

"Wake up Leonidas!" bellowed the surly camp manager, Behelondas, "You're going helot-hunting today."

"Coming", was the reply from the small, slight man in the back left corner of the overcrowded dorm room, he had never quite attained the bulky physical build that the trainers deemed optimal, and with his tousled black hair he appeared to have the build of a stick. What Leonidas lacked in build however he made up for in skill with the javelin and pure cunning. However, the trainers did not consider those traits to be desirable in the charges and as a result of that he was one of the oldest trainees still in the training barracks.

As Leonidas left the barracks, he noticed that in the yard in front of the long, central barracks block there was a perioikoi crafting an enormous water jug. The potter soon noticed Leonidas' gaze. "I'm making this pot for the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, thinking of decorating it with a gorgon."

"Leonidas, stop dawdling!" barked the camp manager, "or at this rate we may as well give the job to Psychros." Psychros was a rising star among the younger recruits and if he was given the opportunity to go helot-hunting instead of Leonidas, Leonidas knew that he would continue lording it over him until the day he died. "Coming", came the resigned response from Leonidas.

As they walked down the streets of Sparta, Leonidas noticed men rubbing oil into their skin from their small oil flasks, potters spinning wheels to make small, miniature pots, some destined for the sanctuary of Artemis Orsica, some destined for the home. He also noticed bronze workers crafting miniature figurines of warriors and horsemen, shepherds, and Persians. Gazing at the perioikoi, going about their lives, Leonidas felt a sudden longing for a life as simple as that.

After what felt like an age, they finally came to the helot-hunting fields. "So we're here", came a sudden sentence from the normally quiet Behelondas. Leonidas looked at him in amazement, he'd never seen Behelondas say anything that sounded even remotely distanced from an order. "What are you staring at boy!" exclaimed Behelondas, "get into position, now hurry up!". Once Leonidas had produced his kit Behelondas finally said "Okay, so I've heard you're good with a javelin".

"Yes...", came the uncomfortable reply from Leonidas, feeling fairly certain that he knew in which direction this conversation was heading, "I've been told that, yes."

"Right, so see if you can hit that target over yonder.", he pointed to what looked like a cut-out of a man stock on top of a wooden post, about a hundred or so metres away. Leonidas drew back, and threw the javelin that he was holding in his hand. It sailed the distance and hit the target right in the centre of the chest. "So, you're good with a javelin but a bit small for the spear." Yes, Leonidas definitely knew in which direction this was heading. "Well, since we can't exactly let you get to close-quarters or they'd probably be able to kill you", Leonidas felt his hackles rise.

"I **can** use a sword you know, " he began, "I just don't enjoy using it".

"Well", said Behelondas, "your instructors would beg to differ." "Get your armour on and we're going helot-hunting."

"Why do we have to go helot-hunting" came the question from Leonidas, "Its not as if we don't know how to fight."

"Well, **boy**, its so that we accustom you to killing some actual humans, and if I hear any more chatter from you I'm giving the job to Psychros."

As Leonidas gathered his gear he soon spotted a helot and, giving chase, he speared it with his javelin. What Leonidas didn't expect however, was how his heart welled up with pity for the poor man, who thrashed violently before lying very still, deathly still. Behelondas, soon came up behind him saying "Well Leonidas, you've killed one, tomorrow we'll come back again."

As Leonidas lay in his dorm room later that night he wondered, what gives us the right to kill other people, and as he turned the question over and over in his mind he came to the unwelcome conclusion: we don't. And somehow, with that in his head, he drifted down to sleep.