



Heroes of Troy

by Neil Richards. Part 1

There's a lot been said about the Trojan Wars. A lot been written too. Most of it by cleverer men than me...Poets – Kings even. A lot of pretty verse about love and vengeance and treachery. And Heroes.

But you don't hear much about the ordinary men. Men who rowed across miles of perilous ocean to be hurled into battle on a windswept beach far from home. Men who were slain, mourned by their loved ones for ever. Men who were there at Troy. Men like me.

Here's my tale. Forgive me if it doesn't rhyme - but I'm not a poet, I'm a soldier. My name? Ach, that's not important either. What's important is what really happened. I know. I was there at the beginning. And at the end.

It started right here in the Spartan court. Forty years ago. I was a boy soldier then, assigned to the bodyguard of King Menelaus. Sparta was rich and powerful – I lived in the palace - and life was good! I was a canny lad, mind – not a thing went on in that place that I didn't know about. Menelaus was a tough old bird, didn't suffer fools gladly.

But his wife – Helen – that made up for everything. Most beautiful woman in the world they said – and they were right. Whole place lit up when Helen walked in – and Menelaus turned into a right old softy the minute he saw her. He knew he was lucky to have her, mind – he'd had to fight off a lot of competition.



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And then...one day...a young prince called Paris turns up. That's when the whole thing went fig-shaped. There was a big storm see, and out of nowhere this Trojan fleet got blown in, way off course. Now Troy was the real deal then – a big powerful city to the east.

Everybody wanted to keep in with Troy and their King Priam - because our trading ships used it all the time. So as soon as Menelaus hears that this fleet has Priam's son – Paris - on board he pulls out all the stops. Big welcome, food, drink, dancing girls – you name it. Fine by me, I like a good party as much as the next bodyguard. Brilliant.

So come the big banquet and I'm looking around like a bodyguard should. Paris is all tanned and cool, reclining at the table. I'm thinking he's maybe a bit full of himself, but Menelaus is slapping him on the back and laughing away. Then I look across at Helen and I see she can't take her eyes off Paris. And he's looking back at her, all gooey eyed.

I check the room. Nobody else has noticed a thing and when I turn back - the two of them's pretending nothing just happened. But I'm not a bodyguard for nothing. I see things. I'm paid to see things. And I know that what I'm looking at is big, big trouble.

Anyways, a week goes by and the storm keeps blowing and by now Paris is pretty much one of the family, he and Helen all laughing and joking and King Menelaus not spotting what's going on under his very eyes.

And then Menelaus gets called away for a few days and he says to Helen look after Paris for me would you my love and I'm in the corner rolling my eyes thinking – this is a very bad move, boss. Acch - he's a king - what can you do?



So Menelaus goes and I keep a shifty eye on Paris. No sooner has Menelaus's boat popped over the horizon than lover-boy's in Helen's room telling her he's so totally fallen for her. And she's fighting it – but not much – oh dear what about poor Menelaus, she loves the old fella too and she mustn't betray him. Blow that, says Paris, I've been dreaming about you all my life, so Helen shrugs and says all right then. And Paris goes all dramatic and says, my ship is ready to sail, I shall come for you tonight and we shall flee together.

Now people have said to me I should have stopped them right there and then. That the whole Trojan War and the deaths of thousands come down to that moment in Helen's room with them two dithering and me hiding behind the curtain. But as we all know, what goes on with Kings and Queens is up to the gods, not fellas like me. And as the poet says - with hindsight everyone has twenty twenty vision.

So there I am just before dawn, sitting on the end of the jetty with a wee fishing rod, watching Paris smuggle Helen on board his ship. And as the Trojan fleet ups anchor and slips quietly away towards the East, I'm thinking to myself – Menelaus is not going to be happy about this. Menelaus is going to be livid. And when Menelaus gets livid, Menelaus goes to war.

But here's the thing – war against Troy is not going to be your run of the mill war. War against Troy will be the war to end all wars. And muggins here'll be right in the thick of it. And you know what's really rubbish about that? There's no gods watching over me, oh no. I'm going to be in it up to my neck and it'll be down to me – and me alone - to get through it all alive. Brilliant.