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| “I am Laertes’ son, Odysseus. |  |
| Men hold me |  |
| formidable for guile in peace and war: |
| this fame has gone abroad to the sky’s rim. |  |
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| My home is on the peaked seamark of Ithaca(1) |  |
| under Mount Neion’s windblown robe of leaves, |
| in sight of other islands—Dulichium, |  |
| Same, wooded Zacynthus—Ithaca |  |
| being most lofty in that coastal sea, |  |
| and northwest, while the rest lie east and south. |  |
| A rocky isle, but good for a boy’s training; |  |
| I shall not see on earth a place more dear, |  |

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| though I have been detained long by Calypso, |  |
| loveliest among goddesses, who held me |  |
| in her smooth caves, to be her heart’s delight, |  |
| as Circe of Aeaea, the enchantress, |  |
| desired me, and detained me in her hall. |  |
| But in my heart I never gave consent. |  |
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| Where shall a man find sweetness to surpass |  |
| his own home and his parents? In far lands |  |
| he shall not, though he find a house of gold. |  |

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| What of my sailing, then, from Troy? |  |
| What of those years |  |
| of rough adventure, weathered under Zeus? |  |
| The wind that carried west from Ilium (2) |  |
| brought me to Ismarus, on the far shore, |  |
| a strongpoint on the coast of the Cicones. |  |
| I stormed that place and killed the men who fought. |  |
| Plunder we took, and we enslaved the women, |  |
| to make division, equal shares to all— |  |
| but on the spot I told them: ‘Back, and quickly! |  |
| Out to sea again!’ My men were mutinous, |  |
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| My men were mutinous, |  |
| fools, on stores of wine. Sheep after sheep |  |
| they butchered by the surf, and shambling cattle, |  |
| feasting—while fugitives went inland, running |  |
| to call to arms the main force of Cicones. |  |
| This was an army, trained to fight on horseback |  |
| or, where the ground required, on foot. They came |
| with dawn over that terrain like the leaves |  |

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| and blades of spring. So doom appeared to us, |  |
| dark word of Zeus for us, our evil days. |  |
| My men stood up and made a fight of it— |  |
| backed on the ships, with lances kept in play, |  |
| from bright morning through the blaze of noon |  |
| holding our beach, although so far outnumbered; |
| but when the sun passed toward unyoking time, |  |
| then the Achaeans, one by one, gave way. |  |
| Six benches were left empty in every ship |  |
| that evening when we pulled away from death. |
| And this new grief we bore with us to sea: |  |
| our precious lives we had, but not our friends. |  |
| No ship made sail next day until some shipmate |  |
| had raised a cry, three times, for each poor ghost |
| unfleshed by the Cicones on that field. |

**T**

**he Lotus Eaters**

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| Now Zeus the lord of cloud roused in the north |  |
| a storm against the ships, and driving veils |
| of squall moved down like night on land and sea. |
| The bows went plunging at the gust; sails |  |
| cracked and lashed out strips in the big wind. |  |
| We saw death in that fury, dropped the yards, |  |
| unshipped the oars, and pulled for the nearest lee(1) |  |
| then two long days and nights we lay offshore |  |
| worn out and sick at heart, tasting our grief, |
| until a third Dawn came with ringlets shining. |  |
| Then we put up our masts, hauled sail, and rested, |  |
| letting the steersmen and the breeze take over. |  |

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| I might have made it safely home, that time, |  |
| but as I came round Malea the current |  |
| took me out to sea, and from the north |  |
| a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera. |  |
| Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea |  |
| before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth |  |
| we came to the coastline of the Lotus Eaters, |  |
| who live upon that flower. We landed there |  |
| to take on water. All ships’ companies |  |
| mustered alongside for the midday meal. |  |
| Then I sent out two picked men and a runner |  |
| to learn what race of men that land sustained. |  |

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| They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus Eaters, |  |
| who showed no will to do us harm, only |  |
| offering the sweet Lotus to our friends - |  |
| but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotus, |  |
| hey longed to stay forever, browsing on |  |
| that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland. |  |
| I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships, |  |
| tied them down under their rowing benches, |  |
| and called the rest: ‘All hands aboard; |  |
| come, clear the beach and no one taste |  |
| the Lotus, or you lose your hope of home.’ |  |
| Filing in to their places by the rowlocks |  |
| my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf, |
| and we moved out again on our seafaring. |  |

