The Iliad and the Odyssey

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Chapter 1: Helen of Troy

A long time ago, in the age of heroes, when gods and goddesses still took a close interest in human affairs, a great wedding was planned between a famous warrior called Peleus and a lovely sea-nymph whose name was Thetis. All the kings and queens of the day were invited to the wedding feast, as well as all the immortal ones who live on Mount Olympus – all, that is, except for one. For no invitation was sent to Eris, the goddess of strife. Now strife is when people argue, and it was generally thought a bad idea to invite strife to a wedding party, in case she caused the happy couple to quarrel. Eris was extremely annoyed about being overlooked, and as revenge, she decided to play a spiteful trick on the wedding guests. Just as the celebrations were at their height, she appeared in the banqueting hall dressed as a serving girl. A silver plate was in her hands, and on it an apple on which she had written the words, “For the Fairest of them all”. This she placed on the table where the three loveliest goddesses were sitting. Their names were Hera, Athene and Aphrodite. Immediately that they saw the words on the apple, a quarrel broke out between the three goddesses. Hera said to the others, “I am the queen of all the immortal gods, and it follows that I must be far fairer than either of you two. So therefore the apple belongs to me”

“My dear Hera,” said Athene, “You might be queen, but I am the goddess of wisdom, and therefore I know absolutely everything that is worth knowing. You must believe me when I say that you are quite mistaken. Wisdom is beauty,
and beauty is wisdom. They are one and the same thing. So therefore the apple belongs to me.

“Darlings,” purred Aphrodite. “It’s quite obvious that the apple belongs to me. I possess the power of love because, to put it quite simply, I am so much more beautiful than anybody else.”

The goddesses carried on arguing continuously for years after the wedding was over - for time means nothing to the immortal ones. The king of all the gods, mighty, thundering Zeus, became quite fed up with listening to their bickering. When, at length, he was at his whit’s end, he suggested to the three lovely goddesses that they resolve the question once and for all with a beauty contest. And that is exactly what they did.

The three goddesses agreed on one thing: that the most handsome and fashionably dressed mortal who walked on the face of the earth was Paris, Prince of Troy. They decided to surprise him. One day when Paris was out hunting on the foothills of Mount Ida, he discovered three lovely goddesses standing beneath a tree. In all his life he had never seen such dazzling beauty. For a moment, he stood amazed. Then Hermes, who was the winged messenger of the gods, flew up to Paris and spoke to him as follows.

“Hail Paris! Prince of Magnificent Troy. Lord Zeus, the King of all the gods, sends you his greetings. He wishes to bestow upon you a great honor. He asks that you give this apple to the fairest goddess of them all.”
Paris, who normally had a keen eye for beauty, found it hard to choose. Each goddess was so beautiful. Hera had the most lovely milky white skin ever seen. Athene had the most dazzling, dancing eyes. And Aphrodite had the most charming smile. Which should he pick?

At length, seeing that he was at a loss, Hera said to him:

“Prince Paris. Give the apple to me, and I will give you the gift of great power.”

Athene, not to be outdone by this offer, said, “Prince Paris, Give the apple to me, and I will give you the gift of great wisdom.”

But Aphrodite laughed and said. “Paris my dear, don’t you listen to those two silly goddesses. What fun would you have with power or wisdom? Give the apple to me, and I will give you a gift that is much more to your liking. I shall give you the love of the most beautiful woman on earth.”

Now Paris no longer found the choice so hard to make. He had long been in love with the most beautiful woman on earth, whose name was Helen. It so happened, that Helen was married to King Menelaus, and Paris had thought up until that moment, that the possibility of his winning her love, was beyond all hope. But, now, he understood that his chances could be greatly improved.

And so Paris gave the apple to Aphrodite. She giggled with delight, but the other two goddesses were furious and flew directly back to Mount Olympus in a great huff, where they complained long and bitterly to Zeus about the unfairness
of the competition. Zeus had a dark feeling that there was trouble in store for human kind.

Paris set sail for the land of Sparta where Menelaus was king and lived with his beautiful queen Helen. Menelaus welcomed the famous prince into his palace, and while the two sat talking about the affairs of the world, Queen Helen came down from her perfumed room, looking as lovely as a goddess. The maid-servants brought her a seat and covered it with a soft lamb’s wool rug, and she sat before her silver work box. But before she began to embroider, she glanced over at the visiting prince, and questioned her husband:

“Shall I guess the name of this prince who has come to visit us? Let us see if I am right or wrong? I have heard tell of a prince from far-off Troy who is famous the world over for his looks and fashionable style. Is it he, Paris, Prince of Troy who has come to stay with us?”

“My dear wife,” said Menelaus, “As always, you are quite right. It is indeed, Paris, Prince of Troy who is paying us the honor of his visit.”

And Paris acknowledged Queen Helen with a nod of his head.

At dinner that night, Helen added a special potion into the wine, so that anyone who drank it would forget all his cares, and be happy for the rest of the evening. They feasted and made merry, and while Menelaus was busy laughing and joking with one of his generals, Paris spoke softly to Helen.
“Most beautiful queen,” he said, “I beg you, meet me tonight in the orchard beneath the palace walls, and we shall sail away together in my ship, and head directly for Troy, the most magnificent city in all the world.”

And because the goddess of love, Aphrodite, had wished it so, Helen could not help herself, and agreed to his suggestion.

