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## CHAPTER FIVE

King Demaratus's party slowly dispersed after Cleomenes and his family departed. The first to excuse himself was Perseus, and although Aristagoras didn't pause his conversation with the elderly Pausanias as he walked the old man to his chariot, he was displeased to see his nephew leave so abruptly.

The consummate diplomat, Aristagoras worked his way through the Ephors, bidding each member a formal farewell, and thanking King Demaratus and his wife profusely for their gracious hospitality before retiring for the night. As he strode across the mosaic tiled courtyard toward the guest chambers, he reflected on the evening. Even though Demaratus was more cultured than most of his countrymen, the visit paled in comparison to the luxuries Aristagoras had encountered during his visits to Susa to congress with the Persian Emperor, Darius I, whose gold palace, down beds, rose scented pillows, live music, dancing women and ever-flowing wine – made his stay decadent and unforgettable.

Other than his exchange with the fiery Cleomenes, the evening had been subdued and serious, dominated by talk of harvests, local politics and military training. The dull hospitality extended to the cramped accommodations that Aristagoras shared with his nephew. Though the room contained all the necessities -- two beds set side by side, two chairs placed by the window, and a table supplied with wash basin, pitcher and two clay cups -- the unadorned walls and austere quality to the furnishings made the space feel cold and dry even if the Peloponnesian air was warm and humid.

Perseus didn't even glance up as his uncle entered the room. He was sitting in bed staring at a small piece of tattered parchment.

Though Aristagoras said nothing as he crossed over to the pitcher of water and poured himself a cup, Perseus refolded the worn note and returned it to his pocket for safe keeping. He had seen his nephew pensively studying the scrap of parchment periodically since leaving Miletus and crossing the Aegean Sea for Sparta. Curious, Aristagoras had ferreted it out of his nephew's pocket earlier in the trip while the young man slept. The words he had discovered surprised him:

*Who the morning, noon, and evening did decree*

*As reminders to the wise, of duty's call?*

It was the last two lines of an old Zoroaster poem.

Aristagoras recognized his sister Sophia's markings and found it odd that she would copy it and give it to her son since she could read very little and write even less.

"Where were you at dinner tonight?" Aristagoras said, as he removed his outer cloak and flung it on the end of his hard bed of flattened hay.

"I was sitting right next to you." Perseus deadpanned, ignoring his uncle's sarcasm.

"But your mind, Perseus, was somewhere else entirely," Aristagoras sighed. "You pushed food around your plate, but nothing went into your mouth."

"I wasn't hungry," Perseus murmured, rolling over on his side, pretending to try and sleep.

Aristagoras walked to the window that overlooked the olive orchard bathed in white moonlight, reflecting momentarily. *Perhaps it was a mistake insisting Perseus accompany me on this voyage.* He had been second guessing himself since leaving

Miletus. He knew he was taking a great risk inciting the fractured Greeks against the mighty Persian Empire, but after his failure at Naxos, the political winds had moved against him, calling for desperate measures.

Aristagoras turned and sat in a chair that faced his nephew. "It was an insult to our host," he said, keeping his voice low and measured. After years of dealing with arrogant and hardheaded despots, he would not be riled by the insolence of his ill-mannered nephew.

"We have a mission. We need Sparta's support – they have the fiercest army in the world; an army that even Darius the Great admires and fears. With Sparta behind us, we have a real chance of succeeding. And the Ionian Revolt must succeed."

Perseus sat up and crossed his arms. "This is your revolt, Uncle, not mine," he glared defiantly. Though Perseus resembled his father in build and coloring, he had his mother's eyes, and Aristagoras recognized the spark in his cool azure gaze.

Sophia had pleaded with him not to involve her son in his crusade. *He is just a boy.*

*Perseus is on the edge of manhood and has spent far too long in the crook of his mother's wing!*

*He has no interest in your power and politics – leave him be.*

*He should be interested. This isn't about me. This is a family affair. Do you think Emperor Darius will differentiate if we fail?*

*Curse you, brother. Your exploits will bring only shame and death upon our household.*

They sailed for Sparta the following morning.

“No, Nephew, this is *our* revolt, for the people of Miletus. Now, tomorrow this is what we are going to do.”

