

Arden

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30: Back to Normal?

1318, 3rd month, 1st day.

We are almost back to normal. Everyone wanted to see us and we have become wary of retelling everything. That will pass. Our boys were upon us in an instant and have been like glue bound to us. Our ladies were most happy with the fine gifts and very appreciative.

Our fathers have been more reserved but I can tell they are glad to see us safely returned. They have been spending much private time in our quarters. I know they are happy to have us returned as both are in exceptionally good and playful moods.

The Eparchos of the sailing Argoanuts brought Lyuben to us and to meet his new King. Lyuben was rendered almost speechless. King Iason and Father quickly overcame his shyness. It was quite amazing to watch.

Lyuben was quite something to behold too. Now that he was clean, had been given a proper hair cut and was dressed in a uniform that fit, he had been transformed into a Boy Adonis. His long legs and narrow body moved with grace. His large eyes were also very appealing and the boy had a most engaging smile. Even though we had all told him this meeting was very unofficial and was family, he was still very formal in his interactions. Father seemed to understand saying, "Lyuben, my beloved Iason and I are now your parents. We are father and Princess Elpis is mother. All of these boys are now brother.

In private, as we now are, you must stop using titles and formal language." Lyuben looked at the floor. "Come son and sit at my feet as Nikias does," my mentor said in a soft voice. Lyuben sat and mentor gently touched his head letting the lad's cheek rest against his leg just as Nikias. Karyakos began asking simple questions. He was playing the Question Game, each person is allowed 10 questions to guess the secret. Lyuben recognized this and began playing. The question quickly focused on how he came to be on the Prince Arden and so on. In no time at all he was sitting on Karyakos' knee and looking them both in the eyes when he answered.

The royal couple departed soon after, leaving us and our boys to our love making. I noticed that our fathers had poor Lyuben charged up for sex and when they left the room he momentarily looked lost. The Eparchos hands soon found their way under his kilt and the two settled on a couch for the evening. Soon after the lamps were snuffed, the sounds of sex grew louder and louder. This seemed only to increase my ardor and those of my bed mates, my beloved Iason and our eromenoses.

I am continually amazed that our love, Iason's and myself, grows stronger each day. Just when I think it could not possibly be greater some new level is reached. I am also amazed at my capacity to love others, as well. As my brothers and some friends sleep with their boys, I am completely enthralled with each and everyone of them. We may have helped Lyuben to avoid the life of a pleasure slave but he is now like all of us, a slave to pleasure.

I can see why he was picked for that, he has long and slender legs that are topped by the most desirable round globes, of firm and smooth flesh. Except for a few blond hairs at the base of his penis, as smooth as a girl. His arms are long and shoulders wide. He is very thin and looks his young age. He will be very popular here and in his Argonaut House.

In conversation, I learned that his eunuch acquaintance told him, by being castrated at the right age, the eunuch remains more boy like, as he ages. The acquaintance told him "boys or men like me" are

much desired and fetch a high price to our masters for our service. That he spends much of his time giving pleasure to men his master arranges. At least in Parga prostitutes receive the benefits of their labors. I suspect not that much real love and possibly a questionable amount of real pleasure.

He has only had sex with Odo and his Eparchos, not that others showed no interest. His Eparchos has kept him close to himself. I can understand that. The Eparchos wanted him to fully understand his new life and gain sufficient self confidence, as not to be easily or even inadvertently used by others. Those were my instructions to him. He is also no fool and recognizes the lad charms.

Given the number of Argoanuts there is a shortage of good mentors for them. Those boys that truly desire one can be accommodated but unless a boy asked and actively seeks, he will be without. I think Lyuben needs a mentor and soon. I think I just might know who would be the best man for that job too. I will ask Thanatos and if he declines, Uncle Tertius. It would be best if both would court the boy, as men did in the old days. That would truly give Lyuben the feeling of independence and self love he needs.