When King Menelaus awoke in the morning, and he discovered that his guest and his wife had run away together, he flew into a rage, kicking the furniture and punching the walls of his chamber. He swore before all the Gods that that his revenge would be truly terrible. And so he went to see his elder brother, King Agamemnon of Argos, and spoke to him as follows:

“My dear brother, the honor of our family has been besmirched by this foreign peacock, this perfumed playboy, this prancing prince of Troy. Let us gather together all the kings of Greece and combine our armies into the greatest force that has ever been seen since the dawn of history. And let us sail to the far off city of Troy, and teach Prince Paris some manners”

But Agamemnon was wise, and he knew that it is always a terrible mistake to rush headlong into conflict. He suggested first that they send an ambassador to Troy to request the return of Queen Helen, whom he was sure had been abducted against her will. He knew that Paris’s father, King Priam of Troy was a good man, and he was sure that he would order his son to release her. And so they sent a
message to Troy in the name of peace and reconciliation, but Helen did not wish to go home, and Prince Paris refused to return the lovely Queen to her husband, saying that they had been brought together by the Goddess of Love, Aphrodite herself.

And so that meant War. King Agamemnon, the brother of the wronged Menelaus, summoned all the Kings of Greece and prepared a navy of a thousand ships, the greatest military force to ever set sail. And that is the story of how Great war between the Greeks and the Trojans was started by Prince Paris and Queen Helen.
Chapter 2: Troy

Each of the great cities of Greece sent an army to join the war against the Trojans – each, that is – except for one. The City of Thebes refused to join the war, saying that it had no quarrel with the far-away Trojans. And so the Greek King Agamemnon decided to teach the Thebans a lesson. He ordered his men to destroy their beautiful city and take its treasure - and that is what they did. While the ruined city of Thebes was still burning, the greatest of the Greek warriors shared out the the prizes of war. King Agamemnon chose for himself one of the captives - a beautiful young girl, called Chryseis (Cry-see-is) – a priest’s daughter. He told her that she must live with him from now on, and be his slave. The girl wept bitterly and begged to be returned to her father, but King Agamemnon had a cruel heart, and was unmoved by her tears.

Eventually, the Greek ships reached Troy, and the army set up a vast camp on the beach not far from the city. One evening, the good old priest who was the father of Chryseis, arrived at the camp and asked to meet King Agamemnon and all the greatest of the Greeks. And this is how he spoke:

“Oh Agamemnon, Leader of Men, May the Gods grant your wish to destroy the magnificent city of Troy, and may all the Greeks return home safely in their black ships, but grant me this favour: free my daughter and accept in her place a gift of great treasure that I have brought for you.”
The Greek army cheered the old man for his generous offer, and for the love that he had shown for his daughter, but Agamemnon flew into a rage. “Old man,” said he, “let me not find you hanging about our ships, nor coming here again. I will not free your lovely daughter. She shall grow old in my house in Argos far from her home. So get out of my sight right now, or it will be the worse for you!

The priest was afraid and swiftly left. But later that evening, he knelt down on the shore of the resounding sea and prayed to his god, Apollo of the silver bow. And Apollo heard the good old man’s prayer for just revenge, and he took up his silver bow and fired arrows into the Greek camp. The arrows of Apollo brought disease, and many of the Greek soldiers fell ill.

By far the greatest of the Greek warriors was Achilles. He was faster and stronger than any man alive, and also very proud. When Achilles saw the Greek soldiers dying of disease, he called a meeting of all the generals and spoke as follows:

“Noble Agamemnon, though you are our leader, I must speak the truth. It was wrong to threaten the priest, a good old man who came to you with a generous offer. The gods are angry with us for what you did, and matters must be put right. You must return the lovely Chryseis to her father.”

King Agamemnon, was surprised to hear such words, as he was not all used to being told what to do.
“Great Achilles”, he said, “Brave and strong you may be, But I am King and I shall do what I like, and you shall know your place!

To which Achilles replied.

“You are too greedy! Why should all the Greeks suffer for your evil ways? I for one am not going to follow a leader like you into battle.”

Now King Agamemnon (Aga-mem-non) was absolutely furious, but he also understood that something must be done to appease the gods and stop the plague that was destroying his army. And so the next day, he ordered a boat to take the young girl back to her father, but he also sent messengers to the tent of Achilles and ordered him handover his own slave girl. And from that moment on, the pride of Achilles was so hurt that he refused to take part in the battle for Troy, but instead stayed inside his tent and sulked while the Greeks went out and fought.

Soon after, the Trojans opened the great doors of their city and their army marched out like flock of wild birds, swooping back and forth and calling with screeching voices.

Now the finest warrior among the Trojans was Prince Hector. He was the brother of Paris, but he was quite different in character. Hector was brave and noble, while Paris loved fine clothes and parties and enjoyed his riches to the full.

As they rode out to battle, Hector said to his brother,
“Paris. It is for your sake that thousands of brave soldiers will die today. It is only because you ran away with the Greek Queen Helen that this great army has arrived at our gates with the aim of destroying our beautiful city, killing all the men, and carrying off the women and children as slaves. It were better that you had not been born, my brother.”

When he heard this, Paris felt ashamed. And to make amends, he drove his chariot out in front the Trojan Army and towards the enemy. In his fiercest voice, Paris called out to the Greeks to send forth their bravest warrior, and to fight him in single combat to decide the war – so that others need not suffer.

On the Greek side, King Menelaus (Menel-a-us) hated Paris more than any other man alive. And so Menelaus jumped out of his chariot and said, “I will gladly fight Paris, and kill him with my spear that is made of ash wood and tipped with cruel bronze.”

And when Paris heard this, he was so frightened that he coiled back like a man who has seen a snake, and he shrank into the protection of his men. Great laughter arose from the Greek army, and the Trojans were furious with Prince Paris for bringing shame on them. And then Paris began to worry that if the beautiful Helen heard about his running away, she would not love him anymore. And so he gathered his courage, and went out once more in front of the army, and again shouted out to the Greeks.
“I call on you men to lay your swords and spears on the ground while King Menelaus and I fight one another - hero against hero.”

