Dawn came up from the couch of her reclining, leaving her lord Tithonos' brilliant side with fresh light in her arms for gods and men. And the master of heaven and high thunder, Zeus, went to his place among the gods assembled hearing Athena tell Odysseus' woe. For she, being vexed that he was still sojourning in the sea chambers of Kalypso, said:

"O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever, let no man holding scepter as a king think to be mild, or kind, or virtuous; let him be cruel, and practice evil ways; for those Odysseus ruled cannot remember the fatherhood and mercy of his reign. Meanwhile he lives and grieves upon that island in thralldom to the nymph; he cannot stir, cannot fare homeward, for no ship is left him, fitted with oars—no crewmen or companions to pull him on the broad back of the sea. And now murder is hatched on the high sea against his son, who sought news of his father in the holy lands of Pylos and Lakedaimon."
To this the summoner of cloud replied:

"My child, what odd complaints you let escape you. Have you not, you yourself, arranged this matter—as we all know—so that Odysseus will bring these men to book, on his return? And are you not the one to give Telemakhos a safe route for sailing? Let his enemies encounter no one and row home again."

He turned then to his favorite son and said:

"Hermès, you have much practice on our missions, so make it known to the softly-braided nymph that we, whose will is not subject to error, order Odysseus home; let him depart. But let him have no company—gods or men, only a raft that he must lash together, and after twenty days, worn out at sea, he shall make land upon the garden isle, Skhēria, of our kinsmen, the Phaiakians. Let these men take him to their hearts in honor and berth him in a ship, and send him home, with gifts of garments, gold, and bronze—so much he had not counted on from Troy could he have carried home his share of plunder. His destiny is to see his friends again under his own roof, in his father's country."

No words were lost on Hermès the Wayfinder, who bent to tie his beautiful sandals on, ambrosial, golden, that carry him over water or over endless land in a swish of the wind, and took the wand with which he charms asleep—or when he wills, awake—the eyes of men. So wand in hand he paced into the air, shot from Pieria down, down to sea level, and veered to skim the swell. A gull patrolling between the wave crests of the desolate sea will dip to catch a fish, and douse his wings; no higher above the whitecaps Hermès flew until the distant island lay ahead, then rising shoreward from the violet ocean he stepped up to the cave. Divine Kalypso, the mistress of the isle, was now at home. Upon her hearthstone a great fire blazing scented the farthest shores with cedar smoke and smoke of thyme, and singing high and low in her sweet voice, before her loom a-weaving, she passed her golden shuttle to and fro. A deep wood grew outside, with summer leaves of alder and black poplar, pungent cypress. Ornate birds here rested their stretched wings—horned owls, falcons, cormorants—long-tongued beachcombing birds, and followers of the sea. Around the smoothwalled cave a crooking vine held purple clusters under ply of green; and four springs, bubbling up near one another shallow and clear, took channels here and there through beds of violets and tender parsley. Even a god who found this place would gaze, and feel his heart beat with delight: so Hermès did; but when he had gazed his fill he entered the wide cave. Now face to face the magical Kalypso recognized him, as all immortal gods know one another on sight—though seeming strangers, far from home. But he saw nothing of the great Odysseus, who sat apart, as a thousand times before, and racked his own heart groaning, with eyes wet scanning the bare horizon of the sea. Kalypso, lovely nymph, seated her guest in a bright chair all shimmering, and asked:

"O Hermès, ever with your golden wand, what brings you to my island? Your awesome visits in the past were few. Now tell me what request you have in mind; for I desire to do it, if I can,
and if it is a proper thing to do.  
But wait a while, and let me serve my friend."

She drew a table of ambrosia near him  
and stirred a cup of ruby-colored nectar—  
food and drink for the luminous Wayfinder,  
who took both at his leisure, and replied:

"Goddess to god, you greet me, questioning me?  
Well, here is truth for you in courtesy.
Zeus made me come, and not my inclination;  
who cares to cross that tract of desolation,  
the bitter sea, all mortal towns behind  
where gods have beef and honors from mankind?  
But it is not to be thought of—and no use—  
for any god to elude the will of Zeus.

He notes your friend, most ill-starred by renown  
of all the peers who fought for Priam's town—  
nine years of war they had, before great Troy was down.  
Homing, they wronged the goddess with grey eyes,  
who made a black wind blow and the seas rise,  
in which his troops were lost, and all his gear,  
while easterlies and current washed him here.  
Now the command is: send him back in haste.  
His life may not in exile go to waste.  
His destiny, his homecoming, is at hand,  
when he shall see his dearest, and walk on his own land."

