

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Tyrant: Destroyer of Cities

Written by Christian Cameron

Published by Orion Books

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

TYRANT

DESTROYER
OF CITIES

CHRISTIAN CAMERON



First published in Great Britain in 2013 by Orion Books,
an imprint of The Orion Publishing Group Ltd
Orion House, 5 Upper Saint Martin's Lane
London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette UK Company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Christian Cameron 2013

The moral right of Christian Cameron to be identified as
the author of this work has been asserted in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the
prior permission of both the copyright owner and
the above publisher of this book.

All the characters in this book are fictitious,
and any resemblance to real persons,
living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library.

ISBN (Hardback) 978 1 4091 2224 1
ISBN (Export Trade Paperback) 978 1 4091 2225 8
ISBN (Ebook) 978 1 4091 2226 5

Typeset by Deltatype Ltd, Birkenhead, Merseyside

Printed in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, CRO 4YY

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that
are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made
from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and
manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the
environmental regulations of the country of origin.

PROLOGUE

HERAKLEA ON THE EUXINE, SPRING 306 BC

Stratokles the Athenian sat on an iron stool in his mistress's receiving chamber, and crossed his legs comfortably.

'Interesting times, Despoina,' he said.

She was reading through her correspondence – he'd already read it, of course – and making notes. 'Demetrios has taken Athens!' she said. She snapped her fingers at a maid for more milk, and tapped her fingers impatiently until the maid had warmed the milk in a silver cup, mixed in honey and transferred the contents to a second cup, before presenting it with averted eyes.

Quietly, firmly, she spoke to her slave. 'Listen, girl. I expect you to have this ready-mixed. Understand? Don't wait for me to demand it. How long have you been with me?' Amastris of Heraklea snapped her index finger against the maid's forehead and the girl cried out. Then Amastris turned back to her Athenian. 'Does this change your views on Antigonus One-Eye?'

Stratokles shrugged, wondering idly if, by comforting the slave-girl after his interview with her mistress, he might put himself between her legs. He allowed himself to catch her eyes, and she hesitated before looking away. Interesting. Slaves were always so *lonely*.

'Are you attending to me, sir?' Amastris asked sharply.

Stratokles was unflappable – at least, by his mistress. 'It relieves me of any responsibilities towards Demetrius of Phaleron or Cassander,' he said carefully. 'I remain loyal to the city of Athens. Demetrios the Golden will pretend to be a democrat – everyone always does when they come to power in Athens. We shall see, after the first few months. But, for once, the news from Athens is not the most important. There's more news – more immediate, if not more important. Look at the dispatch from Byzantium.'

Amastris shook her head, the blond ringlets staying crisp and perfect as her head went from side to side. She drank her honeyed milk absently. ‘When I finish this.’

Stratokles got up and poured himself a cup of wine.

‘Satyrus is coming here!’ Amastris said, eyes on the scroll, and her hand went to her hair as if she needed to preen a little.

‘Yes, Despoina,’ Stratokles laughed. He wished that he might affect her – or any woman – the way Satyrus of Tanais affected her. He shot a glance at the maid, who met it – and then dropped her eyes. *Played this game before, have, you?* he thought with satisfaction. ‘He’s coming with his fleet and his merchants, moving the grain south to Alexandria.’

‘As usual, not coming just to *see me*.’ She sat up. ‘Why does my uncle continue to forbid the match? I want to be wed.’ She read further. ‘He’s too devoted to that slut of a sister. He’d be well rid of her.’

‘Your father is about to crown himself *king*,’ Stratokles said with unfeigned distaste – distaste for kings, and distaste for his mistress’s obvious jealousy.

‘Melitta is Queen of the Assagetæ in her own right,’ he said. ‘Your princely Satyrus needs her.’

Amastris snapped her fingers and another maid brought her a wrap, a costly piece of work imported from India. ‘I need him to need me,’ she said with a sweet smile. ‘And if my uncle wants to be a king, why must you sound so sour about it?’

Stratokles, whatever his faults, and he admitted that he had a phalanx of them, nonetheless saw himself as a true democrat in a world of aristocratic despots. ‘As *King* of Heraklea, he expects to marry you a little better than the *King* of Hyperborea.’

‘Satyrus is the King of the Bosphorus,’ Amastis said with asperity. ‘He is as much a king as my father. And Stratokles – why is it that when you say the word “king” you render it like an insult?’

‘Despoina, if you don’t know by now, it is too late for me to teach you. I loathe tyrants.’ He shrugged.

‘And yet you serve me,’ she said.

‘You need me, Despoina. And Athens needs this city and her grain, and my eyes on the north. I have never pretended to love your uncle’s tyranny, nor your lover’s kingship.’ He rolled his shoulders, flexing his

fighting muscles and wondering, in the way of middle-aged men, if he didn't need to spend more time in the gymnasium.

'You might give pretence some consideration, or Nestor will have your head.' Nestor was the captain of the Tyrant's bodyguard, and no friend of the Athenian's.