And this time Menelaus did not give Paris time to change his mind. He hurled his spear at him so that it broke his shield, but just missed his body. Paris fell backwards, and soon Menelaus was on him, dragging him by the plume of his helmet towards the Greek army. But the Goddess of Love, Aphrodite, who was fond of Paris, saw what was happening, and came to his aid disguised as a cloud. She scooped him into her lovely arms, and whisked him back to his Palace where the fair and fragrant Helen was waiting for him.

And the so the Greeks and the Trojans fought each other in battle. War-cries and the din of shields clashing against shields, and iron against iron, filled the plane of Troy. Many brave soldiers were killed and wounded on both sides, but so long as Achilles refused to help the Greeks, the Trojans were stronger, and drove the Greeks back to their camp by their ships. At night, a thousand camp-fires glowed upon the plane, and by the light of each fire there sat fifty men, while the horses, champed oats and corn beside their chariots, and waited till dawn should come.

The Greeks begged the great warrior Achilles to come out and fight, but still he refused to join the battle. But his best friend, whose name was Patroclus, came up with a cunning plan. He secretly put on the magnificent armor of Achilles and went out into the battle, looking exactly like the great hero. He knew that when the Greeks saw him, they would
gain courage at the sight of Achilles, and fight with redoubled strength, and when the Trojans saw him and they would think that the warrior they most feared had returned, and would lose heart. When the Trojans saw Patroclus dressed like Achilles, they were indeed afraid – all except Prince Hector, who immediately he saw the Trojans’ worst enemy, flew at him with his spear and killed him. Only then did he discover that it was not Achilles whom he had killed, but Patroclus.

When the mighty Achilles heard that his best friend had been killed by Hector, his anger and sorrow were great in equal measure, and he stood up before a meeting of the Greek Army and said:

“As you know, King Agamemnon has insulted me and I have every right not to fight in this stupid war. But now things have changed. My best friend has been killed by Prince Hector of Troy. It is for the sake of Patroclus – who was dearer to me than any other man - that I will take up the fight and avenge his death.”

And when the Greek Army heard this, they all cheered and threw their helmets in the air, for they knew that with Achilles on their side, victory could be theirs.

When Prince Hector saw that Achilles stood once again at the head of the Greek Army, he knew that there was only one thing for it. He must go out and fight Achilles, and decide the fate of Troy.
As he was leaving for battle, he went in search of his wife, the lovely Andromache. He found her walking along the great walls of the city, holding their little baby in her arms. When she saw her husband, Andromache said,

“Brave Hector. I beg you. Do not go out today to fight Achilles. What will I do when you are gone? Think of your little son. What use is a father to him if he is dead?”

But Hector replied that he could not refuse to fight, as the Greeks and the Trojans would say he was a coward.

He stretched his arms towards his child, but when boy saw the horse-hair plume that nodded fiercely from his father’s helmet, he was scared and cried, nursing his head into his mother’s bosom.

His father and mother laughed to see him, but Hector took the helmet from his head and laid it all gleaming upon the ground. Then he took his darling child, kissed him, and dangling him in his arms, praying over him to Zeus, the King of all the gods: “Mighty Zeus,” he said, “May one day people say that this child is even braver than his father, and a mightier warrior in battle, so that their praise gladdens the heart of his mother.”

Hector rode out before the gates of Troy. Achilles, seeing him, started to run with all his might towards Hector, ready to hurl his spear at his hated enemy. Hector jumped from his chariot and stood firm waiting to meet Achilles, but secretly he thought to himself:
“What, if I were to lay down my shield and helmet, lean my spear against the wall and go straight up to noble Achilles? What if I were to promise to hand back Helen, who was the cause of all this war, and to let the Greeks take half of all the treasure in the city? - but why argue with myself in this way? Were I to go up to him now, he would show me no mercy;”

As he pondered, the swift-footed Achilles charged up to him as if he were Aries himself, the plumed God of battle. The bronze tip of his spear gleamed around him like the rays of the rising sun. Fear came over Hector, and he turned and ran, while Achilles darted after him at his utmost speed. As a mountain hawk, swiftest of birds, swoops down upon some trembling white dove—that is how Achilles make straight for Hector with all his might, while Hector fled around the City walls as fast as his legs could carry him.

Achilles chased Hector three times around the walls of Troy until at last Hector turned and fought. First Achilles threw his spear at Hector and missed. Then Hector threw his spear at Achilles and hit his shield, but did not break it. Then they fell on each with clashing bronze swords, and Achilles, for he was the stronger hero, killed Hector.

When they heard the sad news, all the women of Troy wept for the loss of their greatest hero, but none wept more than his wife Andromache.

Now that the finest hero of the Trojans was dead, the Greek army thought that they would soon win the war. King
Priam of Troy greatly grieved the loss of his bravest son, and feared that the city would soon be defeated. But this is not how things turned out – not yet. For Apollo, the winged god of the Silver Bow, again decided to help the Trojans. One day, in the midst of battle, he came up to Prince Paris and spoke to him as follows:

“Hail, Paris, Prince of Troy. Lift up your bow and fire an arrow into the Greek army. I will guide its point into Achilles and kill him.”

When he heard this, Prince Paris replied:

“Almighty Apollo, I will gladly do as you ask. But will I not just waste my arrow? For everyone knows that when Achilles was a baby, his mother dipped him in the River Styx that runs through the Underworld - and as a result, no weapon can wound him, for the waters of the River Styx make a man immortal.