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| In the next land we found were Cyclopes |  |
| giants, louts, without a law to bless them. |
| In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth |  |
| in mystery to the immortal gods, they neither plow |
| nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain |
| wild wheat and barley -–grows untended, and |
| wine grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven’s rains. |

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| Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting, |  |
| no consultation or old tribal ways, |
| but each one dwells in his own mountain cave |  |
| dealing out rough justice to wife and child, |
| indifferent to what the others do. |
| As we rowed on, and nearer to the mainland, |  |
| at one end of the bay, we saw a cavern |
| yawning above the water, screened with laurel, |
| and many rams and goats about the place |
| inside a sheepfold— made from slabs of stone |
| earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged |
| towering oak trees. |
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| A prodigious man |  |
| slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks |
| to graze afield— remote from all companions, |
| knowing none but savage ways, a brute |  |
| so huge, he seemed no man at all of those |
| who eat good wheaten bread; but he seemed rather |
| a shaggy mountain reared in solitude. |
| We beached there, and I told the crew |  |
| to sand by and keep watch over the ship: |
| as for myself I took my twelve best fighters |  |
| and went ahead. |

The Cyclops

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| I had a goatskin full |  |
| of that sweet liquor that Eu anthes’ son, |
| Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo’s (3 |
| holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness |  |
| we showed him there, and showed his wife and child, |  |
| he gave me seven shining golden talents |  |
| perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl, |
| twelve two- handled jars |  |
| of brand, pure and fiery. Not a slave |  |
| in Maron’s household knew this drink; only |
| he, his wife and the storeroom mistress knew; |
| and they would put one cupful— ruby- colored, |  |
| honey- smooth— in twenty more of water, |
| but still the sweet scent hovered like a fume |  |
| over the winebowl. No man turned away |
| when cups of this came round |
| A wineskin full |  |
| I brought along, and victuals (5) in a bag, |
| for in my bones I knew some towering brute |  |
| would be upon us soon— all outward power |
| a wild man, ignorant of civility. |

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| We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops |  |
| had gone afield, to pasture his fat sheep: |  |
| so we looked round at everything inside: |  |
| a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens |
| crowded with lambs and kids, (6) each in its class: |
| firstlings apart from middlings, and the ‘dewdrops,’ |
| or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both. |
| And vessels full of whey (7) were brimming there |  |
| My men came pressing round me, pleading: |  |
| Why not |
| ‘take these cheeses, get them stowed, come back, |
| throw open all the pens, and make a run for it? |
| We’ll drive the kids and lambs aboard. We say |  |
| put out again on good salt water!’ |
| Ah, |  |
| how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished |
| to see the cave man, what he had to offer— |
| no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends. |  |
| We lit a fire, burnt an offering, |  |
| and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence |
| around the embers, waiting. |
| When he came |  |
| he had a load of dry boughs(8) on his shoulder |
| to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it |
| with a great crash into that hollow cave, |
| and we all scattered fast to the far wall |  |
| Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered |  |
| the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams |
| and he goats- in the yard outside, and swung |
| high overhead a slab of solid rock |
| to close the cave. Two dozen four-whelled wagons |
| with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred |  |
| the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it |
| over the doorsill. |
| Next he took his seat |  |
| and milked his bleating ewes. A practiced job |
| he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling; |
| thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey, |
| sieved out the curds to drip in withy(9) baskets, |
| and poured the whey to stand in bowls |  |
| cooling until he drank it for his supper. |
| When all these chores were done, he poked the fire, |  |
| heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us. |

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| Strangers,’ he said, ‘who are you? And where from? |  |
| What brings you here by seaways— a fair traffic? |
| Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives |  |
| like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?’ |
| We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread |  |
| of that deep rumble and that mighty man. |
| But all the same I spoke up in reply: |  |

Cyclops 2

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| ‘We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course |  |
| by shifting gales on the Great South Sea; |
| homeward bound, but taking routes and ways |  |
| uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it. |
| We served under Agamemnon, son of Atreus |  |
| the whole world knows what city |
| he laid waste, what armies he destroyed. |
| It was our luck to come here; here we stand, |  |
| beholden for your help, or any gifts |
| you give- as custom is to honor strangers |
| We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care |  |
| for the gods’ courtesy; Zeus will avenge |
| the unoffending guest. |
| He answered this |  |
| from his brute chest, unmoved: |
| ‘You are a ninny, |  |
| or else you come from the other end of nowhere, |  |
| telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes |  |
| care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus |
| or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far. |
| I would not let you go for fear of Zeus— |  |
| you or your friends— unless I had a whim to. |
| Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship- |  |
| around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?’ |