Stratokles chose to ignore her. 'Satyrus won't just be an ally if he weds you,' Stratokles said. *I'll be out of a job*, he thought. 'He'll be master here. He has a fleet, an army and a core of professionals that we can't really match. With Pantecapaeum and Olbia behind him, surely you can see that we're next.'

'Hmm. I look forward to his being my *master*,' Amastris said, and licked her lips. She laughed at his discomfiture. 'Don't be a prude. Satyrus isn't half as bright as I am. Who'll run whom, do you think? Heraklea won't be the loser. Melitta might be, though,' she said with a smile.

'Your uncle is not interested in ruling through your womb,' Stratokles said. 'And you will need Melitta's good will as much as Satyrus does, if you come to be his wife.'

'Now that's the sort of thing I employ you to say,' Amastris nodded. 'He's old, though – my uncle, I mean.'

'Don't be rushing him to his grave, Despoina. Please read the dispatch from Byzantium.' Stratokles wasn't always perfectly pleased with his charge. She was past the first innocence of youth and she was becoming headstrong, just when he felt she most needed a rein. And with Demetrios in Athens ... The world was changing. Stratokles was beginning to wonder if he had lingered too long in Heraklea. Although he had other ideas—

She flipped through the scroll tubes. 'Demonstrate is dead?' she asked.

'Got it in one!' Stratokles pounced like a cat taking a rat off a post.

'By Aphrodite, lady of ladies!' Amastris said, and shook her head. 'The old pirate is *dead*? Who killed him?'

'Who cares? The point is that a new man has Demonstrate's fleet – if he can hold it. They are pirates. And now Antigonus One-Eye will have a clear run at allying with them – the pirates – a fair shot at buying all of them.' Stratokles swirled the wine in his cup.

'But we're no allies of old One-Eye. My uncle broke that chain.' She drank off the last of her milk.

Stratokles swirled his wine again. ‘There are never just two sides in politics, my dear. Antigonus would like to be master here. So would Lysimachos and so would your Satyrus. By naming himself “king”, your uncle puts himself on the same level as all of them. He can only maintain that level by ceaseless vigilance and a willingness to play one against the other.’

‘And my beloved has just lost his guarantee of passing the straits unmolested,’ Amastris said. ‘Perhaps he’ll come here and stay awhile.’ She smiled.

‘He’s lost more than that, dear,’ Stratokles said. ‘He’s lost his immunity, and some of his status with the great powers. Now he’ll have to buy the pirates like the rest of us. And if Antigonus has Athens’ fleet, and the pirates,’ Stratokles shrugged, ‘well then, so much for Ptolemy.’ He leaned back and recrossed his legs. ‘Times are changing, dear.’

She looked at him from under her eyelashes. ‘You don’t love my Satyrus,’ she said.

‘I helped him achieve his kingdom,’ Stratokles said. ‘But no – he’s no friend of mine.’ He didn’t mention that in another dispatch – one he didn’t need to pass to her – he’d had news of Lysimachos. Lysimachos, the fourth contender for Alexander’s power. Lysimachos, whose Thracian wife had just died.

The perfect husband for his little princess. With Lysimachos and Amastris, Stratokles could guarantee Athens’ grain trade for fifty years, and to Hades with Satyrus of Tanais.

And why dream small? With the two of them, Stratokles could aim higher.

Whereas her marriage to Satyrus would mean that he would have to start all over again.

BOOK ONE



EUXINE

TANAIS, EUXINE SEA, SPRING 306 BC

Late winter, or perhaps early spring on the shores of the Euxine. The first crocus buds were peeping out of the earth, and the lambs were coming, and the horses were foaling, and in just a few weeks there would be fresh green on the Sea of Grass.

Two archers stood on the city's Field of Ares, shooting arrows into a distant target made of linen canvas stuffed tight with rags and straw. Shooting with a precision that bored the onlookers, who mostly sat on the dead winter grass enjoying the first day of sunshine. Until both archers started shouting.

Melitta touched the corner of her mouth with the fletchings at the peak of her draw, and loosed her arrow at the target.

It struck home with a satisfying *thwack* as the barbed head cut the taut canvas. 'When is she going to marry you, if she loves you so much?' she asked her brother.

Satyrus pulled an arrow from the *gorytos* at his waist and nocked the arrow. He drew a breath, raised the bow and shot – a continuous motion that sent the arrow into the target with the same flat *thwack*. 'When her uncle is done traipsing about pretending to be one of Alexander's men,' Satyrus said. He didn't hide the disappointment in his voice. Every spring brought a new delay in his wedding plans. He was twenty-four, and Amastris was older.

Melitta nocked, drew and shot. *Thwack*. 'You have a slave in your bed,' she said, accusingly.

Satyrus nocked, drew and loosed. His arrow flew over the top of the target. 'By the Lord of the Silver Bow, sister, is that any of your business?' he asked pettishly.

‘We swore to *Mater* that we would not lie with slaves,’ she said. ‘You missed, by the way. The horse is mine.’

Satyrus struggled with his temper for as long as it took his heart to beat three times. ‘Yes,’ he said after the third heartbeat.

‘Yes, you are sleeping with a slave? Or yes, the horse is mine?’ Melitta asked. Just for emphasis, she drew, nocked and shot again – and her arrow struck dead in the centre of the mark.

