

# *The Odyssey*

by Brit

*For The Blintz, who's a lot smarter than she gives herself credit for.*

“Here.” The paper bag bounced off my shoulder before landing on the dashboard of my car. I glanced into the rearview mirror, trying to read the expression on Hutch’s face before he completely disappeared from view. Stakeouts are often likely to kill you from boredom, especially when it’s your turn to stay awake and watch for the bad guys.

His face was unreadable as he stretched out in the back seat, sunglasses keeping the light out of his eyes and making them hard to see. I grabbed the sack and pulled out a new paperback.

“What’s this for?”

Hutch shifted, trying to find a spot that’s not so hard on his back. “It’s ‘The Odyssey.’ Homer.”

“I can see that. What’s it *for*?”

A brow raised up over the top of his sunglasses. “It’s *for* you. I’m sick to death of your insipid trivia and word games. Besides,” he finally settles on the seat, “I thought you might like it. Warships, battles, good guys, bad guys, that kind of thing.”

After staring at the familiar book, I glanced back at him in the mirror again, and realized he’s staring at me. I wish he didn’t have those damned glasses on. I wanted to see if he was serious or not, or if he thought I was...

Stupid.

That’s what my seventh grade teacher had called me—not in so many words, but stupid all the same—when I had selected Homer’s story for a book report. I hadn’t been in California all that long and was having a hard enough time adjusting as it was, only to have this moron with a teaching certificate dress me down in front of the entire class. Said I was tackling something “far beyond my grasp and intellect.” When I told him I had already read “The Iliad,” he said he found that hard to believe and suggested I try reading something a little more in my league like “White Fang.”

I was sent to the principal’s office shortly after telling him what he could do with Mr. London’s book.

I usually make it a point *not* to give a rat’s backside about what people think of me, but for some reason, that stuck with me. I did the book report on “The Odyssey,” and even though I struggled through it, I really liked it. I worked my butt off on the report, too. It

didn't matter though. The teacher gave me a "D" and called my report "juvenile." Told me next time to stick to my own skill level.

I never picked up Homer again after that.

I looked back hard at my partner, trying to read his eyes. Even through the sunglasses, I could tell there was nothing mocking me, no challenge. His expression softened a bit from its previous nonchalance. A slight smile curved at the corner of his mouth the way it sometimes does.

"Let me know how it ends."

And I did.

*7/30/01*