

Arden

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28: Eastern Travel

1318, 2nd month, 1st day:

We departed on the afternoon tide. So far, I find writing on shipboard is not too difficult. I am accustomed now to the rhythm of the waves. The Prince Arden is a fine vessel and I am very much impressed with its' crew and its' marines.

We were dressed in our parade uniforms as we walked from the castle to the dock. All gathered around the Ganymede of Parga and sang Odo's ode. King Iason and Prince Karyakos were with us and sang along, as if boys again. I know Uncle is envious of us. He told me the other day. Our

grandfathers sent them on a fine ship but it was smaller than the PA. They had chosen a very mature and seasoned crew and captain for them and assigned an old scholar, as their guide. “Except for our guardians, we were the youngest men on board.”

Flying from the tallest mast were our ensigns: Parga, Crown Prince, Crown Prince Consort, Prince Advisors, Argoanuts. We embraced our fathers and kissed them each in turn. I could see a tear in Karyakos’ eye, as his sons and beloved marched up the ramp. As we moved up the ramp trumpets sounded and a great cheer went up from the ships company, who were all assembled on the deck. We saluted Captain Hermogenes and he us.

Our boys waved and called to us from the quay, we slipped our bonds and slid

across the smooth water of the inner harbor. Once underway we were mobbed by the Argoanuts and marines. We personally knew every Argonaut but few of the marines and even fewer of the sailors. Once we had moved into open water all the sailors and marines formed a long line, to personally greet their princes. Our guardians knew many of the marines and sailors. The last in the line was Panther. His broad smile and warm hand shakes gave us a good feeling.

I know we will get to know every one of these fine men. The long days and nights at sea will provide good opportunity. We four have sailed before, we had some idea of it, this time things were slightly different. It took me a while to realize what that was. Hermogenes gave a few brief instructions and the ship seemed to sail itself.

He turned over the bridge to his lieutenant and took us into our cabin. I was somewhat surprised to find Panther in this place. Hermogenes told us Panther was assigned as his cabin boy and would help Ikaros getting us settled. Under normal conditions, this cabin would be for the senior officers. They were moved to the forecastle along with the marine and Argoanuts officers. Being a military vessel, even the ships boys are young men, at a minimum age of 16.

Hermogenes instructed us to put our parade uniforms away and dress for work, our lessons in navigation started as soon as we came to the bridge. No sooner had Hermogenes closed the hatch, Panther was on his knees kissing our hands and thanking us for sending Mitos to his aid. He took my hands and

rubbed them against his face saying, “Prince, you spared my life when I deserved to die, I am forever in your debt. You must take me into your personal service.” I was somewhat taken aback by him. This was not the same young man I had encountered before. His attitude was and even his deportment was different.

Panther, I can not do that until these voyages are completed, I told him. “I understand, the Captain treats me very well and I am learning everything one needs to know, in becoming a good seaman.” I am sure of that Panther and I am sure you will make a valuable addition to our family. These are my brothers and friends, as well as lovers all; any one who serves me, serves them. Is that acceptable? His smile was ever so wide as he rose to standing. “Agapios told me you would

say something like that. I am ready. He made me promise to attend the Captain's bed often and well, especially if any other red haired boys should come on board.”

Did he tell you how important sex is in our little family? “Oh yes, as did Dios.” He lifted his kilt so we could see his prodigious manhood and most exquisite buttocks. “As you see princes I am prepared to serve in any capacity you desire.” Several hands appeared and began a closer inspection. His penis was fully erect and he was prodigious indeed. I judged him to be a foot long and round enough to make a goodly hand full. His testicles hung well below and were also very large. The smile on Ikaros' face told all to us. He loves being fucked and the bigger the cock the better.

Since Solon became his eromenos, he has changed his attitude about fucking men. He now willingly participates in our little orgies and does so with great pleasure. As Panther is even more prodigious than he is, I am sure our two cabin boys will find bonding a most pleasurable task.

