

Arden

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23: Preparations

I signaled the King for permission to speak. "Prince Arden you have something to say."

"Yes Sire I do. Will the scribes please make a record of my comments for the Envoy to take with him. Envoy, the senior princes of Parga are less than amused by the actions of your Load's leadership. It is obvious to us that you do not represent Epirus or Thomas but someone else. We believe it must be Count Nikholas Orsini of Kephalaria, his nephew. We have no desire to be drawn into Epirus' internal politics and resent his attempts to cause this.

We princes are greatly offended that Nik. would send assassins against us. We take even greater offense that he sent men who were less competent swordsman than ourselves. If Count Nik. wishes to challenge us on a field of honor, that would be at least acceptable, if still puzzling. To send assassins against unarmed students is dishonorable.

To send armed men against Parga for no reason, is little more than foolish. To use the fishers of either state, all clansman I might add, in an attempt to salvage some political face is unforgivable. It shows his weakness of character and impotence. We are greatly offended that you would be sent on such a fools errand as you have been. We feel your embarrassment at being unwittingly placed in an untenable situation. It is not our way to take offense against the messenger for the foolishness or distastefulness of the message. All this suggests he is either sick of mind or thinks us incompetent. The former is understandable, the latter offensive to the people of Parga. The right to use our seals of office is earned in Parga, not granted by chance of birth alone.

We are most aggrieved that Nik., obviously a self appointed demigod, is unwilling to demonstrate leadership of action or even publish his name in connection with these adventures. No misadventures, but misleads you to believe he is doing Thomas' bidding. We four princes of Parga stand here and take full credit for planning and exciting our little adventure, which should be a source of embarrassment to him, us being just boys of

16.

We find it puzzling that Nik. feels our lives and the lives of his soldiers and our citizens are expendable, when it comes to his personal self aggrandizement. This demonstrates a rather unchristian way of acting. One might even say it was barbaric. Perhaps murder and assassination is acceptable in the Despot and other places?

This calls to mind Aristotle and his study of permiology, I believe the ancient paremi goes, "he who lives by the sword dies by the sword."

The lessons for Nicholas Orsini are simple. He underestimated the leadership of King Iason 7th and Prince Consort Karyakos; that has resulted in costly, embarrassing and foolish adventures. He underestimates the Princes of Parga at his peril. If however, he desires true humiliation or a trip to hates, we are prepared to accommodate him. I sat down.

"This Envoy is not just the bravado of youth, although Prince Arden's choice of words are heavy with it. The Princes of Parga and Parga's kings have stood and delivered since the time of Homer. We have always represented a free people. We have never interfered with our neighbors and have always been a source of aid to them in times of need. That aid has always been freely given and willingly accepted. We have asked little from our neighbors but have received much friendship and mutual respect. Parga asks only to be treated with the same civility and respect we have always treated others.

We are greatly disappointed that our neighbor has chosen to sponsor these recent actions against us. Most graves is the attempted harm of Crown Prince Iason and his Consort, Prince Arden. These acts are less than neighborly or honorable. This kind of thing goes on in other states, we know that. Perhaps it is acceptable in Epirus but it is not acceptable in Parga. Even if acceptable in Epirus it is not acceptable for Epirus or anyone acting unofficially, to export it to Parga. It is apparent that Thomas 1 had no knowledge to this. He has acted in a most honorable way. That can not be said for those who planned and executed these deeds.

I proclaim the 8th day of the 10th month as Wedding Day. A day when Parga will celebrate the exploits of its Princes by holding weddings through out the land. Let no deserving couple be kept apart. On this day

the ancient custom of the groom and his brothers kidnapping the Bride from her family, can as always be ceremonially enacted by escorting the Bride from her home to the place of ceremony. For this Wedding Day enactment only, the wedding attendees may adopt the symbols and standard of Prince Iason's Argonauts." Uncle Iason turned to the pages, "Odovakar please compose, with the aid of the other palace musicians, a processional song for this event." He turned back to the Envoy.

