

Arden
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29 Eastern Travels 2:

Just as we were finishing swimming, the lookout signaled two small boats approaching. In the first boat were a number of officers from the Catalan, Trimens Galley, we had seen earlier in the day. The other small boat was to far away for us to see clearly who was in it.

They pulled along side and requested permission to come aboard, which the Captain granted. I did not recognize any of these men but they, Iason and I. Their captain was much impressed, as his senior officers prostrated themselves before two young princes, of a nation that had defeated them in battle and held them prisoner. He spoke mostly to Odo in Genoese Italian. The Florentines did know Hermogenes and several of the other officers, they had all worked together in repairing the damaged Florentine ships.

I was just about to get the Argoanuts to begin singing Odo's Ode to Ganymede, when the deck officer of the day pulled me aside. We went to the rail and I could see a small skiff with about 10 boys and a very young, very junior, officer. I waved to them and they waved back but they did not approach. Then it dawned on me, they were the ships boys and were probably not here with their captain's permission. I motioned for Odo and the Genoese captain to come closer. Pointing to the skiff, "please Sir, give your ship's boys permission to join us, it will mean much to us, the Argoanuts and to them."

"They should not have left their ship without my permission," he said.

"Something that forgiveness is easier to seek, me thinks," added his first officer. He turned to Hermogenes who nodded and smiled widely. "Ship's boys without spirit are not of much value."

He motioned to the skiff. "Captain Hermogenes asks you come aboard with my blessing, be quick about it," he shouted, "this is all because of those tales you Florentines have been filling their ears with."

Odo answered him in Italian, "They are not tales Sir, I was there to see it, it was I who convinced the Argoanuts to select Prince Arden as the model for the statue and I who composed the ode, which we will sing once they come aboard."

The ten boys and one officer scrambled onto the deck and lined up for inspection. Iason and Kastor did that, greeting each one and saying a few words to them. Captain Hermogenes and Admiral Pantaleon both welcomed our new visitors. "But you did not come to hear nice words from an old man like me. It is the Ganymede of Parga you wish to see."

I pulled off my tunic but not my kilt and took my position, as my brother's and the Argoanuts began to sing the ode. When they finished I jumped down and began greeting each one. Someone addressed Prince Arden and before I could answer, Iason took his theatrical pose. He began looking around, high, low, behind others. We do learn something from our fathers. This solicited the desired effect when the Argoanuts, having seen it before, began to laugh. "I can not find anyone here called Prince Arden, I do see my brother, whose name is Arden, will he do? Suddenly I was engulfed by the ten all asking questions at once. They all seemed intent on touching me, I think to make sure I was real and not just an illusion. I could see their young, minder officer, was about to intervene when Volos stopped him.

I overheard Pantaleon saying, "they may look and act like men but inside they are still boys; unlike us, they are still free enough of spirit to show it."

We were all telling stories to our new friends when Ikaros came up to me with my tunic in hand and insisted I put it on. "Yes mother," I replied to much laughter. By this time most of the officers had also joined our little circle. Odo stole the show as he always seems, now that his shyness has passed. He told the boys about my seeing him and many others, some of those Argoanuts, he pointed; huddled next to the defeated army, riding over on my horse and taking complete control of the situation, beseeching the King on their behalf and accepting the General's sword of surrender. "We were all afraid but when a boy, accompanied by a Knight, came over to us and started asking questions in Latin, not Italian, we were puzzled. He gathered us up and took us to the Generals and King and other commanders. We were sure no boy could do anything or even get the Kings attention. Not only did he do that, he asked that we boys, among the captured, be placed under the protection of the Princes of Parga, since we were not old enough to be combatants and must therefore be guests. King Iason paused and looked at him and looked at us and just said granted. I think we knew then this was no ordinary boy or prince. Our General seeing this understood more than any of us and surrendered his sword to Prince Arden and not the King or his Generals. I thought at that moment he was a god and this must be heaven. Then I knew I was in heaven when this soldier swept me up and placed me on Prince Arden's horse and he wrapped his cloak around me. He told me I would be safe. It started to rain and the more it rained the tighter he held me." That soldier was the King. Much more laughter. "It turned out only to be Parga, a real place and not heaven. Now I have a family, with parents and a whole group of big brothers and all those Argoanuts. Sometimes it is a big job for a boy to look after all of them but we boys can do anything."