1318, 2nd month, 4th day:

Hermogenes holds several readiness drills each day. Everyone is expected to perform some specific duty in the event of military action, coming or going from ports, storms, launching and retrieval of the small boats and so on. From when an alarm is raised, until readiness, he times the activities. We too must learn what is expected of us. In the case of storms we are to go to our cabin. On leaving or arriving in port we are to keep

out of the way. In the event of military action, he also wanted us to go to our cabin. Iason flat out told him, the seven of us were not only knights, first class archers but also excellent swordsman and only Odo would go below with Panther. Having some little experience with these things Odo reluctantly agreed but only after he assisted us with our armor and weapons.

The four cannons are covered and Hermogenes told us they will be taken down before we enter a port. The light catapults and large cross bows are also covered. Few if any ships have these cannons installed on them. Not something we wish to advertise. These training times also practice the raising, lowering and resetting of the sails. The sailors are very fast at this. He also has the marines and Argoanuts ready and prepared to assist, if necessary.

The Prince Arden has been slightly refitted, taking away the center fin. This was done to give us more speed and greater room in the main hold. We have lots of room as our crew was small, in comparison to other ships and we did not carry much cargo or have galley slaves to row for us. Since we did not have our own oars to dock and leave the quay, we used three or four of our long boats, filled with sailors rowing and stout ropes attached to the Prince Arden.

The sides of the Prince Arden are relatively high compared to most military galleys. It is also three times longer than most but about the same width. Having three masts, all be it one relatively short, is a radical design difference from anything we see in our port, as is not having any oars. Much

like many merchants, our hull is light. The Prince Arden does not sit low in the water since it does not carry great loads. On this voyage we have added ballast to replace the stability of the fin. Like the merchants the PA's sides are high above the water making it more difficult for others to board us.

The Ingegneres tell me that the northerners, mostly the Danes, build smaller flat bottomed ships much wider in the beam, called a Cog. These Cogs have only one mast and one main sail. Our ingegneres have designed the PA to exceed the speed of any rowed vessel by half, given any kind of reasonable wind. Given our great length the PA is less maneuverable in tight quarters, than rowed ships. On the other hand, the wheel driven rudder, is far more effective a steering device than steering oars.

Hermogenes told me, when we are in foreign ports, with tight quarters that need our small boats to tow us, we are being laughed at. We will just need to smile and say, being a poor country Parga can not afford to pay hundreds of oarsman. Say nothing about our performance on the water.

Apparently we are the only shipbuilders that construct from the frame out. This allows us to achieve the long lengths of our vessels. I know Archimedes has designed these full sail vessels to accommodate a large number of the new cannons, which are larger and more powerful than the four swivel guns we now have, when they become available of course. At this time we have several large cross bows fixed to each side that can send projectiles against other ships. These arrows are

designed to stave in the sides of opponents and deliver incendiary devices as well.

Our guides and advisors have a cabin just below ours. The first official stop will be Athens. Our scholars told us Athens is still a great city but has lost much of its power since the famous schools were closed. Political and military power and much economic activity is with the emperor at Constantinople/Byzantium. This is also the most important trading city and one of the richest in this part of the world.

We four are too keep a separate journal of our activities, people we meet and official things we do and visit. Each of us will make entries, I will keep track of my personal impressions and those adventures we wish to keep separated from official duties. The Captain keeps

two records, one noting conditions and activities the other is his navigational calculations.

1318, 2nd month, 5th day:

We have been now 4 days at sea and will arrive in Athens in the morning. Panther is taking navigation lessons with us. His pert ass and prodigious penis are quite distracting to me. I know he does not intend to be so but he is. Since coming on board he has been climbing the rigging, often going up the long ropes using only his hands. Now I know why these sailors all seam to have such wonderfully full shoulders and upper arms, even nicer then us archers. Ikaros has started teaching him the finer points of swordsmanship. “Along with the finer points of being a chamber boy. I want to teach him the finer points of

being a bed boy but I suspect the captain has already done that.”

