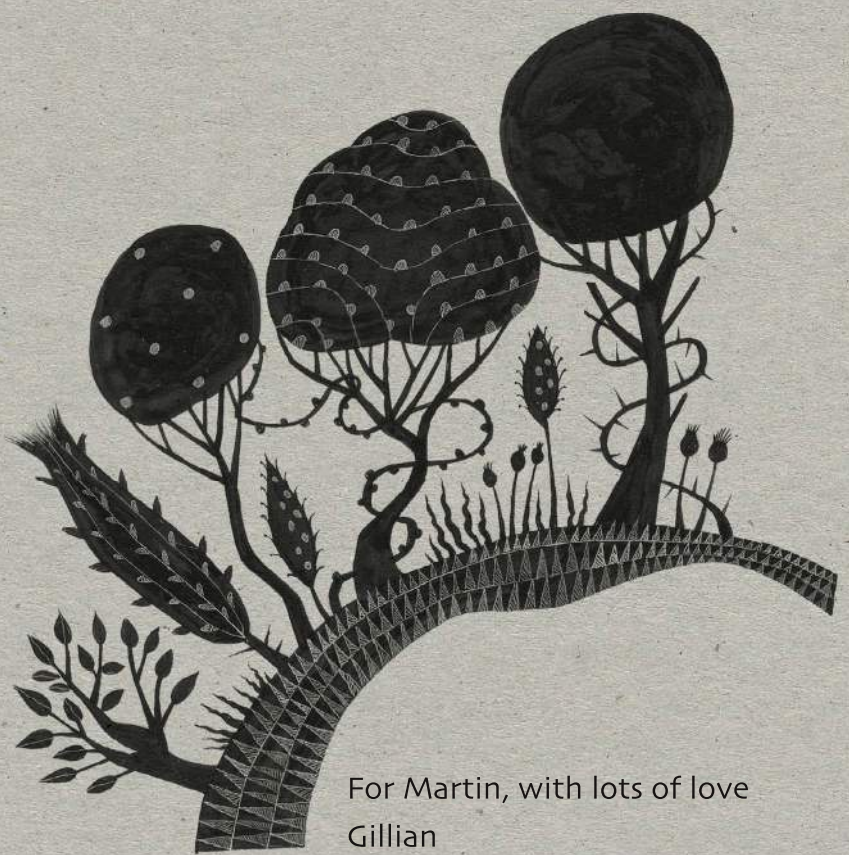
THE ODYSSEY

RETOLD BY Gillian Cross

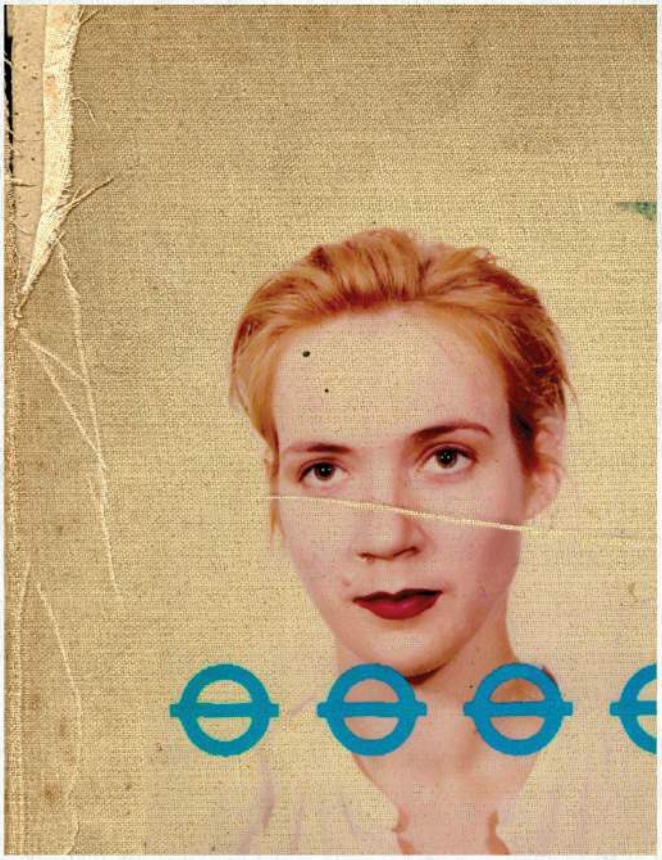
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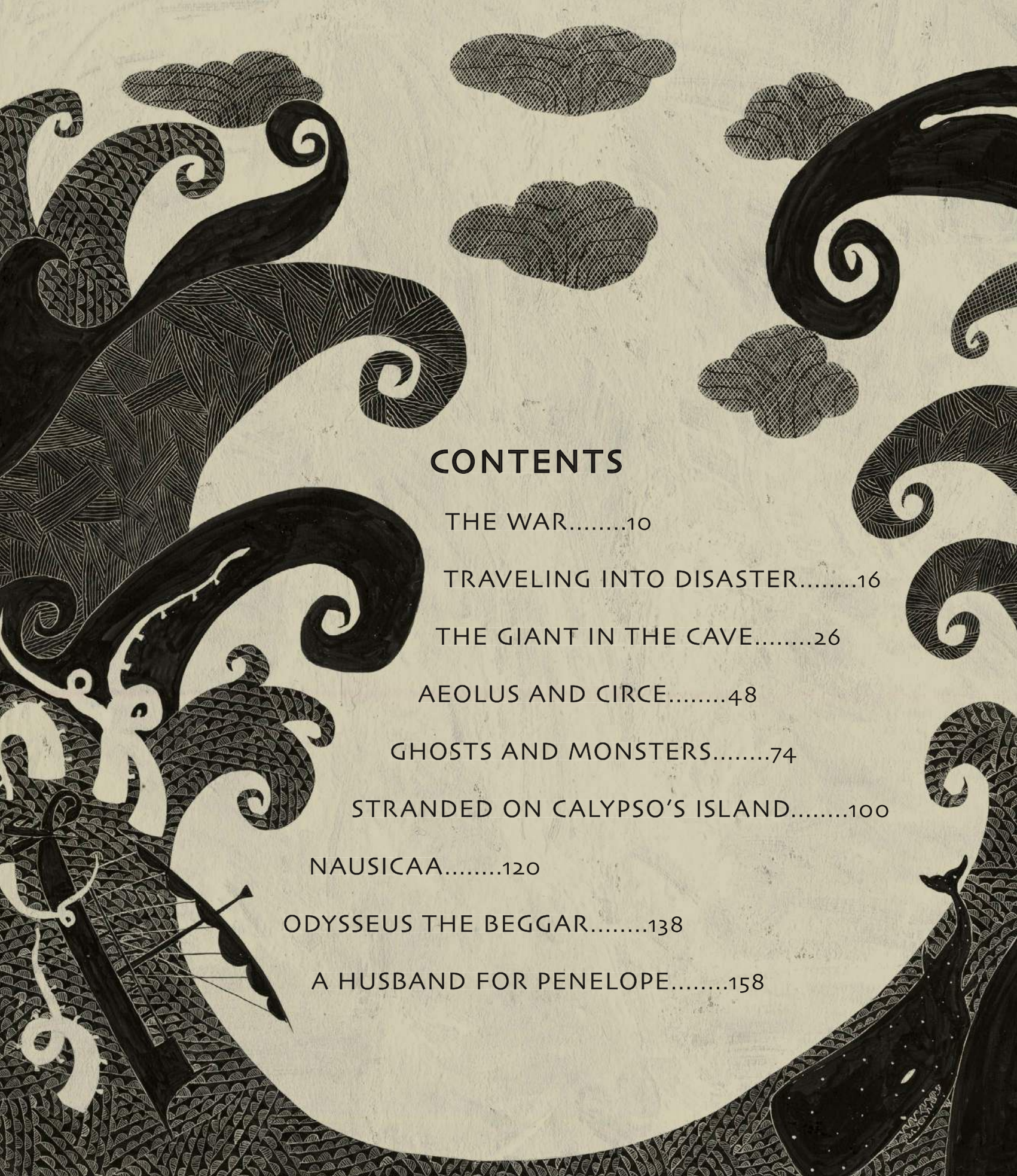
CANDLEWICK PRESS



For Martin, with lots of love
Gillian



For Emily Carol Bickerton [1965–2008]
Love, Neil and Arvo



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Out of the mysterious past comes this tale of human endurance, full of unknown dangers and terrifying monsters. It tells the adventures of a man who spent ten years fighting the anger of the raging sea as he struggled to sail home.

