

Odysseus and the Cyclops
(A Tale from “The Odyssey” by Homer)

Odysseus, the great Greek warrior king, was a master of disguise and often referred to as “Odysseus the Cunning.” After winning the Trojan War, he and his men set sail for home on a voyage that would take them ten long and perilous years.

They had been sailing for many unremarkable weeks when they chanced upon a strange island. Odysseus and a handful of men went ashore to search for food. Encountering a huge cave, the warriors entered and began to explore. Deep inside, to their relieved delight, they discovered many flocks of sheep. Starved, the men slaughtered several sheep and began to feast, little knowing that this was the island of the giant, one-eyed Cyclopes, and this cave the lair of Polyphemus, the most dangerous and brutal Cyclops of all.

Polyphemus, unaware of the Greeks inside, returned to his cave and closed its entrance with a massive rock. Hearing great rumblings, Odysseus and his men ran towards the entrance and were shocked to see their exit blocked by a mighty rock, and the terrifying one-eyed monster gazing down at them hungrily. Polyphemus was enraged to find his sheep killed and eaten. He held the men captive, every day making a meal of two brave warriors, dashing their brains against the walls of the cave and chewing them raw.

With his typical cunning, Odysseus devised a plan for escape. He offered Polyphemus a gourd of strong wine. The giant grabbed it, pouring it greedily down his throat. Within minutes, the Cyclops was drunk and fallen asleep. Instantly, Odysseus pulled a red-hot poker from the fireplace and thrust it into the Cyclops’ only eye, blinding him.

Howling in pain and rage, the sleeping giant awoke, demanding to know who had assaulted him. The ingenious Odysseus, thinking quickly, shouted out that the attacker’s name was “Nobody.” Polyphemus was now on his feet, stumbling around and creating such commotion that his fellow Cyclopes came running from across the island. Outside the cave, they asked Polyphemus what had occurred.

“Help me!” he screamed. “‘Nobody’ has blinded me!”

The other Cyclopes laughed, calling Polyphemus an idiot. “Since ‘Nobody’ has blinded you,” they taunted, “you’ve still one eye to spare!”

The following morning, the blind Polyphemus let his flocks out of his lair to graze. Odysseus and the remaining men strapped themselves to the belly of the sheep and thus escaped safely to their ships.