That goddess most divinely made  
shuddered before him, and her warm voice rose:

"Oh you vile gods, in jealousy supernal!  
You hate it when we choose to lie with men—immortal flesh by some dear mortal side.  
So radiant Dawn once took to bed Orion  
until you easeful gods grew peevish at it,  
and holy Artemis, Artemis throned in gold,  
hunted him down in Delos with her arrows.  
Then Démètèr of the tasseled tresses yielded  
to Iasion, mingling and making love

in a furrow three times plowed; but Zeus found out  
and killed him with a white-hot thunderbolt.  
So now you grudge me, too, my mortal friend.  
But it was I who saved him—saw him straddle  
his own keel board, the one man left afloat  
when Zeus rent wide his ship with chain lightning  
and overturned him in the winedark sea.  
Then all his troops were lost, his good companions,  
but wind and current washed him here to me.  
I fed him, loved him, sang that he should not die  
noe grow old, ever, in all the days to come.  
But now there's no eluding Zeus's will.  
If this thing be ordained by him, I say  
so be it, let the man strike out alone  
on the vast water. Surely I cannot 'send' him.  
I have no long-cared ships, no company  
to pull him on the broad back of the sea.  
My counsel he shall have, and nothing hidden,  
to help him homeward without harm."

To this the Wayfinder made answer briefly:

"Thus you shall send him, then. And show more grace  
in your obedience, or be chastised by Zeus."

The strong god glittering left her as he spoke,  
and now her ladyship, having given heed  
to Zeus's mandate, went to find Odysseus  
in his stone seat to seaward—tear on tear  
brimming his eyes. The sweet days of his life time  
were running out in anguish over his exile,  
for long ago the nymph had ceased to please.  
Though he fought shy of her and her desire,  
he lay with her each night, for she compelled him.  
But when day came he sat on the rocky shore  
and broke his own heart groaning, with eyes wet  
scanning the bare horizon of the sea.  
Now she stood near him in her beauty, saying:

"O forlorn man, be still.  
Here you need grieve no more; you need not feel
your life consumed here; I have pondered it,
and I shall help you go.
Come and cut down high timber for a raft
or flatboat; make her broad-beamed, and decked over,
so you can ride her on the misty sea.
Stores I shall put aboard for you—bread, water,
and ruby-colored wine, to stay your hunger—
give you a seacloak and a following wind
to help you homeward without harm—provided
the gods who rule wide heaven wish it so.
Stronger than I they are, in mind and power."

For all he had endured, Odysseus shuddered.
But when he spoke, his words went to the mark:

"After these years, a helping hand? O goddess,
what guile is hidden here?
A raft, you say, to cross the Western Ocean,
rough water, and unknown? Seaworthy ships
that glory in god's wind will never cross it.
I take no raft you grudge me out to sea.
Or yield me first a great oath, if I do,
to work no more enchantment to my
harm."

At this the beautiful nymph Kalypso smiled
and answered sweetly, laying her hand upon him:

"What a dog you are! And not for nothing learned,
having the wit to ask this thing of me!
My witness then be earth and sky
and dripping Styx that I swear by—
the gay gods cannot swear more seriously—
I have no further spells to work against you.
But what I shall devise, and what I tell you,
will be the same as if your need were mine.
Fairness is all I think of. There are hearts
made of cold iron—but my heart is kind."

Swiftly she turned and led him to her cave,
and they went in, the mortal and immortal.
He took the chair left empty now by Hermès,
took thought for the great-hearted hero's voyage.
A brazen axehead first she had to give him,
two-bladed, and agreeable to the palm
with a smooth-fitting haft of olive wood;
next a well-polished adze; and then she led him
to the island's tip where bigger timber grew—
besides the alder and poplar, tall pine trees,
long dead and seasoned, that would float him high.
Showing him in that place her stand of timber
the loveliest of nymphs took her way home.
Now the man fell to chopping; when he paused
twenty tall trees were down. He lopped the branches,
split the trunks, and trimmed his puncheons true.
Meanwhile Kalypso brought him an auger tool
with which he drilled through all his planks, then drove
stout pins to bolt them, fitted side by side.
A master shipwright, building a cargo vessel,
lays down a broad and shallow hull; just so
Odysseus shaped the bottom of his craft.
He made his decking fast to close-set ribs
before he closed the side with longer planking,
then cut a mast pole, and a proper yard,
and shaped a steering oar to hold her steady.
He drove long strands of willow in all the seams
to keep out waves, and ballasted with logs.
As for a sail, the lovely nymph Kalypso
brought him a cloth so he could make that, too.
Then he ran up his rigging—halyards, braces—
and hauled the boat on rollers to the water.

