hunting the sea around that promontory\(^\text{689}\) for dolphins, dogfish, or what bigger game thundering Amphitrite\(^\text{690}\) feeds in thousands. And no ship's company can claim to have passed her without loss and grief: she takes, from every ship, one man for every galleon.

The opposite point seems more a tongue of land you'd touch with a good bowshot, at the narrows. A great wild fig, a shaggy mass of leaves, grows on it, and Charybdis lurks below to swallow down the dark sea tide. Three times from dawn to dusk she spews it up and sucks it down again three times, a whirling maelstrom;\(^\text{700}\) if you come upon her then the god who makes earth tremble could not save you. No, hug the cliff of Scylla, take your ship through on a racing stroke. Better to mourn six men than lose them all, and the ship, too.\ldots

\[\text{689. promontory (prəm'ə-nərē): high area of land that juts out into a body of water.}\]

\[\text{690. Amphitrite (amf'i-trītē): goddess of the sea and wife of Poseidon.}\]

\[\text{700. maelstrom (mēl'strom): n.: large, violent whirlpool.}\]

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675. Harpies (här'pēz): monsters, half bird and half woman, who are greedy for victims.

680. whelp's (hwel'pə): n.; puppy's.

686. serried (ser'id) adj.; crowded together; densely packed.
Then you will coast Thrinakia, the island where Helios's cattle graze, fine herds, and flocks of goodly sheep. The herds and flocks are seven, with fifty beasts in each.

710 No lambs are dropped, or calves, and these fat cattle never die, . . .

Now give those kine a wide berth, keep your thoughts intent upon your course for home, and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.

715 But if you raid the beehives, I see destruction for ship and crew . . .

The Ilionians set off. Odysseus does not tell his men of Circe's last prophecy—that he will be the only survivor of their long journey.

Still speaking to Alcinous's court, Odysseus continues his tale.

"The crew being now silent before me, I addressed them, sore at heart:

720 "Dear friends, more than one man, or two, should know those things Circe foretold for us and shared with me, so let me tell her forecast: then we die with our eyes open, if we are going to die, or know what death we baffle if we can. Sirens weaving a haunting song over the sea we are to shun, she said, and their green shore all sweet with clover; yet she urged that I alone should listen to their song. Therefore you are to tie me up, tight as a splint, erect along the mast, lashed to the mast, and if I shout and beg to be untied, take more turns of the rope to muzzle me."

I rather dwell on this part of the forecast, while our good ship made time, bound outward down the wind for the strange island of Sirens.

735 Then all at once the wind fell, and a calm came over all the sea, as though some power lulled the swell.

The crew were on their feet briskly, to fuel the sail, and stow it; then, each in place, they poised the smooth oar blades and sent the white foam scudding by. I carved a massive cake of beeswax into bits and rolled them in my hands until they softened—no long task, for a burning heat came down from Helios, lord of high noon. Going forward I carried wax along the line, and laid it thick on their ears. They tied me up, then, plumbs amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast, and took themselves again to rowing. Soon, as we came smartly within bailing distance, the two Sirens, noting our fast ship off their point, made ready, and they sang . . .

The lovely voices in ardor appealing over the water made me crave to listen, and I tried to say "Untie me!" to the crew, jerking my brows; but they bent steady to the oars. Then Perimedes got to his feet, he and Eurylochus, and passed more line about, to hold me still. So all rowed on, until the Sirens dropped under the sea rino, and their singing dwindled away.

760 "My faithful company rested on their oars now, peeling off the wax that I had laid thick on their ears; then set me free.

But scarcely had that island faded in blue air when I saw smoke and white water, with sound of waves in tumult—a sound the men heard, and it terrified them. Oars flew from their hands; the blades went knocking wild alongside till the ship lost way, with no oar blades to drive her through the water.

Vocabulary

ardor (ār'dār)n. passion; enthusiasm.

tumult (təm'əlt)n. commotion; uproar; confusion.

760. plumb (plumb) n.: vertically.

755. Perimedes (per-i-mē'dēz).
Well, I walked up and down from bow to stern
trying to put heart into them, standing over
every oarsman, saying gently,

'Friends,

have we never been in danger before this?
More fearsome, is it now, than when the Cyclops
penetrated us in his cave? What power he had!

Did I not keep my nerve, and use my wits
to find a way out for us?

by hook or crook this peril too shall be
something that we remember.

Now I say

Heads up, lads!

We must obey the orders as I give them.
Get the oar shafts in your hands, and lie back
hard on your benches; hit these breaking seas.
Zeus help us pull away before we founder."

You at the tiller, listen, and take in
all that I say—the rudders are your duty;
keep her out of the combers* and the smoke;
steer for that headland; watch the drift, or we
fetch up in the smoker," and you drown us."

That was all, and it brought them round to action.

But as I sent them on toward Scylla, I
told them nothing, as they could do nothing.
They would have dropped their oars again, in panic,
to roll for cover under the decking. Circe's
bidding against arms had slipped my mind,

so I tied on my cuirass* and took up
two heavy spears, then made my way along
to the foredeck—thinking to see her first from there,
the monster of the gray rock, harboring
torchbear for my friends. I strained my eyes
upon that cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere
could I catch sight of her.

And all this time,
in travail,* sobbing, gaining on the current,
we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port
and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire
gorge* of the salt sea tide. By heaven! when she
vomited, the sea was like a cataract
seething over intense fire, when the mixture
suddenly leaves and rises.

The shot spurned
soared to the landside heights, and fell like rain.

But when she swallowed the sea water down
we saw the funnel of the maestral, heard
the rock bellowing all around, and dark
sand raged on the bottom far below.

My men all blanched* around the gloom, our eyes
were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear
of being devoured.

Then Scylla made her strike,
whisking six of my best men from the ship.

I happened to glance aft at ship and oarsmen
and caught sight of their arms and legs, dangling
high overhead. Voices came down to me
in anguish, calling my name for the last time.

A man surf-casting on a point of rock
for bass or mackerel, whipping his long rod
to drop the sinker and the bait far out,
will hook a fish and rip it from the surface
to dangle wriggling through the air;

so these
were borne aloft in spasms toward the cliff.

She ate them as they shrieked there, in her den,
in the dire grapple,* reaching still for me—

and deathly pity ran me through
at that sight—for the worst I ever suffered
quelling the passes of the strange sea.

We rowed on.

The Rocks were now behind; Charybdis, too,
and Scylla dropped astern.

Then we were coating
the noble island of the god, where grazed
those cattle with wide brows, and bounteous flocks
of Helios, lord of noon, who rides high heaven.

From the black ship, far still at sea, I heard
the lowing of the cattle winding home
and sheep bleating; and heard, too, in my heart
the words of blind Tëritës of Thebes
and Circe of Aeae; both forbade me
the island of the world's delight, the Sun... ."