‘Yes, I think it’s time you got moving on your spring progress,’ Satyrus said. He didn’t do a very good job of keeping the anger out of his voice.

‘Splendid!’ Melitta said. ‘What a very good job you are making of living up to *Mater*’s desires. And Philokles’! And Leon’s! We said we would *not* have slaves. How are you doing with that, *brother*? I seem to see more agricultural slaves arrive every day.’

‘Some of them on Leon’s ships!’ he shot back. ‘This is the real world, sister! You go and ride the plains and pretend to be a nomad princess. I have a kingdom to manage. We need agricultural labour.’

‘In our beds? Get me one, brother. A nice one with a big cock.’ She rolled her hips. ‘How’s that!’

‘Ares! You are the limit! It is not your business who’s in my bed!’ The King of the Bosphorus realised that he had shouted the last, and that even on the Field of Ares outside the city people were watching them.

Melitta shrugged. ‘Handsome boy like you ought to be doing better than agricultural labour,’ she said.

‘Perhaps I could sleep with the captain of my bodyguard?’ Satyrus asked his sister.

‘Shut your mouth!’ she hissed.

‘Of course, he’s twice my age – but surely Coenus is still a good-looking man,’ Satyrus finished, satisfied that he’d punched through his sister’s air of superiority. He had long suspected that she slept with her guard captain, Scopasis, a former outlaw.

They stood and glared at each other for ten heartbeats.

‘At least he’s not a slave,’ she said – and she meant to hurt.

‘That’s all right,’ he shot back. ‘Go out on the plains and leave your son with me to raise.’

In fact, she wasn’t the most devoted mother, and that shot hit its target squarely so that she turned bright crimson from the roots of

her black hair to the tops of her breasts, just visible under her slightly open Persian coat.

‘You owe me a horse,’ she said, and walked away. She walked ten steps and turned, unable to stop herself. ‘You need to stop pretending that Amastris will marry you. Find yourself a girl. Fuck her and make some children, and then you can talk to me—’ She was choking up, getting angry, threatened with tears and hating herself for it. ‘Then you can talk to me about children.’ She walked to her horse, leaped into the saddle and dashed away.

‘That is the king?’ asked a foreign voice. The man sounded puzzled.

‘The king’s not available just now.’ Satyrus turned his head, anger still pounding away in his bloodstream and saw his hypaspist, Helios, standing with a powerfully built man – Satyrus had seen him arrive – Antigonos’ ambassador Niocles, son of Laertes of Macedon. Or so his morning report had said.

Helios hurried to his side, and Satyrus handed him his bow and *gorytos* to carry. ‘What’s next?’ he asked, walking to his horse.

‘The new plough, lord,’ Helios said.

‘I’ll skip that,’ Satyrus said. Anger was still heavy inside him, so big that it seemed to fill his breast and choke him. *How dare she tax him with his slave-girl.* He took a deep breath. *How disgusting it was of him to hit back at her motherhood.*

The problem of being twins was that you were born able to hurt the person you loved the most.

‘Lord, you said you had to see the plough today or it would be too late—’ Helios sounded contrite, but he knew his master and he knew his duty.

‘Then I shall.’ Satyrus cut short a lecture on duty by jumping onto his charger’s back and putting his heels to the animal’s sides, and he was gone as fast as his sister.

Satyrus owned a number of farms around the perimeter of Tanais, the city that he made his capital. It was the city founded by his father – posthumously, it is true. The bronze statue of his father still loomed over the agora, although other statues were joining it.

Thinking about his father – heroised, and almost deified – didn’t help him dismiss his bad behaviour. Nor, as he rode along the escarpment and looked down into the valley of the Tanais River, did

thoughts of Philokles, his tutor, with whom he had often galloped these same stades.

He rode down the near cliff at a reckless pace and his horse carried him in great bounds, his four feet seeming to skim the earth. Satyrus kept his seat at the base of the ridge only by leaning well back and clamping his knees like the vice in a bootmaker's shop. And when he felt his charger's pace ease, he righted himself, leaned low over the stallion's neck and galloped along the road – the road where he'd killed his first man.

And his first woman.

Right here, he'd shot her. She'd been lying wounded, and he'd leaned over and put an arrow in her and watched her die. Just his age, at the time; thirteen or fourteen. He still saw the look on her face. He still wondered where she went when she left her body – and what awaited him.

He flew along the road, past the stream where the salmon went to breed and up the next hill to where he kept his own farm. It was a wealthy farm, with stone barns and a good house, and he rode into the yard, his stallion throwing clods of earth from the wet road.

He'd left his attendants far behind, except for Helios who was hard on his heels. His farm manager, Lekthes, was waiting by the ox shed.

'You came, lord!' he laughed.

'Am I so unreliable?' Satyrus asked.

'Reckon there ain't many kings in the circle of the world who till their own fields,' Lekthes said. He spat. 'Plough's hitched. How do your courtiers say it? He *awaits your pleasure*.' Lekthes was a freedman, a former slave who'd been purchased by Leon to run farms and train new farmers. He didn't have the habits of a slave, though. In some ways, he was the most arrogant man Satyrus had ever met. He had the arrogance of a craftsman.

