

Arden

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## 27: Preparations For Adventure

1318, 1st month, 1st day:

Word has come from Kephalaria that Count Nikholas is assembling an army to march against his uncle, Despot Thomas 1 of Epirus. We believe Thomas believes his cousin is coming to assist him. He will do so in the spring since the winter is a poor time for this. We also understand that Nepali's influence over him is being ignored and in fact, rejected. Our Fathers told us this in confidence and in privet. I know Uncle is much disturbed that he has knowledge that he can not share with Thomas. Yet again, we were not told how he knows this or how good that knowledge is. Lugo and Dario had told us that the Venetian influence in the area is much reduced and concentrated on Kirkira where they have a very strong fortress.

Dario is now made a Captain in the Royal Guard and elevated to Knight 3nd class. He will return with Lugo in a few days and prepare to become our Ambassador to Venice. Karyakos and his brother in law have made good arrangements for Dario's wedding to Olympia, in late Summer. He will return to Parga in the late spring following Lugo's wedding. We will not be here. The other day father told us we four princes and our guardians will be taking what he called a "Large Tour".

(TN: The quotation marks are mine.) We are to visit as many places in the six months of our absence as possible. That would include all the courts and major cities between here and the northern German lands. We will travel by sea and land. Our guides are to be Demokritos and Olympos along with several of Archimedes' ingegneres and a number of older Argoanuts. In preparation we will make a trip to Athens, Constantinople, Nafplio, Rodos and Krite and so on, this spring. At each place we will be met by our local representative and introduced to the local political powers.

After much begging and reasoned argument, we convinced them to allow Odovacar to accompany us. How we will live without our boys, friends and colleagues we are not sure. The young princes were greatly disappointed and protested on every level, even seeking their mother's aid. All to no avail. Uncle Iason refused to allow them to go but did promise they would have a "Large Tour" as we are having and as he, Karyakos and Tertius had. When they are of age and not before. Hesiodos has hand picked every member of our crew and staff, except for our guardians. I am sure they wasted their time in seeking help from our mother. She was not pleased that all four of us were going together. I could not see how she would let all of her children out of her site at once, given three of them are only 12

It was not easy for our fathers either, they know from experience how important this kind of thing will be to us

in the future.

I know, when we are 18, all four of us are expected to take on specific duties and responsibilities in the government. As of now different Knights in the council have these jobs and we will serve as their apprentices. Once we have received our degrees we will be able to take on full time jobs, until it is time for Iason and I assume the offices we are being prepared for. Kastor and Polydeukus have the option, as do the younger princes, to take up some profession or another. Joulous and Justus may do just that. I think Nikias is being groomed for the military, he will be our Tertius. Lysandros and Helladios are still too young to even speculate.

While I am speculating, I may as well put down my thoughts about my Iason's wife. Little hint has been given by anyone. I know Tertius and mother have been hard at work over this. Several of the new female pages are in the right age group as are some of the young ladies training as Royal Guards. This will give them both a unique opportunity to study them before a selection is made. Examining the politics of this, is a complex issue. Since I am from the southwest of the country and Elpis from the central east, I suspect they will be looking for someone from the north. That limits it to a hand full. Since we are all related in one way or another, anyone closer than second cousin will need to be eliminated and anyone in poor health or slow of wit also.

My guess is, several knights who have daughters in the right age group are trying to influence the King. Uncle Iason for his part is attempting to let mother and uncle do the work, with as little input from him as possible. I am sure Karyakos will be in the middle of it as well, after all Iason is his eromenos. It is possible that Iason will not be elected to succeed his father. It is possible that he may succumb to some disease or be killed in an accident. If that were to happen one of his brothers would be elected and the next king would not be Iason the 8th but one of the others, even me is possible. Now I see why I was encouraged to mentor Nikias since he would be the next logical choice. If unmarried at that time all well and good but if he has a wife already....

At first I thought this a very complex and even morbid thing but now I realize how important succession planning is. By having custom and rules, with clear direction, the risk of fractious squabbling is reduced. Unlike the situations in most other states. Epirus is a good example of that. Since the king's mother must be a native born citizen, as must the king and since the office of king is more appointed, on merit than heredity, much intrigue and foreign influence is eliminated. Since the Royal Family is in fact related to all other citizens or families in the clan, there is much less incentive for court intrigue.

My bed mate is calling to me and I am moved to quite this and join him. We do want to start this new year in the best possible way. Making love. I hope our mentors

will join us

1318, 1st month, 3rd day:

The printing of the play is now complete, the actors have gone on to other venues, along with many copies. I would guess the Count will be some upset and soon too.