This is the story of Odysseus of Ithaca, cleverest of all the kings of ancient Greece.

THE WAR

IT WAS WAR THAT forced Odysseus to leave his home. When Paris of Troy ran off with the king of Sparta's wife, her husband gathered an army to fetch her back. And he called on all his fellow kings to join him — including Odysseus.

There was no escape. Odysseus wanted to stay on Ithaca with his own wife, Penelope, and their baby son, Telemachus. But the other kings needed his quick wits and his cunning. When he didn't come, they went to Ithaca to find him.

"Sparta is your ally," they said. "You swore to fight side by side with the Spartans. And that means helping to fetch Helen back from Troy."

It was true. All the Greek kings had promised to help one another. With a heavy heart, Odysseus called his soldiers together and prepared a fleet of ships.



The night before they left, he talked to Penelope, his wife. "This will be a fierce and bitter war," he said. "If I die, you are in charge of Ithaca. But only while Telemachus grows up. When he's a man, he'll take over, and you must get out of his way. Choose another husband for yourself and go to live with him."



"I don't want any husband except you," Penelope said with tears in her eyes.

"That's how it must be," Odysseus insisted. "Promise to do what I ask."

Still with tears in her eyes, Penelope promised. "But you *will* come back," she said fiercely. "I know you will."

"That depends on the gods," Odysseus said. He kissed her good-bye and hugged Telemachus.

Then he went down to the long ships in the harbor, and he and his men set sail over the wine-dark sea.

For nine long, bloodstained years, the Greek army besieged the golden city of Troy, battering at its walls in vain, while the gods watched from their home on high Olympus.

For nine lonely years, Penelope stayed in Ithaca, taking care of the kingdom and waiting for the war to finish. As Telemachus grew tall and strong, she told him about his father, Odysseus, the cleverest king in Greece.