1318, 3rd month, 2nd day:

Princess Elpis, asked us to bring this new Argonaut to the mid day meal, in the family dining room. I knew that both Thanatos and Tertius would both be attending and spoke to the Eparchos about my idea. He would be very busy over the next month in preparation for our next voyage, one Lyuben would not attend and which would last almost 6 months. He was not pleased but he could also see, he could not possibly look after him properly, until the fall at the earliest. I didn't mention that he was also too young at 20 to be a boy's mentor. He needed to establish himself professionally first. Which will take several years. I knew that Tertius has picked him as officer material, that is why he leads the Argoanuts on the Prince Arden. I doubt that he will ever return as Eparchos of his house, except for a short transition visit.

Volos had taken Lyuben on a tour of the castle and to watch the Council in action. We princes were in our usual positions and pages were running in and out. Admiral Pantaleon accompanied by Captain Hermogenes and several others came in. Each captain had a junior officer with him. Panther was with Hermogenes and the other junior officers were all former Argoanuts. I must say their uniforms were new and they looked very smart in them. I was a little shocked to see Panther among them. He has the age but not the experience of the Argoanuts.

The Admiral introduced the new junior officers, not by name but as a new class of junior officer, recently created, called a Captain's Assistant. (TN: βοηθος καπτετανιου, a rank which seems unique to Parga) This is the lowest rank of officer in the navy. Panther and his comrades all stood behind their captains and all carried cases of documents or other things. They are aids I thought.

Dios was sitting with the other pages, trying not to look to excited on seeing his father. Agapios was in the gallery, I could see his bright red hair. I was surprised as he should be in his classes at this time of the day. After the reports were give and the business of the day neared completion, Karyakos asked the new CA's to come forward. They all did so, standing in a very straight military line before King and Consort. We four, could not keep wide smiles from our faces, knowing each of these young men intimately and expect for Panther, for many years.

"Panther, you are the only one of these new junior officers not to have been an Argonaut. You should send a message to your mother telling her of your appointment, mothers are always interested in the knowing about their children." He named each of the others, 7 in all. "Your mother and father wish to congratulate you and have asked me to extend their invitation to join them and your Princes in the family dining room, for our evening meal. Panther and his captain are expected to dine with the pages and the others in the Princes' quarters."

King Iason and I are very pleased to see such a fine group, as you are, taking up this newly created position. Parga's navy has a long and proud history. This place has been one of great and long standing traditions. Our navy is leading the way, in modernizing those traditions. We are the first sovereign state, we know of, to have rid ourselves of galleys. All of our war ships are now oar free, sailing vessels.

Our ships are of the finest design and among the best constructed in the world. These are called the Prince Class. Prince Class ships can carry a complement of 175. Our older trimens carried 200 of which 170 were oarsmen. Of the 175 on a Prince Class: we have 45 sailors, a carpenter and 10 support staff, 6 officers, and 100 marines as a standard complement. We can accommodate an additional 100 marines if necessary. Combined with our four cannons, catapults and such, this is one of the most formidable warships ever devised by men.

In addition, the size of these ships allows us to stay at sea for up to six months without landfall, with its full potential 270 complement. They have been designed to be refitted with the most modern weapons of war imaginable. The Prince Class will be formidable well into the future.

Having eliminated oarsmen means we can substitute marines. The standard Trimens type, of our neighbors, carry only 20 or at best up to 50 marines. Our design is less top heavy and has a deeper draft than the old. They are more stable, able to keep more sail on at all times and run faster under most conditions.

This new navy needs new kinds of sailors and new structures. The position of Captain's Assistant is the first of these new structures. Other new positions will be created in the future. Innovation is not new for us. It was in King Iason the 1st's time that we abandoned the old Athenian way, of having the captain being a political appointee and the ships military operations commanded by the helmsman (kybernetes). Our navy was made fully professional by him. The largest and newest of the Prince Class ships is the King Iason 7th. It is Admiral Pantaleon's flag ship. That vessel is experimenting with several new positions and jobs among the ranks of the sailors and some innovative ship to ship and ship to shore communications. Another tradition we have changed is the naming of our ships, instead of giving them female names, as the merchants and others do.