1318, 1st month, 4th day:

Our mother commanded us to attend her, in her apartments as soon as we returned from the university. That we did. Princess Elpis does not often command. I am not sure if she even has that authority; however, she is our mother and we are dutiful sons. I was most surprised to find my birth mother Hyginos, sitting with Elpis, as we were shown in. Even more surprising was to see Euthalia and Zoe also in attendance. Needless to say Iason and I were completely gobsmacked.

“You didn’t think the birth of my first grandchild would go unnoticed did you,” Elpis said.

“No mother,” we answered in unison.

“This is a big event for me, not the first for Hyginos, important never the less. The birth of every child is important to us grandmothers.”

Our ladies giggled. They are so young, I thought, just 14 and with our babies in their bellies.

“You boys probably don’t know, I attend almost every birth in this castle. I make a point of attending every birth by the Place Girls. I was in attendance for both Euthalia and Zoe.” They turned red. Every child born outside a marriage in this castle is important to me. That is something I don’t expect you men to fully understand.”

“Arden, Euthalia tells me you are both ardent and gentle in your love making. Abrith and I are proud of you, as I know Karyakos must also be.” I smiled and nodded in agreement, I think I blushed some too. I know I was still puzzled by all this, as is Iason. “Princess Elpis and I were concerned that your liaisons with Zoe and Euthalia was a proper one. They have assured us it is and that your attentions were desired and not forced upon them.”

“Two things are happening in your lives that we thought it important to talk to you about. Your duties as Princes will only be increasing in the coming months. Your time and ability to support the mothers of your children, when they most need it, will be diminished. Hyginos and I wanted all four of you to know we are here to help. The latter few months will be a very difficult time for these ladies.” We nodded in agreement, neither of us knowing what if anything to say.

“Abrith was always a great help to me in the latter stages of my many pregnancies, as well as those weeks after

delivery. Arden's birth was most difficult and neither of us would have survived without his swift action and attentiveness." I did not know this, it was sure news to me.

"Iason and Karyakos have always been most supportive of me when I needed them. I know Karyakos has taken a great interest in both his and Iason's bastard children, as both of you." She indicated Zoe and Euthalia. "Must remember as small children."

"I know Arden, Iason must try and distance himself. He can easily father but he can not be an active parent in these situations. Abrith and I expect you to do that for our grandchildren and I know Princess Elpis would appreciate you doing that for hers."

Yes mother, I understand perhaps more than either of you realize, I said. Zoe, Euthalia I pelage here as I have before, all be it unbeknownst to you, to do just that and more. I had long ago realized that the job of King requires the shoulders of a titan and that my beloved Iason, for all his many qualities, is only a man.

Iason was attempting to speak but I stopped him by placing my hand on his knee and gently squeezing it. I resolved long ago to make sure he is insulated, from being the parent of his bastard children. Speak not brother let me finish. The King must be many things, first among them is taking responsibility for the well being of Parga and all of its' citizens. It is a division of

duties for me to take on the role of parent for any and all that need it. Karyakos and Abrith have shown me the way and I have given my word to both my mothers. No child in this castle shall want for the love of a father.

That was all very strange, I am still not sure just why it happened. I was pleased to see both my birth mother and my adopted mother and the mother of my first child, all on friendly terms. Iason was even more confused than I. I still do not know the reasoning behind this.

1318 , 1st month, 5th day:

Our confusion gave way to some very passionate love making. Iason and I were able to settle ourselves in Kastor and Polydeukus' bed for the night. In the morning we woke with our boys Nikias and Dios snuggled tight against our bodies.

Having slept on the little meeting, I now realize our mothers wanted us to know they understood our position in this affair, as well as that of our ladies. They knew we were expected to sire many children, as are our companions and the other princes. We would do this with or without their approval. They also wanted us to realize we have a moral obligation to our ladies and our children, bastards or not. I think they wanted to make sure Zoe and Euthalia realized they would support and help them, motherhood at such a tender age can and is, both exciting and frightening. Iason and I would be on

our tour when the births occurred. Many of the Palace Girls are orphans. These two do have living parents. We know their birth mothers, who are part of the palace staff but we do not know their sires. Drakon politely declined to tell us and we knew well enough not to press. If Euthalia wants me to know and if she even knows, she will tell me.

On our return from the university we met Mitos and a young man we knew to be his cousin. I remember his face vividly, as I held my sword to his throat. Mitos introduced us. This was the mark of a new beginning in his young life. A formal introduction would serve as a good starting point. Like my journal, a new page for a new story. "Princes, guardians, may I present my younger cousin Panther. Princes: Arden, Iason, Kastor, Polydeukus, Captains Pyrros and Heron, Lieutenant Drakon. He bowed and took each of our hands with a firm grip.