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| He thought he’d find out, but I saw through this, |  |
| and answered with a ready lie: |
| ‘My ship? |  |
| Poseidon Lord, who sets the earth atremble, |  |
| broke it up on the rocks at your land’s end. |
| A wind from seaward served him, drove us there. |  |
| We are survivors, these good men and I.’ |

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| Neither reply nor pity came from him, |  |
| but in one stride he clutched at my companions |  |
| and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies |
| to beat their brains out, spattering the floor. |
| Then he dismembered them and made his meal, |  |
| gaping and crunching like a mountain lion— |
| everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones. |
| We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus, |  |
| powerless, looking on at this, appalled; |
| but Cyclops went on filling up his belly |  |
| with manflesh and great gulps of whey, |
| then lay down like a mast among his sheep. |
| My heart beat high now at the chance of action, |  |
| and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went |
| along his flank to stab him where the midriff |
| holds the liver. I had touched the spot |
| when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him |  |
| we perished there as well, for we could never |
| move his ponderous doorway slab aside. |
| So we were left to groan and wait for morning. |  |
| When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose |  |
| lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire |
| and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order, |
| putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then, |
| his chores being all dispatched, he caught another brace |  |
| of men to make his breakfast, |
| and whisked away his great door slab |  |
| to let his sheep go through— but he, behind, |
| reset the stone as one would cap a quiver |
| There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops |  |
| rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness. |  |
| And now I pondered how to hurt him worst |  |
| if but Athena granted what I prayed for. |
| Here are the means I thought would serve my turn: |

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| a club, or staff, lay there along the fold— |  |
| an olive tree, felled green and left to season |
| for Cyclops’s hand. And it was like a mast |
| a lugger of twenty oars, broad in the beam |  |
| a deep -sea-going craft—might carry: |
| so long, so big around, it seemed. Now I |
| chopped out a six-foot section of this pole |  |
| and set it down before my men, who scraped it; |
| and when they had it smooth, I hewed again |
| to make a stake with pointed end. I held this |
| in the fire’s heart and turned it, toughening it, |  |
| then hid it, well back in the cavern, under |
| one of the dung piles in profusion there. |
| Now came the time to toss for it: who ventured |  |
| - along with me? Whose hand could bear to thrust |
| and grind that spike in Cyclops’s eye, when mild |
| sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it, |
| the men I would have chosen won the toss— |
| four strong men, and I made five as captain |
|  |  |
| At evening came the shepherd with his flock, |  |
| his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time, |
| entered the cave: by some sheepherding whim— |
| or a god’s bidding— none were left outside. |
| He hefted his great boulder into place |  |
| and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes |
| in proper order, put the lambs to suck, |
| and swiftly ran through all his evening chores. |
| Then he caught two more men and feasted on them. |  |
| My moment was at hand, and I went forward |  |
| holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink, |
| looking up, saying |  |

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| ‘Cyclops, try some wine. |  |
| Here’s liquor to wash down your scraps of men. |
| Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried |
| under our planks. I meant it for an offering |  |
| if you would help us home. But you are mad, |
| unbearable, a bloody monster! After this, |
| will any other traveler come to see you? |
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| He seized and drained the bowl, and it went down |  |
| so fiery and smooth he called for more: |

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| ‘Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me, |  |
| how are you called? I’ll make a gift will please you. |
| Even Cyclopes know the wine grapes grow |  |
| out of grassland and loam in heaven’s rain, |
| but here’s a bit of nectar and ambrosia!’ |