Admiral Pantaleon has also informed us, like the King Iason 7th, each Prince of Parga will be an honorary captain of his named vessel."

At our mid day meal, Lyuben was the center of attention. He was still quite shy but Princess Elpis soon had that emotion overcome. He was seated between her and the King. "Lyuben, you should write a letter to your mother so she knows you are safe and well." Lyuben looked down, "I don't know how to write and my birth mother does not know how to read."

"Iason," she said to the king, "have Odo write for him and I will include a note from myself. You can have our ambassador read it to her." Uncle Iason nodded in agreement and Odo smiled widely.

"If Augusts Grantzities knows where I am, he try and take me back. I like it here."

"Fear not little one," Tertius said, "the next time you see this Augusts Grantzities, if ever, it is he who will be serving you, not you him."

"Arden."

Yes mother.

"I don't think Lyuben should study with the others his age, until he has learned basic reading the writing skills. Why not send him to study with Helladios and Lysandros. Alexandros can assist him with the sports and military. I assume he will be living in your apartments."

I agreed to that. I was also thinking that Princess Eudoxia could try her hand at teaching with him as well, since the female pages are close at hand. This would be good for both since he will not be embarrassed, since the others his age have these skills. Mother is very perceptive and very protective of all her children.

1318, 3rd month, 3rd day:

I don't know about the others but I had more wine than I should have had. My head is just a bit hurting and I feel very tired. Most of the drinking took place after mother retired. I know all of the Argoanuts were deeply honored by her presence. I am sure they will display that honor in the years to come, many girl children will have the name Elpis. I am also amazed at my beloved Iason. He so readily shares the love and affection of his birth parents with all of us. It is his duty as Crown Prince but even the Crown Prince is human. If he has a jealous part I have never seen it and he never displays it. Even a fine actor as he is, can not play that role for so many years, so well, as to hide it from me.

We have become as Kastor and Polydeukus, twins in all but blood. Sometimes I think in blood too. Perhaps it is the seed we so often share with each other. I know not how that could be, though. I believe in a few years, we four will all be so well tuned together that any one could act for any other, without thought.

I have noticed of late that Joulous, Justus and Nikias are forming the same kind of bond as we four. In their example, Nikias is the leader and the twins more follower. As I recall the Dioskouroi were more like them at 12, not today. Today they are our equal, all be it in a more reserved outward appearance.

It is now evening and I take up my pen again. Silas and Lt. Drakon (Translator's note: I have placed the (Lt.) next to Darkon's name as to not confuse the guardian with the Steward.) have volunteered to look after Lyuben until we depart. Dysme will watch over him and all of our boys while we are absent. Between them and Alexandros he will be well cared for. It is hoped he will be ready to join his house in the fall, unless he chooses one of the men as a mentor. I suspect, even then he will be sent to his house for periods of time, if for no other reason than building those relationships.

Hermogenes is taking Agapios to his home until that time, leaving Panther and Dios with us. This is only for the night, Panther will report to his ship each morning and Agapios to his classes

Polydeukus has taken it upon himself to further reorganize our apartments. He is creating two special baths on the main level. One for males and one for females. In addition, he is having special stair cases put in place, connecting our apartment directly to the male bath and the female page's dormitory to the other. Drakon will staff and look after both. Given the connecting stair cases, guards will be stationed at the main floor entrances to both, barring entry to all except us and the pages of course.

Our privet quarters, that is the dormitories, our sleeping chambers and privet common room, can then function as a true gymnasium, in the ancient sense of the term. We can and will be naked in them, at all times.

