

19/3-4

# from the book of short stories

## THE ENCHANTED GLADE

(Dedicated to Robert Graves)

Over Aeaea, the Adriatic island of dying, where the Goddess of Death sang while she spun her wool, a perfectly clear and sunny day reigned. Odysseus, full of some spring-time strength gazed out at the broad expanses, completely at peace and calm, like a blue mirror. It was still early morning and the sun had just come up, it warmed the hero's back wrapped in a transparent cape. Two lions crawled over to his legs and began to romp, just like cubs. Plunging his hands into the royal manes, Odysseus felt his lungs fill with the fresh air coming off the water. For a moment he thought he'd seen a striped sail in the distance, but a second later, when it had just sailed along the edge of the horizon, the vision disappeared and the majestic sea swallowed the image. Poseidon's trident slept somewhere on the ocean floor. The hero felt lonely and sad. Then from the enchanted glade surrounding Circe's palace flew a golden falcon and settled down on a little column, right next to the Ithacan. From the little wings sprouted slender hands, from the claws long legs, and then the entire bird turned into the enchantress.

— You are yearning for your home, said Circe, hugging him.

Odysseus watched her in silence. When she had wrapped herself all around him his melancholy changed to desire.

— I was yearning for you, he said carressing her breasts.

— No, you'd like to go home, replied the enchantress wiggling away. He tried to stop her, but Circe got away and rushed down a golden path which climbed twistingly towards the palace. When she disappeared Odysseus batted away the lion which was romping as before, and then went after the mistress of Aeaea. He entered the wide courtyard and came across Circe deep in thought and out of countenance.

— I swear by Zeus ... says ...

— Don't lie.

But the hero had already grabbed her with his arms and was whispering unintelligibly some passionate verses to her. Through an opening blew a cold wind, Circe's body warmed and enticed at the same time.

— Let's go to the bower, the Ithacan insisted.

— You're lying.

— My little falcon, my dove ... mumbled Odysseus, without listening. And she was already half-naked, the hero's body pressed her on the marble floor. She caressed him between the legs. Now he mumbled excitedly, breathing deeply. He was her Odysseus and she didn't want to lose him. He'd be immortal if he stayed with her ... But the traveling wind blew off the sea. She pushed him away filled with doubt.

— You want to leave!

The hero looked at her panting the whole time.

— Prove that you aren't lying.

Furious, he jumped to his feet and rushed out. The sun was already high, and in a thick glade, spring shadows were flitting. There, on a hidden meadow an enchanted bull was mounting Circe's doe. The passionate roar mixed with the hero's excitement. Just as he sat on the soft grass, the enchantress appeared from somewhere and embraced Odysseus. She caressed him gently as if bidding farewell.

— Don't be angered, Ithacan. Doubt is tearing me apart ...

The hero looked at her surprised. A breeze shook the branches and purple petals floated through the air. The enchantress caught one and then went on:

— As you take me, I'll change my form. Each time I feel you're lying, I'll become someone else. Only will truth keep it's real form ...

He embraced her. Freed of clothes they rolled onto the grassy carpet. From the trees above they were watched by birds that resembled colored Corinthian kerchiefs.

Just as he entered her, he noticed that Circe's flame-colored hair had darkened, and the enchantress's slender body had become firm and muscular. Under him was lying Antiphata, the daughter of the Laestrygonian. His hands touched firm breasts, while his passion rose all the more. He flipped over onto his back and tried to move her onto him. When she had straddled him, her breasts shrank, and the hero entered Epeia, the wife of the Giresian fisherman. Her round face was framed with black curls. Her thick lips moved from pleasure. He felt as if he were floating on the agitated sea of Sicily, and then once more he dove down into the lap of the peaceful Ithacan bay. At that the shuddering of the body on top of him became stronger and stronger. Powerful hips squeezed him, taking him right to the threshold of the peak. There, where Epeia had been sitting, now rode Cleitia, the one-breasted Amazon. Odysseus rolled her over onto her hip breathing deeply. While the entire glade rang with passion, the birds flew from the treetops, leaving behind them fluttering branches. Then they

disappeared somewhere into the expanse of the crystal clear sky. Whenever a new image appeared before the hero, he started from the beginning. But finally, in the embrace of the blonde Spartacan Elpenora, he felt himself climbing towards ultimate liberation. While he flew towards empty space, a moment before satisfaction, he touched braided hair, and then all of Penelopes's body, warm like his native Ithaca. He climaxed dreaming of his home. Then, free of everything, he turned over on his side and fell into a half-sleep.

Dusk found him in the same place. A wolf was howling somewhere in the bushes. From a near-by cypress fluttered Circe's falcon, glittering in the dark with its golden wings. In the palace servants were already lighting torches.