'I'll get started,' Satyrus said. 'All my people are close behind, and I can't avoid the Macedonian ambassador for ever.'

Helios allowed a grim chuckle to escape his lips.

Satyrus stripped his chiton over his head so that he was almost naked, tossed the garment to Helios and clucked to the oxen.

They were well trained, and very strong. As soon as he made the noise, they started forward, and the blade – the *hynis* of the new plough – bit immediately, penetrating the winter sod and cutting deep, more

than a handspan deep. After a single furrow, less than a stade, Satyrus could feel the strain in his wrists and lower back. He clucked again and the beasts snorted and rumbled to a stop, and he leaned over the handles of the plough to examine his furrow. Straight enough. And deep. The black soil was turned in neat mounds on either side of the furrow. The sexual imagery of ploughing was obvious; even the smell—

The king shook himself. Sex was very much on his mind, and he forced himself back to the matter at hand. He clucked again, and his two beasts pushed forward against their yokes – the *zygotes* that gave the hoplite class their name.

Up and down, and up and down. After three full furrows, Satyrus understood all over again why farming was the best training for war. He motioned to Helios, had a drink of wine from his flask and ignored the arrival of the Macedonian delegation and got back to work.

He lost himself in it for a while. Ploughing – which he had only begun to practise the autumn before – required his full concentration, body and mind. The management of the oxen, the depth of the plough blade, the shifting of the machine under his hands and the pain in the small of his back—

The oxen shambled to a stop, the offside beast shying at a fly. Satyrus considered that there was something poetic, even oracular about a beast the weight of three horses shying from the furrow because of a fly the weight of a grain of wheat. While he indulged in this bit of petty philosophy, he had to use the full breadth of his shoulders to keep the plough on course.

The erring ox stopped, flicked its tail and lowered its head.

Satyrus let the handles of the plough down, easing the weight of the machine onto the turned soil. Then he rolled his shoulders, stretched his back and stood straight for the first time in five long furrows.

Satyrus the Second, King of the Bosphorus, was naked like a slave – or a farmer – toiling in the hot spring sun of the Euxine. He stood a full six feet, with shoulders that seemed as wide as he was tall. Men likened him to Herakles, which made him laugh. He was twenty-four years old, and he had been king for three years, and those three years seemed to him to have aged him more than all the years before, as if time were not a constant, whatever Aristotle and Heraklitus might have to say on the subject.

Helios came running from the trees with a chlamys, a strigil and a linen towel – and the canteen of wine. Satyrus took the wine first, drinking a long draught of thrice-watered red before he used the strigil, wiped himself down with the towel and pulled the purple-edged white chlamys over his head. Satyrus gave the younger man a smile and walked across the field towards the foreigners.

‘You don’t have to see them until tonight,’ Helios muttered.

‘I’m all right now,’ Satyrus said.

Many of the Macedonians were mounted, and there wasn’t much to tell them apart. They had the same dun-coloured cloaks and the same look of arrogance. Satyrus laughed because the thought came, unbidden, that Lekthes might have been the Macedonian ambassador’s brother.

Satyrus walked across the furrows to greet the ambassadors of the world’s most powerful man, Antigonus One-Eye, naked except for his short cloak. He paused, just short of the range at which men begin social interaction, to note the workmanlike nature of his furrows with pleasure.

‘Crax?’ he called.

‘My lord?’ Crax responded, pushing through the crowd of sycophants and courtiers. Crax was Satyrus’ Master of the Household. He was tall and red-bearded, and his voice still had a hint of the Bastarnae brogue that he had been born to – before slavery, freedom and war made him a powerful officer in the Kingdom of the Bosporus.

‘The new plough is a fine machine. Order ten for our farms, and suggest to Gardan that a meeting of the farmers be held on one of our farms so that they can see the benefits.’ As he spoke, he noted Coenus – one of his father’s most trusted men – standing at his ease, surrounded by soldiers of the bodyguard. He winked, and Coenus responded with a wry smile. Satyrus turned to Helios. ‘Make a note for me. Meet with Gardan. He’s been requesting it.’

Helios wrote some notes on a wax tablet. Crax wrote something as well, on his own tablet. The sight of a tattooed Bastarnae writing on a wax tablet might well have been mocked, in other company.

‘And these gentlemen?’ Satyrus asked with elaborate unconcern. As if the last day hadn’t been spent preparing to receive them.

‘An ambassador, my lord,’ Crax said. ‘Niocles son of Laertes of Macedon from Antigonus, Regent of Macedon,’ Crax said, indicating

a middle-aged man – strong, of middling height, who looked more used to wearing armour than the long robes of officialdom.

The man so named came forward, his white chiton held carefully out of the newly turned furrows by a pair of slaves. ‘My lord,’ he said. His voice was gruff, and his face said that he was none too pleased with the morning’s proceedings.

‘A pleasure to receive you,’ Satyrus said. He clasped hands with the older Macedonian, and if he was discomfited to be greeted by a nearly naked Herakles, he didn’t show it.