“I already know,” Perseus cut him off, wanting to end the conversation. “We are going to take the Map of the World to the scarred king’s house--”

“*King* Cleomenes!” Aristagoras surprised himself with his fervor. He recollected himself before adding, “Do not underestimate the Spartan king. He earned those scars in war. His support is critical to our cause and I intend to obtain it by any means necessary. Now after our preliminaries, I want you and the king’s daughter to go out for a tour of Sparta while I—”

“What good is the girl to us that you must force me to endure her company for an entire day? If you *must* include me in this insanity at least allow me the dignity of standing with the men in council, not being dragged through the city like some playmate,” Perseus protested.

“No, the girl may be useful to us,” Aristagoras said coolly, ignoring Perseus’s objections. “It is important that you gain her trust. You saw it yourself tonight, the way Cleomenes allowed her to remain at the table with the men during our discussion – beaming with pride. This king has an extremely high regard for his daughter – he cherishes her. Spartans are not like the other tribes of Greece; they honor their women as the bearers of great warriors. And that young lady is a Spartan Princess, who will someday be expected to bear this nation a new king. She is important to the people.”

“Why doesn’t the king just depose of his wife and marry a different woman that will bear him a son?” asked Perseus.

“Perhaps he loves her,” Aristagoras stated simply, shocking Perseus and momentarily leaving him at a loss for words.

“Either way, the King listens to his daughter. He openly discusses world affairs with her. It is likely King Cleomenes treats her this way so that she might pass on his wisdom and knowledge to a potential heir, a future king. He clearly understands the profound influence a mother can have on her son,” Aristagoras raised his eyebrow, and Perseus looked away.

“You will get her support for this war. If she supports it, then she can help convince her father,” Aristagoras continued. “Rivalries among men feed their suspicions of each other; therefore, it is often the counsel of their women that serves as their higher conscience. Words have tremendous power, dear nephew, and those that pass from mother to son, wife to husband and even daughter to father, can shape the course of history.”

“What makes you think this girl, Gorgo, will listen to me,” Perseus inquired still skeptical of his uncle’s plans.

“I watched how she looked at you during dinner. She couldn’t take her eyes off you. She was mesmerized.”

“I am a stranger – a foreigner,” Perseus objected.

“And just how many foreigners does this girl encounter? She is young and curious. Young girls are drawn to mysterious young men like moths to a flame. Use that to convince her to support this cause. It will be easy enough for me to stir Cleomenes’ appetite for war with promises of riches and glory, but you must remove any objections from hearth and homestead.”

“What of the wife? Korrina –”

“You leave her to me,” Aristagoras waved his hand dismissively.

“You are quite the schemer, uncle.”

“You have no idea,” Aristagoras mumbled under his breath.

“But you’re forgetting something: I don’t support *your* war.”

Aristagoras turned and flashed with anger, dropping his diplomatic demeanor as it was late and he was weary of his nephew’s opposition. “Yes, you do, Perseus. For the sake of Miletus you do. For the sake of your mother, you better.”

“Leave my mother out of this,” Perseus hissed back, standing up, balling his fists in anger.

“I can’t – If I am unsuccessful in my Ionian Revolt, we die – me, you, your mother – what remains of our family—”

Perseus stepped forward, seething at his uncle. “Because of you! Your failed Siege of Naxos, my father and brothers are already dead!

“They willingly followed me, and you know that! They died honorably. And if it weren’t for your mother, who begged me to let you stay behind, you could have been there to witness their sacrifice. At your rightful place by our side.”

“That’s a lie,” Perseus shook his head, refusing to listen. “You told me I was needed to run the household.”

“She said you weren’t ready – too interested in music and poetry – too soft for battle. She saved your life by shielding you from war.”

Perseus’s shoulders slumped with the weight of the truth. He sat back down on the edge of the bed.

Aristagoras regained his composure and sat on the chair across from Perseus with his elbows resting on his knees. He knew his words were having the desired effect. He paused briefly before going in for his final blow. “Now you need to save hers by supporting me and this war effort, and after we secure the Spartans cooperation, then you will stay here in Sparta while I continue to gather more allies to our cause. Then I will call for you to return home to join the revolt.”

“No, not stay here!” Perseus allowed his voice to swell.

Aristagoras sat back and relaxed, he knew Perseus would do exactly as he commanded. “You will stay here and train at the agoge and become a warrior. For the love of your mother, you will.”

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