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| Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down. |  |
| I saw the fuddle and flush come over him, |
| then I sang out in cordial tones: |  |
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| Cyclops, |  |
| you ask my honorable name? Remember |
| the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you. |
| My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends |  |
| ,everyone calls me Nohbdy.’ |
| And he said: |  |
| ‘Nohbdy’s my meat, then, after I eat his friends. |
| Others come first. There’s a noble gift, now.’ |
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| Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward, |  |
| his great head lolling to one side; and sleep |
| took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccupping, |  |
| he dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men. |
|  |  |
| Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike |  |
| deep in the embers, charring it again, |
| and cheered my men along with battle talk |  |
| to keep their courage up: no quitting now. |
| The pike of olive, green though it had been, |  |
| reddened and glowed as if about to catch. |
| I drew it from the coals and my four fellows |  |
| gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops |
| as more than natural force nerved them; straight |
| forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it |  |
| deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it |
| turning it as a shipwright turns a drill |  |
| in planking, having men below to swing |
| the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove. |
| So with our brand we bored that great eye socket |  |
| while blood ran out around the red-hot bar. |
| Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball |  |
| hissed broiling, and the roots popped. |

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| In a smithy |  |
| one sees a white-hot axhead or an adze |
| plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam- |
| the way they make soft iron hale and hard- |
| just so that eyeball hissed around the spike. |
| The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him, |  |
| and we fell back in fear. Clawing his face |
| he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye, |
| threw it away, and his wild hands went groping |
| then he set up a howl for Cyclopes |  |
| who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby. |
| Some heard him; and they came by divers ways |  |
| to clump around outside and call: |
| ‘What ails you, |  |
| Polyphemus? Why do you cry so sore |
| in the starry night? You will not let us sleep. |
| Sure no man’s driving off your flock? No man |  |
| has tricked you, ruined you?’ |
| Out of the cave |  |
| the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer: |
| Nohbdy, Nohbdy’s tricked me. Nohbdy’s ruined me! |
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| To this rough shout they made a sage reply |  |
| ‘Ah well, if nobody has played you foul |  |
| there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain |
| given by great Zeus. Let it be your father. |
| Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.’ |
| So saying, |  |
| they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter |
| to see how like a charm the name deceived them. |
| Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him, |  |
| fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone |
| and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide |
| for any silly beast or man who bolted— |
| hoping somehow I might be such a fool. |  |
| But I kept thinking how to win the game: |
| death sat there huge; how could we slip away? |
| I drew on all my wits, and ran through tactics, |  |
| reasoning as a man will for dear life, |
| until a trick came—and it pleased me well. |
| The Cyclops’s rams were handsome, fat, with heavy |  |
| fleeces, a dark violet. |
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| Three abreast |  |
| I tied them silently together, twining |
| cords of willow from the ogre’s bed; |
| then slung a man under each middle one |  |
| to ride there safely, shielded left and right. |
| So three sheep could convey each man. I took |  |
| the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock, |
| and hung myself under his kinky belly |
| pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep |
| in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip. |
| So, breathing hard, we waited until morning. |
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| When Dawn spread out her fingertips of rose |  |
| the rams began to stir, moving for pasture, |
| and peals of bleating echoed round the pens |
| where dams with udders full called for a milking. |
| Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound, |  |
| the master stroked each ram, then let it pass, |
| but my men riding on the pectoral fleece |  |
| the giant’s blind hands blundering never found. |
| Last of them all my ram, the leader, came, |  |
| weighted by wool and me with my meditations |
| The Cyclops patted him, and then he said: |
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| ‘Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest |  |
| in the night cave? You never linger so, |
| but graze before them all, and go afar |
| to crop sweet grass, and take your stately way |
| leading along the streams, until at evening |
| you run to be the first one in the fold. |
| Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving |  |
| over your Master’s eye? That carrion rogue |
| and his accurst companions burnt it out |
| when he had conquered all my wits with wine. |
| Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear. |  |
| Oh, had you brain and voice to tell |  |
| where he may be now, dodging all my fury! |
| Bashed by this hand and bashed on this rock wall |
| his brains would strew the floor, and I should have |
| rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me. |

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| He sent us into the open, then. Close by, |  |
| I dropped and rolled clear of the ram’s belly, |
| going this way and that to untie the men. |
| With many glances back, we rounded up |  |
| his fat, stiff-begged sheep to take aboard, |
| and drove them down to where the good ship lay. |
| We saw, as we came near, our fellows’ faces |  |
| shining; then we saw them turn to grief |
| tallying those who had not fled from death. |
| I hushed them, jerking head and eyebrows up, |  |
| and in a low voice told them: ‘Load this herd; |
| move fast, and put the ship’s head toward the breakers. |
| They all pitched in at loading, then embarked |  |
| and struck their oars into the sea. Far out, |
| as far offshore as shouted words would carry, |
| I sent a few back to the adversary: |
| ‘O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions? |  |
| Puny, am I, in a Caveman’s hands? |  |
| How do you like the beating that we gave you, |  |
| you damned cannibal? Eater of guests |
| under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you! |