Poly took the captain aside and just out and asked if we could have Panther to our beds for the evening. We would send one of us in his place. The captain choose Odo.

Panther entered our quarters announcing, “Seaman third class Panther, reporting for pleasure sirs.” We all greeted him warmly with many touches and gentle, not passionate kisses.

“I am told you wish to join our family Panther. I think it only fair to tell you in advance that to do so will require a number of sacrifices, not that their are no rewards but for some men they are insufficient and they decline. It is not our intention to spurn your willingness to

exchange pleasure with us. That we shall do,” Iason said.

“What Prince Iason is trying to say, we all look forward to pleasure with you. That pleasure can take one of two forms, pure lust or divine love. All the members of our family are deeply devoted to each other and love each other, in all the way one man can love another: as family, i.e. brothers, as companions and coworkers, as friends and comrades and so on. Our love for each other is divine, it is a gift from the gods not a compulsion of nature. Both types of love often begins in lust and just as often ends in that deep emotional bond. Sex between us is that which binds us together, making us strong. Sex for the sake of lust and physical satisfaction is good too and we are not adverse to it.” Kastor added.

Panther still looked mildly perplexed. I added, “You ask to serve us and I put you off until our voyages are completed and your service to the Navy of Parga is more established. That is not to say you can not or should not prepare for that service. Sex is a powerful thing Panther and it can be used for ill as for good. It is our intention to see only good results. We know that once all of us have shared your passion and you ours, a bond will be formed among us. Just as you have formed a bond with our captain, that goes beyond your service as a seaman.

Ikaros handed each of us a mug of wine starting, with Panther, “let us drink and talk and get to know each other better.” We all agreed and bid Panther sit with us. Polydeukus, picked up our thoughts. “Panther, to be a member of this family, some would call it a household or perhaps a court, requires

a life long commitment. Like Ikaros and our guardians, you will probably not have any other family than us. Wives and children are very difficult for us. In fact most of us are men who love men or men above women. You will be expected to give up thought of a home with a wife and children in it.”

Pyrros, Volos, Damao, Heron, Drakon and Silas were all sitting quietly. Damao finally spoke, “We, Heron and I have been lovers and were joined by the king many years ago, as are Pyrros and Volos, Drakon and Silas. Some of us are by nature men who love men. Some others are men who prefer men to women as life partners. What you give up is the ease to seek a wife and raise your children. What you gain is a powerful family of commands, economic and social status, political and military power, adventure, the love and

friendship of each other and a dedication to duty that is unmatched.

We all have had many chances to lay with women, those of us who choose it. We have sons and nephews, daughters too. It is just a little different, our first duty is to Iason and Arden, second our brothers, third our eromenoses, forth children and concubines. What everyone here is trying to say is you need to know, before you go to far in this affair, what your expectations and options are. You need not decide now but one day you will need. If you have not understood and thought it through, that decision will be a very difficult one.”

Silas was next. “You are under no obligation to have sex with any of us. As attractive a man as you, your presence fires our passion but you must be a willing partner in this.”

“I am willing and most desires. It is my intention to submit to any tasks or duties you desire. What ever test to demonstrate my worthiness is acceptable.”

The only test friend is your performance for Captain Hermogenes.

“As we were alluding to before, over the next while we will all share passion and pleasure with you. This is not a test so much as a foreshadowing. We are many and each different. Even the twins are not truly identical in temperament. It is critical that all of us share common purpose. That purpose is not so much pleasing any one but doing our best to administer the sovereignty of Parga.

That is why in public we are formal and

use our titles, in privet however we are all equal. The titles are discarded with our clothing. Some of us are leaders, it is our nature, others followers, it is also our nature. What is your nature Panther,” Iason asked.