Father came to see us just before our evening meal. He told Poly and Kastor that they are now betrothed to the twins as they requested. "The wedding will take place in two years time, when the girls are 14. In the intervening time they will be brought to the castle to continue their education. "Your birth mother will supervise them, except for the time they are serving as pages. It is wise that you inform Justus and Joulous privately; give them your expectations of their relationship to these new lovers. It is best too that you inform your concubines of this prospect, I would not show any real

delight in it to them. It is a game that you two must play for the harmony of our greater family.

Iason's position has always been clear in this, as is Arden's but you two have choice. My advice, keep the facts between the five of us. Let them think that it was I and the twin girls father that made this decision, as is the truth. The fact that you expressed interest in having wives and them as those wives, should remain between us, a father and his sons."

At first I was not quite sure why Karyakos was saying this in front of Iason and I, we are only the brothers. After a short reflection, I realized this was his way of telling us; keeping this father and son confidence was our duty to him and our brothers. At first I was not quite sure why he just did not requested so. We would honor that request no matter what the reason. He did not offer much, save his advice. Since we are all callow in these matters, we would take it to heart. For Iason and I the rules are clear and defined. I can not and he must. Zoe and Euthalia and others realize they can never be more than concubines, their role is to produce children and give us female companionship and hopefully some romantic love. They trade maidenhood for the chance to have children, receive perks and a measure of additional respect from others. Not every desirers women, can or will be, the concubine of a future king and his prince consort.

Kastor and Polydeukus are also princes but they can have wives and not just of someone else's choosing. Perhaps they hoped for something more, perhaps not. By letting everyone think this was an arrangement made by the fathers and probably for some political or economic reason; should those hopes be dampened, it was by someone else's doing. After all, is it not a father's job to do the best he can for his children.

I guess our lives will only become more complex with time, not less.

1318, 3 month, 4th day:

Today we received our first lectures about the customs, manors and social structures, we will see on our tour west and north. We learned that personal and public hygiene is mostly lacking. From Naples north and west, people seemed not to bath much or at all. Soap was used for textiles but seemed only sparingly. While the Romans spread the use of public baths and frequent washing, that seems to have fallen completely by the way. Large cities will be highly offensive to our noses, as animal and human waste is common litter in the streets.

As we had noticed, in Athens and other places in the east, water is delivered to wells and fountains but not to homes. Sewer systems are no longer in existence or are simple open trenches in the streets. Over the past few years we now have water delivered to almost everyone in Parga, who lives in a city or village of any size. Sewers, in closed clay pipes, run from every dwelling to central collection points. The castle has now been completely altered, every toilet and washing room, has clean water from a copper spigot, to fill basins and remove our wastes into the sewer system.

Our university alchemists have developed several different kinds of soap. That for the body, textiles, kitchens and eating bowls, spoons and such, as well as that for stone, metal or wood structures. They mix different clays, animal fats or plant oils and wood ash in different proportions for these. These products are prepared under the direction of the soap guild. Hand washing stations are available in every part of the castle.

We will not find such in most other places. They told us how to make sure we remained clean and pleasant smelling, while away. Several of the Argoanuts, marines and sailors are taking or have taken barber training, as being clean shaven or having well trimmed beards and hair is important to us. In addition to the barbers we will have a highly qualified physician among our scholars.

In the afternoon, we gathered in our apartments for some refreshments and conversation. Odo and

Lyuben came in shortly after and occupied my little writing table, which is off in one corner, by the large windows. Everyone was assembled except the young pages and our new guardsmen, when a knock on the door interrupted. The guard told us five young pages accompanied by the Captain of the Palace Guard, required one of us. We all looked at each other. We had been in this situation before, every one of us, on the receiving end.

Kastor replied, "Send them in and come yourself. This will be a bit of fun I suspect."

When they came in I pointed to a place on the floor for the pages to sit. Captain Consus, how nice to see you, I see you came with an honor guard, I said pointing to the pages.

"At least I didn't need to chase them, as I did you four, at that age."

