



Sparta: A Novel

Roxana Robinson

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Going from peace to war can make a young man into a warrior. Going from war to peace can destroy him.

Conrad Farrell has no family military heritage, but as a classics major at Williams College, he has encountered the powerful appeal of the Marine Corps ethic. "Semper Fidelis" comes straight from the ancient world, from Sparta, where every citizen doubled as a full-time soldier. When Conrad graduates, he joins the Marines to continue a long tradition of honor, courage, and commitment.

As Roxana Robinson's new novel, *Sparta*, begins, Conrad has just returned home to Katonah, New York, after four years in Iraq, and he's beginning to learn that something has changed in his landscape. Something has gone wrong, though things should be fine: he hasn't been shot or wounded; he's never had psychological troubles--he shouldn't have PTSD. But as he attempts to reconnect with his family and his girlfriend and to find his footing in the civilian world, he learns how hard it is to return to the people and places he used to love. His life becomes increasingly difficult to negotiate: he can't imagine his future, can't recover his past, and can't bring himself to occupy his present. As weeks turn into months, Conrad feels himself trapped in a life that's constrictive and incomprehensible, and he fears that his growing rage will have irreparable consequences.

Suspenseful, compassionate, and perceptive, *Sparta* captures the nuances of the unique estrangement that modern soldiers face as they attempt to rejoin the society they've fought for. Billy Collins writes that Roxana Robinson is "a master at . . . the work of excavating the truths about ourselves"; *The Washington Post's* Jonathan Yardley calls her "one of our best writers." In *Sparta*, with the powerful insight and acuity that marked her earlier books (*Cost*, *Sweetwater*, and *A Perfect Stranger*, among others), Robinson explores the life of a veteran and delivers her best book yet.

A *Washington Post* Notable Fiction Book of 2013

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