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## *The Cyclops's Neighbor*

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### Abstract

"Hey, Polyphemus, what on earth's the matter with you?" roared Flagadonous, disturbed by howls coming from a nearby cave. "Is someone trying to kill you?"

### Keywords

Fiction; The Cyclops's Neighbor; C.R. Schabel

## 3

## THE CYCLOPS'S NEIGHBOR

By C. R. Schabel

"Hey, Polyphemus, what on earth's the matter with you?" roared Flagadonous, disturbed by howls coming from a nearby cave. "Is someone trying to kill you?"

"Oh Flagadonous! No-man is killing me!"

"Well, if no man is killing you, then your affliction must be from the gods. There's nothing we can do about that. Best make your peace with them and good night!"

Flagadonous returned to his bed thinking Polyphemus would come to a bad end. He would not be sorry to see it happen. Polyphemus was the largest, strongest cyclops--and a bully. But it had been prophesied that one named Odysseus would come and blind the mighty giant. All looked for some huge god-like being to come, but none had.

Flagadonous himself was small for a cyclops, but well respected in the community. He worked bronze and silver, irrigated fields, and bred the best sheep and goats. Polyphemus often stole from his flocks.

"Well, what was that big lug yelling about?" asked Flagadonous's wife, Sarcadroita.

"He must be sick."

"Sick! I thought he had been killed," she sighed. Sarcadroita had more reasons to hate Polyphemus than her husband did.

\*

Early in the morning they were wakened by a loud splash, a louder roar and another crash like a mountain falling into the sea.

Flagadonous quickly dressed and ran down to the rocky beach. Great Polyphemus was tearing huge chunks of stone from the cliff and hurling them out to sea. There a tiny ship easily avoided his wild throws. Flagadonous saw that Polyphemus's eye had been put out. Clotted gore hung from the empty socket. A moment of empathy for the stricken giant melted into severe terror.

"If the mightiest among us could be so harmed, what of the smallest," he thought. The only serious enemies the cyclops had were the Larcedonians, a neighboring tribe of savage giants nearly as big as them. The boat Polyphemus was trying to crush couldn't even hold one Larcedonian. It most likely held some of the little two-eyed men some cyclops liked to eat.

Back at the caves, Hurion was talking to an anxious group. "Someone's got to talk to him and find out exactly what happened. He trusts Flagadonous."

"But ..."

"I've heard Polyphemus say that he wouldn't have any other cyclops live so close to him."

"But ..."

"But nothing!" Hurion groped out and placed a hand on Flagadonous's shoulder. "We, once smiths to the gods, warriors who helped in the Titan wars, the greatest and strongest of mortal beings, must not perish! You must find out what happened to the son of Posidon!"

Flagadonous agreed, reluctantly. Polyphemus was a mighty demi-god, twice his height, four times his weight, and twenty times stronger. When he arrived, there was practically nothing left of the cliffs. Polyphemus lay on the earth exhausted, rivers of sweat pouring from his massive body.

"Polyphemus," he said meekly.

"What! Who is it? Are you stealing my sheep?" roared the great giant as he stood up and charged at the cringing Flagadonous. He stumbled on an unseen stone and fell prone at the little cyclops's feet.

"I'm blind," he moaned. "Oh Posidon, my father, help me!"

"I'd like to help you if I could," said Flagadonous, rasping words over his dry mouth. "But I'd have to know what happened to you to have any chance of effecting a cure."

"Is that my neighbor, Flagadonous?"

"Yes, it's me, here with some of the others.

We would like to know if those little men in the boat had anything to do with your affliction. Did you poison yourself eating them?" He hoped that was the answer, having never eaten a little man.

Polyphemus paused. If he told the truth, that Odysseus had gotten him drunk on wine and put out his eye while he slept, he'd be laughed at all over the island adding insult to injury. So, in a moment of uncharacteristic inspiration, he made up a story.

"Oh Flagadonous, beware the little men, they wield great magic! I came home from the fields yesterday at sunset and found them in my cave, eating my cheese. I asked them what they wanted, trying to be hospitable, and the one called Odysseus, named in the prophesy, held up his puny arm and a bolt of Zeus's fire flew from his hand and smote me blind!"

The agonized leviathan pounded the earth with his ox-sized fists until the whole island shook, then continued.

"I quickly rolled the boulder over my doorway and trapped them inside." He sank from rage to depression. "The one named Odysseus had told me his name was No-Man so that if I called for help, you would be tricked into thinking I was hurt by gods. In the morning, I had to let my flocks out to graze and they escaped with them. I could not see or I would have destroyed their boat."

