

**DAUGHTER OF SPARTA:
CHAPTER FOUR**

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KRISTEN LEPINE

HISTORIC HEROINES PUBLISHING
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CHAPTER FOUR

Gorgo felt exuberant as she rode with her parents by chariot to King Demaratus's estate. After her encounter with Phoebe and Hegaso in the agora, she pieced together the mystery behind the early morning skytale Macar delivered and determined they were headed to Erinna and Gaius's wedding reception.

It had been so long since they had joined with King Demaratus and his family in celebration. Gorgo remembered nostalgically how close the families had been. The children used to play games together and put on elaborate shows while Demaratus's wife, Myia, and her mother went horseback riding while the kings attended *Syssitia*, the male only military meals. Their lives intertwined idyllically until the relationship between Demaratus and her father grew strained by political disagreements.

King Demaratus was a worldly diplomat that traveled to nearby cities, meeting with royalty and entangling Sparta in foreign affairs. King Cleomenes was an isolationist; he believed these entanglements drained Sparta of resources and detracted from his own ambitions for conquest. As co-rulers of Sparta, this led to many heated debates.

Their last disagreement rendered the relationship irreparable. Demaratus publically humiliated Cleomenes over a military decision and then persuaded the Ephors, a council who advised the Spartan kings, to deny Cleomenes's request for troops to aid in one of his campaigns.

As a result, the families drifted further apart. When King Demaratus's eldest daughter, Chara, was married, Gorgo and her family weren't invited.

"I am so excited to join the celebration for Erinna and Gaius's wedding!"

“We don’t yet know that is the reason for the dinner,” Korinna reminded Gorgo.

“Of course that’s the reason,” Gorgo insisted, ignoring her mother’s skepticism.

“When Chara married the Athenian, I am told the festivities went on for three days. Why wouldn’t Demaratus do the same for Erinna?”

“That was completely different. The groom’s family insisted on a traditional Athenian ceremony.”

“You have said many times that Demaratus covets the Athenian lifestyle.”

“Do not disparage King Demaratus,” Cleomenes scolded.

“Father, does this mean that you and Demaratus have called a truce?”

“You make it sound like Demaratus and I are at war with each other.”

“Aren’t you?” Gorgo asked.

As the chariot passed by two elegant Ionic columns flanking the entryway to Demaratus’s estate, his Athenian styled house came into view. The scroll topped columns decorated the entry way of his home that led into an enclosed garden.

Outside the house, Demaratus and his family gathered to welcome the chariot. Demaratus’s wife, Myia, wore a long flowing chiton that reached to the ground with a gold brooch clasped at her shoulder. Most Spartan women, even nobles, did not decorate their outfits.

“Ridiculous,” Korinna murmured to her husband, wrinkling her nose, “soon she will be painting her face like the gaudy Athenians.”

Myia waved enthusiastically as the chariot came to a stop. Next to her stood two of her three daughters, Erinna and little Ismene. Chara now lived in Athens with her

husband. Demaratus and Myia also had a son, Belos, but he was nowhere in sight, nor was Erinna's groom, Gaius.

When Gorgo and her mother stepped to the ground, Myia hugged them both. "My dears," she cooed, "It's been far too long. I have missed you so."

Gorgo warmly returned Myia's embrace, "I have missed you, too."

She then turned to Erinna and squeezed her hands, "Congratulations. I can't wait to hear all the details. Where is Gaius?"

Erinna blushed and was about to say something, but Ismene grabbed Gorgo's hand and pulled her toward the garden, "Come on, Gorgo. I can't wait to show you the decorations I helped Macar layout for the dinner tonight."

Within the garden, a profusion of orchids and small lemon trees crowded a table set for dinner, but the men that stood nearby were not who Gorgo expected to see. Gaius and Belos were not among them. Instead it was a group of elders, the Ephors. As they came forward to greet the kings, Gorgo saw two foreigners standing behind waiting for an introduction. One was a middle aged man clad in the typical attire of a traveling dignitary, but Gorgo gasped when she saw his younger companion.

He wore baggy trousers like the barbarians from the east. Standing with his legs shoulder width apart, arms folded across his slight chest, he blew a wisp of golden colored hair out of his face.