Our boy guests did not want to share their stories with us. I can understand that, since their commanders were in attendance.

1318, 2nd month 12th day:

My personal impressions of Athens and its rulers is over all favorable. It is not the place of fable any longer but one could see how those fables must have arisen. I was somewhat disappointed in the Parathion and the other temples on the Acropolis. They were long ago subverted by the Christian Church and much of the art was carried off, mostly to Constantinople. It is still an impressive place. Many of the citizens or residents of the city are less well off i.e., not housed as well or as well fed, as ours. Others display almost unbelievable wealth. The palaces and fine homes we visited were often much more opulent than ours. Our castle and fortress is mighty and larger than anything I have seen so far, but it is utilitarian, no gold or jewels decorate it or any of us.

The young nobles we met were all nice enough and friendly. It did not start out that way. In fact most seemed cold but polite toward us. After Iason explained that his title while granted at birth does not guarantee his succession to the throne and that the title of prince was granted by the council to each of us and could be withdrawn should we prove feckless or incompetent, even himself. "I am not assured of my father's succession until the council votes. That is why we all must serve a pages and apprentice officials in the government as well as qualify as Knights or Navel Officers. That is why we are all students at the university."

This mollified them and I think won them over. Ikaros had to prove himself as a Knight 2nd class by besting their self proclaimed best swordsman. He did so with ease. His obvious feminine deportment and small stature has fooled many. The military rank of our guardians and the news of our having dispatched the assigns was sufficient for us.

I was unable to find anyone to run against and was forced to do so against Pyrrros' count and estimation of distance. Several of these noble sons were Nikias' age and since that time I have missed him terribly. They seemed to like Odo, being closer to them in age and his poems and stories were a great delight.

I think their is something to this leadership business. None that I met struck me as natural leaders. Most did not appear to be natural followers either. None among them seemed to command the respect that Iason and I do from our brothers. The oldest son of the count seemed to demand it and his younger brothers and the others seemed to give it, but more from custom than willingness. It was expected and they met that expectation. I believe in our family we have earned what respect we get. I also noticed he gave little. I know we give much. The idea that Iason is not above us but "first among equals," is a concept none of them seemed to fully understand. Having no experience with it, I assume it is difficult to comprehend. I would also expect they depend more on rank than ability, when it comes to leadership.

Since I doubt they sleep together, that might explain some lack of closeness as well. I know our practices were actively discouraged from the time of the Christian Church's official status. The Romans believed it was a man's duty to father as many children as physically possible. That did not mean many did not follow the Greek Way. More of a waxing and waning.

The women believe it a practice that undermines their power; working on the idea, who controls sex, controls all else. The Church has taken up the idea of population expansion. They say to increase the number of believers but I think it is the same as before, to increase the number of workers and soldiers.

We were all admonished not to pass judgment on our hosts. It would be impossible to be a fair judge, when only knowing them a short time and not fully understanding their political situation. I can not resist. In our official journal none of us will. In my private recording, I shall as I choose.

Panther did not get to accompany us ashore. He had much to do on the ship anyway. Iason and I immediately fell in love with his prodigious penis and his skills at using it, when it came our turn for him to share our bed. Not only has he earned a place in our butts but in our hearts. We have always been admonished that it was less what a man had between his legs than how he used it. In Panther's instance he has much and uses it exceedingly well. His place in our family as bed boy is absolutely secure, if nothing else.

I am sure he will earn many other duties. No man could keep up with the demand on his ardor that would result otherwise. Ikaros tells me that he is learning his duties quickly and well, he suggests he will make a fine steward.

1318, 2nd month, 18th day:

Our trip to Constantinople was uneventful except for the extraordinary sex we were enjoying with each other, Panther and some of the Argoanuts. Some of the us brought our instruments and with Odo to provide his, created as we go, songs, the voyage seemed short.

I must say this is a most impressive city to behold and travel about in. Many different languages can be heard in the streets and markets. Goods of all kinds can be found, most in abundance. The city is perhaps ten times the population of Parga. We were most uncomfortable at first, with so many people, it seemed almost oppressive due to simple numbers.

