

EPISODE 2 – Odysseus Starts his Story

total running time: 8:57

Warriors seeking a welcome (⊕ 5:17)

I have used several names across my life but the name by which you would know me is Odysseus. And to hear this story it fills me with strange emotions. To hear the name of my friend, whose bones now lie under Trojan sand, it fills my eyes with tears. And if I were to hear myself, described as a hero, a man of honour, it would make me want to laugh. It would make
5 me remember the day when I first heard that red-haired Menelaus was mustering an army. It was the very day my wife Penelope gave birth to our son Telemachus. And to hold that child in my arms, it changed everything. It made me wonder why I wanted to sail across the sea and risk my life for the sake of another man's wounded pride.

So when Menelaus' lieutenant arrived on the shore of my island I was not there to meet him.
10 He was met instead by my wife, the baby in her arms. She told the lieutenant that I had gone mad. She led him to a beach where he found me, my face streaked with dirt, my hair in greasy ringlets, my clothes no more than filthy rags. I had harnessed a donkey and an ox to a plough. I was ploughing the shingle, sowing handfuls of salt over my shoulder into the furrows that I had made, raving all the while. This lieutenant was suspicious. Already I was famous for my
15 cunning. Before I understood what he was doing, he had run forward, grabbed the baby and put it down in front of the plough. When I saw that I knew he had outwitted me. If I was to continue my pretence of madness, I would have to plough through my own son, I would have to cut the baby in half with the blade of the plough. And so I had to admit that I was sane. I mustered an army from among my subjects, I joined the great host that laid siege to the walls
20 of Troy. All of us went a little mad during the war, what with the betrayals and the intrigues, the interventions of the immortals, the stupid petty arguments amongst ourselves. In the end, I was the one who finished it, with a great wooden horse.

And so, of course, my ship was crammed with precious things when I set sail for home. As we voyaged, in my mind's eye I could see the hero's welcome I would receive when at last I
25 reached rocky Ithaca again. I could see the streets of my land, lined with my people cheering. I could see myself stepping over the threshold of my feasting hall, to find there my wife, my son, now a ten year old boy, I could almost see the pride in the eyes of my father. I could almost feel my mother's warm embrace.

For many days we sailed until we found ourselves approaching an island that seemed to us a
30 paradise. We could see big fat sheep and goats grazing. We could see land level for the plough. We were on a voyage. We had no idea how long it would be before we would pass such a friendly-looking place again. And so it made sense to us to beach the ship and to search the island. I chose twelve of my crew. I told them each to take, from the treasures of Troy, some precious thing, some goblet, some bracelet, some brooch in the hope that on this
35 island we would find people with whom we could swap these treasures for animals and directions to a source of fresh water. I took a goatskin of wine. That wine was so strong the smell of it rendered the senses muddled. One cupful of that wine poured into a whole barrel of

clear water will still make a strong drink. We set off, up the beach, into a forest. We found a path, we followed it. It took us to a hill. In the hill there was a cave. Beside the cave a boulder that looked as though it had been placed there for some reason. So we entered the cave and
40 sure enough it was a home. We found enclosures, fences and inside them lambs and little goats, kids. We found buckets of cheese and milk. We found a fire. My men wanted to steal what we needed and return to our ship. But I was curious, I wanted to see whose home this was. And so instead we squatted by the fire, we munched some cheese, we drank some milk and we waited.

***An unfriendly host* (⌚ 3:40)**

At last we heard bleating. Animals were approaching in a great flock. Something – perhaps a premonition, a whisper from a god or goddess – made me urge my men to come with me into the darkest part of the cave, the innermost part of the cave, where we hid behind some rocks and watched. A flock of sheep and goats entered the cave. Behind them we saw a shape in
5 the entrance, a silhouette. It was the shape of a man, but this was bigger than any man we'd ever seen. This was the size of a tall tree. It reached out and grabbed that boulder we had seen. Carefully it rolled the boulder behind it, sealing the cave mouth so that now the only light came from the fire. It fed the flames of the fire with wood. By the light of those flames we watched it milking the female sheep and goats with surprising tenderness, with obvious
10 affection. By the light of that fire we studied its face, its tusk-like teeth, its snout of a nose, and its eye. In the middle of its forehead, it had one enormous eye. By the light of that fire it must have seen our shadows on the wall behind us. So it peered toward us and said, "What's this? I have guests". We stepped forward. "We are men. We have here precious things. We would swap them with you for some of your animals and directions to a source of fresh water.
15 Remember father god Zeus rewards those who are kind to travellers."

"Zeus! Don't you know what I am? I am a Cyclops. We Cyclopes are the sons of the sea god Poseidon. For him we feel respect. I'm afraid we have no fear of your stupid blustering Zeus!"
And he grabbed one of my men then, lifted him up, smashed his head against the roof the cave, pushed the twitching corpse into his mouth, washed it down with a bucketful of milk and
20 lay down and went to sleep.

We were so stunned by what we'd seen, for a while none of us could do anything. We simply stood and stared. Then one of my men drew his sword. He stepped forward intending to plunge the blade through the skin of the Cyclops and pierce his heart as he slept. But it occurred to me: if we killed the Cyclops, this cave would be our tomb. All of us together were
25 not strong enough to push that boulder. Only the Cyclops could free us – we were trapped in the cave.