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Athens
9th waning, Moon of Metageitnion, 490BC

“The Persian boats are here in the northern section of the bay,” Moeris said, pointing out the named area on his map. He had had the burnished leather as long as I could remember – Papou and Mumma having helped him create it many winters before. “The natural marshy area here and to the south of the bay, along with the surrounding mountains, shall prevent them from using their cavalry as they have thus far in their campaign. They rely heavily on their cavalry to defeat enemies and Eretria fell to their horses and soldiers before the city was lost and burnt to the ground.”

“Much as we did to their city of Sardis,” Kleitos noted. “Indeed,” Moeris agreed.

It was Kleitos and Sander who had convinced Moeris to travel to Athens and offer our support to Callimachus – the senior military leader of the Athenian army. With the two of them being the only survivors from Sardis, they thought it only right our forces were involved in the fight against the Persians – except that this time it would be all of our soldiers, not just two men.

A few winters ago, the Persians had finally crushed the Ionian Revolt, sacking Naxos and enslaving its citizens. The other islands submitted quickly and the Persians achieved full submission from Thrace and Macedonia to their rule. King Agrias’ nephew – Alexander, who was King of Macedonia – felt he had no any other choice than to bow to them, but within his trusted circles, he continued to speak his hatred of his Persian Masters, and those words reached us in Trachis.

All was quiet for a time after that, until we heard about the Persian boats heading towards Greece, with Datis and Artaphernes at their helms. We heard King Darius wanted to punish the two Greek cities who had provided extra boats and soldiers to the Ionians – Eretria and Athens – and that Artaphernes himself wanted to lead the troops as he had been the Satrap in Sardis when it was destroyed.

Our army left Trachis immediately but unfortunately we arrived too late for the Eretrians, the smoking remains of the city visible across the water when we reached Delphinium. We continued onto Athens, joining soldiers from Plataea, who were also allied with Athens and had agreed to battle the Persians with them, along the way.

If Kleitos had not been able to convince Moeris that our army should go to Athens, he, Sander, Lysistratos and I would have gone anyway. They all knew I would want to after what happened to my mothers at the hands of the Persians in Trachis, and the allegiance Sander and Kleitos had to Mumma Skylar was still firmly ingrained in their memories and actions. Lysistratos had his own reasons for wanting to be there too – not only was he determined to fight beside his older brother, Kleitos, in battle but he wanted revenge against the Persian enemies who took his wife’s father, and caused her mother to take her own life soon after. Just as my mothers were never far from our minds when we thought of the Persians, neither were Thaddeus and Hesper. With the four of us united, Moeris had no hesitation in agreeing – not that we expected him to – given the friends he also lost that night.

“And when the men from Eretria heard the Persians were headed to Athens next, they were careful to mention that cavalry would be useless due to the mountains and marshes to the south. So, if we are fortunate, they shall not even have the cavalry with them,” Moeris said.

“How do you know of this?” Callimachus asked.
“Two men survived the Eretrian attack. We met them in Delphinium and they told us what happened,” I replied.

The Anthenian commander nodded as Moeris continued. “There is a section here that is an open beach area. If the Persians did not heed the Eretrians’ warning, they could disembark their horses there.”

“We are not equipped to face such an enemy,” Aristides, another General of the tribes of Athens, noted.

“We have not travelled so far south to have you turn and run in fear. We will not allow Athens to fall,” I growled, glaring at each of the Athenian men.

“Enough, Ava,” Moeris ordered. Aristides’ mouth fell open and, though I was younger than him by more than just my eighteen winters, he did not challenge my words. I clenched my jaw, but obeyed Moeris as he addressed Callimachus with his next words. “Please forgive the passion with which we speak. Some of us have encountered the Persians before and it did not end well then. We shall not allow it to be the same again. Not for anyone.”

“We lost many good soldiers in Ephesus and Sardis, so we understand,” Miltiades, another General, replied. “I believe what Aristides meant was, how do we defeat the Persians if their cavalry does join them on the beach?”

