

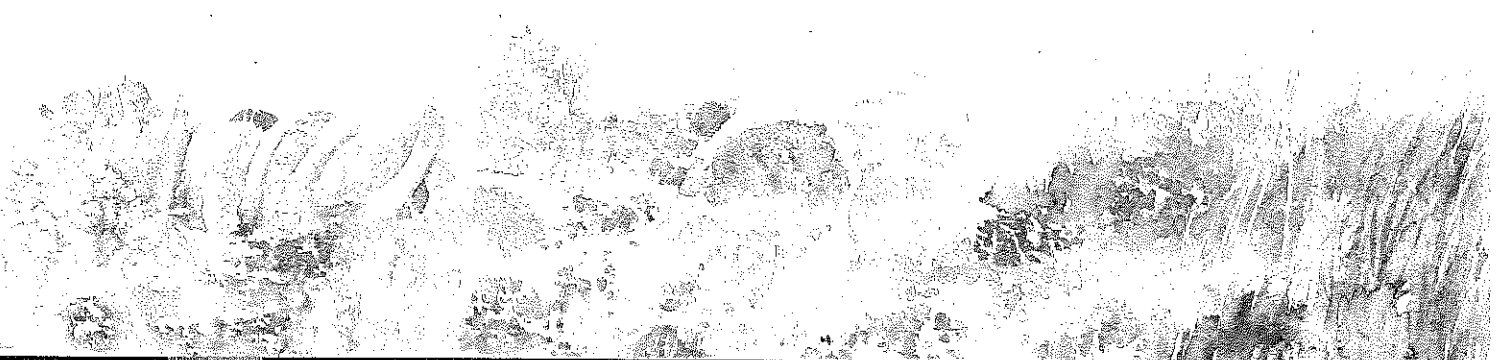
## SEA PERILS

**T**HE FIRST THING that Odysseus did, when he and his men returned to the enchantress's isle, was to see Elpenor burned and a mound piled over his ashes and his oar set up on the crest for a marker.

Then they feasted with Circe as they had done so often before, and told her all that had passed since last they had feasted there. And that night, finding them still set on sailing for home, she warned Odysseus of the perils still in store, telling him how to overcome each one: the peril of the Sirens and the peril of the Wandering Rocks, and the peril of Scylla and Charybdis. And Odysseus listened, and stored up in his heart all that she told him.

At dawn they parted for the last time. Circe wandered off into the forest, while Odysseus and his crew boarded the ship and headed out once more into unknown seas.