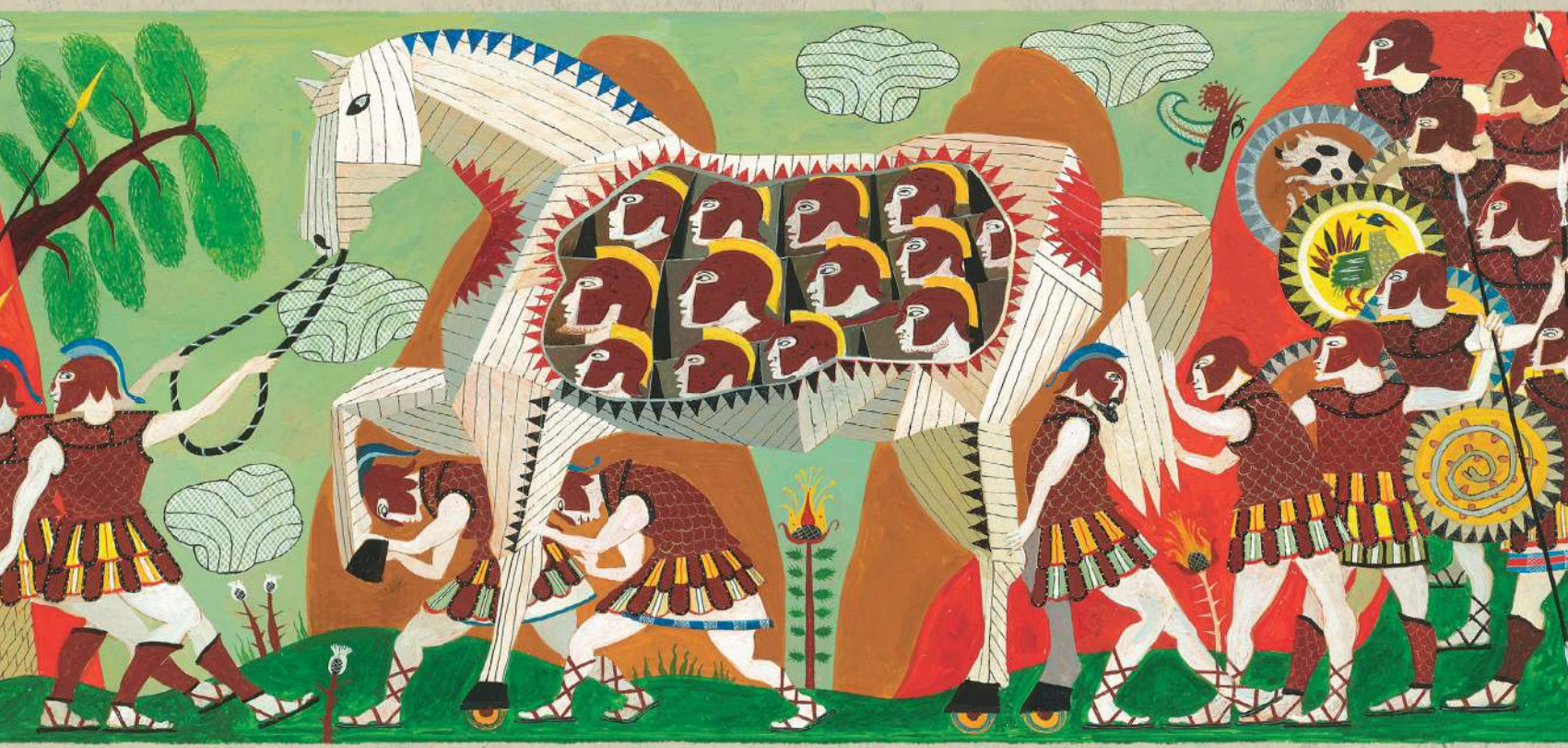
"When the war ends," she said, "he will come back to us."



In the tenth year of fighting, the Greeks tricked their way into Troy. The war ended in a storm of blood and fire, and the golden city of Troy was burned to ruins. One by one, the kings of Greece trailed home across the sea.

Except Odysseus.

Where was he?



No one knew, except the gods, gazing down from high Olympus: Zeus, the father of gods and men; Athene the goddess of wisdom; Hermes, the giant killer and messenger of the gods; and Poseidon, the dark earth-shaker god who controlled the ocean. Only they saw the whole, long story as it unfolded.


CRONOS
HERA
ZEUS
ZEUS - HERA
ZEUS
DEMETER
HEPHAESTOS
APOLLO
ARES
ATHENE
HEBE


U
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POSEIDON=AMPHITRITE
= LETO
ZEUS=DIONE
CYCLOPSES
HESTIA
ARTEMIS
APHRODITE
EROS
ZEUS=MAIA
HERMES
ZEUS=SEMELE
DIONYSUS

TRAVELING INTO DISASTER

ODYSSEUS LEFT TROY with twelve ships full of weary, homesick men. The wind was in their favor, but they weren't carrying enough food and water for the journey.

When they came to the city of the Cicones, they went ashore, killing all the men and taking what they needed. It was a stupid, greedy attack, and the sailors made it worse. When Odysseus ordered them back to their ships, they refused to obey him. They'd just finished fighting a long, fierce war, and they wanted to rest and feast.

Ignoring Odysseus, they butchered the sheep and cattle they'd captured and barbecued them on the beach. As they worked, they broke open barrels of wine and started drinking steadily.

By the time night came, they were all incapable. They slumped down onto the sand and fell asleep beside their dying fires.

It was disastrously stupid.





While they slept, the Cicones were creeping around in the hills, gathering reinforcements. At dawn, a wild army came sweeping down from the hills, looking for revenge.