“We have the advantage – we know the terrain,” Moeris replied. “There are only two paths from the Plain of Marathon to Athens. If we block them and keep the Persians in the Plain, we can beat them.”

“And they shall never reach Athens,” Callimachus finished.

“Exactly,” Moeris nodded. Callimachus returned the nod and turned to a third General by the name of Themistocles.

“Send the scouts on ahead to ensure the Persians have not already breached the Plain and paths beyond. I want a full report by the time we arrive.”

“Of course,” Themistocles nodded, reaching out to grip the forearm of his superior before turning on his heel and leaving the rest of us.

“Aristides, gather together the tribes, the Athenian main army and the Plataeans. We shall leave within the candlemark,” Callimachus directed.

“As you wish,” the named man bowed, following Themistocles from the room.

“Are you ready to face your enemies again?” Callimachus asked Moeris.

“Always,” he replied, his eyes finding mine and holding them as he nodded.
Marathon

“General Miltiades, Hippias is with the Persians. He has spoken of the open beach and their horses are to arrive by nightfall,” the scout panted, dropping to his knees as he finished giving his report.

We had arrived at the Plain of Marathon on the path from Athens between Mount Parnitha and Mount Penteli a mere half candlemark ago. There was no sign of the Persians in the Plain, but their boats waited in the bay, and it seemed like, for now, they were waiting on board.

“Who is Hippias and how does he know about the land here?” I demanded, shoving my way between the Athenian hoplites to face Miltiades.

The Athenian general hesitated in his answer but when I stepped closer, my eyes at the same level as his, he released a deep breath and replied. “He was once Archon of Athens. Winters ago he was banished, though there have been attempts to recall him on occasions since.”

“Is it a problem? How well does he understand battle and tactics?” Moeris asked, arriving beside me, his hand ever so lightly at the small of my back – both a warning and a support.

“He was never a particularly strategic man, though he has been in Darius’ homeland for many winters so perhaps he has learnt to be,” Miltiades replied.

“How well does he know the formations of the Athenians?” I asked.

“Well.”

“Then we cannot fight as he would expect,” I shrugged.

Both Moeris and Miltiades frowned, the former addressing me. “Speak your thoughts.”

“Where is your map?” I asked. Moeris drew it from beneath his cuirass and handed it to me. I dropped to one knee, unrolling the leather and waiting for the two men to join me on the grass.

“Hippias, and therefore the Persians, will expect a phalanx formation. They will rely on their cavalry to break through that defence and take many of us down before we can mount a proper defence. But what if we only set a small number in formation to face them? The best place would be here, facing the Bay of Marathon and their oncoming soldiers.” I pointed to an open area at the eastern base of Mount Parnitha. “How many soldiers do we have?”

“Ten thousand,” Miltiades replied.

“And the Persian number – do we have that?” I asked.

“Double our number,” the scout replied miserably.

“That is not so bad,” I reasoned. “Two men for every one of ours. We are strong enough to account for that.” I quickly did the calculations in my head. “Let us consider that only two thousand of our soldiers stand against the cavalry. The rest can remain on either flank, one group of around three thousand here beside the river and almost five thousand here, their backs to Mount Penteli,” I said, again pointing out where I spoke of. “The riders will pass through, and the soldiers facing them will allow it.”

“What?” Miltiades barked.

“Wait,” Moeris said, placing a hand on the other man’s shoulder and nodding for me to continue.

“Our soldiers will turn to face them, reforming into position. Angered that their initial charge has failed, the horsemen will turn their steeds and again try to crush our soldiers beneath their horse’s hooves. We will again stand aside, and only when they come for a third time, will our men remain firmly in formation and not let the horses pass. Meanwhile, our flanking men will emerge and attack the second group of Persian soldiers closer to the beach.”
“How can you be certain there shall be a second wave behind the cavalry?” Themistocles asked, having found his way to the front of the soldiers gathered around the Miltiades, Moeris and I.