‘A pleasure to meet such a famous soldier,’ the Macedonian said.

‘Welcome to the Kingdom of the Bosporus,’ Satyrus said. ‘I expect that you have come wanting something?’

Niocles might have made a face, but he was made of sterner stuff. ‘Aye, lord. It pleases you to receive us in a muddy field – and to go straight to the point.’

‘I’m busy,’ Satyrus said. ‘It’s ploughing season.’

‘As if a king needs to plough his own land,’ commented a man in the delegation. The sneer was almost audible.

‘I’m sure you came here with business to transact,’ Satyrus said.

‘I have come on behalf of Lord Antigonos, who men call “One-Eye”, Niocles said. ‘To demand reparations.’

‘Are you sure this isn’t your speech for Ptolemy of Aegypt?’ Satyrus asked, and many of his men laughed. The Macedonian flushed and there might have been violence, except that Coenus’ men of the bodyguard appeared as if from the grass and stood in neat array between their king and the ambassador’s men – every bodyguard in the somewhat archaic uniform of bronze breastplates, greaves, attic helmets and long, indigo-blue cloaks. They carried the heavy round aspis of old Greece and short, heavy-bladed spears.

Niocles waited, calming himself. Satyrus wished him luck.

‘We understand that you are not so close with Lord Ptolemy as might formerly have been the case?’ he asked.

Satyrus smiled. ‘Am I not?’ he asked. ‘How may I help you, and your lord?’

Niocles shrugged. ‘Why, with a treaty making us allies in war and peace, of course, lord. But for the moment, I am here to resent the behaviour of your merchants at my master’s port of Smyrna.’

Here it comes, Satyrus thought. ‘Yes?’ he asked, all innocence.

‘My lord must know that two of your ships attacked my master’s ships in the port of Smyrna. Men were killed. We demand the captains.’ Niocles smiled, and now his tone hardened as well. ‘This is not negotiable. It might have been better for you if you had given them of your own free will.’

‘Better how?’ Satyrus asked. He stepped forward, so that he was quite close to the Macedonian. ‘Let me see . . . I have heard of this incident, of course. Two of my ships are riding at anchor in Smyrna, your master’s port. Hmm? And they are attacked. Yes?’

‘Men were sent to demand the taxes,’ Niocles said. He shrugged. ‘Violence only ensued when they were refused.’

‘Taxes that included the seizure of the ships?’ Satyrus asked.

‘My master may make any law he pleases within his own dominion,’ Niocles said. Now he all but purred with pleasure. ‘And unlike some lords,’ he said with a glance at Satyrus’ guards, ‘my master has the power to enforce his demands.’

‘Let me get this straight,’ Satyrus said. His hypaspist handed him a golden cup of wine, which he drank without offering any to the Macedonian beside him. ‘Your master set a ridiculous “tax” in the port of Smyrna as a pretext to allow a band of pirates to attack my ships. They were roundly defeated. Now I am to hand over my captains, and what? Pay an indemnity? For my presumption in resisting the tax?’

Niocles nodded. ‘Exactly.’

‘And our crime in this matter is . . .?’ Satyrus asked, and took a sip of wine.

‘Trading with Ptolemy,’ Niocles said. ‘Your ships had traded with Ptolemy.’

Satyrus laughed. ‘That’s a crime?’ he asked.

‘In Smyrna,’ Niocles said.

Satyrus nodded. ‘So,’ he said. ‘A lord has the right to make any law he pleases, if only he can enforce it?’

‘That’s right,’ Niocles said.

Satyrus handed his wine cup back to Helios. ‘Ploughing is excellent exercise for war,’ he said, ‘as my ancestors, who defeated the Persians when Macedon was an ally of Persia, could attest. The pretence’ – and here Satyrus’ voice took on a tone he had not possessed just a few years before, the sharp tone of a king dealing with a fool – ‘the

pretence that your master has the power to inflict his will on me, here, on the shores of the Euxine, is sheer folly.’ Satyrus smiled. ‘But as you have yourself noted the precedent, I’ll be happy to free all the slaves that you so obviously have in your tail, there.’ At this, Satyrus began to walk across the furrows towards the Macedonian embassy.

‘What – what?’ asked Niocles.

‘You – are you a slave? All of you who are slaves, step away from the others. Good. Yes. Coenus? See to it.’ Satyrus rounded on Niocles, who had followed him across the ploughed ground and up onto the grass. ‘Slavery is a carefully controlled institution in my kingdom,’ he said. ‘Such is my whim, and the whim of my sister. And since I have the power to enforce my will,’ he said, ‘you can go home to your master and tell him that the next time he attacks a couple of my ships, I’ll have my fleet begin to burn cities on his seaboard. I hope that’s clear enough.’ Satyrus waved. ‘Get you gone. And leave your slaves. I suspect they’ll be happier here, anyway.’

Niocles stood his ground. ‘You are declaring war?’ he asked.

Satyrus shook his head. ‘No,’ he said. ‘I’m just playing this foolish game the way you people play it.’

‘What game, lord?’ Niocles asked.

