

the Duchess. The reader may wish to speculate on the significance of the many changes from the original, which appear in his retelling. In Book XI Ovid describes how King Ceyx of Trachis makes a sea-voyage to Claros to consult an "oracle that helps mankind in trouble." His ship is destroyed in a storm, and he is drowned. The present excerpt picks up the narrative as Queen Alcyone, daughter of Aeolus, awaits the return of her husband.

Meanwhile the daughter of Aeolus,<sup>1</sup> in ignorance of this great disaster, counts off the nights; now hastens on to weave the robes which he is to put on, and now those which she herself will wear when he comes back, and pictures to herself the home-conning which can never be. She dutifully burns incense to all the gods; but most of all she worships at Juno's<sup>2</sup> shrine, and approaches the altars on behalf of the man who is no more, that her husband may be kept safe from harm, that he may return once more, loving no other woman more than her. And only this prayer of all her prayers could be granted her.

But the goddess could no longer endure these entreaties for the dead. And that she might free her altar from the touch of the hands of mourning, she said: "Iris, most faithful messenger of mine, go quickly to the drowsy house of Sleep, and bid him send to Alcyone a vision in dead Ceyx' form to tell her the truth about his fate." She spoke; and Iris put on her cloak of a thousand hues and, trailing across the sky in a rainbow curve, she sought the cloud-concealed palace of the king of sleep.

Near the land of the Cimmerians<sup>3</sup> there is a deep recess within a hollow mountain, the home and chamber of sluggish Sleep. Phoebus can never enter there with his rising, noontide, or setting rays. Clouds of vapour breathe forth from the earth, and dusky twilight shadows. There no wakened, crested cock with his loud crowing summons the dawn; no careful watch-dog breaks the deep silence with his voice, or goose, still shrewder than the dog. There is no sound of wild beast or of cattle, of branches rustling in the breeze, no clamorous tongues of men. There mute silence dwells. But from the bottom of the cave there flows the stream of Lethæ, whose waves, gently murmuring over the gravely bed, invite to slumber. Before the cavern's entrance abundant poppies bloom, and countless herbs, from whose juices dewy night distils sleep and spreads its influence over the darkened lands. There is no door in all the house, lest some turning hinge should creak; no guardian on the threshold. But in the cavern's central space there is a high couch of ebony, downy-soft, black-hued, spread with a dusky coverlet. There lies the god himself, his limbs relaxed in languorous repose. Around him on all sides lie empty dream-shapes, mimicking many forms, many as ears of grain in harvest-time, as leaves upon the trees, as sands cast on the shore.

When the maiden entered there and with her hands brushed aside the dream-shapes that blocked her way, the awesome house was lit up with the gleaming of her garments. Then the god, scarce lifting his eyelids heavy with the weight of sleep, sinking back repeatedly and knocking his breast with his nodding chin, at last shook himself free of himself and, resting on an elbow, asked her (for he recognized her) why she came. And she replied: "O Sleep, thou rest of all things, Sleep, mildest of the gods, balm of the soul, who puttest care to flight, soothe our bodies worn with hard ministries, and preparest them for toil again! Fashion a shape that shall seem true form, and bid it go in semblance of the king to Alcyone in Trachis, famed for Hercules. There let it show her the picture of the wreck. This Juno bids." When she had done her task Iris departed, for she could not longer endure the power of sleep, and when she felt the drowsiness stealing upon her frame she fled away and retraced her course along the arch over which she had lately passed.

But the father rouses Morpheus from the throng of his thousand sons, a cunning imitator of the human form. No other is more skilled than he in representing the gait, the features, and the speech of men; the clothing also and the accustomed words of each he represents. His office is with men alone: another takes the form of beast or bird or the long-bodied serpent. Him the gods call Icelos, but mortals name him Phobetor. A third is Phantasos, versed in different arts. He puts on deceptive shapes of earth, rocks, water, trees, all lifeless things. These shapes show themselves by night to kings and chieftains, the rest haunt the throng of common folk. These the old sleep-god passes by, and chooses out of all the brethren Morpheus alone to do the bidding of Iris, Thaumias' daughter. This done, once more in soft drowsiness he droops his head and settles it down upon his high couch.

