

The Lotos-Eaters Summary

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"Courage!" he said, and pointed toward the land,

Odysseus tells his mariners to have courage. He tells his crew/men/sailors that the big waves would soon push their ship onto land.

In the afternoon they came unto a land

In which it seemed always afternoon.

In the afternoon, they reached a strange land. There, it always felt like it was afternoon — sleepy, dreamy, and very quiet. The air was heavy and slow, like a tired person breathing during a dream. The moon hung full in the sky even during the day. Small streams of water fell down the cliffs very slowly, almost like smoke.

A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,

Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;

And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,

Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.

It was a land filled with streams — some falling slowly like thin cloth, others rolling down and forming foamy sheets. The sailors also saw a shining river going out to the sea. In the distance, three tall snowy mountain peaks are glowing with sunset colors. Dark pine trees towered above the thick forest.

The beautiful red sunset seemed to stay longer than usual. Through the gaps in the mountains, they could see valleys, palm trees, yellow hills, and winding meadows covered with plants.

A land where all things always seem'd the same!

Everything in that land seemed calm and unchanging.

Then, from around their boat, strange people called the Lotos-eaters came. They had pale, gentle faces. They carried branches of the magical lotos plant, filled with flowers and fruits. They gave the sailors some lotos to eat.

*...but whoso did receive of them,
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave
Far far away did seem to mourn and rave
On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave;
And deep-asleep he seem'd, yet all awake,
And music in his ears his beating heart did make.*

Whoever ate the lotos fruit felt as if the sound of the sea became far away and sad. Even the voices of their friends sounded thin and ghostly to them. Although they were awake, they felt as if they were in a deep dream. Their hearts beat with a sweet music in their ears.

*They sat them down upon the yellow sand,
Between the sun and moon upon the shore;
And sweet it was to dream of Fatherland,
Of child, and wife, and slave; but evermore
Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.
Then some one said, "We will return no more";
And all at once they sang, "Our island home
Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam."*

The sailors sat down on the yellow beach, between the setting sun and the rising moon. They thought about their homes, families, and the lives they had left behind. It was sweet to dream of home. But the idea of going back to sea — rowing hard through the endless, empty ocean — felt very tiring. One of the sailors said, "We will return no more". Then all of them sang together, "Our island home is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam"—that their home was very far away across the waves, and they decided not to travel any further.