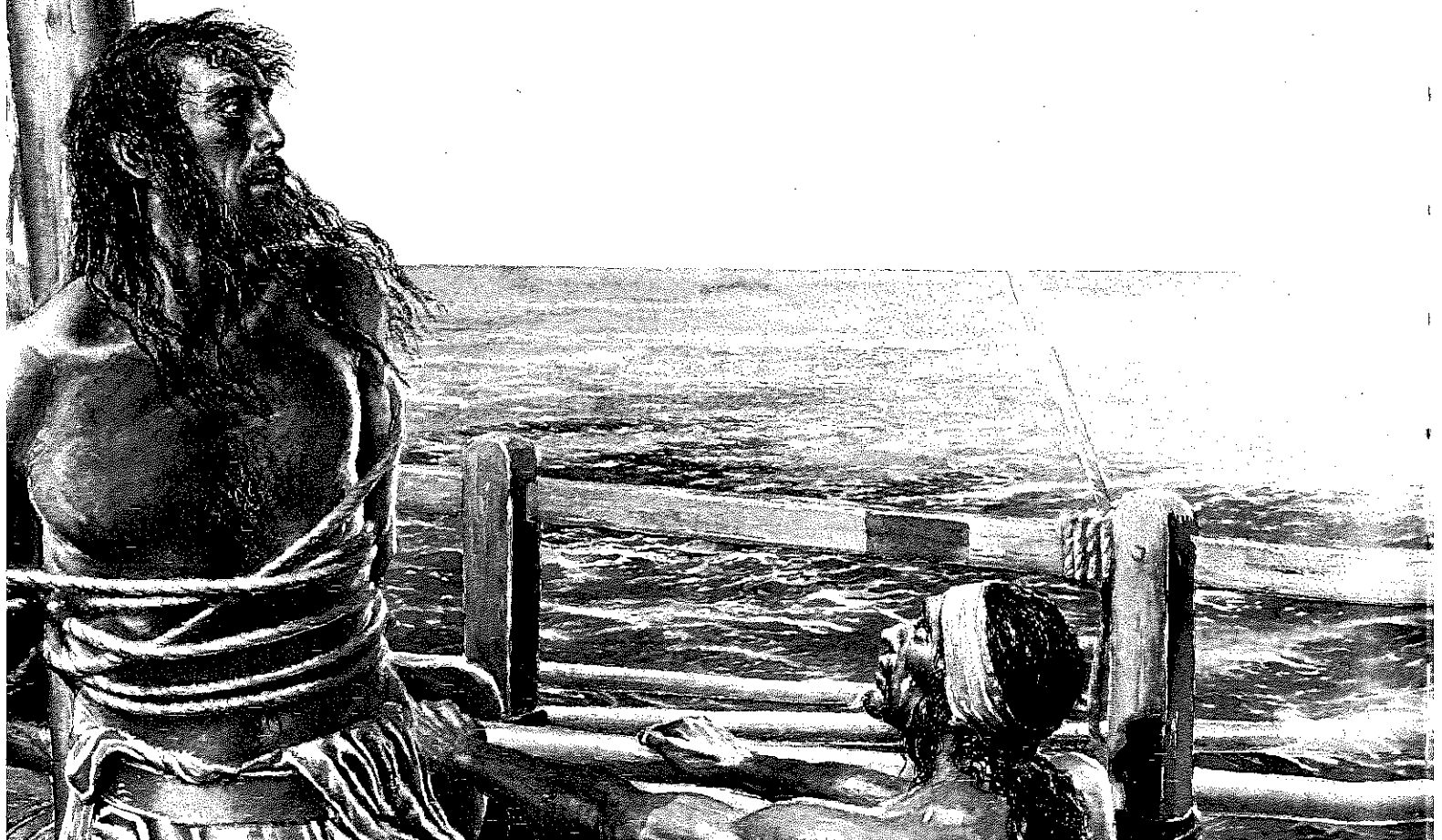
At first they were carried along by a soft wind that was a last gift from the enchantress. But after a while the wind fell away into a breathless calm. And at the heart of the calm, an island like a flowering meadow seemed to float upon the water. And from the island drifted the sound of women's voices singing: a sound so faint that it was only on the edge of hearing, but so sweet that it seemed to draw the hearers like a silken thread. But Odysseus knew, for Circe had warned him, that these were the Sirens, who sit among their flowers and sing to seamen whose ships pass by; but the flowers and the long grasses hide the bones of men who have answered their call and died of their sweet strange singing that carries the soul away.



He bade his men cease rowing—for they had taken to the oars when the wind failed—and he brought out a large lump of beeswax that Circe had given him, and cut it into small pieces, which he gave to his men, bidding them stop their ears that they might not hear the singing.

But he himself hungered to hear the Siren-song, so he ordered his men to bind him to the mast with strong ropes, and not to unbind him, however much he might struggle and cry out to them, until the island was well behind them. The men did as he bade them, then returned to their rowing and sent the ship onward through the water until they were close to the shore and could see the beautiful maidens, and Odysseus could hear their sweet singing across the gentle lapping of the wavelets on the sand.

“Come nearer, Odysseus,  
Flower of all Greek warriors,  
Bring your ship to rest, and listen to our song.  
Our voices are sweet as honey in the comb,  
And all things are known to us, all things that happened before Troy,  
All things that shall come to pass upon the fruitful earth. . . .”



And Odysseus' heart was filled with longing, so that he struggled desperately against his binding ropes, and shouted to his comrades to cut him free, though he knew that they could not hear. But the men only quickened their oar-beat, driving the ship more swiftly through the water, till the island dropped far astern and the voices of the Sirens died away.

Then they took the wax out of their ears and unbound their captain, who was weeping as though for the loss of all the world.

And the first of Circe's perils was safely passed.