"Janus tells us your service with him is completed and he is now concerned that replacing you in the stable will be a difficult task," Iason commented. Panther turned bright red.

"With his and Kleitos' guidance I could not fail but my skills are easily replaced."

"That may be cousin but your dedication and strong effort is what Janus will find hard to duplicate."

Now that your service is completed, what is your future, I asked?

“I am to report to the Prince Arden this very afternoon. Mitos and Captain Hermogenes talked me into joining the navy. They told me I would find all the adventure I ever wanted.”

Poly spoke next, “Did they tell you what the Prince Arden does?” “Not exactly but Hermogenes promised I would not be disappointed. He said the ship has the same spirit as the Prince it was named after. I knew then it was the right place for me. My mother is also very pleased that I will not be returning to our village. She thinks you Princes are gods, for only gods could have been so kind to her.” He smiled and looked us four up and down. “Gods or men, you sure look the part. Prince Arden please give me your blessing.”

I suddenly remembered that day when Abrith gave his blessing to Karyakos and myself. I placed my hands on his shoulders. Panther, your journey of discovery and adventure is just now beginning. Go with our blessing, the blessing of your family and all Parga. You Panther, are a unique child of the gods. Do not try and become a god, that is a fools journey, learn to be Panther. To guide your way, trust in the navigation Hermogenes will teach you. To guide your action, do as you believe we Princes would do. Return to us, your family, safely and a wiser man.”

“Thank you Prince I shall do my best. Before I go I must ask, on that day of my capture, is it true you gave money to the mothers of those killed?”

Iason replied. “Yes, and the other stories you have undoubtedly been told, most true as well. Following our example will not be easy Panther, it will give the best reward of all, a glad heart, one that knows it did what it thought was right thing to do, for no other reason then it was, the right thing to do.”

As I looked out our window toward the harbor I could see two figures, I knew to be Mitos and Panther, stopping at the Ganymede statue. I fear we princes set impossibly high standards, we operate from a position of privilege and power, not accessible to many others.

In the council we received a report, Nik has read the revised play and was livid. Not that we rewrote his part, nor that we improved the quality of the satire overall. He was most up set that we were not only amused but relished in the satire. The effect he sought was not achieved, it was opposite. Karyakos made a good point when he noted, "had we not known of his intentions we may not have treated the playwrights with as much civility as we had. Sending these poor players into other places besides Parga, on a like mission, probably would have proven difficult for them. Only those totally secure in their positions are comfortable with being the object of humor. Many take themselves to be above such things. No one, not even Karyakos likes to be the butt of jokes

or humor. On the other hand, if one can laugh at themselves, they will probably live much longer and happier lives."

It appears that he is preparing for an invasion of Epirus in earnest and that will take his attention away from us. Our sources suggest this will happen in the early part of the third month.

We are to leave on the eastern part of our tour in the second month. Except for ourselves and our party, all are now on the Prince Arden, including the Argoanuts and they will be training until we are ready to depart. Hermogenes intends to sail each day, honing the skills of his hand picked crew.

Our boys have started a new campaign to be included. This too will fail, I do appreciate their persistence. Since all of our guardians, Odo and Ikaros are to be with us, they will need to learn new masters. We will miss Kleitos, Alexandros and the other as well. Solon is most upset that Ikaros will be going. I know Kalkrates and Dysme will look after him well. Solon and Kalkrates have formed an alliance with our boys, each one trying to charm us into submission. Each of us must do his duty, in spite of its inconvenience. Zoe and Euthalia have already expressed their disappointment. We have promised many fine presents for them. They relented at this, not our boys. I think we could have promised anything, none but the impossible would do. If this continues the King will need intervene by outright

forbidding them and their even talking about it.

1318, 1st month, 15th day:

Kastor and I have been traveling in the country side since the 7th day. We have been visiting our estates and the Argonaut houses, spending a few nights with my birth parents in Koalhurst and so on. Abrith invited us to open the new school and hospital. We also inspected the Koal mines. I did not feel comfortable in what the miners called the pits. It was dark with little room to move and much dust. The miners tell us they are paid well and seem satisfied. These places are not right in Koalhurst, being almost half an hour walk from the village. That is probably why I knew so little about them, even though I spent my first 12 years here.

Having four princes makes these things so much simpler and easier to deal with. Poly and Iason accomplished much while we were away. They will now tour for a the next 10 days while Kastor and I stay in the Castle. I know I do not like being away from my beloved Iason nor he me. Kastor seemed philosophical about being separated from Polydeukus. "I have never been away from him for more than a few hours, in my entire life. At least the only time I need to look upon myself is in a mirror." We did cling together at night, as neither of us likes sleeping alone very much.