"It was us, not Euripides or Helladios, we three need be punished, not them," Nikias announced.

"Is that why you came here Consus, to report some mischief on the part of our five young pages?" Poly asked?

"Yes that is the reason. These five seemed to have revived or reinvented, the old mischief of placing fresh manure under the chairs in the main guard house. I saw them running away myself and gave a brief chase."

At this point we were all desperate, including Consus, to not burst into laughter. Like our fathers, when we did exactly the same thing, it was important not to. Euripides did you five do that mischief? "Yes Prince we did and Helladios and I were a full part." I suppose you just thought this up, as you returned from the sports field passing by the stable? "Yes Prince, how did you guess," Justus answered?

Iason smiled widely, "Our Fathers punished us by making us clean the mess we made and continue to clean the guardhouse, all to Captain Consus' satisfaction, for 4 additional days. This was done on our way to the sports field, not on the return. Do you think that is sufficient atonement Captain?"

"Yes Prince Iason, I think it fair and that it is sufficient to put an end to this for another 4 or 5 years."

"Good," Poly said, "guardian would you escort these five to Drakon, so he can arm them with clearing materials and then to the Guard House, please."

The boys got up and filed out heads just a bit bowed and somewhat sullen. Once the outer door had closed, we all began laughing and reminiscing about our exploits in general and this specific little prank. Captain Consus praised these five, saying they had done a much better job of it than we had, but the best was still himself, King Iason and Karyakos, who managed to do it and not get caught.

I realized Odo and Lyuben were still sitting at my writing table and paying close attention to everything we had said. You boys will forget anything you have heard here after the pages departed, is that clear, I told them. Knowing full well that after five or six days that admonishment would be forgotten. The captain finished his wine and left us. I went over to the boys to check on the letter writing progress.

Odo was doing a masterful job of it. Lyuben related his story and the reason he had run away, how he concealed himself in a load of fruit and hid on the Prince Arden until discovered. He went on to apologize for "the worry, Princess Elpis said I must be causing." He described his new situation and proudly told of his new name and status. He is now reborn as Lyuben of Parga a free man and citizen of Parga, Argonaut third class in Prince Iason Argoanuts. He is a ward of King Iason the 7th and Princess Elpis. Who insist they are now his parents, mother and father, which he should address them as such, when in the family setting, just as all the other children do. His new brother Argonaut

Odovacar is writing this for him, as he has not had enough lessons to do it himself yet. He did manage to sign his name and express his love for his mother in his own hand.

The Princess' note to his mother arrived and we combined them into one package, along with a short message to our ambassador. She explained, all children without parents or guardians in Parga are automatic wards of the crown. "My husband and I take this very seriously." She told her they were mother and father to over 400 children. She can not give every child the personal attention they deserve but that they did know every one by name and they all know a mother and a father are here for them when needed. We are a very large family, family cares, nurtures and supports. "Lyuben was having a meal with us, just yesterday and when I learned he had not told you of his journey and adventure plans, I insisted he write so you would know he is safe, well and now part of our family."

I ask the ambassador to do two things: personally read the letters to Lyuben's mother and answer her questions as truthfully as he could; second, to tell Augustus Grantzities enough about Parga, so he would no longer consider Lyuben his property and assure him that we did not steal the boy, that he was not discovered until almost home. That fact could be checked by reviewing the captain's log as it was noted at the time. I went on to say, we Princes judged any boy of 13, that could do what he did, as a valuable asset to the Argonauts and Parga. He should also explain to Augustus how they work and what they do beside march and sing.

Iason added, Augustus struck us as someone who cared for Lyuben more deeply than just another slave and we thought he should know he is safe and well cared for. Our ladies greatly appreciated the silk we purchased from him and look forward to purchasing more in the future.

