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## The Iliad and the Odyssey, Part 2

By Vickie Chao

Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, had been away from his home for more than nine years now. He missed his wife, Penelope, and his son, Telemachus, terribly. Yet, because of a promise he had made a long time ago, he had to leave his kingdom for the Trojan War. The Trojan War all began with a beautiful woman named Helen. She was married to Menelaus, king of Sparta. The two were happy together. But since Helen was the prettiest woman in the world, she naturally had a lot of suitors. While most had moved on after she got married, Paris, a Trojan prince, had refused to give up on her. With the help of Aphrodite (the goddess of love), he made Helen fall in love with him. The two eloped.



Menelaus was determined to get Helen back. He called on all of Helen's former admirers and reminded them of a vow they had made on his wedding day. He demanded they honor it by going to Troy with him and fighting the Trojans. Since Odysseus was once spellbound by Helen's beauty, he was now obligated to join the war. He really did not want to go. But there was nothing he could do.

For nearly a decade, the Greeks held Troy under siege. They hoped that the Trojans would surrender. But that day never came. Aside from the never-ending standoff, the Greeks had quite a few problems of their own. Their commander-in-chief, Agamemnon (Menelaus' brother and king of Mycenae), was a terrible leader. One day, he got into a big fight with his best warrior, Achilles. In the end, Achilles left the Greek camps in disgust. He swore that he would never come back! The Trojans were elated with the news. And they soon began to make progress. As much as Achilles detested Agamemnon, he eventually changed his mind. Upon his return, he replaced Agamemnon and became the new commander-in-chief. His first line of business was to avenge the death of his friend, Patroclus. He challenged Hector, Paris'

brother and a great Trojan hero, and slew him.

One day, Ajax, Odysseus, and Achilles managed to sneak behind Troy's heavy-guarded gates. But they were soon exposed. With Apollo standing by his side as a guide, Paris shot an arrow into Achilles' only weak spot -- his heel -- and killed him instantly. Ajax and Odysseus retreated in haste and returned to their camps with Achilles' body. The Greeks were stunned by the loss. After burying Achilles next to Patroclus, they awarded his sacred armor to Odysseus. This nice gesture turned out to be a big disaster. It made Ajax very mad. He could not fathom why his fellow countrymen would not bestow him that honor. Plagued by nightmares and jealousy, he eventually killed himself.

Several weeks after Ajax committed suicide, Paris was dead, too. Menelaus was delighted by the news. He thought the war would be over. But he was wrong. Deiphobus, Paris' brother, had fallen in love with Helen. Now he forced her to marry him, so the war dragged on.

Eager to end the conflict once and for all, Odysseus mulled over all the available options. He knew that if only the Greeks could get into Troy undetected, they could win the war. The problem was, of course, how. Odysseus racked his brain day and night. At last, he came up with a brilliant solution. He shared the idea with his comrades. Everybody thought it was brilliant, too. With the blessing from the entire Greek force, Odysseus set off to work on it right away.

One morning, the Trojans awoke and found the Greeks gone. They saw a huge wooden horse dedicated to Athena abandoned out in the open. They hauled it back into the city but had no idea what to make out of it. Later, they caught Sinon, Odysseus' cousin, and took him in as a prisoner. They peppered him with a lot of questions. Sinon told the Trojans that the Greeks had a fall-out with Athena, the goddess of wisdom. To appease the angry deity, they made an imposing statue for her before they set sail back to Greece. The story elated the Trojans. They could not believe how lucky they were! While some remained suspicious, their opinions were quickly cast aside as crazy. That night, the Trojans held a great feast to celebrate their victory. After ten long, agonizing years, the Trojan War was finally over! At the height of the party, Sinon slipped out and lit a beacon. Agamemnon saw the signal and ordered his men to quietly approach Troy from a nearby island. In the meantime, a secret door was swung open in the belly of the wooden horse. The Greek soldiers, fully armored, climbed down the statue. They opened the gates and let Agamemnon's troops in. Together, their joined forces launched a surprise attack. The Trojans, now very drunk, were unable to fight. Most of them died without ever

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knowing what had happened!

