

Tales from Ancient Greece

7. ODYSSEUS AND THE CYCLOPS

- HERMES I remember flying over the sea, circling the mast of Odysseus's ship, wondering what would happen to him now.
- ODYSSEUS Why did I have to go to that dreadful war?
- HERMES An oracle had prophesied that Odysseus wouldn't return from Troy for twenty years.
- ODYSSEUS The prophesy can't be right. What can keep me from home if the gods are with me?
- HERMES And as I flew round Odysseus's ship, it did seem all was well: But everything was about to change -
- ODYSSEUS Land! I can see land ahead!
- HERMES Odysseus had sighted an island in the distance -
- ODYSSEUS We'll anchor and take on food and water.
- HERMES So Odysseus left some of his crew to guard the ship and took a lucky dozen with him to the shore.
- EURYLOCHUS Fresh water!
- ANTIPHUS And the trees are dripping with fruit!
- HERMES They drank greedily from a sparkling stream and ate their fill of juicy plums and grapes.
- ODYSSEUS They're so big! In fact everything's big! Look!
- HERMES Among the trees were some sheep, all of them much bigger than they'd ever seen in Greece.
- EURYLOCHUS They're not wild – they've bells on their necks.
- ANTIPHUS Yeah – they must belong to someone.

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- ODYSSEUS Maybe the shepherds are giants, too!
- EURYLOCHUS No matter! They can surely spare a couple of sheep when they're as big as these!
- ANTIPHUS Too right! Come on – I'm hungry!
- ODYSSEUS Where are your manners, friends? We should ask permission first! Let's see if we can find the shepherd: he might offer us hospitality!
- HERMES But search as they might, there wasn't a shepherd to be seen, or any house or hut.
- EURYLOCHUS Who do the flocks belong to, then?
- ANTIPHUS It's a mystery.
- ODYSSEUS But what's that?
- HERMES Odysseus was pointing at the foot of a rocky crag.
- ODYSSEUS A cave. Maybe that's where they live. Let's go and see.
- HERMES So they climbed the crag to the cavern's mouth and Odysseus peered through.
- ODYSSEUS Hello-oh! No one in!
- EURYLOCHUS But look: there are sheep in a pen at the back of the cave.
- ANTIPHUS Right! I say we make a fire, kill a lamb or two and get cooking!
- HERMES No sooner said than done: it wasn't long before Odysseus and his crew were sitting in the cave round a crackling fire, filling their bellies with roast lamb.
- EURYLOCHUS And cheese to follow! Look: there are baskets of cheeses on the walls!
- ANTIPHUS Excellent!
- HERMES And excellent too was the wine that Odysseus had brought with him from the ship. Soon he and his crew were full, happy and asleep. But the sheep and the cheese had to belong to someone - and as darkness fell, that someone made his way back to the cave. And that someone was no ordinary man but a Cyclops: a giant dressed in sheepskin, with a single, huge, round eye, right in the middle of his forehead. His name was Polyphemus and he was the son of Poseidon, god of the sea.



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- POLYPHEMUS In you go, my beauties!
- HERMES He drove more sheep through the doorway and into the cave, and then - he blocked the doorway by rolling a huge stone across it.
- POLYPHEMUS I'm thirsty! A drop o' milk's what I need!
- HERMES And he was just about to grab a sheep and start milking when -
- POLYPHEMUS Who's lit this fire?
- HERMES - he noticed the fire and the bones strewn over the floor -
- POLYPHEMUS And who's been eating my sheep?
- HERMES - and saw Odysseus and his crew, fast asleep in the shadows.
- POLYPHEMUS Who are you? What are you doing here? Burning my wood! Eating my meat!
- ODYSSEUS Kind sir, we are Greeks sailing home from Troy. We mean no harm!
- HERMES Now what I haven't mentioned - and it's a bit of a shocker - is that the Cyclops didn't just eat sheep or cheese - he ate whatever he could lay his hands on -
- POLYPHEMUS You look tasty!
- HERMES He thrust out his massive hairy arms, grabbed two sailors by the feet and smashed their heads together.
- ODYSSEUS Stop!!! You monster!!!
- HERMES And whoomph! – he stuffs them in his mouth and it's munch, crunch and down they go -
- POLYPHEMUS Yummy!
- HERMES - scoffed as easily as you might eat a sardine.
- POLYPHEMUS Mmm. Lovely! And I'll have a couple more of you for breakfast. See you in the morning! Sleep tight!
- HERMES And the giant Cyclops stretched out on the floor with a sheep for a pillow – and in moments he was fast asleep.