Odysseus's men were woken by the clash of spears and the rattle of chariot wheels. Leaping up in a panic, they snatched at their weapons, but it was too late to form a battle line. They had to defend themselves as best they could, fighting hand to hand all over the beach.

They held out until evening. Then the Cicones overwhelmed them, slaughtering more than seventy men. The others ran for their ships, exhausted and terrified.

They scrambled aboard frantically, hoisting the sails and hauling on their oars. It was impossible to recover the bodies of their comrades. All they could do was call out a sad good-bye as they left them behind on the beach.

And there was no chance to rest once they were out at sea. As soon as the land disappeared, a great storm hit them, blackening the sky and ripping their sails to pieces. Raging winds blew them off course, driving them out, past Cythera into the River of Ocean beyond.

For nine days, the storm howled around them without stopping. There was nowhere to land. Dense cloud hid the sun in the daytime and the stars at night, and even Odysseus couldn't figure out where they were.



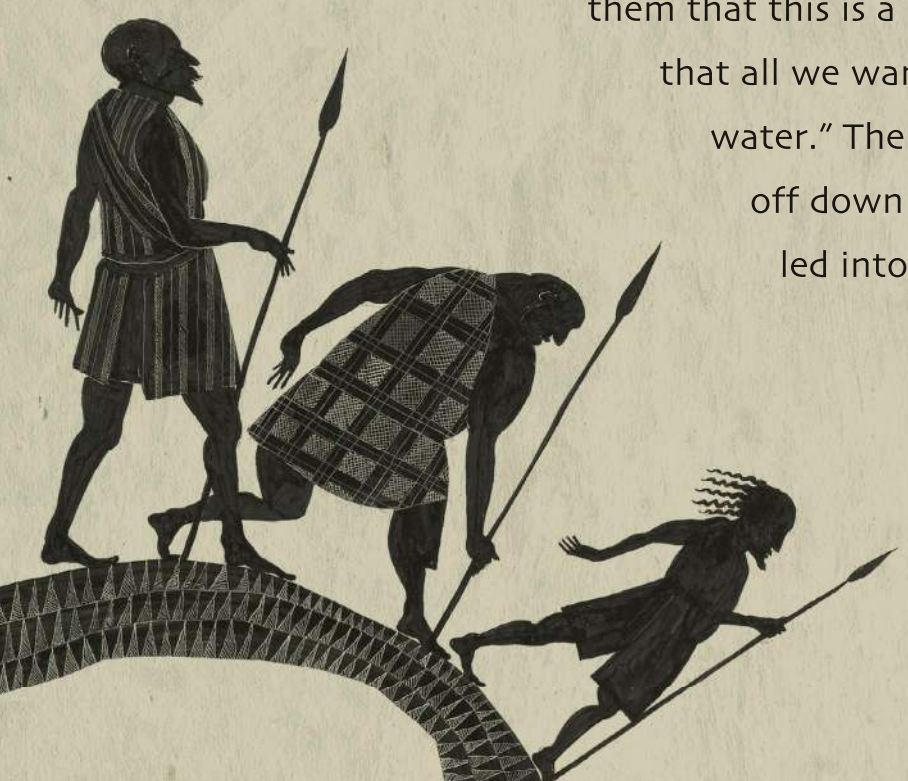
On the tenth day, the wind dropped suddenly and the sky cleared. They found themselves sailing beside a strange and beautiful shore covered in thick vegetation. It looked completely uninhabited.

"Drop anchor here!" Odysseus called across the water.

The twelve ships anchored side by side, and the sailors lowered little boats to take them ashore. This time they were much more cautious. Odysseus looked around warily as they landed, and they were all watching out for enemies. But nothing moved except the leaves rustling in the breeze.

By now, they were desperately short of food and water, but this time Odysseus didn't send them all inland. He kept most of the men down on the beach to guard the boats. Only three of them were picked to go off and explore.

He warned them to be careful. "If you meet any people, treat them politely," he said. "Tell them that this is a peaceful visit — that all we want is food and water." The three men headed off down a winding path that led into the trees.



The others were left behind to keep watch, and they settled down beside the boats, alert for any sign of danger. All they could do was wait.