They have many strange customs. Demokritos told us when we travel west the customs will be even stranger and so will the dress and food. All of that is recorded in our official journal.

I was impressed by Andronikos II Palaiologos. He has been the emperor for almost 36 years now. He is much older than our fathers, he is more like a grandfather. He is assisted by his son as co-Emperor Michael IX Palaiologos, who is 41, also a lot older than our fathers. We spent much time with Andronikos III Palaiologos, he is Michael's son and 21, just a few years older than us.

He seemed like a nice enough person but with much political and power ambition. Kastor rather liked him, Poly not. Iason and I were in the middle. He obviously looked a little down on us, since Parga is so small and poor. We could not offer him either support or cause him difficulty, Parga and therefore us, were of no real importance to him. He was diplomatic and careful not to offend us. He expressed interest in our new Free University and made sure we spent some time with our scholars at his, which has been in business since 700. We were impressed but noticed it was not free. Its primary purpose was to train the civil servants, Church Scholars and medical Doctors; like ours has a wide range of chairs: Law, Philosophy, Medicine, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, Music, Rhetoric and others, in addition to Latin and Greek. This is covered in detail in our joint journal.

Andronikos thought it strange that all four of us princes were university students. His contingent was much larger than ours, subtracting the Argoanats. For the most part these were bright and ambitious young men, who were willing to sing and share wine with us. He was well trained in the military arts, as are we but not half the archer. His guardians were professional and I am sure dedicated to their task, not friends and definitely not family as are our six.

Michael IX was a most gracious host and saw to it, we, including the Argoanats, had access to the palace baths and provided guides and letters of introduction for us as we traveled about the city. Our Ambassador, a Knight we did not know well, had organized everything for us in advance. He seemed to have a good relationship with the Co-Emperor and his father as well. He accompanied us to most of the places we visited.

1318, 2nd month, 21st day:

We did find some adventure. The tale is thus:

Each day as we marched out of the port area and market into the city proper, we would pass many houses with high walls around. This is not unusual.

Sitting on one of these walls was a young slave boy. I could tell he was a slave by his dress and the leather collar around his neck. He was very blond, with large blue eyes. I took him to be from the north. He was about 12 or so and very thin with long legs. He smiled and would often wave to us, and us to him. The Argoanats would sing some of our marching songs as we passed him. He seemed delighted by our music. After the third of fourth day I did not see him at first. He had come down from the wall and would walk along with the Argoanats, often talking to them and I assumed learning our songs. I though little of it at the time, we often entertained children and others along our way.

On our last day we did not go past this house, stopping in the market to purchase gifts for those in Parga. We had been told the selection would be better here than any other place we would visit. Our Ambassador met us at the quay and moved with us to the market; he was just finishing his instructions to us, mostly about staying in groups of five or six and not getting lost or cheated by the merchants. He was about to release us when a man, who we had not yet met, hailed the ambassador.

They talked for a moment. The ambassador brought him close to us and he explained his problem. His young slave boy Lyuben, who seemed much taken by us, as we passed each day, had run away, something he had never done before. The boy was about to be sold and he was seeking our assistance.

We had already been told that we must respect the laws of the lands we visited, agree with them or not. I for one would not steal a slave, nor would I encourage him to run away. I was not interested in catching a runaway either. I have no problem respecting the spirit of a law but find it hard to always follow them to the letter. I would not refuse any person, slave or free, my assistance or protection, should it be needed.

Iason got up on a block of stone and addressed us. "Brothers, Argoanats, Sailors and Marines of the Prince Arden, we have been asked to keep an eye out for a runaway slave boy named Lyuben. He belongs to this man, Augustus Grantzities. I have assured him and our Ambassador that we all would do just that, keep an eye out for him. Most of you have seen him before, he is the lad that often sat on the wall and sang with us," Iason pointed up the street, "as we marched into the city. Dismissed and good bargain hunting."

Augustus Grantzities and the Ambassador continued in conversation and the assembled group began forming little groups and heading into the market. In all of this confusion, I saw, from the corner of my eye, a boy matching Lyuben's description, disappearing under the canvas of a near by stall that sold fruit. His foot was sticking out. I pointed it out to Poly, who smiled and nodded at Iason and Kastor. We chatted a bit and Odo joined us; all the while our guardians made a little half circle around their charges and the fruit stand. We moved closer to it, so it closed the flat part of our semicircle.