At dinner we were witness to the most interesting little play. Tertius and Thanatos had both begun to actively court the boy, although I don't think he realized it until later, when Nikias told him. Corrado, Alexandros and Adonis sat across the table from Tertius and Thanatos who were flanking Lyuben. This was all very strange for Lyuben since he had never been courted before or seen how the knights and princes of Parga socialize.

All through the meal they talked to him and to each other. I could see them filling his cup with child's wine. After the food was finished many knights including Alexandros, Adonis and Corrado, left the room, that is when our boys invaded. Ikaros and Dysme and their two joined us all at a huge table. Uncle Iason and Father held their two Ganymedes. This gave us a chance to introduce Lyuben to some he had not yet met.

Uncle Iason had given his boy a little more wine than he normally would. With much fanfare he asked the lad to give his special nectar. Lifting up the boy's kilt and fondling his penis to hardness in seconds. The boy took his hand and began masturbating himself, while Uncle held the cup to catch his special nectar. Ganymede then added some wine, kissed the rim and gave it to the King, smiling so wide his face almost disappeared. Now that this was performed, every young eromenos at the table immediately did the same thing for his Zeus.

Lyuben's eyes were as wide as I had ever seen them. I could see he was game for this and had Corrado been in the room would have joined. Thanatos reached for a fresh cup and held it to Tertius, who nodded. They gave it to Lyuben and together lifted the lad's kilt letting him spill his nectar into it. Wine was added. Lyuben must have been instructed, as he kissed both sides of the cup and holding it out both men drank, tipping it first to one then the other. I could see they were both fondling him and playing with his ass. He was frozen not quite knowing what to do, never the less pleasure and excitement was clearly on his face.

Karyakos announced it was late and the pages should head to bed so the party broke up, Lyuben joining them. We prepared to depart as well but held a moment to hear what King Iason was saying to Tertius and Thanatos. He quietly admonished them not to press the lad hard or fast. "He is new to our ways and if one of you is to gain his favor, you must be easy with him. Remember he has little

experience in making his own choices and decisions. He is clearly willing to share adventure. Every boy dreams so, this one is living it. His decision to join our sons, was less through thought than limit of choice. Not all Argoanuts have mentors, those that need or ask are accommodated. For him we think it important that he has and that it be someone in a position of power and authority. Someone who lacks guile and is less interested in his own needs and more in the boy's. Unless I am mistaken the three terrors are at this very moment explaining to him what happened tonight and how he should make advantage of it. My sons and the others will see you spend sufficient treasure in this, be assured of that. Make a friend of him first, the love part will come in its own time.

All the while both he and Karyakos had their hands busy under the kilts of the two Ganymedes.

1319, 3rd month, 8th day:

The census data was presented in summery form on the 5th day. I found it very interesting. I could also see that the Argoanuts and Arden's boys, when combined, were able to do a remarkable job. In general, our population was slowly growing. This was true in all age groups, for both genders. Since non of us are bound, except by simple contracts, that can be terminated or amended, much mobility was happening. Trades that had greatly improved productivity or for which demand has lessened, saw a decline in apprentices, while trades in demand saw in increase. Production from agriculture had increased by 1/8 and farm labor had decreased by about the same amount, while the plethrons under cultivation remained the same. The number of sick and injured apprentices was half of just three years ago.

The army and navy were about the same size as were the herds of food and draft animals. The number of public buildings had increased by almost 1/4, due to the building of new schools and hospitals.

Many trades had made real advances: potters, weavers, wheelwrights, building trades and glass making, to list a few. Our exports of agricultural products are increased slightly but our exports of manufactured goods and objects of art, are increased greatly.

The Argoanuts are able to keep their ranks filled without having to requite. Kastor suggested we institute an examination process since the numbers needed were far fewer than applicants. Iason thought that a good idea. Corrado suggested we increase the size of each house by 10. We debated this and agreed, one new Dathapatish for each house. Poly and I will make up the examination with several of our scholars and the house Eparchoses. It is our intention to keep the academic and physical standards as high as possible.