

Herald 15

Chapter 15 A Messy Family

"Now then, that's enough resting. Ugh, let's get back to our tent, Camius." Alexander stood up with a small grunt.

"Yea, we should be going too. Mean, you grabbed something to eat?" Cambyes asked as she too got up.

"Yes, I did. I also got everything we need here." Mean held up her right hand to show the bulging bag. In there was dry food, alcohol, rolls of bandages and beetroots.

"Good. Let's go then." Cambyes said.

"Camius, remember to take our chiltons. They need to dry." Alexander reminded the man at the last minute.

"Yea, yea." Came a tired reply.

As they exited the tent, they found the sky had mostly cleared up and the rain had transformed to a light drizzle, peppering them with only tiny refreshing droplets.

Suddenly Cambyes turned around to look at the tent and asked wrinkling her eyebrows, "Are we just going to leave the tent unguarded? Where is Romeus? He should be standing guard."

"Oh yeah, now that I think about it, how did you guys get in? He should have stopped you." Mean too pressed the two men.

"Haha....." Came Camius's only reply.

"We sent him to take Bartho to the clinic. The hunk fainted in front of the camp " Alexander explained.

"That buffoon! Remus must have taken sucked out all his intelligence in the womb." Mean cursed, shaking her head.

Only an idiot would leave the camp leader's tent unguarded at a time of war. Not only were there classified information in there but there have been records of assassins hiding inside a commander's tent and later assassinating him. This was a major breach of protocol.

Fortunately, it was just Alexander this time.

"He must have been conned by you two. If father found out, he would have chewed Romeus out." Cambyeses glared at the two.

"We need every hand to help with the wounded. Besides, there's little of value in the tent. The good stuffs nice and secure." Alexander succinctly replied, defending his action.

"But still rules are rules. He disobeyed orders and left his post." Surprisingly this was spoken by Mean. The fiery little tiger was quite a stickler for rules, even more than most soldiers.

"Forget the tent and let's get going. We are going the same way." Alexander urged.

Seeing their "leader" leave, the trio followed.

As they meandered through the snaking muddy path betwixt the tents, suddenly Alexander asked, "Hey Cambyeses, have you heard anything about Octavius?"

He only knew that Octavius was stabbed. After that, he had neither seen nor heard about him.

Maybe Cambyeses met him in the clinic.

"Did anything happen to young master?" Mean also inquired, but her voice strangely had an unmistakable gleeful anticipation.

"Father bought the body just before I left. They say that he carried it over his shoulder even as he escaped. Fool even begged me to treat that corpse." Cambyses answered with a disdainful smirk. "I left saying I needed to find Mean to get more medicine."

No wonder she so readily sat down to have a meal with the boys. She was stalling for time. A puzzle in Alexander's heart was finally solved.

"My condolences for your brother." Camius respectfully said, paying his dues to the dead.

"Half brother. And good riddance he's dead!" Cambyses corrected Camius, venom dripping from her voice.

"Mmm, that's the only good thing that came out of this war." Mean unequivocally agreed with her mistress.

Saying that relations between Cambyses and Octavius were bad would be the understatement of the century.

Octavius detested his far more talented sister. He always felt an irrational fear that his sister might take over the mercenary group with Alexander's help and thus tried to make things difficult for her at every opportunity. And being his only heir, Nestoras often turned a blind eye to such, in his mind, "petty" actions.

And since Octavius hated Cambyses, hence by proxy, he also detested Alexander and Mean.

Once in a drunken fit, he had tried to forcibly take Mean, she only being saved at the nick of time by Alexander and Cambyses who were fortunately nearby and heard the commotion.

In fact, it could be said the reason Cambyses, Mean and Alexander were so close to each other was in part due to Octavius.

"Forget it. He's dead. Pay your proper respects and don't let anyone spread rumors." Alexander said in an unusually assertive voice. "Especially you Mean. You might not keep that tongue for long if you keep spewing such nonsense. Know your place." Alexander warned the little slave girl.

"Hey, don't bully her. She didn't say anything wrong." Cambyses jumped to protect Mean like a mother hen.

She then asked, "Don't tell me you feel sad?"

"I forget grudges with dead people." He replied coldly.

"And you pamper her too much. There are things a slave can and cannot say aloud. She's gonna get herself killed one of these days." Alexander chided his mistress.

"Hmph, my Mean can say whatever is right. If anyone doesn't like it, they can take it up with me and I will knock their teeth out." Cambyses said wildly swinging her dainty arms.

"Not everything can be solved by fists, you gorilla woman. Learn some tact." Alexander spat out.

"You're the gorilla! You're fourteen generations are all gorillas! Ekkhow dare a mere slave call his mistress gorilla!" Cambyses erupted like a super volcano, absolutely incensed, spewing spit and curses all around.

She stomped her feet, bared her teeth and her nostrils flared like an enraged bull, almost wanting to strangle Alexander.

It seemed Alexander himself forgot his own advice from just a few moments ago, 'There are things a slave can and cannot say'.

Calling any girl a gorilla would be extremely rude but it was particularly taboo for Cambyses.

She was unanimously considered the second strongest fighter in the camp after Menes. She was so strong that she could even overpower her "in his prime" father. God only knows where she hid all that strength in her slim body.

In addition, she was a prodigy of the sword arts. Her speed, sense of balance and footwork enabled her to run circles around her opponents and her thrust and parries could cut ordinary soldiers to ribbons in no time.

If she wasn't born a girl, she would undoubtedly be next in line to be the leader.

But, because she was, it drew both sad sighs and jealousy towards her.

Particularly the jealous and far less talented Octavius started calling her "gorilla" in spite.

Once, after being beaten soundly in a sparring match, Octavius mocked her using that and she beat him to an inch of his life. With a broken nose, jaw and two black eyes, Octavius had to be spoon-fed liquid gruel for the next month.

She was not a girl you messed with. And if it was anyone other than Alexander, he would have ended up like Octavius.

It had to be said Alexander was no lightweight himself. Standing at 180cm and weighing 80kgs, he could take on almost anyone.

But not Cambyses. Against her, he almost had no chance of winning.

She was just that unnaturally strong, possibly having to do with her genetics.

p "Haha, have you vented enough? Bottling up stress isn't good." Alexander simply laughed at Cambyses's outburst.

He could sense the young girl burying a lot of emotions under her normal facade.

From seeing many so many people she knew die in front of her crying her name to save them, to losing the battle, to the worrying situation about their food, the trauma she suffered in such a small time was enormous.

"You...you...you rogue! How dare you make fun of your mistress!" Cambyses turned visibly red as a tomato as she understood she had fallen for Alexander's little prank.

"Heeeeheeee." From the side came Mean's incessant laughter.

"Stop laughing!" Cambyses shouted visibly threatening Mean but that only made her increase the volume.

"Hey, you two, I command you to stop laughing!"

"Haaaha Hahhaaa."

"Heee Heee."

The more Cambyses protested, the more the two's laughter increased, each seeming to spur the other more.

In this gloomy situation having a good hearty laugh seemed to melt away all their worries.

As the disinterested Camius observed the entire thing, it looked to him like a bickering couple taking a leisurely stroll with their daughter in tow.

"Happiness can be so elusive yet so close." Camius thought.