

Odysseus and the Lotus Flowers

There was once a man named Odysseus who was a captain of a ship with 20 crew members. After the Trojan War, they set sail to return to their home, an island named Ithaca. On their journey back, Odysseus and his crew had many adventures. One of their adventures brought them to the Island of the Lotus Flowers.

On the day they arrived, Odysseus tied his boat up and came up with a plan. Because he did not know if the inhabitants of the island were dangerous, he decided to send three of his crew members to investigate. One member was the smartest, the other was the strongest, and the third was the fastest.

After three days, the men never returned so Odysseus and his crew decided to leave the boat and search for their missing crew members. After hiking for five hours, they realized that this island was a paradise; there were fruits and vegetables growing everywhere, and the rivers flowing all around them had clean cool water. Eventually, they came upon a hill with hundreds of people sitting on it.

When they got closer, they noticed that all the people had long hair that grew down to their feet, and their clothing was faded and ripped. Also, the people were pulling strange looking flowers from out of the hill and eating them. Although the people were all skinny and dirty, they were not sick, in fact, they were perfectly healthy.

Suddenly, the three men from Odysseus's crew appeared from on top of the mountain. The three men walked down while eating the strange flowers called lotus and smiled at Odysseus, but he could not recognize them. The smart man looked confused and stupid; the strong man was thin and had no muscles anymore; and, the fast man preferred sitting down on the ground. Although Odysseus was happy to see them, he was worried.

For the next hour, the three men explained what had happened. They told Odysseus that they eventually found this hill and all the people. So, they approached the people and began talking to them. What they learned was that the funny looking flowers could make you immortal if you ate them all day every day. The only problem was that the flowers could only grow on this mountain.

Odysseus thought that was amazing, but he was concerned when all the people on the mountain began handing him and his crew members flowers to eat. Odysseus did not eat the flowers, and he commanded his crew members not to eat them. Everybody was confused, and they asked him why he wanted to prevent them from living forever.

Odysseus laughed and pointed at all the people and explained that these people were not truly alive. One of his crew members stepped forward and said he was wrong, but Odysseus just laughed more. Odysseus explained that although the flowers kept all these people alive, none of them did anything with their days other than eat the flowers. He then asked one his previously strong crew member how often he had to eat the lotus. What he found out was shocking: the crew member said that he had to eat the flower every five minutes or else he would start aging again.

Odysseus then commanded his crew members to grab the three men who he sent out a few days earlier and carry them back to the boat. On the entire journey back, the men kicked and screamed because they needed to eat the flowers to live forever. They cursed Odysseus and their friends, but once they were on the boat and far away from the island, their abilities began to come back. The strong man was getting his muscles back; the smart man was thinking again; and the fast man was running all around the ship.

Eventually, the men went to see Odysseus to apologize; however, they were still confused as to why he would not let them stay. Odysseus explained that although they could have lived forever, they had a price to pay to do it—that they had to sacrifice life to gain life. The men were still confused, but just as they were leaving, the smart man understood and explained the meaning to the others.

Oedipus and the Sphinx

Long ago, when the land and little islands of Greece were divided into many kingdoms there was a city called Thebes. Its ruler was a man named Laius, and his harsh ways and unfair acts soon made him very unpopular with his subjects. The gods who lived on Mount Olympus, and watched over all living creatures, saw that King Laius had grown very proud, and they sent a terrible monster called the Sphinx, to punish him.

The Sphinx settled on a mount, overlooking the road that led to the city, and she waylaid everyone who passed by and asked them a riddle. If they did not answer correctly, then she fell upon them and ate them. One day a young man called Oedipus was travelling along the road. He had heard tell of the Sphinx, but he was strong and courageous, and continued undaunted.

Suddenly he espied the monster seated on a rock. She had the head of a woman, the body of a lion, the tail of a serpent and the wings of an eagle. At the sight of Oedipus her face lit up, and she addressed him in these words.

"Stop, O traveler," said the Sphinx "You may not continue until you have answered my riddle, which was taught to me by the blessed Muses." "Very well," said Oedipus calmly. "Tell me your riddle, and I will give you an answer."

"You are very confident, young man," said the Sphinx. "But know that all other travelers before you have lost their lives. Now, hearken to my riddle. What creature with only one voice has sometimes two feet, sometimes three, sometimes four, and is weakest when it has the most?"

"That is simple," said Oedipus, calmly and answered the riddle. "You have guessed correctly," cried the Sphinx, and soaring upwards in a fury, she hurled herself to her doom, over the edge of the cliff. Oedipus travelled on to the city of Thebes, and when the citizens heard that he had rid him of the Sphinx, they loaded him with honors and declared him their king.

King Midas

King Midas was a very kind man who ruled his kingdom fairly, but he was not one to think very deeply about what he said. One day, while walking in his garden, he saw an elderly satyr asleep in the flowers. Taking pity on the old fellow, King Midas let him go without punishment. When the god Dionysus heard about it, he rewarded King Midas by granting him one wish. The king thought for only a second and then said I wish for everything I touch to turn to gold." And so it was.

The beautiful flowers in his garden turned toward the sun for light, but when Midas approached and touched them, they stood rigid and gold. The king grew hungry and thin, for each time he tried to eat, he found that his meal had turned to gold. His lovely daughter, at his loving touch, turned hard and fast to gold. His water, his bed, his clothes, his friends, and eventually the whole palace was gold.

King Midas saw that soon his whole kingdom would turn to gold unless he did something right away. He asked Dionysus to turn everything back to the way it had been and take back his golden touch. Because the king was ashamed and very sad, Dionysus took pity on him and granted his request. Instantly, King Midas was poorer than he had been, but richer, he felt, in the things that really count.