

Odysseus on the Island of Calypso

by Mary E. Burt and Zenaide Ragozin

All the Greeks who had escaped from the destruction of Troy and had been spared the terrors of the sea returned to their homes. But the unfortunate Odysseus was delayed by the fair nymph Calypso on her island, where she made her home in a cool and beautiful grotto. There he wept and mourned, desiring to see his wife again and his native land. Each of the gods save one, Poseidon, god of the sea, wished to help him to find the way home. Odysseus had brought Poseidon's wrath upon himself through inflicting a terrible injury upon the favorite son of that deity, and for that reason the wrath of the god fell on him and he was wrecked. One day all the other gods had assembled in the hall of Zeus, on Mount Olympus, when Athena, the favorite daughter of Zeus and firm friend of Odysseus, knowing that her father in his heart was well-disposed toward the hero, began to plead for him in a way to excite greater pity still.

"O my father, thou great king among the gods," she said, "my heart is troubled on account of the wise Odysseus, who lingers on an island, far away from home, and suffers greatly; for a nymph lives on the island, the daughter of great Atlas, and with sweet words she strives to make Odysseus forget his native land. But he bewails his fate and is full of sorrow, his only wish being to have a glimpse of the smoke of his beloved country."

Zeus thereupon ordered Hermes to depart at once for the island and tell the nymph to send Odysseus to his home without delay. Hermes obeyed quickly. He bound his winged sandals to his feet, and, taking his golden wand in his hand, flew like a meteor over land and sea till he reached the island where the nymph Calypso made her abode. He found her within the grotto, singing sweetly while she wove a fine web on a golden loom.

All about the grotto there was a grove of cypress-trees in which birds of gay colors were sporting and springs of pure water bubbling, and the fragrance of strange flowers filled the air. When Hermes had gazed upon these wonders he entered the grotto. It was bright with a blazing fire on a spacious hearth, and fragrant with the odor of burning cedar and cypress.

Calypso saw him as he came in and knew him. She bade him sit down on a throne dazzling with jewels, and, placing a table before him laden with nectar and ambrosia, invited him to eat and drink. After he had finished his repast, Hermes told her that Zeus had sent him to her with the command that she should send Odysseus without delay to his native land. Having given this message, he disappeared, leaving Calypso in great grief.

Odysseus in the meantime sat by the shore mourning and gazing out upon the sea. Calypso found him there, sitting alone, weeping and longing for his home. She stood by him and said: "Odysseus, my unhappy friend, do not waste thy life any longer in sorrow. The end of thy grief has come. Arise and prepare to depart for thy home. Build thee a raft of the trunks of trees which thou shalt hew down. I will put bread and water and delicate wine on board; and I will clothe thee in comfortable garments, and send a favorable wind that thou mayest safely reach thy native land."

Thus spoke the lovely goddess, but Odysseus could hardly believe her, and said: "I fear, O goddess, that thou hast some other thought in thy mind, and that thou dost not wish to send me home when thou biddest me sail over this stormy and dangerous sea. I shall never go on to the raft against thy

wish, and thou must swear the great oath of the gods that no harm shall come to me."

The goddess smiled at these words, and, taking the hero by the hand, rejoined: "Thou art a wise man, and thy answer is well made. I will pledge thee a solemn oath, by the heavens and the earth, and the waters of the Styx, that I have no plan of evil against thee. And I advise thee to do as I have instructed thee, to be ready for any crisis."

Speaking thus, the goddess went into the grotto and Odysseus followed her. When he had come into the spacious hall, he sat down on his throne and the nymph brought him rich food and wine. Then she took a seat opposite him, and her attendants brought her ambrosia and nectar, which she would gladly have shared with Odysseus, that he, too, might become an immortal.

When the repast was over, Calypso narrated to him all the trials he would have to undergo before he could reach his native land. While she was relating these things the sun sank down, and darkness came upon the island, and all who had their abode in the grotto sought rest and slumber.

Source:

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