“I am a follower. Captain Hermogenes told me to study well himself, to learn how to lead and identify when it is necessary to do so; for the best followers are those who are the most dependable, at delivering results requested or required.”

Enough philosophy for now. Ikaros more wine for our guest please. You, Panther know much about us but we know little about you. Your life before the navy is a closed book and we would not ask you to open it. We know you have only been on board the Prince Arden and in the navy for a few weeks

but you seam to have secured a plumb position and earned the Captain's trust if little else. Tell us about how this came about, as we love a good story almost as much as good sex.

“After receiving your blessing Prince Arden.” Just Arden the princes have retired for the night. “After receiving your blessing Arden, my cousin Mitos brought me to see the Captain, who had visited me a couple of times, while I worked in the stables. I came on board and signed on the ships company and into the navy. It is a three year term of service. Captain Hermogenes introduced me to my crew mates and the officers. He told them and me, since I was new and untrained, I would need learn my duties and responsibilities over time. He appointed me his cabin boy until I had opportunity to do so.

I was much appreciative of this, since I had only the vaguest idea of what a sailor does and none about how a ship works. I know I had an attitude problem and that combined with being a natural follower, got me into trouble before. The Captain assigned me to the First Mate and the other officers for a few days. They had me swabbing the decks, hauling garbage and doing just about anything that no one else liked to do. In the evening they would strap me into a leather swing and use my body. They tied my testicles with a leather strap so I could not ejaculate, it was painful as they not only fucked me over and over but made me take them in my mouth. They would tease my penis, making it so stiff it hurt but refused to give me relief. My hands and feet were tied on the swing.” He pointed to four hooks in the upper bulkhead of our cabin, which had been the officer’s cabin.

“Each night, just as I was about give up and resign, the Captain would come in, order my release and personally cary me to his cabin and his bed. On the first night he lay me down and released the strap, using his mouth and hands gave me the greatest pleasure I had ever experienced. He told me the most important role of a cabin boy was the comfort and rest of his captain. Then he pulled up a light blanket and we slept. After several days of this I had learned how to address officers and other seamen. I had learned most of the language of the navy and the names of the ship’s parts. I also learned how to gain much pleasure from the swing and to give pleasure to my tormenters, which made the torment tolerable.

On the second night, I took the Captain in my mouth as he took me and on the

third night he entered my anus for the first time. I was astounded at how wonderful it was. On the fourth night he let me fuck him. I had never fucked a man before and it was wonderful. On the fifth morning, when the First Mate came for me, he refused to let me leave saying, ‘Panther has earned his sea legs and will be my cabin boy from now on. He is to be treated as any other member of this crew.’ That means no one, not even him, could force me to have sex with them. He began showing me what my duties as cabin boy were and when I was not performing them, he made sure I was being shown everything I would need to know to be a good sailor. I still have much to learn about both jobs.

One night while we lay in bed after our sex, he wrapped his arms around me and began kissing my neck and ears.

He told me he missed his eromenos Agapios and his late wife terribly. Then he said the strangest thing. ‘Panther, do not let yourself become romantically in love with me. We must love each other and respect each other but as sailors, as professionals.’ I told him about your advice and begged him for his. ‘You are not a natural leader, you are a natural follower. Parga needs both if it is to survive. One is not more important than the other but as a team great things are possible. The natural leader must choose his followers wisely. The natural follower, must choose his leader with just as much wisdom. Any leader or any man in the role of leadership, must learn how to give orders and directions. Those in the role of follower, must learn how to receive those orders and carry out the instructions. The best leaders are also good followers, the best followers can learn to be good leaders.”

Now if Odo were here he could make a poem of this. I turned to Pyrros, where is Odo, why is he not here? I knew but wanted to see what answer would be provided. Panther answered, “I took the liberty of asking him to keep the captain company tonight, as I was sure I would not be available. I hope no one minds this liberty?”

“It is not a liberty to place duty ahead of ones self. See you are one of us already,” Damao interjected.