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EURYLOCHUS Odysseus! What are we going to do?

HERMES What indeed?

HERMES So there they were, Odysseus and his twelve – correction, ten – companions, locked in the cave with the sleeping Cyclops.

EURYLOCHUS We've got to get out!

ODYSSEUS Let's try and shift the stone – quick, while he's asleep.

HERMES They tried with all their might to move the rock that the Cyclops had rolled across the doorway.

ANTIPHUS It won't budge an inch!

EURYLOCHUS We're dead meat! Kill him.

ANTIPHUS Right!

EURYLOCHUS Here! Bury it in his guts!

ODYSSEUS No! Think! If we kill him what'll happen? We'll die a slower death: he's the only one who can shift this stone! We'll be locked in here for good!

EURYLOCHUS What, then? Sit and wait to be eaten?

ODYSSEUS Quiet a minute and let me think – something'll come to me.

EURYLOCHUS Yes – death! Teeth, slobber!

ODYSSEUS Sssh! Let me think!

HERMES Odysseus sat there all night long, trying to plan a way of escape. Then morning came, and the Cyclops awoke. He yawned and stretched. Then:

POLYPHEMUS Let's be havin' you!

HERMES - he snatched up two more of the crew, beat their heads together, and wolfed them down.





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- POLYPHEMUS Mmmm – lovely! Be even nicer cooked. Yes, definitely a hot meal tonight: I'll get a fire going when I come home and roast you on the spit.
- HERMES Then the Cyclops rolled aside the stone, drove his flock of sheep outside, then rolled it back again to seal the cavern tight.
- EURYLOCHUS Well, Odysseus? What d'you say now? You'd better have a plan, or we're done for.
- ODYSSEUS I have! I have got a plan! That pole behind you – that staff of olive-wood.
- EURYLOCHUS What's the use of that? That won't lever the stone away.
- ODYSSEUS Just do as I say. Sharpen one end. Sharp as you can. Trust me
- HERMES So the crew did as Odysseus ordered. They shaved the staff to a good sharp point.
- ODYSSEUS Now hide it. Here –
- EURYLOCHUS There. What now?
- ODYSSEUS We sit and wait.
- HERMES Well. You can imagine how it felt waiting for the Cyclops to return - and when he did, the stone was rolled away - and before anyone could think of slipping out he rolled the stone straight back again.
- POLYPHEMUS Right!
- HERMES Just as he'd threatened, the Cyclops had a cooked meal that night.
- POLYPHEMUS Oh, now that that is seriously yum!
- HERMES Now, while the monster munched and crunched, Odysseus rummaged in the straw behind him and produced a flask. Then he offered it to the Cyclops.
- ODYSSEUS Cyclops - you might like to wash your meal down with wine.
- POLYPHEMUS What?
- ODYSSEUS I brought some with me from the ship. Rich, red wine – would you like some?
- POLYPHEMUS Wine? What's wine?



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- ODYSSEUS A delicious drink, a gift from the god Dionysus.
- POLYPHEMUS Gods? Ha! I don't care about gods – I'm bigger than any of 'em – 'cept my father, o' course: Poseidon the sea-god.
- ODYSSEUS You're Poseidon's son? What are you doing drinking milk? Only wine is good enough for you! Here – try it – drink your fill!
- POLYPHEMUS Don't mind if I do! Cheers! Cor!
- ODYSSEUS Good, eh?
- POLYPHEMUS Beats sheep's milk any day!
- ODYSSEUS Another bowl?
- POLYPHEMUS I'll say! Fill it full!
- ODYSSEUS So you've never tasted wine before?
- POLYPHEMUS Never drunk anything but milk!
- HERMES Which might explain why the Cyclops, after the second bowl and then a third, was well and truly sloshed. He threw a huge arm round Odysseus's shoulders and said:
- POLYPHEMUS I love yer! Yer me best friend! Whass yer name?
- ODYSSEUS My name? My name is Nobody.
- POLYPHEMUS Nobody? Wha' a byootiful name! Thass really lovely! 'Nobody!' I tell yer what, Nobody. Because I loves yer, I'll eat you last. Right, well I think it's time to say night-night. Been a lovely evenin'.
- HERMES And the one-eyed giant stood up and -
- POLYPHEMUS Ooh!
- HERMES - staggered one way -
- POLYPHEMUS The whole cave'sh shpinning!
- HERMES - then the other -
- POLYPHEMUS Night-ee night! Oooooohh.