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| The blind thing in his doubled fury broke |  |
| a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us. |
| Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank |  |
| whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giantwave |
| that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore. |
| I got the longest boathook out and stood |  |
| fending us off, with furious nods to all |
| to put their backs into a racing stroke— |
| row, row or perish. So the long oars bent |
| kicking the foam sternward, making head |
| until we drew away, and twice as far. |
| Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew |  |
| in low voices protesting: |
| ‘Godsake, Captain! |  |
| Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!’ |

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| ‘That tidal wave he made on the first throw |  |
| all but beached us.’ |
| ‘All but stove us in!’ |
| ‘Give him our bearing with your trumpeting, |  |
| he’ll get the range and lob a boulder.’ |
| ‘Aye |  |
| He’ll smash our timbers and our heads together!’ |
| I would not heed them in my glorying spirit, |  |
| but let my anger flare and yelled: |

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| 'Cyclops, |  |
| if ever mortal man inquire |
| how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him |  |
| Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye: |
| Laertes’ son, whose home’s on Ithaca!’ |

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| At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled: |  |
| ‘Now comes the weird upon me, spoken of old. |  |
| A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus, |  |
| a son of Eurymus great length of days |
| he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes, |
| and these things he foretold for time to come: |  |
| my great eye lost, and at Odysseus’ hands. |  |
| Always I had in mind some giant, armed |  |
| in giant force, would come against me here. |
| But this, but you—small, pitiful, and twiggy- |  |
| you put me down with wine, you blinded me. |
| Come back, Odysseus, and I’ll treat you well, |  |
| praying the god of earthquake to befriend you— |
| his son I am, for he by his avowal |  |
| fathered me, and, if he will, he may |
| heal me of this black wound—he and no other |
| of all the happy gods or mortal men.’ |
|  |  |
| Few words I shouted in reply to him: |  |

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| ‘If I could take your life I would and take |  |
| your time away, and hurl you down to hell! |
| The god of earthquake could not heal you there! |

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| At this he stretched his hands out in his darkness |  |
| toward the sky of stars, and prayed Poseidon: |

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| ‘O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands, |  |
| if I am thine indeed, and thou art father: |
| grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never |  |
| see his home: Laertes’ son, I mean, |
| who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny |  |
| intend that he shall see his roof again |
| among his family in his fatherland, |
| far be that day, and dark the years between. |  |
| Let him lose all companions, and return |
| under strange sail to bitter days at home.’ |

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| In these words he prayed, and the god heard him. |  |
| Now he laid hands upon a bigger stone |  |
| and wheeled around, titanic for the cast, |
| to let it fly in the black-prowed vessel’s track. |
| but it fell short, just aft the steering or, |  |
| and whelming seas rose giant above the stone |
| to bear us onward toward the island. |

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| There |  |
| as we ran in we saw the squadron waiting, |
| the trim ships drawn up side by side, and all |
| our troubled friends who waited, looking seaward. |  |
| We beached her, grinding keel in the soft sand, |  |
| and waded in, ourselves on the sandy beach. |
| Then we unloaded all the Cyclops’ flock |  |
| to make division, share and share alike |
| only my fighters voted that my ram, |  |
| the prize of all, should go to me. I slew him |
| by the seaside and burnt his long thighbones |
| to Zeus beyond the stormcloud, Cronus’ son, |
| who rules the world. But Zeus disdained my offering: |  |
| destruction for my ships he had in store |
| and death for those who sailed them, my companions. |
| Now all day long until the sun went down |  |
| we made our feast on mutton and sweet wine, |
| till after sunset in the gathering dark |
| we went to sleep above the wash of ripples. |

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| When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose |  |
| touched the world, I roused the men, gave orders |
| to man the ships, cast off the mooring lines; |
| and filing in to sit beside the rowlocks |
| oarsmen in line dipped oars in the gray sea. |
| So we moved out, sad in the vast offing, |  |
| having our precious lives, but not our friends |