But Morpheus flits away through the darkness on noiseless wings and quickly comes to the Haemonian city. There, putting off his wings, he takes the face and form of Ceyx, wan like the dead, and stands naked before the couch of the hapless wife. His beard is wet, and water drips heavily from his sodden hair. Then with streaming eyes he bends over her couch and says: "Do you recognize your Ceyx, O most wretched wife? or is my face changed in death? Look on me! You will know me then and find in place of husband your husband's shade. No help, Alcyone, have your prayers brought to me: I am dead. Cherish no longer your vain hope of me. For stormy Auster<sup>4</sup> caught my ship on the Aegean sea and, tossing her in his fierce blasts, wrecked her there. My lips, calling vainly upon your name, drank in the waves. And this tale no uncertain messenger brings to you, nor do you hear it in the words of

vague report; but I myself, wrecked as you see me, tell you of my fate. Get you up, then, and weep for me; put on your mourning garments and let me not go unlamented to the cheerless land of shades." These words spoke Morpheus, and that, too, in a voice she might well believe her husband's; he seemed also to weep real tears, and had the very gesture of her Ceyx' hands. Alcyone groaned, shed tears, and in sleep seeking his arms and to clasp his body, held only air in her embrace. She cried aloud: "Wait for me! Whither do you hasten? I will go with you." Aroused by her own voice and by the image of her husband, she started wide awake. And first she looked around to see if he was there whom but now she had seen. For her attendants, startled by her cries, had brought a lamp into her chamber. When she did not find him anywhere, she smote her cheeks, tore off her garment from her breast and beat her breasts themselves. She stayed not to loose her hair, but rent it, and to her nurse, who asked what was her cause of grief, she cried: "Alcyone is no more, no more; she has died together with her Ceyx. Away with consoling words! He's shipwrecked, dead! I saw him and I knew him, and I stretched out my hands to him as he vanished, eager to hold him back. It was but a shade, and yet it was my husband's true shade, clearly seen. He had not, to be sure, his wonted features, nor did his face light as it used to do. But wan and naked, with hair still dripping, oh, woe is me, I saw him. See there, on that very spot, he himself stood, piteous"—and she strove to see if any footprints still remained. "This, this it was which with foreboding mind I feared, and I begged you not to leave me and sail away. But surely I should have wished, since you were going to your death, that you had taken me as well. How well had it been for me to go with you; for in that case neither should I have spent any of my life apart from you, nor should we have been separated in our death. But now far from myself I have perished; far from myself also I am tossed about upon the waves, and without me the sea holds me. My heart would be more cruel to me than the sea itself if I should strive still to live on and struggle to survive my sorrow. But I shall neither struggle nor shall I leave you, my poor husband. Now at least I shall come to be your companion; and if not the entombed urn, at least the lettered stone shall join us; if not your bones with mine, still shall I touch you, name with name." Grief checked further speech, wailing took place of words, and groans drawn from her stricken heart.

Morning had come. She went forth from her house to the seashore and sadly sought that spot again from which she had watched him sail. And while she lingered there and while she was saying: "Here he loosed his cable, on this beach he kissed me as he was departing"; while she

was thus recalling the incidents and the place and gazing seaward, away out upon the streaming waters she saw something like a corpse. At first she was not sure what it was; but after the waves had washed it a little nearer, although it was still some distance off, yet it clearly was a corpse. She did not know whose it was; yet, because it was a shipwrecked man, she was moved by the omen and, as if she would weep for the unknown dead, she cried: "Alas for you, poor man, whoever you are, and alas for your wife, if wife you have!" Meanwhile the body had been driven nearer by the waves, and the more she regarded it the less and still less could she contain herself. Ah! and now it had come close to land, now she could see clearly what it was. It was her husband! "Tis he!" she shrieked and, tearing her cheeks, her hair, her garments all at once, she stretched out her trembling hands to Ceyx, crying: "Thus, O dearest husband, is it thus, poor soul, you come back to me?" Near by the water was a mole built which broke the first onslaught of the waters, and took the force of the rushing waves. Thither she ran and leaped into the sea; 'twas a wonder that she could; she flew and, fluttering through the yielding air on sudden wings, she skimmed the surface of the water, a wretched bird. And as she flew, her croaking mouth, with long slender beak, uttered sounds like one in grief and full of complaint. But when she reached the silent, lifeless body, she embraced the dear limbs with her new-found wings and strove vainly to kiss the cold lips with her rough bill. Whether Ceyx felt this, or whether he but seemed to lift his face by the motion of the waves, men were in doubt. But he did feel it. And at last, through the pity of the gods, both changed to birds. Though thus they suffered the same fate, still even thus their love remained, nor were their conjugal bonds loosened because of their feathered shape. Still do they mate and rear their young; and for seven peaceful days in the winter season Alcyone broods upon her nest floating upon the surface of the waters. At such a time the waves of the sea are still; for Aeolus guards his winds and forbids them to go abroad and for his grandsons' sake gives peace upon the sea.<sup>5</sup>

## NOTES

1. God of the winds.
2. Juno's attribute as goddess of wedlock is probably referred to.
3. The Cimmerii were said by Homer to have dwelt farthest west on the ocean, in a land enveloped in constant darkness.
4. The southwest wind.
5. These are the so-called "halcyon days," around the shortest day of the year. The couple were metamorphosed into kingfishers, which nest at this time.