Odo vacar, I said, do you have your sharp dagger in your belt. "Yes Prince Arden." Would it be sharp and strong enough to cut through a thick hard piece of leather, should you find one? "Yes prince." I pointed to the foot just visible under the facade of the fruit stall. He smiled and nodded.

Kastor added, Prince Iason, when you said that we should keep an eye out for this Lyuben, did you intend to apprehend and return him to his master?"

"No, Prince Kastor, my intention was to do just that, keep an eye out and nothing more. We are visitors here not police; we should not brake local laws but we are not obligated to enforce them."

Then what would you do Brother, if you were to see such a person, as this Lyuben?

Iason smiled and reaching down he clamped his hand on the boy's ankle. "I would do just this," and he pulled hard, much to the surprise of young Lyuben, drawing him out in the dust of the ground. "Ok Lyuben, I have seen you, now crawl back under the facade." He did, giggling while doing so. I pointed to Odo who followed him. Odo quickly returned placing his dagger in his belt.

"The Ambassador comes," Damao announced.

Well Ambassador, I think we are all capable of purchasing our gifts and some fresh food for the ship. Why not return to your business, I know we have kept you from it for some time now. We look forward to your next visit to Parga.

Each of us thanked him for his capable and valuable assistance and he departed. I looked at Odo. "I told him to remain until one of us gave him instructions to do otherwise," he whispered.

"How many oranges and lemons can Lyuben carry," Poly asked?

"Two large sacks," the voice from under the facade replied.

"Hum that will not feed the Prince Arden's crew but it might yourself Prince Arden."

Well I guess we will need to carry a few ourselves. Lyuben poked his head out, "do princes work as slaves?"

The Princes of Parga are not too proud to do what ever is required of them. I told him.

Poly moved around in front of the stall, signaling the Guardians to hold their positions. "Fruit seller, the price for all the fruit in your stand? I do not have time to bargain or haggle, just name a fair price. "Three Florins, sir." Poly reached into his purse. Here are four, please bag them up for us, in jute sacks and baskets. Please do so with your blinders on."

Now this fruit seller was quite aware of all that transpired, the cloth of his stall facade is thin and few customers were yet about. He could see the boy hiding under his table.

He quickly began doing just that. He held up one of the smaller sacks and reached down and dropped in a brown piece of leather, "that is a strange lemon," he commented and filled it with the bright yellow fruit. He filled a second, smaller sack, also with lemons and handed them to Kastor. He filled six more sacks and a couple of baskets in all. We formed up a phalanx and Odo summoned Lyuben, placing a small sack on each of his shoulders and positioning him in the middle. We all took up sacks or baskets, except Iason and Damao. Iason reached into his purse and handed the merchant another gold coin. "A token for the deaf, dumb and blind of good will." The merchant was beside himself. Thanking us profusely for our generosity and for taking his entire, emphasizing the term, inventory.

The man was quite a comedian as he placed a gold coin in each eye and looking at us said, "I hope to see you all again some day, perhaps then you will tell me who you are." His smile was wide and his voice sincere.

We marched to the quay. When we got a short distance from it we could see some soldiers searching the boats. Iason and Damao went ahead and returned with a sailor's tunic. Lyuben stuffed his slave's shift and his sandals into the sacks and slipped on the tunic. None of us looked at him, so officially we did not see this happen at all. He does have a very attractive boy's body, however. We then marched to our boats. Odo pointed to Lyuben and to the second boat. He climbed down into the boat and we began lowering sacks to him. When the soldiers came up to us Pylros and our marine guards talked to them. All they could see was sacks and baskets of fruit being lowered to a sailor.

Our open boats were of no interest to them anyway. They asked for us to be on the lookout for a runaway slave boy dressed in a slave shift with a brown leather collar. By now some of the others were returning with their treasures. We told them to take no notice of the strange fruit but they were welcome to eat as many oranges and lemons as they wished. They were of course expected to make sure our strange fruit was still in the boat when we returned.

When we got back to the market we encountered Augustus Grantzities again. He asked and I truthfully answered, I had seen his slave boy over by the fruit stand but now both the boy and the stand were vanished. He threw up his hands. "I hope no harm comes to him, he is a good boy, one dear to my heart and that of my wife."