‘The game of diplomacy,’ Satyrus answered. ‘Where you pretend to be powerful and I pretend to be powerful and we posture like boys around the Palaestra. I don’t want war. Understand? My little realm has had too much war. But neither will I play. At all. Your master has neither the time nor the inclination to come into the Euxine, any more than Ptolemy does. Come back when you want to speak my language.’

Niocles made a face and then shook his head. ‘You’re more a Macedonian than most Greeks,’ he said.

Satyrus shrugged. ‘I assume you meant that as flattery,’ he said. ‘But your flattery won’t get you your slaves back.’

‘When Antigonus is Great King – King over Kings – you will be sorry you indulged in this petty insubordination.’ Niocles stepped closer to Satyrus, and men among the bodyguard shifted. Hands went to spears.

Satyrus shrugged. ‘You may judge my views on the subject,’ he said, ‘by my willingness to behave as I do.’

*

Tanais was a new city, so new that the smell of linseed oil and fresh-cut pine seemed to fill every room in every house, rivalled only by the dusty-dry smell of fresh-cut marble and limestone. It was less than fifteen years since the city had been burned flat by Eumeles of Pantecapaeaum, and less than three years since serious rebuilding began.

Once again, there was a bronze equestrian statue of Kineas, Hipparch of Olbia, in the agora. Once again there was a golden statue of Nike in a temple to Nike at the east end of the agora, and this time the temple was built of Parian marble, shipped block by block from far-off Sounion on the coast of Attica. The 'palace', a small citadel with six tall towers, was small but built entirely of stone, and its central hall was great enough to entertain the whole of the city's thousand citizens, crammed tight as sardines in a barrel, on feast days when it rained.

The loot of four campaigns and the tribute of the northern Euxine cities had rebuilt Tanais with dramatic speed. But it still had the air more of a rich colony than a real city. Many of the citizens were farmers who tilled the land themselves, and hundreds of the local Maeotae had been admitted to citizenship to balance the mercenaries who received land grants in lieu of payment for services.

Besides Greeks and Maeotae, the Valley of the Tanais had a third group of citizens, if they might be so styled. Melitta, Satyrus' sister, was Queen of all the Assagetae – in truth, the leader of the horse nomads from the edge of distant Hyrkania in the east to the far western lands of Thrace and the Getae. She too ruled from Tanais, when she wasn't out on the steppes, ruling from the saddle. As it was spring and the grass was fresh, she was getting ready to escape the confinement of the city and ride free, away to the north, for the yearly gathering in of all the Assagetae when the census, such as it was, was taken. But the Assagetae were as much a part of the kingdom as the Greeks or the Maeotae.

Satyrus left his horse in the 'royal' stable just inside the main gate of the city. The building of stone walls – not just stone in the socle, or foundation courses, but stone all the way to the rampart's top, like the richest cities of the world – had been the twins' first priority. The main gate was flanked by two recessed towers, each three storeys tall and holding three levels of heavy artillery – big torsion engines capable of firing a bolt of iron two yards long. A permanent garrison manned the

engines in every tower, and the city had twenty-six towers. Standing as it did on a low bluff over the mouth of the Tanais as it flowed out into the shallow Bay of Salmon, Tanais was as impregnable as the hand of man and the expenditure of gold could make it.

The towers alone had cost the equivalent of a year's revenue from the whole kingdom. That's how Satyrus had begun to see everything in his kingdom – as a price tag. The street from the main gate ran past the royal stables (seventy minas of silver, needed a tile roof) along the wide Street of Heroes with statues of Satyrus' ancestors and some of Kineas' friends (Philokles' statue was due any day from Athens, bronze with silver and gilt, four talents of silver, delivered and already waiting in a pile of wood shavings, along with a statue of his most famous heroised ancestor, Arimnestos of Plataea in bronze, silver and gold), past the gates of the citadel, whose defensive artillery covered the road and gate (four hundred and seventy talents of silver, complete) to the sea gate (five hundred and ninety talents) beyond which stood the masts and standing rigging of Satyrus' fleet, the strongest in the Euxine. Without straining himself, the young king of the Bosphorus could count twenty-two trieres, or triremes, whose hulls, repair, sails, rigging, sailors' wages, rowers and marines cost him eighteen talents of silver a year in wages. Each. With his six hemiolas, or sailing triremes (twenty-four talents a year) and his four penteres or 'fivers' at a little more than thirty talents a year, his docks and ship sheds to protect the hulls from Euxine winters, and the fortified mole which protected his fleet and its maintenance, his naval expenditure topped seven hundred talents a year – a noticeable amount even in the revenues of the leading grain producer in the world.

And that was without his magnificent new ship, the *Arete*. New built from stem to stern, and all to his specification. He could see the towering mainyard above the sea gate. She was cubits taller than any other ship in the harbour, and broader in the beam, with room for two men sitting on every bench – a hexeres, or 'sixer'. He longed for his wide deck the way he longed for a girl – any girl – in his bed. The way he longed for Amastris, except that he didn't always think of her when he wanted a woman. Amastris, whose birthday gift, a golden dolphin, had cost two talents of pure gold.