Ismene, who still clung to Gorgo's arm, enjoyed her reaction. "He's Persian. His baggy pants are called anaxyrides, and his name is —"

"Perseus." Gorgo whispered, recognizing him from her dream.

"Hey! How did you know?" Ismene wondered.

Demaratus stepped forward sweeping his arm dramatically through the air. “Allow me to introduce my guests,” he said. “Cleomenes, this is Aristagoras, governor of Miletus, and his nephew, Perseus.”

Aristagoras bowed his head. “It is a tremendous honor to meet you. Your reputation on the battle field is legend across the Aegean Sea in the coastal village of Miletus.”

Cleomenes’s countenance hardened, his face darkening. “Likewise, your reputation precedes you – as a Persian tyrant and traitor.”

Gorgo’s mouth fell open in surprise. The room immediately froze with tension. Korinna and Myia both held their breath.

Demaratus seemed to anticipate Cleomenes’s reaction, “Hold your judgment, Cleomenes.”

“Do not *tell* me—” Cleomenes started.

“—the evening is young and there is much business to discuss,” interrupted Demaratus.

Cleomenes glared at Demaratus. “I don’t know why I expected otherwise. Myia, if you will excuse us, we’re going.”

“Please, your liege,” Aristagoras stepped forward, “I am not a man made to beg, but in this instance, I humbly and gravely beseech you to please stay. Let us dine and get to know each other, and after supper, we can discuss why I am here.”

“Whatever you have to say on behalf of the Persian Emperor, I am not interested in hearing.”

“But I am not here on behalf of *Persia*.” Aristagoras demurred, pronouncing Persia like something sour. “I am here as a kinsman – an Ionian brother. A fellow Greek.”

“You can change your costume to bare your legs,” Cleomenes seethed, referring to the man’s Greek-styled tunic, “but all I see before me is the henchman of Darius the first, Emperor of Persia. And Persia is my enemy.”

“You’re jumping to conclusions,” Demaratus interrupted.

“You shouldn’t have kept this from me. When exactly did this traitor arrive?” Cleomenes demanded.

Pausanias, the oldest member of the Ephors, spoke up. “He arrived last night. He came to me, not Demaratus.” Pausanias’s bad eye was glazed over with a milky film. Unfocused, it darted around.

In his younger days, Pausanias trained Cleomenes and Demaratus when they were at the agoge. He appeared less intimidating in his old age, but he was once a revered warrior, and Cleomenes and Demaratus still deferred to his authority.

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?” Cleomenes growled.

“I don’t care how it makes you feel, Cleomenes. My allegiance, like the rest of the Ephors, is to Sparta, and my actions are made on her behalf. I suggest we sit and enjoy the supper Myia has prepared. Then afterward, we listen to the foreigner’s business.”

“Yes, please,” Myia forced a smile and strained her neck forward imploringly, “take a sit.”

Pausanias and the rest of the Ephors sat down, so did Aristagoras and his nephew.

Gorgo’s eyes were fixed on Perseus. She was still stunned and felt an overwhelming uneasiness. *The man from my dream? What does this mean? I wish I’d had the chance to talk with Phoebe.* She moved instinctively to her station next to her mother, who was intently focused on her husband as he stood contemplating. After a moment, Korinna

reassuringly touched his arm, waking him from his deliberation. He looked at her and softened, then walked to the head of the table and sat directly across from Demaratus, who looked very relieved at Cleomenes's decision.

Myia summoned Macar to bring the wine and food. Gorgo took her seat next to her mother, directly across from Perseus. The young man seemed oblivious to all the others in the room, to include the Spartan princess fixated on him. He smiled politely when his name was mentioned by his boisterous uncle, who was spinning outlandish tales about their long journey to Sparta, but otherwise his blue-grey eyes were distant, dreaming of someplace else.