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- HERMES - and crashed out, snoring, among his sheep. But it still wasn't clear what Odysseus planned to do. How were they going to get out?
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- HERMES It was time for Odysseus to put his plan into action but how exactly was he hoping to escape?
- ODYSSEUS Right. Get the pole from its hiding-place.
- HERMES They pulled the pointed staff from its hiding place.
- ODYSSEUS And heat it in the embers of the fire.
- HERMES Then they stuck the pointed end in the remains of the fire until it glowed red-hot.
- EURYLOCHUS What now?
- ODYSSEUS Now we ram it in the monster's eye.
- HERMES There was no need to ask which one. The single, huge, round eye in the middle of his forehead.
- ODYSSEUS Lift and now!
- HERMES They thrust the wooden spike in the Cyclops' eye and it sizzled and steamed like a red-hot poker dipped in water.
- POLYPHEMUS What're you doing to me? Ahhh!
- HERMES His cries were so loud, so terrible, that another giant came running up, and called from outside the cave:
- CYCLOPS 2 What's up? What's happenin' in there?
- POLYPHEMUS I'm in agony! Nobody's attacking me!
- CYCLOPS 2 You what?
- POLYPHEMUS Nobody's blinded me!
- CYCLOPS 2 What're you on about?
- POLYPHEMUS Nobody's blinded me! Nobody!



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- CYCLOPS 2 Nobody? Well if it's Nobody keep the noise down!
- POLYPHEMUS Argghhh! Argghhhh!
- HERMES The Cyclops got to his feet and thrashed blindly round the cavern -
- POLYPHEMUS I'll get you! Argggghh!
- HERMES - trying to grab hold of Odysseus and the rest. But Odysseus and his crew were hiding among the sheep, and as the Cyclops groped and fumbled, all he could feel was the sheep and their woolly backs.
- POLYPHEMUS I'll lock you in and leave you here to starve!
- HERMES And the blinded giant lay down, groaning in pain, and waited for dawn. When morning came -
- POLYPHEMUS Right – I'm going now and takin' me sheep – and we're not coming back till you lot have all starved and withered away to skin and bones!
- POLYPHEMUS There, there, my luvvies. Out to pasture.
- HERMES And the Cyclops hauled the stone aside to let his flock go out to pasture. He loomed in the doorway, blindly stroking each sheep in turn to make sure there was no one on its back. But it hadn't occurred to him that they might be underneath! Odysseus had planned it all: he'd got his crew to hang upside-down, underneath the sheep's bellies! Through the door the flock went, carrying all the men beneath! Odysseus was hanging under the biggest sheep of all – the last to leave - and as it reached the Cyclops in the doorway he stopped it - as if he knew there was something wrong - and felt its head -
- POLYPHEMUS You're always the first to leave – you always lead your fellows out to pasture. What's kept you now?
- HERMES He was groping all along its back.
- POLYPHEMUS Ah! Is it pity for your master, blinded by that wicked Nobody? If only you could tell me where he's hiding, ooh what I'd do then. Shoo, shoo! Off you go, my beauty! I'll follow you as soon as I've locked him in with the rest to starve!
- HERMES Slowly the sheep lumbered away with Odysseus underneath! He'd made it! Then Odysseus and his crew raced down to their ship – then up with the anchor and out to sea -
- ANTIPHUS We've done it!





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- EURYLOCHUS Odysseus, you're a genius!
- HERMES Up on the cliff they could see the Cyclops, stumbling blindly with his flock - and Odysseus - oh dear he couldn't resist a taunting cry.
- ODYSSEUS We won't be starving quite yet, Cyclops! We've outwitted you!
- HERMES Big mistake! With a roar of fury the Cyclops tore a massive boulder from the cliff - and hurled it towards the ship.
- EURYLOCHUS Look out!
- HERMES It crashed into the sea beside the ship and water swamped the deck!
- EURYLOCHUS Odysseus, no more! Another rock could destroy us all!
- ODYSSEUS Cyclops! If anyone asks who blinded you, don't say it was Nobody! Tell them it was I - Odysseus, king of Ithaca!
- HERMES And back on the hillside...
- POLYPHEMUS Poseidon, oh my father, god of the sea: Odysseus has blinded your son! Make him suffer for ten years before he gets home! Let him arrive all alone, his companions lost, and let him find his house full of trouble!
- HERMES Yes Odysseus had forgotten that the Cyclops was Poseidon's son! And Poseidon heard him and sent a storm of ship-wrecking frenzy. And for ten long years Odysseus was blown from danger to danger.
- ODYSSEUS Goddess Athena! Will you ever guide me home to my wife and son?
- HERMES Yes, and if Athena did help him, would Odysseus arrive home alone – as the Cyclops had demanded – and just what would he find there?