And wait. And wait . . .

The sun rose high in the sky, driving them almost mad with thirst, but Odysseus wouldn't let them leave the beach. They had to endure the full heat of the day, and they were still there at sunset, when the light began to grow dim.

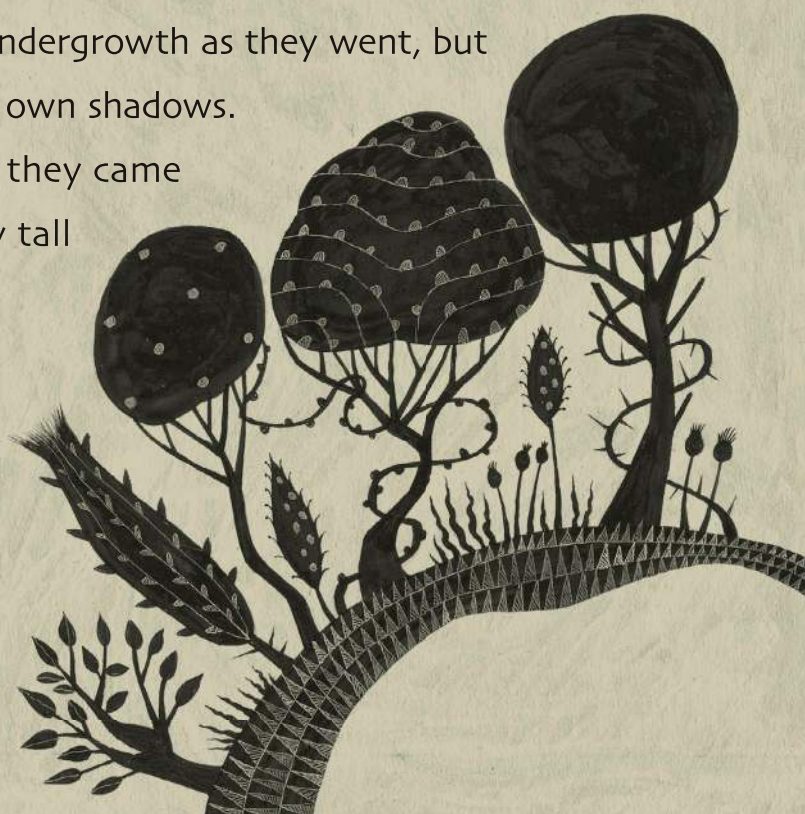
Where were the three men who had gone exploring?

Odysseus was anxious not to spend the night on the beach. That was too dangerous. But he couldn't abandon the men he had sent inland. What had happened to them? Were they dead?

He had to know.

Dividing the rest of the sailors into two groups, he left one group with the boats. Then he led the other group along the path the three explorers had taken. It was very dark now, and they peered nervously into the undergrowth as they went, but nothing moved except their own shadows.

In less than ten minutes, they came to a clearing surrounded by tall trees tangled with vines.



The vines were dripping with clusters of golden fruit that brushed against their heads as they passed. The air was heavy with its rich, honeyed scent.

Ahead of them, all across the clearing, people were lounging on the grass. Men, women, and children sprawled together, languidly sucking at the golden fruit. And in the very center of the group, their hands full of fruit and their faces distant and entranced, were the three lost men Odysseus had come to find.

"What are you doing?" he shouted at them. "Why are you idling here while the rest of us are waiting on the beach? We need to take on food and water and set sail for Ithaca."

The three men looked up with stupid, vacant smiles.



"Why should we struggle on?" one of them murmured. "What is Ithaca? Only a barren rock in the wide sea."

"It's where your wives and families live," Odysseus said fiercely.

The empty smiles didn't change.

"What do wives and families matter?" said another of the men. "Nothing compares to being here, eating the lotus fruit."

The lotus eaters beside him held out handfuls of fruit, calling to Odysseus and his companions.

"Come here and lie with us to eat the lotus. The sea is cold and cruel, and the lands beyond have no delights like this. Forget your homes and families. Stay here. Eat, and forget."