When Odysseus and Menelaus got down from the wooden horse, they headed straight to the palace. There, Menelaus killed Deiphobus and reunited with Helen. Odysseus then set the palace on fire. He and the other Greek soldiers killed every Trojan in sight. By the time they were done sacking Troy, its citizens were either dead or dragged away as slaves. Only Antenor and his family members were spared. They were the lucky few because Antenor -- once a member of the Trojan council -- had helped Odysseus, Menelaus, and Acamas to escape Troy ten years earlier when the trio had gone to the city as ambassadors.

Now with Helen back in Menelaus' arms and Troy completely leveled, the Greeks were ready to go home. Odysseus was excited, for he had been longing for this moment since he left Ithaca. He figured that the journey would only take a few days. But it was just not meant to be! Shortly after Odysseus left Troy, a violent storm drove his ships off course, thus setting off a series of adventures. To find his way home, Odysseus dealt with one obstacle after another. He blinded a Cyclops, a one-eyed, man-eating giant. He visited a dead prophet in the underworld and saw many of his former comrades. He watched his men being swallowed alive by a hideous, six-headed monster called Scylla. He heard Sirens' enchanted songs but had to fight the urge to swim ashore, for the music would lead him to a deathtrap. After these and several more near-death experiences, Odysseus finally made it home -- nine years later!

To Odysseus' dismay, the palace was in disarray. During his time away, many young men came and proposed to his beautiful wife, Penelope. Faithful as she was, Penelope turned them all down. But those shameless suitors refused to take "no" for an answer. So they came to the palace everyday. They ate, drank, and entertained all at Penelope's expense. Penelope and her son, Telemachus, were very angry, but there was nothing they could do. For years, they heard nothing from Odysseus. They did not know if he was dead or alive. Telemachus even ventured to Sparta and Pylos to try to get some information about his father. But nothing turned up. Then, one day, an old beggar came to the palace. He told Penelope that Odysseus was on his way home. What he did not tell her was that he -- the old beggar himself -- was Odysseus. Penelope received the old beggar cordially.

She did not know the visitor was her husband. But how could she? Odysseus had aged considerably for the past nineteen years. By now, his appearance had changed completely. Odysseus did not blame Penelope for not recognizing him. He sat quietly in the palace and observed the situation. Later, Penelope devised a new plan to dissuade the suitors. She told them about a trick that Odysseus used to do before the war. She said that she would marry the man who could shoot an arrow through a line of twelve axes like her husband had once done. Just as she had predicted, all those young lads failed miserably. Then, all of a sudden, the old beggar stood up and asked if he could try, too. He took the bow into his hand, flexed it a bit, and calmly shot an arrow through a line of twelve axes! The palace hall fell dead silent. The old beggar whirled around and killed all of Penelope's suitors. Even after the deed was done and the bodies were taken away, Penelope still had doubts. In one final attempt to attest his identity, the old beggar revealed a secret that only she and Odysseus would know. He told her that the bed in their bedroom was carved out of a giant living olive tree. Upon hearing his words, Penelope broke into tears. She needed no more proof. She knew now that the old beggar was indeed Odysseus. At last, after nineteen years, her beloved husband had come back for her. She could not ask for a better ending than that!

The Iliad and the Odyssey, Part 2

## Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Of which kingdom was Menelaus the king?
- A. Pylos
  - B. Troy
  - C. Sparta
  - D. Ithaca
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Which of the following about Odysseus is correct?
- A. When Odysseus finally arrived back home, he found his wife, Penelope, remarried already.
  - B. Odysseus divorced Penelope and married Helen after the fall of Troy.
  - C. After the Trojan War, it took Odysseus a total of nineteen years to get back home.
  - D. Odysseus was the king of Ithaca.