It made sense to Flagadonous.

Little men who could blind a cyclops with lightning! This was worse than he ever imagined. The other cyclops grew alarmed when he told them the grim story. They all left for their homes in silence.

Wide-eyed, staring straight ahead, Flagadonous stalked into his cave and sat down.

"Well, what happened?" asked Sarcadroita.

He repeated the tale.

"Sounds like a pack of lies to me!" she exclaimed.

"And how would you know? Did you see what he looked like? There was nothing left of his eye, nothing! How else could little men do that to one so mighty as the son of Posidon?"

To nervous to eat, Sarcadroita had to push him out of the cave to attend his chores. Flagadonous spent the whole day moaning to himself. He checked every place that could possibly hide little two-eyed, magical men ready to strike him eyeless. Some of his flock wandered off and were nearly devoured by wolves, rabbits got into his root crops, and he failed to chase them off. When his friend Elephantus came over for their usual game of "Crack-boulder," he couldn't concentrate.

"Snap out of it, Flaggi," his friend advised.

"Why should you care what happened to that dreadful Polyphemus? I think this Odysseus did us a favor. For the first time in years, young cyclops maidens can roam free without being attacked by that monster. Remember when he took a fancy to my sister and I tried to stop him? I was bed-ridden for a month from the beating he gave me, and he still had his way with her. She hasn't been the same since, but today she seemed more cheerful!"

"All true," admitted Flagadonous. "But what if the Larcedonians attack us again. Without Polyphemus, could we defeat them?"

"They cause us less trouble than he has."

But as much as he tried, Elephantus couldn't cheer up his little friend. They parted at sunset for their own caves.

\*

At home, Flagadonous continued to rave with fear until Sarcadroita could stand no more.

"I don't know how the little men managed to blind him," she burst out, "but I'll tell you this, I'm glad they did. He deserved it, and more!"

"Why? Because he stole our flocks?"

She silently contemplated her next words. "He took something far more precious than that."

Her tone captured Flagadonous's scattered wits. "Not you!" he shrieked, forgetting his fear in rage. He had suspected this! Sarcadroita was one of the most beautiful women among them, and she lived so close.

"I'm going to get the truth out of that monster," he screamed. "He may be blind, but he's not mute!"

"Don't, he'll kill you!"

Flagadonous fashioned a large staff with a sharp bronze tip. "He'll have to catch me first and get by this!"

\*

Flagadonous entered the giant's empty cave. Being the son of Posidon, god of the sea, Polyphemus was slowly restoring his vision with daily treatments of ocean water.

"Ye gods, what a filthy creature he is!" exclaimed Flagadonous, his nostrils flared at the reek in the cave. He rummaged around and found a fire hardened,

blood-soaked stake, some broken skeletons of little men, and a bowl with a little liquid in it. Curious, Flagadonous took a sip.

"Wow!" he exclaimed. The wine was still strong and sweet. Then he found a skin half-full of the same wine and nipped at it as he waited.

For the first time in days he felt no anxiety.

He was unafraid of Polyphemus, magical little men, Larcedonians, or anything else. As he stumbled about, practicing with his spear, a shadow fell over the cave. Its half-sighted owner had returned.

Polyphemus could just discern movement in his cave, something that was too big for a man, too small for a cyclops. He grappled the huge boulder he closed his cave with and hoisted it over his head.

"Who dares invade my home?"

"Flagadonous!" screeched back the little cyclops.

"And I dare anything I like. Me and the other cyclops have had it with you!"

The son of Posidon roared and threw the great rock. It missed by inches. Flagadonous grabbed at his spear but got it caught between his legs. He tripped, just as Polyphemus charged. Flagadonous fell head-long with superb timing and landed a perfect cross-body block across the rushing giant's legs, who flipped over and landed flat on his back with such force that the cave trembled and some stalactites broke free and smashed him in the head, nearly ruining his half-healed eye.

Dazed, the mighty demi-god tried to rise, but found sharpened bronze jabbing into his throat.

"No, don't kill me!"

"Tell me truthfully then!"

That is how he got the whole story of Odysseus from the cowed giant and also got him to pledge, on his father's throne, not to bother any of the women on the island, or to take sheep that didn't belong to him, or to eat anymore strangers.

And Polyphemus kept all his promises, though, unknown to him, Flagadonous had forgotten everything by the next hung-over morning.