Then you truly desire to become a member of our family, our brother and dedicate your self to the service of Parga?

“Yes, I know no better leaders to emulate and follow, then the Princes of Parga.”

“It is settled then,” Volos said, “Your induction begins now. We are an odd number and too many to welcome you all at once, as we are 10 but only nine present. In preparation we have all chosen numbers, one for each couple. You must choose a chip from his jar. Each chip has a number on it. That way you can be bedded by one couple after another, on successive nights.” He held out the jar and Panther choose.

“Number 4” That was Kastor and Polydeukus. They stepped forward and taking Panther by the hand lead him to their bed. Ikaros came with Iason and myself to ours and we all retired. It would be a long night for our brothers, those three would get little sleep and Odo aside, the reaming 7 would need pull extra duty in the morning.

The moon provided some illumination to

the room but not sufficient to see details. It was obvious that the Dioskourol had him between and he shared oral pleasures with one and was being fucked by the other. From the sounds all were in the throws of rapture, as were the other couples in the room. We were making such a mighty noise I was sure the entire ship knew of our great pleasure. I have been with my twin brothers before and know how skilled they are at this. I know Iason and I learned much from them about it. We will judge success in the morning by how tender they are, for the twins are not small and Panther is very large.

As for us, Ikaros still desires to be fucked more than to fuck. Tonight he lay on his stomach and Iason and I fucked him in turn, the spare providing kisses and gentle touches to the others.

1318, 2nd month, 7th day:

I am writing in my personal journal early in the morning before the others rise, while on the ship. I am so pleased that this ship has my name. It is a fine honor, even if it is the smallest of its class. Admiral Pantaleon has called all of our new sail only ships, the Prince Class. The newer vessels are even larger but this, the Prince Arden was the first. The Admiral's Flag Ship is the King Iason the 7th. It is the largest to date. Each has a figure head carved in its name sake's likeness. I think the PA's is the finest. I am not objective, as I need be in public.

The next ship to be built will be called the Prince Nikias, since he and the others are only boys I do not know how the figure heads will be made.

We will arrive in Athens in the afternoon. In the morning we had a big meeting with Admiral Pantaleon, Demokritos and Olympos. They gave us some historical background and told us who we would be meeting and what places we would visit. Dress for us is very important and we were given firm directions on what we could and could not wear.

Since Athens was recently taken over by the Catalans in 1311, a new set of nobility was now in power. Odo will need speak this Catalan dialect, Greek of course and several Slavic languages and French who took over from the Empire in 1204. Greek and French will probably be the two most widely used.

I am hoping to do some sports with the local princes. While we did our fencing, archery, wrestling and some boxing on

the ship, running is just not practical. I need badly to get out and stretch my legs over several stadia.

Apparently the Catalans have adopted local dress which is a variation on the tunic or long chiton. Cloaks are also popular. Our dress is semi military. The local soldiers ware tunics and leather skirts over the top. We ware tunics and cloth kilts under the longer tunic. Our non riding boots are only slightly different from the sandals they ware. Hats of different kinds are popular they told me. We will keep our head bands. Being young we are not expected to conform as the older men with us are. The Admiral will have his uniform of course and the scholars will ware long robes not unlike the chiton. We will all have our swords fixed with a baldric (TN: fancy belt to hold the weapon) and a dark blue chlamys (TN: semicircular

cape that clasps at the right shoulder)

Our tunics are brightly colored blue with yellow, embroidered symbols of office across our chests, not unlike tablions of the nobility. These are parade or dress uniforms. The Argoanuts are adorned like us and will form a military escort for us. All of them were part of our original membership and their language skills and cultural knowledge will be of great use to us later this summer.

I could see, as we approached, that many more ships were in the local waters. Athens must be a busy port, I thought. About midday, I noticed a large Catalan galley, some distance ahead of us and obviously on the same course. The PA was running a full rig and we had a reasonable sea breeze pushing us landward. The galley's 2 sails are large and triangular like ours. It was a

Trimens and the oarsmen were pulling at an easy and steady pace.