Satyrus sighed, tried to forget the price of everything and walked towards the agora, trailing Helios and Crax and Coenus and two

dozen guards. No one bowed. Men did run to him, demanding his attention concerning their lawsuits, or seeking his approval for their wares, or for merchant ventures.

It took him the better part of the afternoon to cross the agora.

Finally he freed himself from the last anxious citizen – a farmer complaining about the moving of his boundary stones – and walked under the gate to the citadel where he was, at last, on his own ground. And this was Tanais – next to Olbia the easiest of his cities to administrate. In Pantecapaeum, it might have taken him all day to get across the agora and he'd have needed the soldiers at his back. There were still many men who hated him in Pantecapaeum.

'My lord?' purred Idomenes. Idomenes was the Steward of the Household – the man who made sure that the king was fed and clothed and had a place to sit. He was also the Royal Secretary. He'd held both of these jobs for the former occupant of the throne, and Satyrus suspected he'd do the same for the next.

'Dinner – just friends.' Satyrus dropped his chlamys on the tiled floor of his own apartments. A dozen servants came forward to lay out his clothes for dinner.

'Bath?' Karlus asked, a giant German who served as Satyrus' personal guard and often worked as his manservant, as well. The big German was getting white in his hair, and his body was criss-crossed with scars earned in thirty years of near-constant fighting.

'Yes, Karlus. Thanks,' Satyrus said. The living areas of the palace had hypocausts – heated floors – and a central furnace that kept water hot all day. Satyrus slipped into the water, swam around his little pool for a few minutes and climbed out to be greeted by a pair of attendants with towels.

Massaged, oiled and clean, Satyrus lay down on his couch for dinner as the sun set in red splendour over the valley of the Tanais River. Satyrus rose only to say the prayer to Artemis and pour the libation of the day, and then he led the singing of a hymn to Herakles, his ancestor, before he reclined alone.

On the next couch, Coenus raised a wine cup. 'You did well, lad,' he said.

Satyrus made a face. 'Posturing. Philokles would laugh. I had a spat with Melitta, and took my aggression out on the Macedonians.'

Coenus shook his head. 'Philokles would say that it was well done.'

He was the very master of deceit when he needed to be, lord. You should have seen him fool the Tyrant of Olbia with spies—’

Satyros nodded and cut off the impending story. ‘I did see him fool Sophokles, the assassin of Athens,’ he said.

Coenus laughed. ‘I’m getting old, lord. You did, right enough.’

Satyros shook his head. ‘Never say old.’

Crax scratched his head. ‘I’m just a dumb barbarian,’ he said. ‘Why exactly do we have to do this dance?’

Satyros exchanged a long glance with Coenus. ‘To keep Antigonus off balance until our grain fleets are safely in Rhodes and Athens,’ Satyros said. ‘We’re at sea in what, two weeks? Antigonus has more than two hundred hulls in the water, and he could pick our merchants off like a hawk takes doves.’

‘So we offended his ambassador?’ asked Hama. Hama was another barbarian – a Keltoi from the far north, who had served Satyros’ family for twenty years as a bodyguard and war captain. ‘How does that help?’

Coenus gave a half-grin. ‘Listen,’ he said. ‘It’s not simple. We offended the ambassador to make him believe what he saw and heard here. If we’d been nice to him, he’d have wondered what was up – after all, we’ve never exactly been friends. The truce between Antigonus and Ptolemy is a dead letter, now. It’s war, across the Ionian Sea, and our people have to sail through the middle of it.’

Hama sat up on his couch. ‘I see it!’ he said. ‘By appearing to offend One-Eye, it seems possible that Satyros is . . . available.’

‘Or mad,’ Coenus said. ‘Niocles can report it either way, and Antigonus might choose to keep his distance from our merchantmen this summer.’

‘Ares,’ Crax spat. ‘What do we do *next* summer?’

Satyros raised his cup and sipped a libation. ‘Next summer is in the hands of a different *Moira*,’ he said. ‘Let us remember the Fates and Fortunes, gentlemen. This summer will be tough enough.’

‘You are determined to accompany the fleet?’ Coenus asked, for the fifth time.

Satyros shrugged.

It was morning – a glorious spring morning. From the height of the palace towers, he could see men ploughing in their fields beyond

the walls, and far off to the east, an Assagetæ horse-trader riding briskly west towards the city with a string of stout ponies raising the dust behind him. Closer to hand, a gaggle of girls went to the public fountain in the middle of the agora (sixty talents for the fountain of marble and bronze, a hundred and seventy for the well, the piping and the engineer and the workmen to dig down into the rock and make a channel so that the waterworks would provide water all year round).

Satyrus watched them draw water; watched the shape of them as they leaned out over the water to draw it, watched as one young woman drank from the pool provided for the purpose and then washed her legs.

Why can't I just summon her? What a fool I am – as if my sister actually cares. And who am I harming? Hyacinth takes no harm from me.

Because I know perfectly well it's wrong, of course. I'm not avoiding my slave-mistress to please my sister. I'm doing it because it is right.

I think.

'I don't think I have your attention,' Coenus said from a very great distance.

'You do, of course,' Satyrus said. He forced his eyes back over the parapet and onto his father's friend. 'But I do request you say that last bit again.'

