

EPISODE 1 - An Apple for a Goddess

CD 1 tracks 1-3

total running time: 16:08

Peleus wins his bride (⊕ 6:16)

Imagine a mountain so tall no man or woman has ever seen its summit. Imagine the home of the mighty gods and goddesses. Imagine Mount Olympus. On top of Mount Olympus there was a throne. Upon the throne would sit father god Zeus, the cloud-compeller, whose temple is the sky. From that throne Zeus could see everything.

- 5 One time Zeus looked down and he saw a little island in the blue Aegean Sea. And riding a dolphin, as though it was a pony, through the shallows towards that island, he saw a nymph, a magic woman. She stepped from the back of the dolphin. She waded up the shallows, she lay on her belly in the sand and she fell asleep.

Zeus was filled with desire for her. He called his brother, the god of the sea, Poseidon. He
10 said, "Who is she?"

Poseidon laughed. "This is Thetis. Surely you know of her? Surely you know of the prophecy that hovers over her? They say one day she will have a son and the son will grow up to be greater than his father. If I were you, I wouldn't pay her one of your visits."

Zeus did not like the sound of that. He didn't want any son of his to grow up to be greater than
15 him. Zeus had an idea. He would make some mortal fall in love with this Thetis, marry this Thetis, have a son by this Thetis and then, once the son was born and safely out the way, Zeus could pay Thetis one of his visits.

And so Zeus caused a Greek king, one of the Argonauts, warlike King Peleus, was made to fall in love with this sea-nymph Thetis.

20 Peleus sailed across the sea until he came to the island. He made his way along the coastline till he found the beach. He laid out gifts in the sand and he waited until he saw, between the sea and the sky, a speck. The speck got larger, until he saw a dolphin and riding it - Thetis. Warily she stepped from the back of her dolphin. She waded through the shallows towards this strange man.

25 She looked at the gifts he'd laid in the sand. Jewels! She was from the sea! She had pearls as big as my hand. She wasn't interested in shiny, tiny jewels. He'd laid out bowls full of honey. Honey! She was from the sea! She loved the salty, bitter taste of fish.

She said to him, "If you want me, if you want me to marry you, you must prove to me that you are worthy of me. Catch me!"

30 He laughed. He was Peleus, warlike Peleus - a great warrior! He stepped forward. He put his hands upon her waist. But suddenly, he wasn't holding a woman, a nymph. He was holding an enormous seagull. She had changed her shape. With her wings she beat at his face. With her beak she pecked at his cheek. He stepped back. He put his hand to his cheek. Blood trickled between his fingers. She darted into the sky as a tiny seabird now. He reached up and by pure
35 luck he grabbed her.

But now he held an eel, a giant eel that twisted round his arm, round his waist, between his legs. He fell into the sand. It wriggled towards the water. He put his arms around it.

Now he held a lioness that rolled onto its back, struck him with its paw, scratched him with its claw. He staggered back. She jumped into the water. She swam away as a seal.

40 He watched as she swam off. But suddenly she turned. She looked at him again with her wet pebble eyes and she said, "Try again."

Day after day she came to the beach. No sign of that strange man. One time she rode the dolphin to near the beach. She stepped from the back of the dolphin. She waded up the shallows and she lay on her belly in the white sand and she fell asleep.

45 Then, warlike King Peleus climbed out of the tree where he'd been hiding. Carefully, slowly, silently, he made his way across the beach. And then, with a piece of rope, he tied her hands and feet together behind her back. She awoke.

She knew immediately that he had outwitted her. If she tried to change her shape now, with her hands and feet tied behind her back, she would tear herself in half. She would rip herself in
50 two.

She nodded her head. She said, "You have won me."

He untied her. He rubbed her wrists and ankles where the rope had cut. And then the two of them kissed.

***The wedding of Peleus and Thetis* (⊕ 6:11)**

On the night of the next full moon there was a wedding - a wedding in a clearing on that island. At one end of the clearing two thrones - on one sat warlike Peleus, on the other the sea-nymph Thetis. All around the clearing vines, heavy with ripening grapes, gurgling streams, cattle grazing.

5 All the mighty gods and goddesses had been invited to the wedding - gods and goddesses mingling with men and women, horse-loving Greeks. Each of the mighty gods and goddesses had brought a gift.

The first to give her gift was the goddess of war and wisdom - owl-eyed Athene. She gave them a spear so sharp it could cut through the wind itself.

10 Then came the god of battle. Red-eyed Ares gave them a golden breastplate emblazoned with silver stars.

Then the goddess of love herself. Voluptuous Aphrodite took from one of her fingers a ring. She gave them one of her golden rings, a ring curved in the shape of a curling arrow, whose sharp point touched its feathered tail.

