



Heads up, lads!

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

155 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 smother, and you drown us.’

154 founder: sink.

157 combers: breaking waves.

158–159 watch . . . smother: keep
the ship on course, or it will be
crushed in the rough water.

160 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
165 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
170 torment 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
175 and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire
gorge of the salt sea tide. By heaven! when she
vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron
seething over intense fire, when the mixture
suddenly heaves and rises.

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

But when she swallowed the sea water down
we saw the funnel of the maelstrom, heard
the rock bellowing all around, and dark
sand raged on the bottom far below.
185 My men all blanched against 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
190 high overhead. Voices came down to me
in anguish, calling my name for the last time.

A man surfcasting on a point of rock
for bass or mackerel, whipping his long rod

WORDS travail (trə-väl') *n.* painful effort
TO dire (dīr) *adj.* dreadful; terrible
KNOW anguish (äng'gwīsh) *n.* great physical or mental suffering; agony

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161–168 Odysseus doesn't tell his men that several of them will be killed. Moreover, forgetting Circe's warning against trying to fight Scylla, he takes up his body armor (cuirass) and spears. What do you think will happen?

176 gorge: throat; gullet.

179 shot spume: flying foam.

185 blanched: became pale.

189 aft: toward the rear of the ship.

195 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.

198 borne aloft in spasms: lifted high while struggling violently.

200 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—far the worst I ever suffered,
questing the passes of the strange sea.

200 grapple: grasp.

We rowed on.

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

ODYSSEUS TRIES TO PERSUADE his men to bypass Thrinacia, the island of the sun god Helios, but they insist on landing. Driven by hunger, they ignore Odysseus' warning not to feast on Helios' cattle. This disobedience angers the sun god, who threatens to stop shining if payment is not made for the loss of his cattle. To appease Helios, Zeus sends down a thunderbolt to sink Odysseus' ship. Odysseus alone survives. He eventually drifts to Ogygia, the home of Calypso, who keeps him on her island for seven years. With this episode, Odysseus ends the telling of his tale to King Alcinous.

WORDS
TO
KNOW

questing (kwēs'tīng) *adj.* journeying over; exploring quest *v.*