'I thought that you were going to take an embassy to Heraklea this spring,' Coenus said.

'And so I shall,' said the king.

'You mean, you'll cut a more dashing figure with a war fleet than with some ambassadors,' Coenus said. 'Your prospective father-in-law – now, I'll note, the "king" of Heraklea – may not see it that way.'

Satyrus disliked having his mind read. He disliked it all the more when he felt that he was being mocked – as all of his father's friends tended to do, all the time. His sister Melitta called it the 'conspiracy of the old'. In fact, Coenus was exactly right. Satyrus wanted to see Amastris with twenty ships at his back and resplendent in armour – perhaps fresh from a victory or two.

'Coenus, with what we spend on the fleet, we might as well get some use from it,' Satyrus said.

Coenus grunted. 'You've got me there, lord.'

'And I'm the best navarch, if it comes to a fight,' Satyrus said. 'You've said so yourself.'

‘If you get into a fight with Antigonus One-Eye’s fleet, all the skill in the world won’t be worth a fuck,’ Coenus said. Then he shrugged. ‘I’m sorry, lad. I’m not myself. You are the fittest navarch. I dislike the both of you gone at the same time – you at sea and your sister out on the Sea of Grass. And neither of you with an heir old enough to rule.’

‘If we both die,’ Satyrus said, ‘feel free to run the place yourself.’ He grinned. ‘You already do!’

Coenus grunted. ‘This is not the retirement I had planned,’ he said.

Three days, and Satyrus did not summon his concubine – bought in secret and enjoyed with considerable guilt even before Melitta discovered her. He and Melitta were correct with each other, and no more, and neither offered any form of apology.

But on the fourth day, Satyrus sent the horse. It had started over the horse, a descendant of his father’s wonderful warhorse and a fine prospect for a three-year-old, with heavy haunches and a lively spirit – the same slate-grey, silvery hide, the same black mane and tail. A fine horse, and perhaps more . . . Thanatos had been a great horse.

Both of them wanted this new horse, and they had wagered him on an archery contest – itself foolish, because Satyrus knew that he was never his sister’s match with a bow.

But he conceded defeat and sent her the horse, and then watched from his balcony as a groom took the horse to her in the courtyard, where her people were loading her wagons for her expedition to the Sea of Grass.

He wasn’t going to let her leave until they were friends again.

She looked up from a tally-stick, eyed the young stallion greedily and ran a hand over his flanks. Then she shook her head and went back to her packing.

‘Look up!’ Satyrus said quietly.

But she didn’t.

That night, he invited her to share dinner, as it was her last night before leaving.

She declined.

Satyrus went downstairs to the nursery, where his three-year-old nephew was playing with his nurses.

‘Hello,’ said Kineas. He had bright blue eyes.

‘Bow to the king, lad,’ said the older nurse. She was Sauromatae, tall and probably as dangerous as most of the bodyguards. She flashed Satyrus a grin.

Kineas bowed. ‘Will I be king someday?’ he asked.

Satyrus shrugged. ‘If I don’t get a move on.’

‘What does that mean?’ Kineas asked.

Satyrus shook his head. He often made the mistake of answering his sister’s son as if he were an adult – or as if he were too young to understand the complexities of his position. Kineas was three, and already wise.

‘Would you like to go riding tomorrow?’ Satyrus asked.

‘Only after I watch my mother ride ... away.’ The fractional pause told Satyrus too much – and made him angry.

He played with the boy until the sun began to set, romping on the carpets and helping him shoot his toy war engine, a tiny ballista that the sailors had made for the boy. It was really quite dangerous, as Satyrus discovered when one of his shots stuck a finger’s-span deep in a shield on the wall.

‘Oh!’ he said. He’d given the boy the ballista himself. ‘Kineas, I have to take this away.’

The boy looked at him a moment and his jaw worked silently.

He was trying not to cry. ‘I didn’t— I *am* careful!’ he said. He grabbed his uncle’s knee and raised his small face. His eyes were already looking red around the edges. ‘Please? I *am* careful.’

Satyrus took a deep breath. Someone had to take care— ‘No,’ he said. ‘That is, yes— Oh, don’t cry! Listen, lad. This is a little too powerful for a boy your age. I didn’t know. We can play with it together, but I can’t let you play with it by yourself.’

The sun had fully set before Kineas was content. He wasn’t a spoiled boy, or a bad one – he was merely a bright lad who spent most of his day with a pair of nurses. He deserved better.

Satyrus got a big hug before he left, and found that his anger was fresh and new. He stood at the entrance to the wing that led to his sister’s quarters for as long as it took his heart to beat twenty times, and then, common sense winning out over rage, he walked away.

He went into his own wing, closed the door to his apartments and picked up a cup of wine.

‘Lord?’ asked Helios.

‘Send for Hyacinth,’ Satyrus said.

And instantly regretted it. Anger at his sister did not justify excess.

But in Hyacinth’s embrace, he lost his anger. It was replaced by sadness. Satyrus had made love often enough to know the difference. He made little effort to please Hyacinth. She, on the other hand, made a dedicated effort to please him.

She was, after all, a slave.