“The men from Eretria said it is what they did there. They let their cavalry do the most damage then the rest of their soldiers, most carrying bow and arrow, come behind to finish them off.”

“So, if we have fresh soldiers to attack the arrow men, they shall be less effective … and they cannot assist the cavalry ahead of them,” Miltiades realised.

“Yes. They would not be expecting such an attack and would be so intent on using their arrows to protect themselves that their cavalry, and their own bodies, will be left unprotected from our swords and spears.”

“And our shields can protect us from their arrows overhead as we near,” Themistocles nodded.

“Correct,” I nodded.

Miltiades considered my words a long while before nodding as well. “Your words have merit. Having less troops on the left side is clever – less of the Persians shall gather there as it is close to the great marsh.”

“I shall command the men on the right flank, as is our law,” a new voice entered our conversation. I looked up; Callimachus joined us. He wore what looked like new armour and an un-muddied himation over the top. I wondered if he had actually fought before.

“Law?” I repeated.

Miltiades nodded and got to his feet, Moeris and I doing the same. “Athenian law states that the right flank of any battle formation is led by the polemarch, or commander, of the army. That is Callimachus’ title.”

“I see. Have you led men before?” I asked.

“Ava,” Moeris whispered, nudging me with his elbow.

“I do not take offense to the question; indeed I have one of my own for you. What is your name, Girl?”

I bristled at the way he said girl but merely straightened my back and pushed out my chest.

“Ava.”

“And how did you become part of the Army of Trachis, Ava, for I note that you hold weapons as the men do?”

“My mother commanded them with Moeris when she was alive,” I replied, keeping my voice even, though my blood heated. “When the time came, I joined them without hesitation.”

“I see. I admit I had wondered if the weapons were merely for show; that you were there for the men’s … entertainment before or after a battle.”

“I am no one’s entertainment,” I replied through clenched teeth.

“And to suggest it is offensive,” Lysistratos added, appearing at my side and edging his body ever so slightly between me and the commander.

“She is yours then, Boy?” the commander asked, smiling.

“No. But she is me and my wife’s closest friend.”

“I belong to no one except myself,” I said, pushing Lysistratos aside, my hand finding the pommel of my sword. I did not need him to speak for me or try to protect me, I was perfectly capable of looking after myself. Especially against the likes of Callimachus, who I was now sure
had never been on a battlefield. His cultured voice and choice of wording marked him squarely as a nobleman. I would enjoy seeing that grin wiped from his face.

“No, I see that. You speak as though these men are yours – suggesting how the phalanx is formed and how many should adorn each flank. You have been trained in the art of war?”

“Her grandfa—”

“I have been trained in many things, my talents far greater than pouring wine or entertaining soldiers after battle. I am often in need of my own entertainment after skirmishes,” I said, cutting Lysistratos off.

Callimachus’ grin widened. “Indeed? Well, perhaps when we are done here, I shall invite you back to my home where the celebrations shall be grand and you may partake of what I have to offer.”

“I do not believe yo—”

“If the two of you have quite finished, may I remind you that our enemies are sitting in the bay. Do you intend to allow them to come ashore and attack us while you argue about who has the most experience or who should or should not be here? Personally, I would prefer to form up and make the first move,” Moeris said, standing pointedly between Callimachus and me.

“You know I am always ready to face the Persians,” I told him, my eyes never Callimachus.

“As I shall be, along with the five thousand men beside me,” the commander replied.

“Perhaps it is wise for the Trachians and Plataeans to form the left side, along with the final of our soldiers, do you not agree, Moeris?” Miltiades suggested.

“It would be our honour;” Moeris nodded.

“Good, then it is settled. Callimachus shall command the right, Moeris the left and Themistocles and Aristides the tribes in the centre. Gather your troops, I want the left and right flanks in place as soon as it is dark.”