Why then do you wish to sell him?

"I have no choice, I need the money badly, it is only 30 florins but something I must pay. I had arranged to trade him for the debt. Now what am I to do?"

"Well perhaps some windfall will come your way. Perhaps you can do some business with the Ambassador that will make you the money needed? What is it you do?"

"I am a trader of silks and other fine textiles."

"My brothers and I are in the market for just such items. We have promised our ladies some fine silks."

"I have only the color purple remaining in my inventory and since only Royalty can have it...but you are princes is that not so?"

"Yes we are, well four of us, in Parga we have no such color restrictions. Did not the Ambassador tell you that?"

"No, but I did not tell him that was all I had. I brought it in several years ago, the Palace refused to buy it from me, even though they asked for it in the first place. My new supply is much delayed in arriving, that is why I can't pay the debt."

"Well let us see the goods and I am sure we can make a fair deal. I also suggest you let the Ambassador know more about your inventory. Parga is not a rich place but our ladies, like all others I suspect, do like fine things and perhaps a small market would be better than no market at all," Kastor suggested.

By this time, some of the Argoanuts were returning and we sent our fabrics and other things with them. I bought a nice yellow and red tunic made of Egyptian Cotton and ask the Eparchos to dress the strange fruit in the second boat for me. He nodded, looking a little puzzled and departed. We found much else to purchase too. Fine fragrances and more textiles seemed to be the bulk. For our boys we found lovely daggers and little carvings made of ivory for young princes, dolls for the princesses.

We were the last to return. Most were standing or sitting on the quay, pending our arrival. When I looked into the second boat I saw my bright yellow tunic on a sailor that did seem a bit young for the job and next to him another sailor. We loaded ourselves into the boats except Heron, who went to the other three with some instructions. When he returned we pushed off and began rowing toward the Prince Arden. Lyuben had some tears in his eyes. Odo comforted him. In a Slavic language I did not know.

Heron told us that he instructed all of the shore party to say nothing about the strange fruit or the yellow tunic. "I assured them, as I assure all of you, your captain will not punish you for our mischief. He may wish to punish us when we return to Parga. These oranges and lemons will go to the cook but the strange fruit will go with the Argoanuts. You marines and sailors are to say nothing of this until we release you."

"Did you buy that cloth from my master," Lyuben asked of no one specifically.

"Yes, Kastor replied, "we purchased all that he had and I am sure at a very handsome profit too."

"Then you have purchased me and he is not my master any more. Who is my new master?"

That is partly correct, he is not your master any more. We did not purchase you, kidnap or steal you. You walked away from his home quite on your own. Having found you in a state of distress and apparent danger, we Princes placed you under our protection. Citizens of Parga, can not by law own slaves. Slavery or any other form of servitude is strictly forbidden. We could not purchase you even if we wanted to. You are a free man but since you are not of age, you are now an orphan, you are a ward of the king, our father.

"But I was born a slave, I will always be a slave."

When we arrive in Parga you will be made a citizen and at that time reborn a free man. Slavery in Parga does not exist.

Odo said more to him in his Slavic language. "You mean I get to be one of the Argoanuts. Do I get to wear a uniform too?"

"Yes of course, since I am the Patron Prince of Prince Iason's Argoanuts, I shall make you a member just as soon as I can."

"I have never been on a ship before. I have never even been further away from my former masters house than the water before."

"Why did you leave his household," Poly asked?

"The man he was to sell me to wanted to make me into a pleasure slave. His present pleasure slave is a eunuch and I knew he would cut off my balls."

Did Augusts know this?

"I don't think so, I learned it from the man's present eunuch slave. He told me that happened to him. He told me pleasure slaves are always treated well. My former master Augusts always treated me well for a slave boy. I was born in his house.

My mother told me, my father was killed defending her and me, still growing her body, from the slave traders that raided her village. She said I look like him and that he was a brave and skilled fighter. The idea of having my balls cut off was not very appealing." His hands grasped his boyhood. "I know they are a great source of pleasure to me, one of the very few." He smiled. "I decided I would try and run away. Even if they caught me, the punishment couldn't possibly be as bad as that and even if it happened, at least I made the effort."