Odysseus saw the man next to him take a step forward into the clearing. Some of the others were wavering, staring at the lotus fruit. Unless he acted quickly, they would give in to their curiosity and taste it. Then he would lose them all.

He lowered his voice and began whispering orders quickly.

"We have to get our comrades back to the ship. Rush in and carry them off, without listening to what they say. And *don't taste the fruit*. Don't even lick the juice from your fingers. This is a terrible place."

His sailors obeyed, charging forward to seize their companions. Drugged by the honey-scented lotus, the three on the ground were taken by surprise. As they were hoisted up, they dropped the fruit they were holding. Immediately, they began to wail and scream.

"Give us back the lotus!"

"How can we live without it?"

"Put us down! This is the only home we need. Leave us here!"

Their cries were useless. Odysseus had them carried down to the boats and tied up tightly, to stop them from rushing straight back to the lotus eaters. He had no intention of setting them free until the effect of the fruit had worn off. They were taken on board and pushed under the benches, out of the way of the oars.

Then the boats headed back to where the ships were anchored. They had failed to take on any extra food or fresh water, but Odysseus dared not stay any longer. If the rest of his men decided to taste the lotus fruit, none of them would ever reach home.

So they left the beautiful, treacherous land of the lotus eaters and headed out again into the open sea.

As night fell, a thick fog came down over the sea. Within half an hour, the ships were moving in total darkness. There were no stars to guide them. There was no light from the moon.

They didn't realize that they were near land — until they heard the unmistakable scraping noise of their ships running aground.

Hastily lowering their sails, they dropped anchor and jumped into the water. Through the fog, a dark mass of land loomed ahead of them, but they were too exhausted to think of exploring it. They had just enough energy to stagger up the beach, out of range of the tide. As soon as they felt dry sand under their feet, they lay down and fell asleep, wrapped in their cloaks. They didn't even wonder what kind of land they had found.

THE GIANT IN THE CAVE

They awoke to a beautiful, clear dawn — and a fine view. Their ships had run aground in a natural harbor, safely away from the wild, open sea. Behind the harbor was a stretch of rich grassland, with luxuriant woods beyond.

The place seemed to have everything they needed. Huge bunches of grapes grew on wild vines, and a spring of fresh water ran down into the harbor. Looking up at the wooded hills, Odysseus saw a herd of wild goats leaping from rock to rock.

"The gods must have brought us here," he said. He and his men took their bows and spears and went off to hunt the goats. In a very short time they had enough meat to last for days — and they'd discovered that the island was uninhabited. At last it was safe to rest and relax.

They feasted on roasted meat, washed down with wine they'd looted from the Cicones. Afterward, they lay on the beach, gazing across to the mainland. They heard the sound of voices drifting over the water, and the bleating of sheep and goats.



And they saw smoke rising into the evening sky, from fires like theirs.

Idly, as the sun went down, they wondered what kind of people lived over there. They peered across at the dark shore, but no human figures were visible. And, however hard they tried, they couldn't make out what the voices were saying.

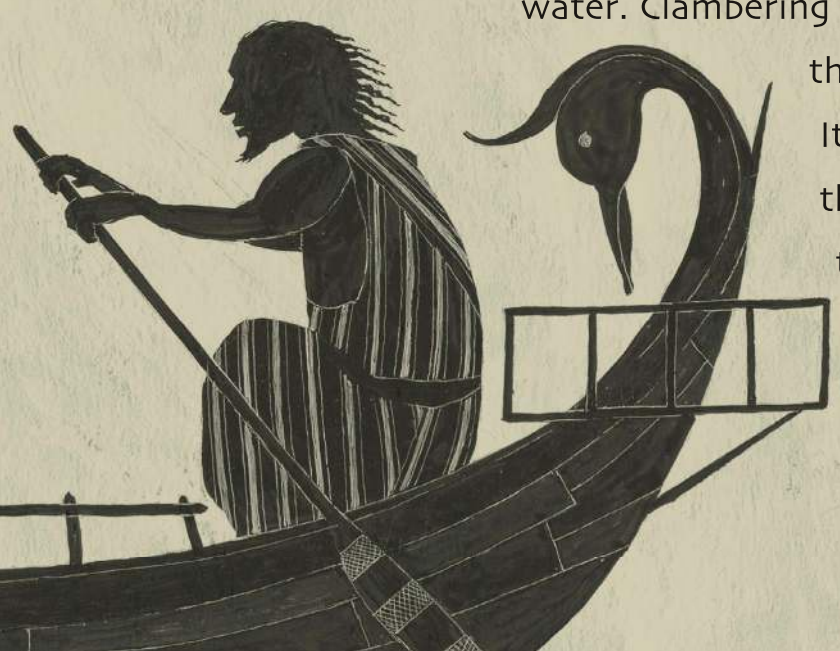
Still listening, the sailors fell asleep, one by one, beside the embers of their fires. Only Odysseus stayed awake, looking across the water. As the sky grew black and the stars came out, he stared at the glimmering light of the distant fires.