"From this day forward until rescinded by the King of Parga our borders with Epirus are closed. No traffic shall flow overland between. Any person being caught crossing that border in either direction will be treated as spy or criminal. Citizens, residents, employees and so on of Epirus that seek entry to Parga, must do so through this and only this sea port. The singular exception to this shall be: Clansman and their Epirusian relatives and personal friends, may enter and reside at any fishing village with the written invitation of the mayor of that village. Likewise Citizens of Parga may travel to fishing villages in Epirus directly after receiving written permission of his village mayor. Anyone not following these instructions will be considered a smuggler and treated accordingly.

This leaves the fate of mercenaries, would be assassins, spies and the like, now in our dungeon or prisoner of war camp, the list you already have, is in the hands of Count Nicholas Orsini of Kephallonia or who ever it is you represent. They will be released onto a ship of your choice once a suitable donation, in place of reparations, is made to the King Iason the 7th Free University and Akadimeia. A precedent was set for this by the Florentines several years ago.

Shall we adjourn today's meeting and seek some refreshments in private Envoy?"

"As you wish Sire?"

Lieutenant Eutukos approached Volos and began talking to him. They joined us at the sports field. Today, as almost every day, we had archery practice, fencing, swimming and other sports. Dios and I also trained on the running track. I think it is our archery that give us young men our massive shoulders. When boys we used the standard Greek bow. As soon as we were able to pull and accurately shoot it, we were given Long Bows. These came to us from the Welsh Coal miners, my ancestors that came to Coalhurst many generations ago. My name is of that origin. The

longbow requires years of practice and training to be accurate and great strength to pull it. From an early age we were taught to pull our bows with either hand. While right handedness is the most common, skill with the left may prove life saving as well as convenient. The long bow requires so much strength that if only one side of the body is used the shoulders and favored arm would develop lopsided. This muscle development and the attendant strength is very useful in other military and sports skills as well as in attracting both male and female admirers.

All of us are well known for the beauty of our physical developments. Wide and muscular shoulders, strong arms and wide chest, narrow midsection and hips, solid well formed buttocks, well formed muscular thighs and solid well defined calf muscles. We all strive to the ancient ideals of beauty and we all are as well. Even Ikaros whose body looks more female than male is extremely strong and fit. He is able to move quickly and with a grace I could only long to have. He is not girly in having large breasts or wide hips. He is girl like in having smooth, hairless skin, no hair grows on his face, smooth not bulging muscles and graceful movements. He giggles and feigns shyness like they, as well.

I found Eutukos to be clever and skilled. I am sure he would be a worthy advisory on the sporting field and one I hope never to need meet, in non sporting combat.

The Dioskouroi are fine all around athletes. They do not excel at any one sport but are competent at all. On any day either one can best the other they are so evenly matched. In fact it is often a draw between them. This year at our castle sports meetings we will have special competitions combining many events, to choose the finest all around athletes as well as us specialists. I know they will do very well at this. In a way we still carry out the traditions of the Olympiad. Being a secular state we do not specifically honor any god but each athlete is free to honor what ever one or ones he chooses. We have Boxing, Pentathlon, Double Pentathlon, Running several distances, Wrestling, Archery, Fencing, Swimming several distances. Like the ancients we do almost all of them naked, not archery or fencing. Unlike them we allow women to attend and watch, since here the games are not dedicated to a male god, taking place on sacred ground. Like them we honor the human form and athletic skills. Unlike them we do not require a oath stating the athlete is a free born citizen, that has done nothing to offend the gods. Here we are considered to be free born. If you are from some place else you are reborn when you

become a citizen.

Our women also have athletic games and sports. They have their own competitions but do not perform naked, just almost so. They run, throw the javelin, have archery and wrestling. While none are strong enough to pull a longbow many are excellent Greek Bow archers.

I was glad to see Volos and Eutukos becoming friends. Heron also seemed to like this young officer as well. He is the kind of officer I would be happy to have serving in our military. I hope his commanders recognize his qualities.