And Apollo replied,

“Paris, you speak the truth, but the gods gave the great Achilles a choice - he could lead a short and glorious life, or a long and boring one. He chose glory and so his life must be short.”

And so Paris dipped his arrow in deadly poison, and fired it into the air. It flew in an ark and its poisoned tip drove into Achilles’ heal. For when Achilles’ mother had dipped him in the river of the underworld, she had held him by his heal, and no water had touched it. And now Achilles fell from
his chariot, and soon his great body lay on the ground, dead.

And that is the story of how the Greeks and the Trojans fought for nine years without either side gaining victory. Many brave warriors died on either side, and many tears were shed over lost sons and lost friends.
Chapter 3: The Wooden Horse

The happiest day in the history of Troy was when the Greek army sailed away. For ten long years the war had raged, and many of the finest and bravest warriors on both sides, had fallen in battle. How the Trojans rejoiced as they walked along the shore where the Greek enemy had camped! Here, cruel Achilles had set up his tent. There, the arrogant King Agamemnon had commanded his men. And now, for the first time in their lives, the children of Troy could run and play in the foam of the sea, and teenage boys and girls could walk hand in hand beneath the cliffs.

But little did they realise, that the enemy army had not set sail for far-away Greece. Instead, they had only taken their ships to the other side of the island called Tenedos, and there they were lurking, out of site, but still not far away. It was all a cunning trick thought up by the wiliest of the Greeks, the red haired Odysseus, who was never short of a plan.

The Trojans saw that the Greeks had left behind a strange offering. It was a giant wooden horse with ribs made from the planks of fir trees. The people marveled at the massive statue, but there were different opinions about what they should do with it. Some wise old men saw there was something not quite right about the horse, and advised that they should set fire to it straight away. Others warned that, the gods would be angry with them if they did not honor the statue. After all, the wooden horse was dedicated to
grey-eyed Athena, the great goddess of wisdom, and nobody wanted to feel her wrath.

The crowd was wavering, and a white-bearded old Priest spoke out above the murmur. “Fellow citizens. Whatever this strange horse may be, remember this: it is always wise to fear the Greeks, especially when they are bringing gifts. By the Great God Poseidon, Lord of the Seas, and by everything that is sacred, let us not fall into this deadly trap, for that is what is surely is!”

So saying, the old priest hurled a mighty spear at the horse, and it flew into the beast’s side and quivered, and the guts of the horse reverberated with an eerie hollow sound like a long, deep moan. And had the Trojans decided there and then to set fire to that horse of death, their lovely city would be standing to this day, and the descendants of King Priam would be living in peace and happiness.

But just then, a Trojan patrol came upon the scene, and they brought with them a prisoner - a Greek called Sinon whom the army had left behind.

“Now we will find out the truth!” said the Trojan guards. “Let’s poke this wretched Greek spy with our bronze Spears until he tells us what this Greek gift is all about!”

When he heard this, the poor prisoner cried out: “No, please! Don’t harm me. I’ll happily tell you all you want to know, for cruel, scheming Odysseus is no more a friend of mine, than he is of you.”
And so the Trojans listened to what Sinon had to say, and they tried to fathom whether or not he spoke the truth.

“Do you not think that the Greeks would have gladly given up this war before ten long years had had passed? Let me tell you that many times they planned to leave their sufferings behind, as they have done no. But each time they prepared to sail way in their beaked black ships, the sea-god Poseidon sent a terrible storm, and whipped up giant waves on the wine dark sea. Eventually, they consulted a priest who told them the reason why the gods were inflicting such pain. You see, before he left his home in Argos, King Agamemnon, the great leader of men, waited an entire month for a wind to blow his ships to Troy. Eventually, he decided that the gods required a very special offering. And as usual, it was scheming Odysseus who thought up the plan. He sent for Agamemnon’s own daughter, his darling Iphigenia, and told her that she was to marry swift-footed Achilles. She came with great joy and gladness in her heart, for Achilles was the handsomest and bravest of the Greeks, but it was all the most dreadful trick. Instead of marrying Achilles at the alter on the cliffs high up above the sea, the priest sacrificed the lovely white-skinned young maiden to the sea-god. And straight-away that the foul deed was done, the winds began to blow.

“Now, ten long years later, as we were waiting for a wind to take back home, Odysseus came up with another plan. “I know,” he said, “Let’s sacrifice the most useless of those among us. Nobody will miss Sinon. He has only ever criticized our plans, and called us leaders wicked and
foolish. We once sacrificed an innocent young girl, now let’s give the gods the life of a man, and you’ll see, they will send us a fair wind to blow us swiftly home.”

“But before Odysseus sent his guards to fetch me to my death, a rumor reached me of what he had said, and I ran into the woods and hid. And so the Greeks came up with a second plan to appease the gods. And you see the result before you. This magnificent wooden horse is their offering, to say how sorry they are for all the needless death and destruction they have caused. Only bring it inside your walls before night falls, because unless I am far wrong, there will be gold and treasure hidden deep inside the belly of that wooden horse.”

And when the Trojans had heard Sinon’s tale, many of them were greedy for treasure, and they believed his wicked lies - for he spoke very convincingly. But still the crowd was uncertain what to do - until, that is, a most terrible thing happened. The old priest, who had thrown his spear at the horse, was standing by the sea, when a great monster came swimming into shore and carried him off its jaws. It all happened in a flash, and the Trojans were filled with a strange terror.

Sinon one again called out: “You see, you Trojans. Nothing but the truth I spoke! The Gods have rightly punished that wicked old priest for sending his spear into the wooden horse!”