Themistocles and Aristides bowed to Miltiades before shouting orders to their men and jogging off. I remained where I was, Callimachus doing the same. The grin remained on his face, though it had softened fractionally. No doubt nervous at the approaching battle. In contrast, blood heated my veins and the familiar surge of fire coursed through me at the thought of felling Persian soldiers.

“Just so there is no misunderstanding between us,” Callimachus began, Miltiades and Moeris stiffening slightly as he spoke again. “I do not disagree with your tactics, though I cannot imagine that a woman could ever be as fine a soldier as a man.”

“Enough Callimachus,” Miltiades insisted, pulling the other man away.

“You are wrong,” I called. I watched him go before turning and heading towards Lysistratos and our soldiers. I had barely taken two steps when Moeris put a hand on my shoulder and stopped me.

“You strategise as your Mumma did; never afraid to alter initial plans should the need arise. She would be proud,” he murmured, loud enough so only I would hear as men rushed about either side of us.

“Thank you,” I replied with a curt nod.

I attempted to step around him but his grip tightened. “You also have a tendency to allow noblemen in positions of power to get under your skin. Callimachus is neither your enemy, nor your grandfather, Agrias,” he warned.

“I did not say he was,” I growled.

“Then stop acting as though it was so.” Moeris finally dropped his hand and I clamped down hard on the many retorts I wanted to make, turning instead on my heel and slamming my helmet
down as I took off towards the left flanking soldiers. I would deal with Callimachus and his insinuations later, for now: I had Persians to kill and a battle to win, which would prove my words and my worth without a doubt.
“At them!” Miltiades’ clear voice cut through the muted dawn light, reaching us on the left flank as the middle ranks of Aristogoras and Themistocles’ men charged towards the Persian cavalry. The Persians were assembled in a long line across the beach, the yellow cloth on their heads and beneath their white cuirasses obvious even from where I stood hidden in the trees. They were staggered in their approach; the centred cavalry closest, soldiers and archers to their left and right, the last line of men finding their sandals on the sand. Those who held no bows were equipped instead with axes or short spears and long shields to protect them from neck to knee. The Athenian tribes raced forward in broken ranks, their war cry of Eleleu! Eleleu! startling a flock of birds above us. The Persian cavalry let them get close, unsure what to make of the forward press, their horses nickering and tossing their heads about, impatient to be let loose on them. When the Greek soldiers reached a distance of six-hundred-and-fifty feet from the enemy, they slowed, re-forming into a tight phalanx, shields protecting the men beside them, their long spears poking out between.

Miltiades and Moeris had calculated that the Persian archers’ range would be most effective within a stadia, hence the re-formation of the phalanx once they reached that distance. The Persians seemed to realise what we had done and their own command was given for the cavalry to charge. They held their shields and the reins of their steeds in one hand, a spear in the other.

The rear guard brought their bows up and the arrows started to pour down onto the Athenian soldiers; their shields protecting them well from the onslaught. I impatiently watched on, fingers squeezing my sword in one hand and the leather straps of my shield in the other, wishing Miltiades had entrusted me and our men to face the first wave of Persians.

The cavalry were within striking distance of the soldiers, but just as I had suggested, the phalanx broke apart, letting them pass through. Re-forming, the soldiers awaited the Persians again, and I prayed I had been right to think they would turn to face them, not simply ride up the valley and along the path to Athens. When they drew their mounts up and forced them to turn, I blew out a long breath, my fingers gripping my weapons tightly again. The second wave of Persians began to slowly move forward, no doubt eager to take advantage of the turned backs of the Athenians. The cavalry burst through the open lines once more, and there was no mistaking the angry cries from the riders, or the step back the second wave took.

“Form up and move,” Moeris’ order came.

I scuttled along, the Plataeans and Trachians either side of me, bursting out of the tree line and placing ourselves in the agreed dense formation near the gathered Athenians, who once again waited for the cavalry.