The first course arrived almost immediately after the wine was poured – a traditional black soup made with water, blood, vinegar and salt. Next came olives, goat cheese and almonds, all harvested from Demaratus's land. Then the final course arrived, a succulent lamb that had been slow roasted over an open fire – a rare treat. Usually, Gorgo would have devoured every morsel, but distracted by the presence of the strange visitor, she hardly touched her food. Her initial uneasiness dissipated and was replaced by an overwhelming curiosity. *Who is this young man the gods plucked from my dream and placed right before my very eyes?*

As agreed, business was not discussed during dinner, but when the meal began to wind down, the mood grew tense again. Aristigoras was clearly anxious to address his reason for journeying so far.

Myia, Korinna and the other women excused themselves to go for a walk in the garden and catch up on the details of Erinna's wedding.

"Are you coming, Gorgo?" her mother turned and casually called over her shoulder.

“No mother, I wish to stay with father and listen.”

For the first time, Perseus suddenly seemed to notice her.

“These are serious discussions, Princess. Wouldn’t you rather walk with your mother and hear about young Erinna’s nuptial?” Aristagoras asked, momentarily intrigued.

“Thank you for your concern, sir, but I am an educated Spartan with a keen interest in international affairs,” she responded politely.

Aristagoras smirked knowingly, but Perseus looked at her with wide, inquisitive eyes.

Cleomenes straightened with pride. “That’s right. Gorgo and I regularly discuss politics.”

“Thank you for agreeing to listen to my proposal,” Aristagoras began, wasting no further time in beginning the conference.

“I am curious to hear what a Persian tyrant like yourself wants from Sparta. We are but a tiny city-state, whereas Persia is a vast Empire. What do we have that the Emperor Darius wants?” Cleomenes asked.

“As I stated before, I am not here on behalf of Persia, I am here as an Ionian tribesman.” Aristagoras began, staying focused and ignoring Cleomenes’s insults. “You are a Dorian tribesman, I know, but Great King, can you not see that we are both Greek? We speak similar tongues, we wear similar clothing, and we worship the same gods.”

Gorgo knew from her lessons that Greece’s ethnicities were divided into four tribes: Ionian, Dorian, Aeolian and Achaean. Each ethnicity related to a tribe’s geography. Spartans were Dorian, while the residents of Athens and the islands to the east were

Ionian. Aeolians lived to the north, and Achaeans lived inland in the mountains. Although divided by mountains and sea, the four tribes shared similar language, religious customs, and mythology.

Cleomenes furrowed his brow in disagreement. "You say we are the same, but when you attacked Naxos, you betrayed any lingering ties to Ionia and mainland Greece. Thank the gods, the people of Naxos stood strong and smartly defended your attack."

Gorgo had heard her father speak of the Siege of Naxos before. Last year, the little island to the southeast of Sparta cleverly anticipated and defeated a Persian attack. It dawned on Gorgo that the man before her was the one who led that very same invasion.

"The Naxians taught me a lesson, one not soon forgotten," Aristagoras protested. "Surely you learned a similar lesson in your attempts at conquering the Greek Argives – Great King."

Demaratus quickly looked down at the table to hide his wry smile. Cleomenes grew flush with anger, shifting uncomfortably in his chair, no doubt reminded of the Argive woman who gave him nightmares. Gorgo held her breath as she stared at her father, anticipating his reaction, but Cleomenes remained silent.

"Nevertheless, I think we can agree – Greeks shouldn't be fighting other Greeks," Aristagoras pressed. "That's why I am here – fifty years ago, your cousins, my people – the Ionians of Aeolis – were not as fortunate as the Naxians. We were conquered and subjugated by the Persian Empire and have lived under their oppressive rule ever since."

“That’s true, but you are not Ionian, Aristagoras,” the King countered. “You are a Persian tyrant appointed by the Emperor himself.” Cleomenes struggled increasingly to keep his anger under control.

“That isn’t true. My Ionian grandfather lost his life when the Persians invaded Miletus. You cast judgement on me, Cleomenes, but you have not had to live under external rule like I have. Of course, with the Persians already at your doorstep in Greece, perhaps one day you will.” Aristagoras paused allowing his words to take hold.

He reached out and lifted a goblet of wine to his lips while staring at Cleomenes to gauge his response. Cleomenes grew stoic and remained still for what seemed like a long time, staring back at Aristagoras.