And now nobody dared to disagree. And the Trojans brought ropes and placed wheels beneath the statue’s feet,
so that they might pull the wooden horse through the gates of their magnificent city. And as the ill-omened procession entered Troy, girls and boys danced around the horse singing holy chants. There was rejoicing in the city, and even the fortune teller, Casandra did not dare open her lips, though she foresaw the imminent doom. For the gods had given Casandra the gift of clear-sighted prophesy, but had decreed that not one person would believe her.

It was a clear moon-lit night, and the Trojans carried on partying. Sinon the Greek had been set free, and nobody noticed that he lit a fire on the beach to signal to the army on the island of Tenedos that the wooden horse was within the walls of Troy. Next he returned to the city, and opened a secret door in the belly of the horse. And the Greek band of warriors, who had been hiding all that time within, let down a long rope- and they were led to the ground, by wily Odysseus, who was the first of them to stand in the central square of magnificent Troy.

It was not long before the Greek intruders had surprised the guards on the main gates and killed them. Soon the wide doors were open, and the Greek army was surging into Troy. The Trojans were either drunk or sleeping, and in no way ready to fight. On every side the city was in turmoil. Soon the palace of King Priam was in the grip of fire, and Helen - the most beautiful woman in the world, for whom these ten years of war had been fought, was throwing herself at the feet of her Greek husband, King Menelaus, and protesting how she had been kidnapped and brought to Troy against her will. It was all lies, of course, but
Menelaus was ready to believe his lovely wife, and took her once more in his arms.
Chapter 4: The Cyclops

After the Greeks destroyed the fabulous city of Troy, they sailed home in their black ships, but not all of them received a warm welcome by any means. When King Agamemnon returned to his place in Argos, his Queen Clytemnestra was far from pleased to see him. You see, before he left for Troy, King Agamemnon had sacrificed the life of their daughter so that the gods would send a fair wind to blow the Greek ships to Troy. Now, Clytemnestra hated her husband more than any man alive - but she pretended to be all smiles and kisses.

“My dear,” she said, “after your long journey, I’m sure that you’ll want nothing more than a nice hot bath”.

And while Agamemnon was relaxing his weary limbs in the warm, soapy, water, Queen Clytemnestra crept up with a knife, and killed him.

But on the island of Ithaca, a very different Queen, whose name was Penelope, was longing for the safe return of her husband. She had to wait quite a while though. His journey home took him ten long years, and all that time, Penelope was surrounded by men who wanted to marry her and steal her husband’s throne. She said to the suitors, “Gentlemen, I am spinning a magnificent bed spread for my wedding night. First let me finish making it, and then I will say which one of you I shall choose for my new husband.” And every day Penelope worked at her spinning wheel, and every night she unpicked her threads, so that her work was never done. In this way she kept the men waiting - for she
was sure that her true husband was still alive and would return home safely to her arms.

His name was Odysseus and he was famous all over the world for his quick mind and his cunning tricks. It was Odysseus who had come up with the idea of the wooden horse, which led to the destruction of Troy. But despite all his resourcefulness, he made slow progress home, for Poseidon the god of the seas was angry with him. The Sea God sent howling winds to blow Odysseus off his course, and fierce storms to buffet his ships. And this is the story of why he was so angry.

Odysseus and his men sailed in their swift boats, their oars turning up white foam on the wine dark sea. One evening they landed on a small island. He and his men hunted down goats for their dinner and that evening they ate roast meat on the beach. In the morning, Odysseus looked across the water to the mainland. He saw a wild country, with wooded mountains wrapped in mist. He decided to go and see what kind of people lived on that land. He told most of his men to wait behind, but he sailed across the water in his own boat with his crew of 20 brave men. On his back he took a skin full of wine that had been given to him by a priest of the sun-god, Apollo. He thought it would make a good gift for his hosts, whoever they might be.

When they got ashore, they scrambled up the steep cliffs, and explored the woods. They saw nobody, but high up on the mountain they discovered a vast cave. Inside they found lambs and goat kids living in pens, and on the ground were piles of round cheeses and barrels full of milk. The men
were all for stealing the cheese and a few lambs, and taking them back to the ship as fast as possible. But Odysseus commanded them to sit down and wait for the owner of the cave - for he was sure he would be a rich man, and generous travelers, according to the laws of the gods. So they waited until evening, and in the meantime they lit a fire, and helped themselves to the cheese and milk.

Towards sunset, they heard the tinkling of sheep bells, and they knew that the owner of the cave was driving his flocks back home. First the sheep came running into the cave, and then they were followed by a giant who had to stoop to enter through the door. He had one eye in the middle of his forehead, as do all those who belong to the race of the cyclops.

The Cyclops was astonished to find a band of men making themselves comfy in his cave and eating his cheese. He blinked with his one eye and asked in a terrible voice:

“And who might you be?”

Odysseus replied: “We are Greeks on our way back from the glorious war in Troy. Lord Zeus, the king of all the gods is our protector, and according to his laws you must treat us kindly, provide us with gifts, and send us safely on our way.”

Instead of replying, the Cyclops went to the door of the cave and rolled a great stone into the opening so that the exist was blocked. Now the only light in the cave was from the fire lit by Odysseus and his men.
“What care I for the laws of Zeus,?” said the Cyclops. “I am strong and besides, I am protected by Poseidon, the god of the seas and of earthquakes too, for he is my father.”

Odysseus and his men retreated into the dark corners of the cave, but the Cyclops could see the in the dark with his one eye, for it glowed as bright as the fire.

“Don’t talk to me of laws” said the Cyclops. “I know your type. You are scoundrels who sail the wine dark seas, raiding the people who live on their shores, killing and burning and plundering whatever takes your fancy. In fact, you are lawless pirates, that’s who you are!”

And with that he grabbed up two of the men and stuffed them into his mouth. “Hmm,’ he said.