In the evening Hermogenes sat with us and socialized. Volos and Pyrros were attempting to learn how he thought they should be raising Dios during his absences. He was quite blunt in saying if Dios' behavior is unacceptable then he is to have his butt spanked. He inquired how his behavior had been in the past. Volos and Pyrros assured him the boy had been nearly perfect and those transgressions were truly minor.

Volos expressed his concern that Dios being younger than the pages would pick up behaviors that were best left for a couple of years. "If you mean boy sex Volos, I think he already has. He told me Prince Nikias had his butt paddled by his brother for teaching him."

"It is true that Nikias had his bottom warmed but not for teaching Dios things but for disobeying our instructions. I was trying to impress upon him that being a prince did not exempt one from the same rules that everyone else was required to follow," Iason added. Hermogenes nodded in understanding and smiled knowing full well how young boys think.

Volos told him about the general guideline in castle about sex between those over and under 12. Odo came in at that point and added Uncle Iason had made an exception for him and we should make one for Dios. I replied that only his father could do that, looking at Hermogenes for his views. He thought a moment. "I suppose that sex between the pages and yourselves and between yourselves and the pages is common as it was in my day." he inquired.

"Yes it is common and willingly shared," Pyrros spoke.

“Then I think Dios must either be included or sent to live with the women for two years. I began serving my great uncle who was a captain of a merchant ship when I was 11. He was my mentor until I joined the navy at 17. That great uncle was my lover and I don’t think I suffered from it. Which of you is to be his.”

“I am,” Iason said, “but he must come to my bed willingly and with the permission of his parents, all three of you.”

“You have it Prince, what say you Volos, Pyrros?” They agreed.

“That is settled then. I think you should not hold for him to come to you. Go after him in a gentle and loving way, court his affection. That will be easy as you already have his complete adoration. You and Arden are his heroes. Most boys want to be like their fathers but he wants to be like his princes. I think it wise that you mentor him, letting Volos and Pyrros play the role of father. I know it was hard for my mentor to be captain, mentor and father all at the same time. The captain must command for the good of the ship and entire crew, the father must from time to time discipline for the good of the child and the mentor must love and guide the child to adulthood.

I know what is in my lover’s mind on this. He is like his father much taken with the younger ones. I understand completely. Boys of this age are just so perfectly formed and proportioned and they love so completely. For them it is all or nothing.

1317, 11th month, 11th day:

Today at our mid day meal Tertius announced he had arranged the perfect young lady for Dario. He wanted us to inform Dario and asked him and Lugo to visit during the soloists celebrations. That way he could organize a meeting without making any kind of commitment. Uncle Iason thought so too and directed us to write him as soon as possible. From his expression I assume he has more in mind than just finding our friend and guardsman a bride.

That was partly confirmed later that afternoon when Ikaros, Drakon and Dysme had a meeting to organize a large celebration party called the Ballizien of the Princes. (TN: Ballizien means to dance and in English,

this would be the Princes' Ball. As you read on it is clear that this was much more than a dance or bal 'a dance (Middle French). It seems Arden did not favor the term Festival. It is clear this was some kind of celebration but not one in any specific honor.)

They suggested we invite Dario and Lugo and his betrothed to attend the Princes' Ball. Where he could meet the young lady and if they prove acceptable to each other the King would make arrangements; if not, nothing more need be said about it. I thought Lugo would be jealous for it appeared he was not give much choice or he thought his choice was the best of a poor lot. If the king is to arrange the wedding of his ward I would expect some kind of position or promotion would be attached.

All this talk of arranged marriages, almost all in this place are, moved Iason to a state of apprehension. What if he didn't like the girl, what if she was ugly or a shrew? We chided him that she could ask the same questions about him. He feigned great offense at being thought possibly ugly or difficult, on second thought he would concede difficult. He pointed out, so far anyway the girls he had been sleeping with were all satisfied, as he was with them.