Odysseus stood up and sang a sorrowful melody, the hymn of the Jonian pirates. The echo followed him to the elevated terrace, where a view stretched out over the sea. In the harbor below the elevation a group was preparing a boat for wandering.

— We've come to say good-by, whispered someone from the side. Before him stood Circe, surrounded by Agreus, Latin and Telegonos. He kissed his sons. Then he embraced the enchantress and turned towards the palace.

The Goddess of Death wound her spindle and sang quietly in the forest glade. Night swallowed Aeaëa. Thus Odysseus scorned immortality.

#### THE DEXIAN CLIFF

Odysseus had but a few more days of life to live as he rested on the sharp cliffs of the Dexian Gulf sipping wine. The old man watched the sea while muttering something grouchy under his breath. Suddenly from the direction of Leucas, a north breeze came up and lightly rippled sleeping Poseidon's skin, smooth as a taut membrane. The sea burbled at the foot of the ravine and the god began to call on his old friend, awakening him from a troubled sleep.

— Odysseus, hey, Odysseus.

The master of Ithaca started, hearing voices which repeated each time a restless little wave splashed the rocks of the cliff, and then, annoyed, he waved his hand.

— Shut up and leave me alone.

— Wake up, old man, yoo hoo . . . — called Poseidon again.

The hero's head jerked, and he looked at the waves through squinting eyes.

— I told you to shut up, I've had enough of you for a hundred years of life in the underworld.

— You drink too much, that's why you're so nasty.

Angry Odysseus, now completely awake, took another swig from his wine-skin just for spite.

— You'd better go back to your horses and those fish of yours — he answered, licking his lips with greed, and... and... took another swig.

— Forget that and tell me how could it be that you have come so early to Dexia.

The old man stared into the sea sullenly, squinting. Then he grinned:

— I didn't want to be bothered by creatures similar to you.

— You mean Penelope?

— Whose business is it who I mean!

Poseidon calmed down for a moment, and the light breeze also subsided. The sea was once again as smooth as Nemean oil. Odysseus had rolled over onto his back and was snoring adroitly.

— She really is unbearable — breathed the sea in a mood to talk.

The Ithacan jumped and took a long pull on the wineskin.

— What are you jabbering about, who do you mean?

— Why Penelope; I'd certainly run away if an old hag like that were chasing me through the bed chambers.

— No one chases the master of Ithaca.

— Likely as not — whinnied Centaurion — you were always so famous for your ability to deal with things.

A smile flitted across the old man's face once more. He looked down at his tangled beard, pleased.

— You're thinking of that Trojan horse. There, that was a monument to your stupidity. Horses are your favorites.

— Ah, no! I was thinking of your Penelope. You surely must have slipped something into her wine, she must be drowsing up there now, in bed, forgetting about passion.

— Idiot, I have a cure for my mare.

The old man jumped to his feet and grabbed his testicles with both hands, showing his hips out towards the sea. — There, that's what you get, that's what you get — he shouted. But soon he tired of that and reached for the wineskin. His head clouded and he topled over onto the ground, still grinning.

— Don't be too sudden, now, Odysseus — sighed the sea.

But the contented hero just waved a hand. His eyes were almost closed. Just at that moment, along the path which twisted down steeply along the foot of Naiad's cave a young slave girl appeared and made her way toward the vineyard stretching out like a carpet: right next to the spot where her master lay. Supple hands began to harvest July's grape clusters.

Eolos' north wind flitted across the surface. Poseidon was troubled.

— Look who's coming our way.

Odysseus opened one bloodshot eye and glanced lazily towards the vineyard.

— That's just Aglaia, my Ithacan slave girl — murmured the idle old man, and then squeezing the goatskin, he mumbled, humming:

— Little Aglaia gathers grapes for her master drowsing near...

— Do you have many slave girls?

— Many slave girls has Odysseus the great hero — answered the groggy Ithacan no longer opening his eyes.

— So you enjoy watching them as they mill around the palace.

— Whenever Odysseus desires a girl, into the bower he goes with her. Now the god laughed, foaming along the bottom of the cliff.

— Your lies are still very clever. My brother Hermes is inclined towards you yet.

The old man turned over onto his back tossing the fleece over his face.

— I told you, go back to your fish, they're smarter then you are.

But the devilish deity refused to give up.

— Listen, Odysseus, don't get angry, just tell me . . . what do you think, who can be the more passionate, you or I?

The hero took another swig from the wineskin.

— Stick that trident up your horse's ass, that's the greatest passion you'll ever know.

Now he mumbled, laughing and muttering in turn, under the warm sun which stung his rough skin.

— Hey, hey, old man — called persistent Poseidon once more.

The muttering turned to rage, the murmuring to a scream. The old man pulled himself up. He sat glaring at the blue kingdom of the sea god, shrewishly.

