

Ulysses' Great Adventure

Ulysses could sense the tide turning. He needed to marshal his troops and return to the ship before it set sail for a new destination.

“Let’s get moving men or you’ll miss the boat.”

Ulysses walked in his sideways manner to and fro as he did when he was becoming impatient. He had five men under his command for his expedition. They had been away from home for many days. Ulysses was not sure if he would ever see his birthplace again but he was determined to make a success of the expedition anyway. They had beached here on this shore six hours before, the welcoming surf calm and the winds mild. He had sent two of his men scouting the seaweed beyond the high tide mark, looking to establish a beachhead against any would-be enemies while they were there. One of his men had secured the boat. Ulysses had determined by the setting of the coastline and the disposition of the weather that he was in a northern land, so he had named it ‘North Beach’. His scouts had returned to report no enemies in the area.

Ulysses had mounted a search party for food. They had found sustenance in abundance in this North Beach land and feasted ravenously. The gods were truly blessing him in his fates.

But now it was time to continue their adventure. A rising sun bursting above the horizon of the sea, which was mirror flat as it reflected the rays skimming the surface, was welcoming him. The air was calm. *Perfect for castoff*, Ulysses thought. *It can’t get better than this.*

The men returned to the boat from their remaining duties. Three scrambled aboard with Ulysses. The other two muscled against the side of the boat to push it into

the water again. The strain of exertion could be seen in the leveraging stance of their bodies, the bulge of their eyes as their shoulders compressed against the edge of the boat. The boat started sliding slowly, then faster as the launchers gathered their momentum with the boat. They ungrounded it at last and clambered on.

The boat gently rocked and slowly floated away from the shore as the waves and tide drew it into the vastness of the sea. Ulysses stood majestically at the bow of the boat, ensuring that his stance impressed his crew as to his fearlessness and aptitude for the continuation of their great adventure.

An hour out and they could barely see the shore. Ulysses smelt the air. He sensed a storm brewing. He scanned the horizon for telltale signs and detected a monstrous anvil shaped cloud speeding directly for them to wrap them in its foul embrace. Ulysses was concerned for his men. The cloud was menacing, the largest monster he had to fight for some time. The gods were testing him. "Secure yourselves," he announced to the crew as he pointed to the east. "Zeus is about to test us. A storm approaches."

The crew looked to where he was pointing and shivered in fear at the sight. The storm was approaching at the speed of Pegasus. The sea was becoming rough.

Ulysses could see Zeus' anger now as he threw his shafts of lightning to the sea. He wondered if Zeus was fighting with Poseidon again or whether he was venting some other discontent of his seesawing temperament.

Waves whipped over the side of the boat and crested white as far as the eye could see. The crew hung on for dear life. The sky darkened. Huge tears of distress started falling from Hera. Was she grieved by the discovery of some immorality amongst the crew? Ulysses wondered. The horizon had vanished, replaced by a wall of rain lashing all of them and washing over the boat in synchronicity with the sea.

Fear started gripping Ulysses' abdomen as he sensed uncertainty soaking into him with the coldness of the storm. Lightning circumfused him and the anger of Zeus's wrath reverberated through his body as the vibrations resonated the assuredness of his mortality.

"Rocks ahoy!" one of the crew shouted barely audible above the roar of the wind.

Ulysses instantly gazed toward the direction the crewmember was pointing. *We are doomed*, Ulysses thought in anguish. He had seen rocky cliffs to the south as they left shore, not considering them a threat, as they would bypass them on the voyage drifting beyond them with the tide. But the gods were against him. They had driven him south too quickly with the wrathful storm of Zeus. "Prepare for grounding," Ulysses shouted.

A massive breaker unloaded its contents on the boat. "Sailor overboard," one of the crew wailed.

Ulysses bowed his head in despair. His eyes hung low as he wept the misfortune that had penetrated him. "O gods of Olympus," he said to the sky. "Please take me now before I see all my crew swept to the depths of the sea, snatched by Poseidon for his ill purposes. I have failed in my commission before you to complete the undertaking you had bestowed upon me. What misdemeanour have I committed that you feel fit to persecute me in this way. Allow me the courtesy of sacrificing my mortality for the safety of the others in my crew."

The storm raged. The wind howled. The deluge swamped them. The lightning and thunder encircled them. The rocks approached, ensuring their demise.

Ulysses could no longer gather any morale from within himself for his crew to share.

“Do you really exist, O mighty gods or are you just a figment of our imagination?” Ulysses continued in his tirade of hopelessness. “What sign have you ever shown us of your existence bar the wrath you vent on us when you are unhappy like a child in tantrum? Is that really you or is the inventiveness of my imaginings exceeding my understanding? I cannot believe you exist anymore if you deign to destroy us like discarded toys you no longer want to play with. Why give us a quest of glory if you snatch it away before we can advertise its success? Do you really disdain us so much as if to spit us out like pips from a fruit? Show your love for me. Give me a sign, a reason to continue to believe in your almighty existence and your love for your mortal beings rather than being casualties of your petty arguments.” Ulysses felt he could continue no longer. He would throw himself into the sea and beg for the mercy of Pontus rather than see his crew dashed onto the rocks, despising the audacious carelessness of their leader as they breathed their last.

As Ulysses debated the length of his life, he sensed an easing in the storm. The winds lessened, the deluge abated, the waves decreased in amplitude. The wind changed direction and came from the south. The rocks were diminishing as if Brizo were hauling their boat out to sea and safety. Could the gods have really heard his supplication, his vituperation and censure? He lifted his eyes. His courage started returning, as if the sluice in the dam had been lifted allowing water to flow again.

“Praise to you, O Zeus. Forgive me for doubting your existence. Thank you for the mercy you have bestowed on us in saving the rest of my crew. Give the perished safe voyage to the underworld. Pay the price to Charon for sure passage for that brave soul,” Ulysses pleaded in humility.

The storm completely passed. The sea returned to its calmness again. The combined effect of the wind and tide swept the boat past the barrier of the craggy and

rocky cliffs that had almost destroyed them. They ventured further south with the current leaving the promontory behind them.

The tide was turning again. Ulysses could see land approaching to the west. His optimism returned as the sun erased the watery reminder of the tempestuous storm from the boat's soaked deck. The gods had heard him and guided him past the obstacles in his path of travel, his sentiment and his credo. They neared a sandy beach as the waxing tide drove them forward. Ulysses braved the bow again with the confidence of one loved by the gods. He looked over his brave corps, eager to obey his every command.

This beach was south of the peninsular they had just passed. Ulysses decided to name this landmark 'South Beach'.

"Prepare to land," Ulysses announced to the crew. He looked up, "Be-gods! Two giant Cyclops have come to greet us. Be prepared for evasive action men."

"What are those crabs doing on that scrap of wood, daddy?" a little girl on the beach asked her father.