While we were in the east, we renewed acquaintances

with an older Knight who we had not seen much of, in the past few years. He greeted us warmly and invited us to visit his family. Kastor was much taken by his daughters. They are identical twins and very lovely too look at, even if a bit young, being just 12. Kastor sounded quite excited in telling Polydeukus about them, insisting he and Iason pay a visit to the Knight. I know they too have been sleeping with several of the palace girls of late. I am sure if Poly approves, after making his visit, they will ask Karyakos to arrange a marriage, when the girls reach an appropriate age.

1318, 1st month, 25th day:

Iason and Polydeukus have just returned from their tour. Kastor and I have been run off our feet in a way of speaking, having to do double duty, as they did for us. It was a hardship on Nikias and Dios as well as Joulous and Justus, having to share for almost a month now. As if those pages have no other source of pleasure and fun. Most of our letters, seeking invitations to the cities and states in the east, have now returned. We are welcome and I look forward to meeting the young princes and nobles, as well as seeing the sites, in such famous places as Athens and Constantinople.

We received a brief letter from Lieutenant Eutukos today. In it he indicated he was being called to the court of Thomas 1st. He told us he had no idea why. Poly replied this very day congratulating him, wishing him well

on his new assignment and reminding him, he was always welcome to visit us and to show this letter at the border if challenged. He added that Polykarpos' wedding was scheduled for the late spring and he might wish to attend.

We have no way to know what exactly is in Thomas' mind. Our sources suggest he is aware of the Count's military adventures but feels it is less of a threat than the Empires'. He has been seeking alliances and help but none has materialized as yet.

Speaking of the Empire, it appears now that Nik and others were encouraged to offend us, in his name, in hopes of cutting off a potential ally. Since both Nik and Thomas are related to the Emperor and to each other, it would appear to be, family helping family. I for one am not so sure that those family ties mean all that much, if anything. Events will unfold as the facts see fit, I guess.

1318, 1st month 30th day:

We are now prepared for our first voyage of adventure and discovery. Hermogenes is ready and has been staying with Agapios in his home, for the past week. Agapios is resigned to his leaving, it is the way of a sailor. He has tried to take Dios close to himself of late. That has not quieted the boy all that much. He is not happy that his father and all his older brothers will be leaving him. I suggested he spend some time with the

pages helping out, since Odo would not be available. Between school, page assignments and the others here, he will be kept busy during our absence. I know Father and Uncle will make sure no boy is lonely or without sufficient older male influence. Dios and the others will be given much attention and none will be lonely. That is one Royal Duty they never seem to tire of.

Since Iason and Polydeukus have returned, we have been in a continuous round of orgies or liaison with our ladies. I am looking forward to spending some time alone with Iason, I am sure the twins want some alone time with each other. If looking at your twin brother is like looking in a mirror, I wonder if fucking him or being fucked by him, is like fucking yourself?

We would have gladly taken all of our friends and associates with us but that could not happen. The Pages, Palace Boys, Argoanuts and Boys all joined forces for a grand boy gathering(TN: bash or orgy come to mind). This all happened in the Argoanuts' Gymnasium. The only requirement was the man or boy must be naked. Our guardians stationed themselves at the entrances, placing the clothing and other articles on large tables, in small piles. After a short while, they joined us having been replaced by several of the older palace guards. Everyone was welcome, even the young Princes, Agapios, Solon, Kalkrates and Dios. The North House was in residence, only their members that were assigned to the Prince Arden were absent. I saw many of our fellow university students and a good number of

apprentices and new journeymen, even a number of the male prostitutes.

Everyone was in a very festive mood and making jokes and singing. We tried to speak with everyone of them, I know that I did not, nor did my brothers. It was impossible to do so. I am sure everyone of them got to speak with at least one of us four. Much food, good music, fine wine and the intoxicating presence of handsome naked boys, was almost overwhelming. Odovacar recited several poems and presented two new songs. I know I kissed a countless number and had some sex with at least 20. I was surprised at the number of boys that did not engage in sex, except with one of us or perhaps with a special lover. It was probably half of those present. That is not to say that most, if not all, fondled and touched others, it is to say that only about half were noticed to be fucking several others or in little groups of intense sex. More than a few have a special lover or partner, like our guardians. These were mostly the older ones. The younger boys seemed intent on giving and receiving as much as they could.

My Nikias had delivered his first ejaculation about a week ago. He did this in my mouth. I was thrilled for him and for me too. Since then he has been testing his limits but I fear has not found them yet. He will soon, as I did. Mine is five in one day, without becoming too tender to continue. The younger twins will not be far behind, I am sure of that. Nikias is only a few months older than

they are. I hope they can hold off until the Dioskouroi return, to share this passage into manhood with them.