This was the fourth day, when he had all ready;
on the fifth day, she sent him out to sea.
But first she bathed him, gave him a scented cloak,
and put on board a skin of dusky wine
with water in a bigger skin, and stores—
boiled meats and other victuals—in a bag.
Then she conjured a warm land breeze to blowing—
joy for Odysseus when he shook out sail!
Now the great seaman, leaning on his oar,
steered all the night unsleeping, and his eyes
picked out the Pleiadés, the laggard Ploughman,
and the Great Bear, that some have called the Wain,
pivoting in the sky before Orion;
of all the night's pure figures, she alone
would never bathe or dip in the Ocean stream.
These stars the beautiful Kalypso bade him
hold on his left hand as he crossed the main.
Seventeen nights and days in the open water
he sailed, before a dark shoreline appeared;
Skheria then came slowly into view
like a rough shield of bull's hide on the sea.

But now the god of earthquake, storming home
over the mountains of Asia from the Sunburned land,
sighted him far away. The god grew sullen
and tossed his great head, muttering to himself:

"Here is a pretty cruise! While I was gone
the gods have changed their minds about Odysseus.
Look at him now, just offshore of that island
that frees him from the bondage of his exile!
Still I can give him a rough ride in, and will."

Brewing high thunderheads, he churned the deep
with both hands on his trident—called up wind
from every quarter, and sent a wall of rain
to blot out land and sea in torrential night.
Hurricane winds now struck from the South and East
shifting North West in a great spume of seas,
on which Odysseus' knees grew slack, his heart
sickened, and he said within himself:

"Rag of man that I am, is this the end of me?
I fear the goddess told it all too well—
predicting great adversity at sea
and far from home. Now all things bear her out:
the whole rondure of heaven hooded so
by Zeus in woeful cloud, and the sea raging
under such winds. I am going down, that's sure.
How lucky those Danaans were who perished
on Troy's wide seaboard, serving the Atreidai! Would God I, too, had died there—met my end that time the Trojans made so many casts at me when I stood by Akhilleus after death. I should have had a soldier's burial and praise from the Akhaians—not this choking waiting for me at sea, unmarked and lonely."

A great wave drove at him with toppling crest spinning him round, in one tremendous blow, and he went plunging overboard, the oar-haft wrenched from his grip. A gust that came on howling at the same instant broke his mast in two, hurling his yard and sail far out to leeward. Now the billow's long time kept him under, helpless to surface, held by tons of water, tangled, too, by the seacloak of Kalypso. Long, long, until he came up spouting brine, with streamlets gushing from his head and beard; but still bethought him, half-drowned as he was, to flounder for the boat and get a handhold into the bilge—to crouch there, foiling death. Across the foaming water, to and fro, the boat careered like a ball of tumbleweed blown on the autumn plains, but intact still. So the winds drove this wreck over the deep, East Wind and North Wind, then South Wind and West, coursing each in turn to the brutal harry.

But Ino saw him—Ino, Kadmos' daughter, slim-legged, lovely, once an earthling girl, now in the seas a nereid, Leukothea. Touched by Odysseus' painful buffeting she broke the surface, like a diving bird, to rest upon the tossing raft and say:

"O forlorn man, I wonder why the Earthshaker, Lord Poseidon, holds this fearful grudge—father of all your woes. He will not drown you, though, despite his rage.

You seem clear-headed still; do what I tell you. Shed that cloak, let the gale take your craft, and swim for it—swim hard to get ashore upon Skheria, yonder, where it is fated that you find a shelter. Here: make my veil your sash; it is not mortal; you cannot, now, be drowned or suffer harm. Only, the instant you lay hold of earth, discard it, cast it far, far out from shore in the windeark sea again, and turn away."

After she had bestowed her veil, the nereid dove like a gull to windward where a dark waveside closed over her whiteness. But in perplexity Odysseus said to himself, his great heart laboring:

"'O damned confusion! Can this be a ruse to trick me from the boat for some god's pleasure? No I'll not swim; with my own eyes I saw how far the land lies that she called my shelter. Better to do the wise thing, as I see it. While this poor planking holds, I stay aboard; I may ride out the pounding of the storm, or if she cracks up, take to the water then; I cannot think it through a better way."

But even while he pondered and decided, the god of earthquake heaved a wave against him high as a rooftree and of awful gloom. A gust of wind, hitting a pile of chaff, will scatter all the parched stuff far and wide; just so, when this gigantic billow struck the boat's big timbers flew apart. Odysseus clung to a single beam, like a jockey riding, meanwhile stripping Kalypso's cloak away; then he slung round his chest the veil of Ino and plunged headfirst into the sea. His hands went out to stroke, and he gave a swimmer's kick.
But the strong Earthshaker had him under his eye,
and nodded as he said:

"Go on, go on;
wander the high seas this way, take your blows,
before you join that race the gods have nurtured.
Nor will you grumble, even then, I think,
for want of trouble."

