

## **Odysseus and the Sirens**

### **(A Tale from "The Odyssey" by Homer)**

Odysseus, the great Greek king of Ithaca, was sailing home from the Trojan War. The voyage took ten years to complete. Throughout their odyssey, he and his men had many adventures, encountering great obstacles and fantastic creatures. On one such adventure, after leaving Hades, Odysseus sailed past the island of the Sirens.

The Sirens were young, beautiful winged creatures who were also devious and deadly. They lured sailors with their enchanting music and eerie voices to shipwreck on their island's rocky coast. Odysseus had been warned about the Sirens by the enchantress Circe. The sorceress knew that Odysseus must sail past the island on his return to Ithaca. She told him to fill every man's ears with beeswax, so the haunting music could not be heard. Circe said that if any man heard the seductive Sirens' song, he would surely jump off the ship toward the music and be killed by the winged monsters.

Odysseus and his men had been sailing for many days without sight of land. Suddenly, strange and disquieting sounds surrounded the men aboard ship. The sounds were like nothing they had ever heard. They tugged at the men's hearts and made them weep with joy. Odysseus realized at once that they were approaching the island of the Sirens. He quickly instructed his men to block their ears with the beeswax. Odysseus, however, wanted to hear the Sirens' song for himself. He ordered his sailors to tie him to the ship's mast so he would not throw himself into the sea as he listened to their song.

The men did as they were instructed. With their ears stuffed with beeswax, they heard only silence as the ship passed slowly near the island's shore. But not Odysseus. He heard the Sirens song, and the sounds were so haunting and seductive that he began to struggle madly against his ropes. He commanded his men as their king to release him from his bonds, so he could swim toward the source of those beautiful sounds.

Fortunately, the ropes held tight; Odysseus could not break free. And because their ears were stuffed with wax, the men heard neither the Sirens' song nor their leader's screams for release. Finally, the ship sailed past the dangerous island, and the song of the Sirens faded to silence. The sailors removed the beeswax and untied Odysseus, who was exhausted but unharmed.