"One thing we can guarantee, your balls will not be cut off in Parga. The pleasure part I think is certain too," Odo commented.

"Why are all you helping me?"

"In Parga every boy has a chance to become the man he dreams of and gain the rewards of his efforts. We liked your spunk and attitude. We could see you wanted to join us and seek adventure. It was obvious to us that you needed some assistance, so we provided the opportunity. You Lyuben made advantage of it." Poly chimed in.

Lyuben, have you ever had sex with another person?

"No but I am willing."

Eparchos, please make sure Lyuben is never forced to this. Keep him close to you until he understands his position. I am sure Odo will seduce him sooner rather than later. I am not sure if Lyuben fully understood what we were saying. I doubt it. He had spent 13 or so years learning to be a slave. To unquestionably do as bid. It will take some time to unlearn that. His brother Argoanuts did and so will he.

1318, 2nd month, 27th day

Krite, Naxos and the other places we visited were interesting. We had no more contrived adventures. We did have two, not of our making. One was two days ago when the second officer realized that Lyuben was not one of the Argoanuts that we had left Parga with. Captain Hermogenes was furious and made his anger known to all around. He of course sent for this unaccounted for Argonaut. Who was found hiding under the Eparchos' bunk. He demanded that we princes all come forward as well.

I saw him wink at Lyuben, who was almost in tears. He motioned and the boy came forward. Do not be afraid son, I will not harm you. I am not angry at you. I must however be harsh with some of the others, it is for the good of the ship. He said this in a calm and quiet voice. Then he boomed, "I want to know why I was not told that we had an additional passenger."

He then started asking who knew and who didn't. Iason stood up and boldly announced, "I knew as did my brothers. The responsibility for this lay with us and us alone. Anyone else who may have had knowledge was sworn to secrecy by me." Poly, Kastor and I stood next to Iason. It is not just Iason but all of us acting together, I said. I could see the Admiral from the corner of my eye.

He knew, the Captain needed to appear to be displeased. The long term discipline of his crew and the safety of the vessel lay in the balance. This was something we did not consider but perhaps should have.

He went on to explain to everyone why it was necessary to keep him and his officers informed of everything and anything that happened. He turned to us, "by your requiring my crew members to be silent, you have divided their loyalty. The Argoanuts are in your charge, they are different. That is not a good thing. Every man here is loyal to Parga and to the Princes that represent it. They must also be loyal to their officers and their ship.

I know you meant no harm and as far as I can see none resulted, this time. I believe the cook requires help with meal preparation, for the remainder of the voyage; I think you princes have an overwhelming desire to volunteer for just such service, am I correct?" We snapped to attention and agreed.

"Eparchos, I want you to make sure none of these Argoanuts render any assistance to the princes, not that they would accept it.

As for you others," pointing to our guardians, "I think you should have advised your charges better on this matter but I also realize you are all land solders and not seamen, it is excused this time." He dismissed us. For the next two days we assisted the cook. I must say it is not the kind of work I wish to do for any longer a time. It is no harder then farm work, of which I have experience, Iason, Kastor and Poly had little. I even think I would rather clean stables then cook for a ship full of men.

Panther later told us that the captain and admiral laughed greatly about the whole thing, agreeing not to tell our fathers, while entering Lyuben's name as a new Argoanuts requite, into the ship's log. Another lesson for the Princes of Parga, one I think we have learned.

Our second adventure was and was not. We spotted two pirate ships and gave chase to them. At one point in the chase the Prince Arden had closed enough, the Captain called for the marines and all archers to the deck. We were released from our cooking duties to join them. Just as they were getting in range of our long bows, a fears wind began blowing, they lost their sails and we were forced to greatly reduce ours. I was not happy about that but was even less happy about the rain that began pounding us.

The captain decided to brake off the chase, since even if we caught up to them, the sea was too rough to make a fight. Given the way the Prince Arden was being tossed around, I doubt if those smaller ships could have done anything but pray. Engagement in such conditions would badly damage both ships, to the advantage of neither.

The storm lasted for many hours and I must say we were all sick, not being accustomed to such things. It is very hard to prepare food when you are reaching one moment and hanging on, not be knocked to the deck, the next.

It was good to see Parga's land and mountains again. It is good to have adventure and travel to strange places but it is good to be home again and finished with this kitchen duty.