Whipping his glossy team
he rode off to his glorious home at Aigai.
But Zeus's daughter Athena countered him:
she checked the course of all the winds but one,
commanding them, "Be quiet and go to sleep."
Then sent a long swell running under a norther
to bear the prince Odysseus, back from danger,
to join the Phaiakians, people of the sea.

Two nights, two days, in the solid deep-sea swell
he drifted, many times awaiting death,
until with shining ringlets in the East
the dawn confirmed a third day, breaking clear
over a high and windless sea; and mounting
a rolling wave he caught a glimpse of land.
What a dear welcome thing life seems to children
whose father, in the extremity, recovers
after some weakening and malignant illness:
his pangs are gone, the gods have delivered him.
So dear and welcome to Odysseus
the sight of land, of woodland, on that morning.
It made him swim again, to get a foothold
on solid ground. But when he came in earshot
he heard the trampling roar of sea on rock,
where combers, rising shoreward, thudded down
on the sucking ebb—all sheeted with salt foam.
Here were no coves or harborage or shelter,
only steep headlands, rockfallen reefs and crags.
Odysseus' knees grew slack, his heart faint,
a heaviness came over him, and he said:

"A cruel turn, this. Never had I thought
to see this land, but Zeus has let me see it—and
let me, too, traverse the Western Ocean—only to find no exit from these breakers.
Here are sharp rocks off shore, and the sea a smootherushing around them; rock face rising sheer
from deep water; nowhere could I stand up
on my two feet and fight free of the welter.
No matter how I try it, the surf may throw me
against the cliffside; no good fighting there.
If I swim down the coast, outside the breakers,
I may find shelving shore and quiet water—but what if another gale comes on to blow?
Then I go cursing out to sea once more.
Or then again, some shark of Amphi trité's
may hunt me, sent by the genius of the deep.
I know how he who makes earth tremble hates me."

During this meditation a heavy surge
was taking him, in fact, straight on the rocks.
He had been flayed there, and his bones broken,
had not grey-eyed Athena instructed him:
he gripped a rock-ledge with both hands in passing
and held on, groaning, as the surge went by,
to keep clear of its breaking. Then the backwash
hit him, ripping him under and far out.
An octopus, when you drag one from his chamber,
comes up with suckers full of tiny stones:
Odysseus left the skin of his great hands
torn on that rock-ledge as the wave submerged him.
And now at last Odysseus would have perished,
battered inhumanly, but he had the gift
of self-possession from grey-eyed Athena.
So, when the backwash spewed him up again,
he swam out and along, and scanned the coast
for some landslip that made a breakwater.
Lo and behold, the mouth of a calm river
at length came into view, with level shores
unbroken, free from rock, shielded from wind—
by far the best place he had found.
But as he felt the current flowing seaward
he prayed in his heart:

"O hear me, lord of the stream:
how sorely I depend upon your mercy!
derelict as I am by the sea's anger.
Is he not sacred, even to the gods,
the wandering man who comes, as I have come,
in weariness before your knees, your waters?
Here is your servant; lord, have mercy on me."

Now even as he prayed the tide at ebb
had turned, and the river god made quiet water,
drawing him in to safety in the shallows.
His knees buckled, his arms gave way beneath him,
all vital force now conquered by the sea.
Swollen from head to foot he was, and seawater gushed from his mouth and nostrils. There he lay, scarce drawing breath, unstirring, deathly spent.

In time, as air came back into his lungs and warmth around his heart, he loosed the veil, letting it drift away on the estuary downstream to where a white wave took it under and Ino's hands received it. Then the man crawled to the river bank among the reeds where, face down, he could kiss the soil of earth, in his exhaustion murmuring to himself:

"What more can this hulk suffer? What comes now?
In vigil through the night here by the river
how can I not succumb, being weak and sick, to the night's damp and hoarfrost of the morning?
The air comes cold from rivers before dawn.
But if I climb the slope and fall asleep in the dark forest's undergrowth—supposing cold and fatigue will go, and sweet sleep come—I fear I make the wild beasts easy prey."

But this seemed best to him, as he thought it over.
He made his way to a grove above the water on open ground, and crept under twin bushes

grown from the same spot—olive and wild olive—a thicket proof against the stinging wind or Sun's blaze, fine soever the needling sunlight; nor could a downpour wet it through, so dense those plants were interwoven. Here Odysseus tunnelled, and raked together with his hands a wide bed—for a fall of leaves was there, enough to save two men or maybe three on a winter night, a night of bitter cold. Odysseus' heart laughed when he saw his leaf-bed, and down he lay, heaping more leaves above him.

A man in a distant field, no hearthfires near, will hide a fresh brand in his bed of embers to keep a spark alive for the next day; so in the leaves Odysseus hid himself, while over him Athena showered sleep that his distress should end, and soon, soon. In quiet sleep she sealed his cherished eyes.