

# BOOK 5:

## *Calypso, the Sweet Nymph*

*For seven of the ten years Odysseus has spent wandering the Mediterranean Sea, he has been held captive by the goddess Calypso on her island. As Book 5 begins, Zeus sends the god Hermes to tell Calypso to release Odysseus. However, she is only to help him build a raft. He must sail for 20 days before landing on the island of Scheria, where he will be helped in his effort to return home.*

No words were lost on Hermes the Wayfinder,  
who bent to tie his beautiful sandals on,  
ambrosial, golden, that carry him over water  
or over endless land in a swish of the wind,  
5 and took the wand with which he charms asleep—  
or when he wills, awake—the eyes of men.  
So wand in hand he paced into the air,  
shot from Pieria down, down to sea level,  
and veered to skim the swell. A gull patrolling  
10 between the wave crests of the desolate sea  
will dip to catch a fish, and douse his wings;  
no higher above the whitecaps Hermes flew **B**  
until the distant island lay ahead,  
then rising shoreward from the violet ocean  
15 he stepped up to the cave. Divine Calypso,  
the mistress of the isle, was now at home.  
Upon her hearthstone a great fire blazing  
scented the farthest shores with cedar smoke  
and smoke of thyme, and singing high and low  
20 in her sweet voice, before her loom a-weaving,  
she passed her golden shuttle to and fro.  
A deep wood grew outside, with summer leaves  
of alder and black poplar, pungent cypress.  
Ornate birds here rested their stretched wings—  
25 horned owls, falcons, cormorants—long-tongued  
beachcombing birds, and followers of the sea.  
Around the smoothwalled cave a crooking vine  
held purple clusters under ply of green;  
and four springs, bubbling up near one another  
30 shallow and clear, took channels here and there  
through beds of violets and tender parsley.

**1–6 Hermes** (hûr'mēz): the messenger of the gods, also known for his cleverness and trickery.

**8 Pieria** (pī-îr'ē-ə): an area next to Mount Olympus, home of the gods.

### **B** EPIC SIMILE

Identify the epic simile in lines 9–12. What does this comparison tell you about Hermes?

### ANALYZE VISUALS

How has the painter characterized Calypso in this 1906 portrait? Consider any relationship between her white dress and the white clouds.

**28 purple clusters:** grapes.