— Let's test each other's strength, Odysseus. You enjoy Aglaia, I'll lay one of my slaves, and the one who is more successful gets the laurel. I am much older; perhaps this is your chance?

— I don't have to compete with any horse creatures. Just look at all those shellfish in your smelly beard . . .

The wineskin made another headspinning arch towards the sun, and then slid to the ground, like a dead octopus. The old man's chest puffed under his tunic of roughspun cloth. He glared around him furiously as if he were looking for a crack in the white walls of Troy. Then he spied the slave girl among the vines.

— Aglaia — he howled and it seemed for awhile as if his voice echoed thunderously off the mountain Neriton.

— Aglaia — he repeated this time stamping his feet on the ground, commanding the girl to come with both hands. And she was already approaching him along the path, like Artemis' doe. Devilish Poseidon watching them stealthily, churned up the surface.

When she reached her master, he grabbed her without hesitation by the breasts and pulled her to him. Horrified, she tried to pull away, but Odysseus tripped and reeled over, he smashed down onto the ground in the end, while the laughter of the mocking sea rang in his ears. But he continued to look at the slave girl sullenly.

— Come here, show that old fool what your master can do — he said, pulling his tunic up over his waist. The girl knelt frightened by Odysseus. With trembling hands she found herself on the old man's legs.

— Come on, Odysseus, show the old fool — sounded the little wave as it rebounded from the Dexian cliff and repeated the question as it retreated.

— You horse shit, you'll be sorry — moaned the old man.

— What did you say, master — asked frightened Aglaia, but her white fingers soon found the grape-like testicles and began to carress them as if she were gathering Ithacan red clusters. The old man's head drummed, in front of his eyes danced the shadows of seductive Calypso. And in no time the heroic member began to awaken slowly, drinking up Odysseus' blook like wine from the wineskin. But just at that moment a refreshing north breeze came up.

— For something like that one needn't go to Delos. Dionysus would envy you your masculinity — whispered lazy Poseidon.

The wine flowed back into the wineskin, the snake-like member slithered sluggishly down between his thighs. Aglaia let out a sigh of relief. The hero grabbed the slave girl shrewishly.

— You three-horned horse's ass lover . . . Ah Aglaia, dear little Aglaia, show him, show him just once more.

Staring at her frenzied master, the girl gave in and began to kiss him and caress him in turn as if before her were Telemon the Leucasan who used to court her every evening in the solitary darkness of the little woods by the palace. And he hardened again, displaying all the majesty of what used to be his heroic flesh. The girl shuddered, prepared to martyr herself and straddled her master. The Ionian sun stung once more from the sky, wine poured out of the wineskin on the fleeced body.

— Look you fish-like fool, look — roared drunken Odysseus wildly thrashing around with the fragile slave girl. Suddenly his words stood in his throat and he stiffened all over. Aglaia jumped to her feet and leaped back. From the sea a great wave came up and splashed them with cold water right at the spot where they had been coupled a moment before. The snake retreated to its lair and frozen it gave up, head thrown out towards the land, completely paralyzed.

While she ran up the steep path, Aglaia watched her master in horror as he howled something incomprehensible and powerful, throwing rocks into the sea from the wall along the edge of the cliff. Then he grabbed his carved cane, which was lying on the spot he had been lying on until a moment before, and rushed down to the little beach in the sheltered part of the bay. He ran into the sea up to his knees and began to thrash the water wildly. While in battle, a few steps from him a shell floated up which then opened just enough to let a member-like wave slide in and pull it down under for a moment. Then the shell appeared again, out of it popped a pearl and took on Aphrodite's features. She made love to a strange figure with a beard full of sea shells. The earth shook as if innumerable herds of horses were galloping over it. The Dexian Bay rang with passionate neighing. From somewhere a furious crest of a wave appeared and pulled the coupled deities towards Odysseus. But the old man kept thrashing. The gilded club smashed down on angry Poseidon who howled.

— It's lucky you won't be traveling by sea any more.  
Then he twisted before the Ithacan, and completely defeated he floated to the hero's feet in the shape of a small innocent wave. At that, all was calm.

Odysseus walked slowly out of the sea and went up towards the Dexian cliff. Peaceful, yet still muttering, he grabbed the wineskin from the ground. He pulled at it long . . . then once more. He rolled onto the ground with his face twisted into a sly grin. Wine slid again into his belly. Then he slowly collapsed onto the fleece. While his tired eyes closed, the hero sang. His voice like a snore gurgled out from the depths of the heroic soul hiding his secret.

— Whenever Odysseus desires a girl, into the bower he goes with her. Soon the incoherent song turned into snoring. The sun caressed the beach of native Ithaca.