The Greeks threw up their hands and wailed: “Oh Lord Zeus save us from this horrific monster!” but the Cyclops just chuckled to himself and lay down to sleep by the fire.

Odysseus drew his sword and was tempted to drive it into the heart of the giant while he slept, but then he thought: “If I kill the Cyclops, revenge will be sweet, but I will also be sending us to our own doom, for we shall never remove that great bolder from the door of the cave. Not twenty horses could pull that rock away. We shall surely remain here till we die.”

And so he and his men lay down and wept for their lost friends, while Odysseus wracked his brains for a better way to avenge them.
In the morning, the Cyclops awoke and without haste he ate two more of Odysseus men. Then he led his sheep out to the pasture, being careful to roll the rock into the mouth of the cave after him.

The Cyclops had left behind him a great walking stick, of the sort that Shepard’s use to climb over the mountains. This gave Odysseus an idea. He ordered his men to look for sharp pieces of flint in the back of the cave. They took these and used them to sharpen end of the stick into a cruel point. Next Odysseus told his men to pick up the stick and harden the point in the fire.

That evening when the Cyclops returned, the men trembled with fear, not knowing which ones of them the Cyclops would eat next.

But Odysseus wished the giant good evening saying: “My dear Cyclops. Let us not be enemies. See hear, I have a gift for you of the finest wine. It was given to me by priest of Apollo. It tastes no less wonderful than the ambrosia which the gods who live on mount Olympus feast upon. Here, I have a whole skinful for you.”

The Cyclops tried a cup of the wine and he liked it. “For once you speak the truth, oh pirate,” he said. “This wine is indeed the finest I have ever tasted.” and he picked up the skin and guzzled some more wine down.

“Tell me little man” he said, “What is your name?”
“My name,” said Odysseus “is Nobody. That is what I am called by my friends who love me, and my enemies who fear me.”

“Well I am neither your friend, nor do I fear you,” said the Cyclops.” But I shall call you Nobody all the same, if that is how you like to be called. For in truth, you soon will be nobody soon when I’ve eaten you. But as a reward for your gift of fine wine, I shall not eat you until I have eaten all the others.”

Before he went to bed he ate two more of Odysseus’s men, and finished the entire skin full of wine - enough to put 50 men to sleep - and he fell into a deep slumber on the floor of the cave, snoring like a volcano.

Now that the Cyclops was sound asleep, Odysseus ordered those of his men whom Cyclops had not yet eaten to pick up the great stick that they had sharpened and hardened in the fire. They carried it over their shoulders - for it was as big as the trunk of a young tree - and they drove it into the one and only eye of the Cyclops. The giant let out a terrible scream -and raged around the cave calling for help. The other one-eyed giants who lived near by came running to see what was the cause of this commotion.

“What’s happened to you?” they called from outside the cave.

“Nobody has hurt me,” wailed the Cyclops. “Nobody came into my cave and did this to me.” His words sounded slurred with wine, and the other giants thought that he was
having a drunken nightmare. Since he insisted that “nobody” was harming him,’ they all went back to bed.

In the morning, the Cyclops was careful to make sure that Odysseus and his men did not slip out of the cave. As each of his sheep went out, he felt it carefully to check that a man was not riding on its back. But he did not know that Odysseus had ordered his followers to tie the sheep together in threes, and that now they were clinging upside down between the sheep. The last animal to leave the cave was the old ram with curly horns. Odysseus was clinging to his underside. The Cyclops stroked the ram and said, “Cruel Nobody has blinded me, but I shall have my revenge. I shall find him tonight cowering in the corner of the cave, and I shall eat him for dinner, chewing very slowly.”

When Odysseus and his men were clear of the cave, started to scramble down the cliffs to the beach, taking some of the lambs with them. They pulled their boat out from where it was hidden in the brush wood, and started to row swiftly out to their friends on the island. Up above on the cliffs they saw the Cyclops, standing as tall as an oak tree and bellowing with rage: “Oh woe is me! Nobody has blinded me in my one eye, and now nobody is escaping across the seas!”

Odysseus stood up in the boat and called out to him: “Cruel Cyclops. You broke the laws of Zeus by eating my men and now you have your just desserts. Never again shall you see the light of day with that terrible eye of yours!”
His men begged him to sit down in the boat and keep quiet, but he carried on calling out insults to his enemy. In reply the giant picked up a huge rock and hurled it down into the sea. It sent up a great wave that rocked the boat so that it almost turned over. When it was steady, hot headed Odysseus stood up in the boat again, and despite the pleas of his men he called out,

“Listen here you Monstrous giant. If anyone asks you ask who did this too you, say it was swift witted Odysseus, son of Laertes, sacker of cities. Yes it was none other than Odysseus of Rocky Ithaca who took the eye of the cruel stupid Cyclops.”

And the Cyclops sent another bolder flying into the sea. And this sent up another great wave that almost sunk the boat again. Now the Cyclops went down on his knees and prayed to Poseidon,

“Oh great ruler of the seas, mighty lord who makes the earth quake and tremble… dear Poseidon, my father… hear my prayer. I did not think to fear this swift witted Odysseus, son of Laertes, Sacker of Cities. He was such a puny and feeble little man. But please, oh great Sea god, grant me revenge. Send a terrible storm to pick up his ships like toys and fling them back down again so that they smash into smithereens and all his brave men are drowned. Or if it is not permitted to end his life before its time, then make sure he only returns home alone, after many long years of great suffering, and that he finds his land in turmoil, and the echoing halls of his palace full of greedy
robbers devouring his wealth. Oh Sea lord. Hear the prayer of Polyphemus the Cyclops - for I am your loving son.”

