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Odysseus and the Bag of Winds

Emilie Poulsson

Far-famed Odysseus was on his way across the sea, to his home in rocky Ithaca, when he came to the island of - Aeolia. Many had been his wanderings, by sea and land, since he had left his own fair dwelling, and most welcome was the sight of this friendly shore. Here lived the great King of the winds — Aeolus — who could send gentle zephyrs murmuring over the sea, and could call back the wild tempests when they played too roughly with the waves. Well might Odysseus and his companions rejoice at coming to the wonderful floating island of King -Aeolus, for here they were kindly treated, after their toils and troubles, and when the time came for them to start once more on their way Aeolus stowed in their boat gifts and provisions of all kinds for their voyage.



One of these gifts was very strange in its appearance — a great bulging sack, as large as an ox ; in fact it was made of an ox's skin — tied tightly about with a cord of shining silver. This Aeolus placed carefully in the boat, and taking Odysseus aside: told him that in this skin he had bound up the blustering winds, so that no storms should disturb the calm of the ocean, and drive the little boat out of her course. If, however, Odysseus should at any time be in need of a powerful blast to carry the boat swiftly away from some dangerous coast, or from some enemy, he was to open the bag with great caution and, letting out only the wind he wished, to close it again quickly, and bind it fast with the silver cord. When Aeolus had bidden farewell to Odysseus and his crew, he sent a gentle west wind after him, to bear them prosperously en their way.

Day after day they sailed peacefully over the gleaming ocean, the soft gale bearing them along, while Odysseus managed the sail, and kept watch night and day. On the tenth day Odysseus was lying asleep in the boat, resting from his labours, when the sailors began talking among themselves of the mysterious looking bag. "It must be full of treasures," said they, "and why should not we have our share of them?"



Speaking thus foolishly, they finally decided to open the bag. They loosed the silver cord, but they need to do no more, for the boisterous winds at once burst forth, and in a twinkling had lashed the quiet waves into foam, and whirled the boat far out of her course. The helmsman could do nothing, since the boat no longer obeyed the rudder, and even Odysseus, awakened by the commotion, was powerless against these roaring, whistling winds that tossed the little boat hither and thither at their will.



At last Odysseus and his men, driven far from their native shores, saw land once again. The foolish sailors were glad enough to pull the boat up on the beach, and in safety once more to build their fire and prepare a comfortable meal.

Many days and years went by before Odysseus at last reached his home. He had many adventures after this, but when he dwelt in peace and quiet at last, in the home from which he had been absent so long, he was always fond of telling the story of the bag of winds given him by King Aeolus, and of the great disaster brought upon his sailors and himself by their foolish curiosity.

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