Dysme suggested it was the flush of lust and the early stages of romance. "Love is blind and dumb when powered by lust and a desire to produce children or at least the motions of doing so," he commented. I reminded him that his betrothed would spend at least 6 months to a year living here with his mother, before the wedding. If she proved unsuitable or fickle our mother will send her away, have some faith brother, I told him. This produced much laughter from everyone as they pointed out I was never to wed a female but our union was arranged and so far it has proven a good and complementary match. To which Iason and I passionately kissed until our friends grew tired of us. Pulling us apart they proceeded to inform us of their plans.

1. use the Argoanuts' dining hall
2. by invitation
3. fancy dress required
4. plays, poems, music, singing
5. dancing of course mostly with the ladies
6. much food and drink
7. our parents could invite some of their friends
8. Odo to compose new music and songs, perhaps even some poems.

9. We should invite our university friends, Arden's boys and all the Palace Boys and Girls over 14. The young princes can have a party for all under 14. We suggested with the younger children having a party of their own supervised by Princess Elpis' staff. We would sneak in a few of our favored children to ours anyway.

Hesiodos thought the security problems were formidable but he would work something out.

At our evening meal Iason had Dios sitting between himself and Nikias. They were whispering to each other through most of the meal. Dios' fathers were seated at another table with our fathers. I could see they were all paying much attention to the young Palace Boys that were attempting to serve the food and wine. The one receiving the most attention from Hermogenes is very shy, with red hair and many freckles on his upper body. Dios could see this too. I think he was just a bit jealous. I did notice that every time Hermogenes' hand wandered underneath the lad's kilt Iason's hand disappeared below the table and Dios would smile.

After our meal Iason called Kleitos over to sit with us. Nikias and Dios moved closer to Iason and I making room for him between. Iason asked Kleitos if he could find a pony for Dios as he would make a present of it to him. Dios looked from one to the next and when Kleitos smiled Dios pressed his face to Iason tunic and the kissed his lips when he bent over. Kleitos brushed his head with his hand and told Dios to report to the stables immediately after the mid day meal tomorrow. Dios was so excited he was almost jumping up and down with anticipation.

Iason is anything but subtle in these matters. In fact he is bold and unabashed. He has announced to everyone, in his fashion, that he would be Dios' mentor and older lover. Being a young lad also his protector. We would have Nikias and Dios in our bed tonight, I was sure of that. It also looked like Hermogenes would be sharing with the red haired boy. Now that his son was old enough to have a mentor he was being looked to as someone who should be mentoring a boy. To my knowledge this is not mentioned unless in privet, the men just seam to know when it is the right time for them. I am sure he manages to enjoy the young sailors while at sea but that is not the same as being a mentor. I was surprised when Father told us to begin mentoring our young pages as we are not yet established ourselves. I guess it is a perk of office, one I am most glad of, as I truly love my little brother and I know the twins have completely

bonded between the four. Iason, as I mentioned before, has an eye for the younger ones. When mine roves it is to my contemporaries for the most part.

I take it also that our fathers feel it important that we are as solid with the young princes as is possible, given the range in our ages it will allow us and them to manage their transition from young men to young princes and knights. In know they work very hard to insure the court and palace intrigues that happen in other states do not happen here. In other places the families or clans and sometimes tribes often command far greater loyalty than the leadership. In Parga their is only one clan, the families are all related to each other and us. Loyalty is less divided, this does not preclude division. It does not preclude greed, jealousy or the desire for power.

Fortunately we were able to avoid the introduction of those Roman laws and methods that divide society. Privilege here comes from accomplishment and performance, not from birth.

As much as I would record to the end of my day this will not be possible. Not only have the four terrors invaded our apartment but Volos, Heron, Pyrros, Damao and now Hermogenes have brought their eromenos (TN: The term used for the "beloved" youth. I can think of no better one. Arden has told us many times adult males are expected to be Pederasty or boy lovers it is their duty to mentor non related youth. Parga has its own unique way to doing things. Here non related means, not the boy's biological father since just about everybody is related to everyone else in some way. Also like in Krite the adult male seeks permission of the boy's father or guardian and like heterosexual marriages, mentorships are often arranged. None of this is to say things were always idealistic, without conflict or that true and lasting love was always attained. The old Kritian proverb "A boy's best friend is his lover," springs to mind, however.)