15 Then came the god of the sea, the king of the tumbling foam, the girdler of the earth. Poseidon gave them four white horses, immortal horses who once had been the crests of waves, whose father had been the west wind.

Now Zeus - father Zeus, whose temple is the sky - Zeus the cloud compeller transformed a hill of ants into warriors. Black eyed, black toothed, black tongued, black armoured, the
20 bodies of warriors but the minds still of ants. Silent, obedient, absolutely unfearing, untiring, undoubting - an army that fought with one mind. The fiercest army in the world - the Myrmidons. They were Zeus' gift.

The last god to give a gift was the last god of all, the lord of the realm of many guests, the god of the dead. Hades gave them a black urn. Inlaid in silver across its front, a picture - an image
25 of three goddesses, the three fates. The first, who spins out the thread of a life; the second, who measures out its length; and the third, who cuts it.

King Peleus and the sea-nymph Thetis gave thanks. They stepped into the centre of the clearing They held each others' hand. And the nine muses began to sing. They danced and all around them in a looping, curling spiral, mortal and immortal holding hands, dancing in
30 harmony.

I said *all* the mighty gods and goddesses were there. One had not been invited. For would you invite the goddess of strife and arguing to your wedding? From up above Eris watched. She saw this happiness. She saw the laughing, the joy. And it was disgusting to her. She felt sick. She thought to herself, "Everyone else has given a gift. Why should I not do the same?"

35 She reached into her pocket and took out something and dropped it. It fell through the sky. It fell through the clouds. It landed with a thump at the feet of the bride and groom. The music stopped. The dancing ceased. Everyone turned and watched as Peleus bent down and picked up...

"A golden apple," he said. "A golden apple has fallen from the heavens. Another gift for us!
40 There are words written upon it - 'to the fairest'. I must give this golden apple to the most beautiful of all of you!"

As soon as he'd said those words, he knew he was in terrible danger. For suddenly, standing in front of him, the three most powerful goddesses of all: here, owl-eyed Athene, the goddess of war and wisdom, her grey eyes blazing with light. She had stretched out her hand toward
45 him.

Standing beside her, Zeus' wife, the queen of heaven. She with the eyes of an ox - ox-eyed Hera - she too was showing him her empty palm.

Standing beside her, the goddess of love. Voluptuous Aphrodite had stretched out her hand. She was looking at it. She was looking at him. He knew the moment he chose one of them, the
50 two he had not chosen would turn against him and they would not rest until he was dead.

He looked from one to the other, to the next. His mouth went dry. Zeus stepped forward. He took the golden apple. He put it in his pocket and said nothing more of it. He nodded his head at the nine muses. The music resumed. The dancing continued.

But now it was not graceful, for often the dancers could not hear the music. For now there
55 was another sound, the bickering of those three goddesses as to which of them was the most beautiful. Zeus soon found himself with a headache.

***The birth and childhood of Achilles* (⌚ 3:41)**

Nine months later the bride gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. Of course she consulted oracles to find out what would happen to her son and she learned, to her horror, if her boy grew up and went to war, though he would win great glory, he would die young. Her husband was a warlike man. He would want his son to follow in his footsteps.

- 5 Thetis took the baby to the end of the world. She took the baby to a dark river. She held the baby and dipped him head-first into the dark waters of the River Styx. The water flowed even over the bottom of the baby's foot.

Wherever the water touched, his skin became invulnerable. But of course there was a place the water could not touch - the place where she held him, his heel.

- 10 She took the child back to her husband. Warlike Peleus was furious that she had stolen the boy away. He banished her. And so the baby never again sucked on his mother's breast. And so his name means 'no lips'.

- He was taken up into the mountains, where he was trained by centaurs in the arts of war. He was fed on the marrow of bears to make him strong, the guts of lions to make him fierce, the milk of does to make him run swiftly. On his sixth birthday he killed his first boar and from then
15 on he was always dragging thrashing beasts into the centaurs' cave. On his twelfth birthday, he chased a full-grown stag through the forest. He killed it with his bare hands.

- When his mother heard that, she was terrified that soon her son would be taken off to some war where he would die, and so she kidnapped him. She took him far away. She thought to
20 herself, "Where can I hide my son where he won't be found? I will hide him among women."

And so she dressed her young son as a young woman. Before she left him, she slipped onto his finger that wonderful golden ring - the wedding gift of Aphrodite - the ring carved in the shape of a curling arrow whose sharp point touched its feathered tail.

- For five years that young man lived the life of a young woman. During those years he became
25 best friends with a warrior, whose name was Patroclus. He liked Patroclus so much he gave Patroclus that golden ring. Patroclus wore it proudly, the ring given him by his friend Achilles.