

Odysseus and Polyphemus

Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, sailed away from Troy with his men. He was eager to return home to his palace after winning a war. But storms and **turbulent** seas drove the ships far off course. After many days under sail, the fleet came to an island. Leaving the ships at anchor, Odysseus and 12 of his men went onto the island to search for supplies.



They soon came to a very large cave. Inside it they found piles of firewood, baskets of cheeses, pails of milk, and pens filled with lambs. "Let's wait here and see who lives in this place. Perhaps he will give us some of his food," said Odysseus.

As it grew dark, a Cyclops named Polyphemus returned to the cave. He was a fierce giant with one enormous eye in the middle of his forehead. Polyphemus drove his sheep into the cave and rolled a huge stone across the opening. Turning, he saw Odysseus and his men. He seized two of them and hurled them to the ground, killing them instantly. Then, smacking his lips hungrily, he ate them. When he was finished, he lay down and fell sound asleep.

The men huddled together in terror. "I would try to kill the Cyclops with my sword," whispered Odysseus, "but then we would be trapped here forever. Not even 20 oxen could drag that stone away from the entrance."

The next morning Polyphemus ate two more of the men, washing them down with large swallows of milk. He left the cave with his flock of sheep and rolled the stone back in place. "We're doomed!" cried the men. But Odysseus told them that he had come up with a plan.

That night, Odysseus offered him some of the wine that he had brought with him. Polyphemus gulped it down greedily and demanded more. He began to reel about drunkenly and finally crashed to the ground, fast asleep. "Now is our chance," Odysseus told his men. They took up a wooden beam that they had sharpened at one end and blinded the Cyclops by thrusting it into his eye. Polyphemus woke up, howling in pain. He stumbled about wildly, but he couldn't find the men.

When morning came, Polyphemus rolled away the stone to let his flock out to graze. He sat by the opening, ready to grab any man who tried to escape. But the men had tied the sheep together in groups of three and hidden themselves by clinging onto the bellies of the middle sheep. Polyphemus felt around as the animals went out, but all that he felt was thick wool.

Odysseus and his men ran to their ships and readied the fleet to sail away. "Farewell, Polyphemus," shouted Odysseus. "Know that it was I, Odysseus, who blinded you." Hearing this, Polyphemus staggered out of his cave. "Then know this, Odysseus," he shouted back angrily. "My father is Poseidon, god of the sea. And he will punish you."