

Polyphemus and the Stranger Called Nobody

written by Leanne Guenther based on the Greek Mythology texts by Berens and Baldwin

My name is Polyphemus. I am a Cyclops, a son of the sea god Poseidon, and I keep my sheep on a green hillside above the shore. I have one eye, set in the middle of my forehead, and it misses very little.

That evening I came home with a load of pine logs and my flock ahead of me. Before the last sheep had passed through the door, I knew something was wrong. A pail had been moved. The cheeses had been touched. Someone was in my cave... my home.

I rolled the great stone across the doorway, the one a hundred men could not budge, and lit the fire. The flames showed me a crowd of strangers huddled in the corner. Their leader stepped forward and said they were shipwrecked sailors. He asked for my hospitality in the name of Zeus.

I laughed at him. We Cyclopes do not fear Zeus. What has he ever done for us?

I won't pretend to be kind. I ate two of his men, and then I slept.

At dawn I ate two more, stretched my tired muscles, drove my flock out and sealed the door behind me. When I came back that night the leader of the men was waiting with a goatskin of wine. My olive staff was shorter than I remembered. I noticed that, and I did not think hard enough about why.

The wine was dark as a storm cloud and sweeter than anything I had ever tasted. Strong wine. I knew I should be careful. But even a clever creature likes to be pleased so I drank.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Nobody," he said.

"Then, Nobody, I will eat you last. That is my gift to you."

Then the cave spun slowly around me and I slept.

I woke to a great fire in my eye. I remember the roar I made. My brothers came running over the hills and shouted through the stone, asking who was hurting me.

"Nobody is hurting me!" I cried.

"If no one is hurting you what's with all the fuss," they said and they shrugged and went home.

It was a good trick. I will say that much for him, the blinder of my poor great eye. Nobody was very smart.

By morning I had a plan of my own. I rolled the stone aside and sat in the doorway with my hands out. The men would have to leave with the flock, I reasoned, and I would catch them as they went. One by one the sheep went by, and I felt along every back. Wool. Wool. Wool.

I never thought to feel underneath the sheep which is where the intruders were hiding.

When the sheep were gone, I heard a voice from the water, far down the shore. It was Nobody finally, defiantly, shouting his real name... Odysseus. I saw nothing but darkness and heard nothing but his mocking laughter. I tore a rock from the hillside and threw it toward the sound. It missed his ship by a hair.

Then I raised my face to the sea and prayed to my father.

"Poseidon, hear me. Let this man struggle to find his way home. Take his ships and take his men."

I don't know if father heard me. But the sea is wide and Odysseus has all of it to cross.