The Sea god Poseidon, heard the prayer of his son, the cruel Cyclops, with one blind eye, and that is the reason why Odysseus spent ten long years buffeted by the cruel seas before he reached his home land.
Chapter 5: The Homecoming of Odysseus

After the war ended, not all the Greeks enjoyed a pleasant home-coming. King Agamemnon went home to his queen, the evil Clytemnestra – and while he was relaxing in his bath, she plunged a dagger into him. The cleverest of the Greeks, wily, red-headed Odysseus spent ten years more sailing home to his lovely queen Penelope. When we last left Odysseus, his ship had been wrecked by a storm. All his crew were drowned, but he was washed up on shore, half dead. He managed to crawl to some bushes by the mouth of the river, and there he fell into a deep sleep.

The island was ruled by a wealthy, sea-faring people. It just so happened that the King’s Daughter - the lovely Nausicaa - had come down to the river with her maids. They were all playing with a ball, and one time it splashed into a swirling pool of the river. The maids shrieked with laughter, and their cries awoke the sleeping warrior.

He clambered out of the bushes, covering his naked, sea-tossed body with leafy branches. The servant girls let out squeals when they saw him – but Princess Nausicaa calmly asked him who he was and how he came to be there. The stranger replied:

“Princess. Your beauty is so great –are you a goddess or a mere mortal? In either case, I stand here at your mercy. My ship was wrecked in the great storm last night. My crew hath drowned and I have lost everything.”
For once, the long-suffering Odysseus was in luck. The people of the island respected all who risked their lives at sea. The princess led the stranger to her father. When the king learned that their guest was Lord Odysseus on his way home from Troy, he prepared a great feast in his honour. Then he ordered a ship to be made ready to take him home. He filled a sea-chest for him with rich gifts – sumptuous robes, a golden cauldron, and a handful of jewels.

The ship carried Odysseus home to his rocky kingdom on the island of Ithaca. After 20 years away, he was far from certain what sort of welcome he would receive, and so he asked to be put on shore in a quiet harbour away from the town. There he hid his sea chest in a secret cave, and wrapped himself in beggar’s rags. Wearing this disguise, he climbed up a rough path. He came to the part of the island where pigs were kept. As he approached the hut of the pigs’ keeper, some fierce dogs rushed out at him. They were about to tear at his limbs - a fine welcome home - but just in time the keeper appeared and called them off.

“You should be more careful,” he scolded, “for the gods would be angry with me if my dogs ripped apart an innocent stranger – if you are, indeed, an innocent stranger.”

Odysseus recognized the man as his old servant, Eumaeus. He was a good man, and he honored the Greek tradition of giving food and shelter to strangers. In fact, in the Greek language there was just one word for both stranger and guest – because all strangers should be honored as guests. That night the two men sat up talking. Eumaeus explained
that his master was King Odysseus who had been away for twenty long years, and was almost certainly dead by now, but his loyal wife Queen Penelope would not believe it. Now his palace was full of scoundrels who ate his food and drank his wine. They demanded that Penelope pick one of them to marry, but she refused. She told them that she could not marry until she had finished sewing her wedding dress. She worked all day and every night she unpicked her work, so that it was never done.

Her son, Prince Telemachus, had taken a ship and gone in search of his father – but he had found no news. He was expected back any day now. The suitors of Penelope had set up a watch down at the harbor, and they planned to ambush and murder him on the road to the palace. Odysseus listened to all this but did not say who he really was.

The next morning, the swineherd pointed him on the road to the town. Odysseus set out – and on his way he met his son, Prince Telemachus, who was smart enough to take a back route to avoid an ambush. The two men walked along – a tramp and a prince side-by-side. Then Athene, the wise goddess, made Odysseus appear as his true self – younger, stronger, and richly dressed. Telemachus was amazed. He realized that this sudden transformation must be the work of a god or goddess - and then he understood that the man standing before him was his father who had left him as a baby. After they had embraced each other for a long time, they hatched a plan. Telemachus would return to the palace alone, and Odysseus would follow on, dressed as a beggar,
and accompanied by the loyal swineherd. No matter how many insults his wife’s suitors flung at him, they would keep their tempers till the moment was ripe for revenge.

Later that day, Odysseus and the swineherd approached the town. On the way they were met by a man they both knew - a servant who kept the goats. When he saw the two shabbily dressed men he called out.

“Well look what we have here! One piece of filth sticking to another piece of filth. Old pig-keeper, what are you taking that garbage to the palace for? All he’ll get there is a sound beating.”

Odysseus was sorely tempted to batter the man, but he knew he must keep his temper for now, and so he and the loyal swineherd walked past.

Not far from the town there was a pile of dung and rubbish. Lying on top of it was a sad old dog who had been cast out of the palace by the suitors. The dog’s name was Argos, and in his prime he had been a fine hunting hound – the favorite of Odysseus. Now he was all but broken. The moment that Odysseus came near, he sensed his master’s scent. He lifted his muzzle from the dung heap and thumped his tail. Odysseus saw him, and went over to pat his faithful animal on the head. Argos licked his master’s hand. He was happy for the first time in many years. And a few moments’ later he breathed his last.

Inside the palace, they found the suitors feasting. Odysseus went round the tables, begging for food. Some of the
suitors threw him some scraps, but their leader was more cruel. He turned to the swineherd and said, “Keeper of Pigs – why do you drag this old corpse into our dining room. Don’t we have enough beggars and pests in this town? Now kindly throw him out before I do much worse to him.”

And Eumaeus, the swineherd, replied:

“My lord Odysseus was always kind and respectful to old soldiers who were down on their luck. It is his food and wine that you are helping yourself to – and he would gladly spare a few morsels.