Nikias was explaining to Dios why his father was suddenly so interested in this red haired boy and why he should not be jealous of him but happy for the pair, as his father and friend are happy for him and Iason. The closer Nikias and I become the more respect I have for his abilities. I would like to think I have much to do with this, being his mentor. True or not it gives me comfort and pride. I think the three terrors were encouraging Dios to play a game of hard to get with Iason. He just lacks all guile and could not play, he was Iason's for the asking. Iason to his credit recognized this and

made sure not to take advantage but ply the boy with gifts, most small, but a pony is very large, and his affectionate attention. He even recruited Odo to help him. Odo had invented a clever little device designed to help stretch a boy's anus and increase his desire. After using his lubricated fingers and his mouth to bring Dios to climax several times, Iason fitted a leather penis in his anus, which is secured by a thin leather strap that runs from a tight belt down his butt cleft through a small loop on the leather penis, splits on either side of his boyhood and fastened to the belt around his waist. I knew from my experience how effective this device would be in developing a desire for the real thing to reside in him.

I must end this as Nikias is fondling my manhood and kissing my body in every place and I can not hold my quill steady.

1317, 11th month, 15th day:

The wedding party has gone but Polykarpos remains here at the castle. His parents had been in the wedding party and they, if no one else, realized his position. Since the mayor of Sarakiniko or his parents were not quite ready to arrange a marriage it was agreed he should work for the castle kitchens as a fisherman and when he has established himself and if the daughter was still inclined, they would reconsider a marriage. We were all happy for him and for ourselves. He is a very handsome and personable fellow. Hermogenes was very generous and arranged for Polykarpos to live in and care for his home while he was at sea. The red haired boy Agapios, would live there as well but only when Hermogenes is in port and Dios would live with the pages. Volos and Pyrros would look after both boys as guardians.

Yesterday Thanatos told us Alexandros was returning from his military training, to the castle. He was to be assigned to the castle security staff and would be a guardian for Princess Elpis and the young children. Then he winked at me and whispered, "your father wants him to marry Princess Eudoxia and be the sheriff of his former village." He said that with the kind of pride only a father can have. He sighed, "Ouranos I and never dreamed of being parents, let alone grand parents. Being men who love men we always thought that just would not happen. But you and Prince Iason allowed it and we will always be in your debt."

"No Thanatos, you and Ouranos can never be in our debt and not for this

specifically. We did not recognize his talent, you did. You two asked to adopt him and you to gave him the parental love every child is deserving of. It is us that are in your debt, if their is to be one at all. It is easy to do well at being a prince when all around you are advisors, models and guides, such as our guardians.

Tell me friend have those four identified guardians for our future sons?”

“Aye they have Arden. They have identified 6 candidates. They are still just boys to young to leave their mothers but we believe they are like us. Men who love men are only about one in ten in the land but 2 in 10 in the castle. The scholars tell us that this runs in families mostly from the mother, women who have several children before are most likely. These boys are being bread like Kleitos’ horses.

We know from history that the personal body guards of the king and Consort are best if they have no desire for women or a family life. That way they find their family among those close to their charges. If they love each other as Ouranos and I, all the better. It means we understand the relationship between you and Iason as we live one like it. It means our loyalty is never divided, it is to each other and our princes. We love each other in every way one man can love another and we love Iason and his partner Karyakos as brothers and as Eros commands. Just as your four love you and Iason. You are our family, our source of strength and we follow you always to wherever it may lead.

Your sons must have the same, it is our duty to find and train them as it is yours to find and train your son. Volos and Pyrros will select the guardians for the new Crown Prince, Damao and Heron will do the same for the new Prince Consort. Each of them will mentor and personally train one of the candidates. We will and do help them as we were helped.”

“I thought you said six not four?”

“Yes, each companion/advisor also has a body guard. They too should be men who love men. Some of those pages you met when you first arrived are now young knights and we will select from them. Like your father, Arden you must sire many strong boys with the ladies suggested to you, as should your personal guardians. It is their duty even if they are not romantically interested in them.”