Gorgo felt like she was going to burst from the magnitude of these implications. Since the Persian invasion of Ionia, the Spartans feared Persian aspirations would turn across the Aegean Sea toward Sparta to feed their insatiable appetite for conquest.

Finally, Cleomenes spoke, “What do you want from me?”

“What I am asking for, is your assistance in avenging my grandfather’s senseless death and ending our people’s enslavement to a cruel Emperor. I am asking for your support in a rebellion to liberate our people. An Ionian revolt!”

Gorgo covered her mouth with her hand to keep from inadvertently yelping in surprise. Cleomenes coolly looked to Demaratus and Pausanias. Her father’s demeanor had changed and he now seemed more controlled. “Did you know about this? Did you know he wanted to start a war?”

Pausanias licked his lips. "I learned of it a week ago when Aristagoras had sent a messenger telling me he had urgent matters he wished to discuss and that he was traveling to meet with us."

"I was informed only late last night. Pausanias had asked me to arrange an opportunity for Aristagoras to have audience with us to outline his proposal," said Demaratus. "That is why I sent you the skytale early this morning."

"I know such a proposal deserves thoughtful consideration," said Aristagoras. "I would like to continue our congress tomorrow. I have something I want to show you. Something that will help me explain my strategy."

"What is it?" Cleomenes asked, looking at Demaratus.

"I haven't shown King Demaratus or Pausanias," said Aristagoras, "I want to show you all together. I promise you it is a treasure. And if you agree to assist me—"

"Agree to help you instigate a war with Persia," Cleomenes interjected.

"—I will give it to you as a parting gift."

Gift? Or bribe, thought Gorgo. She looked at her father who finally nodded his head in acquiescence.

"I will see you and your treasure in the morning," Cleomenes said.

Aristagoras then turned to Gorgo, startling her as the attention of the group unexpectedly turned in her direction, "Perhaps you can assist me tomorrow morning as well, young lady. I have brought my nephew, Perseus, with me so that he can observe the Spartan culture and learn the art of soldiery from your greatest warriors. Would it be possible for you to meet us tomorrow morning, so you can provide him with a tour?"

Gorgo had momentarily forgotten about the young man while she immersed herself in the conversation between the elders. She looked at Perseus, who had returned to a state of disinterest, picking absently at some leftover grapes. *What a puzzling young man*, she thought with disgust. *While his uncle speaks of war and rebellion, he remains completely detached, as if these were merely unwelcome distractions.*

“Yes,” Gorgo responded, “I would be honored to show him the glory of Sparta.”

The party broke up after that, and Gorgo and her family returned home by chariot. While her father sat quiet and pensive, Korinna updated Gorgo on the story of Erinna’s wedding night.

“Erinna agonized all day that Gaius wouldn’t turn up. She had shaved her head and dressed in a boy’s chiton and waited in her dark room all night. Then during pre-dawn, he finally appeared at her window, but by then Erinna had fallen fast asleep. He had to shake her to wake her up, and when she saw him, she started yelling and slapping him,” Korinna giggled. “They began to wrestle so aggressively that the whole house woke up! Apparently as Demaratus was charging toward the room, Gaius hoisted Erinna over his shoulder and escaped before Demaratus burst through the door. She returned home by morning, of course.”

“Sounds perfect,” Gorgo said struggling to listen to what sounded like a very traditional Spartan wedding. Her mind was spinning with all she had heard this evening.

The people of Sparta were always buzzing with whispers of impending war. It was a national past time. A day did not pass without the citizenry discussing rumors of secret plans to conquer far off lands or looming invaders that were plotting Sparta’s demise, but little ever came of it, and the many rumors always proved untrue. Of course, her

father had taken the army to war before, but this felt different. She was older now, educated in politics and history, and had just witnessed first-hand a most dangerous proposition. One that could have dramatic consequences for her father, her family and the people. It was both exhilarating and terrifying. Then there was Perseus – a mysterious young man who had leapt from her prophetic dreams into reality.

The chariot lurched to a stop outside her home snapping her from her inner world. It was late, and everyone retired to their chambers without a word. *Sleep will not come easily tonight*, Gorgo thought, but when she laid herself down, physically exhausted, she fell immediately asleep.

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