

EPISODE 8 – Shipwrecked

total running time: 12:33

The cattle of the sun-god (☉ 4:35)

Once we had escaped the dragon and the whirlpool we could do nothing. We sat at our benches and wept. The ship drifted where it would. Then one of my men sighted land. He pointed. I looked. I saw cattle grazing, no sign of human life. I saw the sun staring down and I remembered the prophecy of Tiresias. I told them we would voyage on. At this something
5 snapped inside my crew. One of them, Eurylochus was his name, spat and stood.

“Odysseus,” he said, “I am beginning to suspect you’re not a man at all. I think you are one of the gods in disguise. For like the gods, you have no pity! We want to mourn the deaths of our friends! We want to recover from this awful ordeal and yet you insist we sail on, blindly into the night, across a foreign sea when a friendly coast beckons us! I say we listen to our desires, not
10 the rantings of a dead man!”

By the nodding of the heads around me, I saw it would be hard to cheat Poseidon of his quarry. I made them all solemnly promise me they wouldn’t harm any of the cattle on the island. They did this at once. We still had plenty of food from the gifts of the witch Circe. And so we beached the ship, we lit a fire, we tried to eat but none of us had any appetite. All of us
15 were thinking of the victims of the dragon Scylla, our friends with whom we had seen so much. Many of us fell asleep with tears still coursing down our cheeks. I was woken during the third watch by Eurylochus shaking my shoulders. As soon as I opened my eyes I could see why – there was a terrible storm. It was as though the sea and the sky were at war with one another.

“You see!” shouted Eurylochus, “If we had been out there now as you had wanted us to be, by
20 the morning our bones would have been rolling across the ocean bed. The crabs would have been plucking the flesh from our bones!”

That storm raged all through the night, all through the following day, all through the next week. First we ran out of bread, then meat, then wine, then everything else we had. Now we were living on what we could find, what we could catch – a few birds’ eggs, a few fish and it was not
25 enough. I began to understand the nature of the trap in which we were caught. I could see hunger gnawing at the patience, at the bellies of my crew. I could see them looking longingly at the cattle.

One morning I clambered over the dunes, I left them behind. I found a place where the ground was dry and I lit a fire there. I made what offerings I could and I prayed to the mighty immortals
30 that they would end this storm so we could sail away from this place that posed us such a danger. In exchange for my act of devotion, some god or goddess kissed my eyelids and I fell into a deep sleep.

When I opened my eyes the sky was high and blue. No moaning wind now, only birdsong. My clothes were dry, the storm had ended. Joyfully I climbed over the dunes, I looked down. There
35 was the ship, beside the ship there were my men squatting round a fire, and on the fire the carcasses of two of those cattle. I ran down the sand, Eurylochus saw me approaching. He pulled a lump of meat from one of the carcasses, he held it up, he said, “Odysseus, the gods

are not angry with us! We made offerings, the best cuts of the meat we gave to the mighty gods and goddesses and as soon as we had done so, the storm ended within moments. They
40 feel hunger too – all they expected was the respect they deserved! Eat!”

***Hyperion's revenge* (☉ 4:00)**

I looked at that meat and I think I saw a sight then they could not see. The two carcasses on the fire opened their lipless mouths and moaned. That meat was cursed! I could not eat it even though I was starving. My men ate their fill and sealed their fates. They wrapped the hides around the remains of the carcasses, they loaded them aboard the ship, we dragged it into the
5 shallows, we rowed away from the island, then we unfurled a sail, we lifted the oars. I shivered. I looked around me. Suddenly the ship was in shadow. I looked up; blotting out the sun there was a cloud – the strangest cloud I had ever seen. It was as if blood was being dropped into clear water. The cloud was swelling out and staining the sky. Then I heard a cry - Hyperion, the sun-god's cry for vengeance and Zeus answered that cry with a thunderbolt that
10 struck our ship where the mast reached the deck. The mast came toppling down – it cracked open the head of my helmsman, the whole ship bucked. A wall of a wave rose against us. I could see into it, the brown weed quivering at the heart of it and then it broke with a white roar and our ship was dashed to pieces, fuming breakers tore at every plank. I sank beneath the surface. For a moment all was silent. I could feel the sea god pressing against my eyelids, my
15 nostrils, my lips, my ears, then I broke the surface and the world was filled with sound: the rumble of thunder, Poseidon's laughter, the crashing of the waves, the screams of my friends. Time and again I fought against the storm, time and again I was sure the darkness would descend over my eyes. But then I looked around me and the surface of the ocean was white, hissing, boiling. The whirlpool, the swallower Charybdis – we were caught in the grip of her
20 current. This was to be our fate. I saw her then, the great swirl of her. I kicked and fought but she was far too strong. A wave lifted me a little, I looked up, there was something blacker than the night sky. I reached up and I clutched it and it was one of the branches of the fig tree that grew from the island beside Charybdis. I was hanging from the tree. I was looking down shivering, moaning, as I saw her pull my men down, down, down until they were black specks,
25 and then she spat out their corpses and they bobbed lifeless in the brine.

With a cry I let go of the branch. Taking advantage of the few moments between suck and spout I hit the water near a piece of the ship and I grabbed it. And then I fought, I kicked and I prayed to the mighty gods and goddesses that I would pass out of these straits before the draw of the whirlpool began. Surely some god or goddess was smiling on me for somehow I
30 made my way away from her before the whirlpool began to suck again.

And for many days and nights I clung to that piece of wood, as when a little boy is taken by his mother to the market for the first time and the sound, the movement, the commotion frightens him. And he stands behind his mother, he clings to her legs, he presses his face into the backs of her knees. So I clung tightly to that piece of wood.

***A mortal choice* (☹ 3:58)**

More dead than alive, I was found on the shore of an island by a nymph. Her name was Calypso. She carried me to her cave, she nursed me back to health. As she nursed me she fell in love with me.

5 She offered me immortal life, if I would only stay there with her. But as I lay there, unable to move, I knew all I wanted from the rest of my life was a simple human thing – I wanted to live and grow old and die with my wife, the woman I loved. So I refused the offer of eternal life.

10 Seven years that nymph kept me on that island. Every day she tried to persuade me. For seven years I walk the coast of the island, staring out across the restless waves of the sea, longing for my homeland. Seven years to think about my life, to ponder all my moments of bravery and honour, all my moments of arrogance and folly. Seven years to wonder that I had made a horse foal men. I had put my trust in the kindness of a witch and the vision of a blind man. Seven years to wonder that I had become nobody, and I had heard the song nobody should hear. Seven years to wonder that I had refused the chance to live forever for the sake of a woman I hadn't seen for half my life.

15 Eventually, thanks to the intervention of the goddess Athene I was given the chance to build a raft, to lift a mast, to put a sail upon it, and once again I rowed the broad, bucking back of Poseidon. He saw me and he raised a terrible storm. Naked, I was found on the shores of this island, King Alcinous.

20 Everything I took from Troy is gone – all that treasure, my ship, my friends – all I have left now is my name. And a longing as sharp as pain to see the land that gave me life.

And King Alcinous said, "Odysseus, you have suffered much in your wanderings across the broad face of the world. But now that you have reached my bronze-floored feasting hall, I swear by the mighty gods, I will send a high-prowed ship to carry you home to rocky Ithaca."