The First Officer told me at battle speed that galley would be as quick as the PA, under our present conditions. The only difference was we could keep up this pace as long as the breeze remained fresh but a galley pulling at battle speed could only maintain it for a few hours at best. When we pulled closer I could see it was about half our length, its' masts were about the size of our second highest, its' freeboard was less and it was half again as wide. He also pointed out, one of our design advantages.

“Notice that at every swell they must overcome it, once that has happened they ride it for their entire length. The longer the ship the longer it can ride the wave or swell. Give we are twice their length, we get twice the ride. Also they must push aside more water, given their

greater width.”

I think Aristotle has perhaps left something out of his analysis of motion but I am not sure what that is. When we pulled along side them, we were close enough that I could see the faces of the men on their deck. I waved and they waved back. One of the officers held out his arms as the Ganymede statue and I responded in like and pointed to myself and held out my arms again. With that he called and several officers and crew appeared and began cheering and waving wildly. Apparently they were some of the Florentines who had been captured.

The First Officer found a large mug and gestured with it, as an invitation for them to visit us in port. “I see your reputation has preceded you Prince. One of us should tell the Captain and Admiral of

our invitation.” I did that and much to my delight they were most agreeable. Telling me we have common cause with them against the pirates and old acquaintances to renew.

We were several hours in advance, of them reaching port. We anchored just inside the main harbor, sending our small boats to register with the Harbor Master and bring back fresh water and food. For some reason never explained to us, the Prince Arden did not dock at the quay but anchored off to one side, well out of the way. Since we had no cargo to load or unload, it did make some sense. I was not on deck at the time but Odo was and came to inform me, the Catalan vessel had entered the harbor and was docking with their sister vessels, on the other side of the bay.

Now in port the marines posted guards

on all points of our ship. They took four hour turns. Presently they announced the arrival of a small boat. It was a page with a message from the Duchy of Athens. The Page was escorted by two soldiers. His uniform was brightly colored. While he was a young man, I would guess our age, his robes were long like those of old men. I thought it must be very hot for him to sit in the open boat with the afternoon sun and no shade.

Since he was a page, Odo placed his hat of office on his head and leaned over the rail to welcome him aboard, after the captain had granted permission for the visitors to do so. All this protocol and rules in these other societies, I thought? Once on the deck Odo greeted him warmly, as one page to another and escorted him to the Captain.

Captain Hermogenes read the message, after thanking the page for his swift and efficient delivery. This caused the young man to blush a bright red. “I will ask the Admiral to prepare an answer but that will take a bit of time. Perhaps you and your crew would share some refreshments. Several sailors appeared with wine, olives and cheese and the oarsmen from the skiff were summoned up to the deck.

Odo talked briefly with the page and taking his hand brought him to us, that we might make his acquaintance. He introduced himself as Stephen du Frank. All the while refusing to look us directly in the eye as he did Odo. His guardians stood a pace behind him as ours did us. Kastor spoke up. “Please take you ease with us Stephen, we four are Princes but like Odovacar, we have all served as

pages in our fathers' court and our guardians as well.” He placed his hand on the man’s shoulder to guide him. “Let us sit here in the shade.” Drakon stepped from behind with two mugs of wine for his guardians and to engage the military in their talk.” We learned much about the life of a page and his prospects in this place. It is much different than Parga. He was shocked to learn that all of us princes, guardians, translator, were all required to have spent at least 1/2 a year as a page and that there were five more younger princes still at home, three in the page’s service at this moment.

Admiral Pantaleon came forward with his reply, after we had consumed two mugs of wine and Stephen departed. We young men including the Argoanuts and some of the sailors and marines took advantage of the warm sun and

calm sea, to swim. I had great fun diving from the mid ship rail and swinging out on a rope fixed to the main sail's yard, dropping into the water.