At this the leader of the suitors flew into a rage. “Fine words, swineherd,” he cried. “And this is what I think of your advice!” With that, he picked up a chair and flung it at Odysseus. It hit him on the shoulder. All the suitors burst out into laughter and started to pelt Odysseus and the swineherd with food. They both kept their cool, and retreated further into the palace.

Emmaeus found the old nurse who had looked after Odysseus as a baby. He said that the stranger was weary from tramping, and asked if she would bathe his feet. She gladly fetched hot water and began to do as she was asked. As she washed him, she could not help but notice a scar on the stranger’s leg. Odysseus had gone out hunting as a young man, and the boar had charged him and dug its tusk into his leg. She recognized the scar at once.
“My Lord,” she said. “You are home at last. Let me rush to your poor queen and let her know this wonderful news.”

“Hold still,” said Odysseus. “One of the servants might hear her rejoicing and my secret will be out. Don’t breathe a word to a soul, not even to fair Penelope.”

The good old nurse swore that she would keep her master’s secret.

As he walked back along the corridor, a maid spat at him and told him get out of the palace with his begging bowl.

That evening, as Odysseus was sitting on the porch of the palace, along came a real beggar. His name was Irus and he was a complete scoundrel – a cheat and a sneak thief. He was a favorite of the suitors who recognized him as a kindred spirit. Irus was not pleased to see a rival beggar around the palace, competing with him for scraps.

“Get up and get out, you filthy swine,” he said. “Make yourself scarce before I box you around the ears.”

“What’s got into you?” replied Odysseus. “I’ve done you no harm. You’d better keep your mouth shut or you’ll be the one on the wrong end of a beating.”

“Are you threatening me old man?” said Irus. “Well stand up so I can punch your lights out.”

One of the suitors overhead the two old tramps quarrelling and thought it was hilarious. He ordered them both inside so that the suitors could enjoy the spectacle of a beggar’s boxing match.
A space was cleared in the middle of the dining hall. The suitors placed bets on which tramp would knock the other out first. Irus was the clear favorite to win. But then the two men stripped down for the fight. Odysseus’s mussels glistened and all could see that he was built like an ox. Irus began to tremble with fear – but it was too late.

The leader of the suitors whose name was Antinous–swiftly changed his wager to back the newcomer. He called out to Irus –

“You’ve filled your fat belly with scraps from our table – old goat that you are - but now it seems your going to get what’s coming to you.”

Odysseus hit Irus with a glancing blow and he was out cold. The servants dragged him out by his feat and threw him on the dung heap beside the corpse of old Argos.

The suitors gave Odysseus his reward for his victory: scraps of meat from their plates, but Antinous said to Odysseus:

“That was a good hit from an old swine like you, but don’t get any ideas get above yourself, or you’ll soon be out on your ears.”

Later that night, Odysseus and Prince Telemachus, held a secret conference. This is what Odysseus told his son to do. He must tell his mother to call the suitors together and tell them that she had made up her mind to hold an archery contest. She would marry the man who could string her husband’s old bow and shoot the straightest arrow from it.
Penelope agreed to this idea because she knew that the only man who was strong enough to string her husband’s bow was her husband himself. She thought the contest was a cunning way to show the suitors that not a single one among them was the equal of her true husband.

The next morning the suitors gathered in the dining hall for the contest. They set up a target at the end of the room, and Telemachus handed his father’s great bow to the first to try his aim. But the suitor could not even bend the bow, let alone fire it. The others all laughed at him for being so feeble, but not for long, for none of them had the strength to string the bow. At last, their leader, Antinous took it in his hands, and though he could bend it just a bit, he was far from able to hook the string over its end.

“Fair Penelope must be laughing up in her chamber,” he said. “A fine trick this is her hers, for there’s no man alive who could string this bow.”

Then Odysseus said, “I was once handy with a bow and arrow. I pray let me try my hand.”

The suitors all laughed at the tramp’s boast. But Antinous said, “Certainly. If you string the bow for me I will reward you with gold. If not, I shall beat you within an inch of your useless old life.”

At this, Odysseus picked up the bow and tried it for weight, balancing it in his hand. The suitors mocked him for this display.

“Thinks he’s an expert, he does,” they jeered.
Then he placed the bow upright on the ground. He leant into it, and hooked the string over the end with ease. At first the suitors were astounded. And then they realized that the beggar was the king whose palace and hospitality they had been abusing, and whose wife they had been wooing. The realization came too late to save their skins, for soon Odysseus was letting arrows fly from the bow and picking them off one by one.

One of the suitors who was better mannered than the others tried to bargain with the king. He swore that if he would spare their lives they would pay him back three times over for what they had taken. But Odysseus replied that if they wanted to save their lives they had better fight. Several men charged him with their swords, but Odysseus was swift at letting the arrows fly.

And so Odysseus and his son Telemachus dealt with all the suitors. At the end of the battle not one was left alive. Now Odysseus told his son to fetch Penelope.

But when Penelope saw her husband she could not be sure after so many years that it was really him.

“Dearest Queen, how can you be so hard-hearted when you see your husband here before you after twenty long years,” pleaded Odysseus. And Penelope still was not sure whether or not to believe her own eyes. So she decided to test him. She called the old nurse and told her to move the bed out of their room and prepare it for the stranger in the next room along the corridor.
“How can that be?” asked Odysseus. “If it is my bed, than nobody could move it. For I made it myself, and one of its pillars is the olive tree that grew on this spot where I build the bedroom with my own hands.”

And then Penelope knew that the man before her truly was her husband, Lord Odysseus, for whom she had waited twenty long years. She threw her arms around him and wept for joy.

The End