What was over there? Whose voices could they hear?

As soon as the sun rose, Odysseus was on his feet, giving orders to his men as they awoke.

"Eleven ships must stay here, to take on food and fresh water," he said. "But I'll take my own ship over to the mainland to see what sort of people live there."

He signaled to his crew, and they followed him into the water. Clambering on board their ship, they took up their oars. It wasn't worth raising the sail, so they rowed the short distance to the opposite shore.



Because they were rowing, they were facing backward. It was only when they turned the ship, ready to anchor, that they had their first close look at the place where they were going to land.

It was a strange, unsettling sight. A little way back from the shore, they saw the entrance to a vast cave, shadowed by laurel bushes. In front of the cave was a huge sheep pen, made of great blocks of rough-cut stone. Every block was taller than a man.

What kind of creature could build like that? The sailors glanced nervously at one another, and someone muttered that they ought to row straight back to the island. But Odysseus was curious. He bit his lip thoughtfully, making a plan.

"Most of you must stay and guard the ship," he said. "I'll take twelve men with me to explore the cave."

He chose twelve of the best and bravest, and ordered them to pack up some food. Then he filled a big wineskin with rich, strong wine and jumped into the water to wade ashore.

He and his twelve companions crept up the beach toward the towering sheep pen. Peering through a crack in the wall, they saw that it was full of lambs, but there were no adult sheep. Odysseus guessed that the main flock was up in the high pastures, with their shepherd, whoever he was.

Whatever he was.

That gave them a chance to explore the cave. Odysseus crept cautiously up to the entrance, beckoning his men to follow.



When their eyes adjusted to the darkness inside, they saw an amazing sight.

The cave was very high and deep, and it was full of gigantic baskets and bowls. The baskets were filled with cheeses the size of cart wheels, and the bowls were brimming with milk and whey.

"Look at all this food!" cried one of the sailors. "There are enough cheeses and lambs to last us all the way back to Ithaca."

"We don't need to come as looters," Odysseus said. "I've brought gifts for the owner of this cave. He'll give us gifts in return, out of politeness, and then we'll have all the meat and cheese we need. And we'll have made a new friend, not an enemy."

His men were still nervous, but he persuaded them to stay. Taking dry wood from a stack at the back of the cave, they built themselves a fire and settled down to wait for the owner to return.

They heard him before they saw him.

THUD. THUD. THUD. His footsteps shook the ground ahead of him. In three strides, he had reached the cave and he was driving his sheep inside. A huge bundle of firewood flew in after them — and then came the giant himself. His massive body blocked out the light as he stooped to walk through the entrance.





When Odysseus and his men saw that vast, dark shape, they rushed to the back of the cave to hide in the shadows. By the time they turned around to take another look, the monster was blocking the entrance of the cave with a great slab of stone.

They were trapped.

Shivering in their corner, they watched him sniff at the dying embers of their fire. His massive head turned left and right, peering around. Then he heaped more wood onto the fire.

The flames shot up, and they saw his face for the first time. It was broad and ugly, with a jutting nose and a thick, heavy jaw. In the center of his forehead was a single, hideous eye. His only one.

They were trapped in the cave of a Cyclops.