This time when the cavalry charged, the soldiers did not move to the side, the sound of horses against shields and wooden shield against wooden shield announcing the battle had really started. “Wait,” Moeris commanded, feeling the excitement in the men around us, just like I did.

He watched the Persians in the distance, their archers continuing to fire their arrows at the Athenians, even though their own soldiers were now battling them. Horses were struck down but it was difficult to see if it were by enemy attack, or their own. The cavalry soldiers jumped from their steeds, drawing weapons and pushing the phalanx back. Those Athenians at the very front who were still able to stand after their collision with the horses, staggered around the battling Persians. To the Persians on the beach it would look like they were deserting their positions. I
knew better – they made their way to the rear of the men, drawing the Persians further up into the ranks of fresher, unharmed soldiers without them realising.

When the soldiers at the back of the phalanx began to press forward, truly engaging the Persian cavalry, Moeris gave the order. “Now!” he cried.

As one, we rushed into the fray, catching the Persians on our side by surprise as I was sure Callimachus and his men were doing on the other. Bracing myself for the impact, I slammed my shield into the nearest Persian archer, his head wrenching back with the force, before flopping forward again as I drove my sword into his stomach. I allowed a delighted scream to escape, a shiver running down my spine as the heat in my blood ignited and my instincts and hatred for the yellow capped men took over. I wrenched my sword free and looked for my next victim, my sword finding two necks and a chest before it met any resistance. Any structure the Persians had had was completely gone now we had caught them unawares.

With hot, thick blood coating my hand and forearm, a huge Persian stepped up to meet my blade. With his short spear he blocked my attack, the axe in his other hand finding the throat of the soldier beside me. He did not carry a shield, but then it did not look like he needed one – his practised slashing finding the flesh of those around him with every wielding. He was no archer; he was a true Persian soldier, trained and ready for battle. I watched him carefully, noting his strengths and his weaknesses. By sheer force he could overpower me so I would have to be smarter.

The archers had been taken down with our initial advance, so I could not hope to draw the Persian before me into the line of their arrows. But I was not unfamiliar with a bow, thanks to the training area back in Trachis and Mumma’s inclusion of the skill when she designed the run. If I found myself on the ground and without my normal weapons, there were plenty of bows and arrows for me to gather and fire before the Persian realised I could use them.

We circled one another, watching, waiting for the other to make the first move. Another of his kin arrived beside him. The Persian pushed him aside roughly, obviously wanting me all to himself. That suited me fine. Bodies fell around us but nobody approached or intervened again, concentrating instead on their own injuries or enemies.

It was the Persian who broke our stand-off first; thrusting his spear at my side. I knocked it away easily with my shield, but it left me open for him to bring his axe down towards my head and shoulder. I ducked out of the way, one edge of his weapon catching the back of my helmet and propelling me forward. I went with the blow, allowing the face of my shield to meet the ground as I used the solid base to kick up with my legs and catch the Persian in the throat. His head snapped back and, using my sword hand to steady myself, I pushed back onto my feet, my sword slashing across his unguarded chest.

His linen cuirass was no match for my sharpened blade and blood bloomed out of the wound a moment later. He staggered, but remained on his feet, anger and pain setting his features in a nasty grimace. He planted his feet, challenging me to come at him. I did, using both my shield and sword as defensive and offensive weapons at the same time, just as I had trained. All sounds of the battle faded away and my weapons felt weightless in my hands. I moved with speed and skill, finding the Persian’s flesh more than once and managing to knock both his spear and sword from his hands.

Still he did not waiver in his intensity to win and clenched his fingers into fists, ready to meet my attack. I grinned and raised my head, our eyes meeting and holding. I sheathed my sword and dropped my shield to the ground. If he was unarmored, then I would be as well. For now. He
returned my smile. I took a step back, feeling the bow beneath my sandal and knowing an arrow lay beside it.

The Persian charged and I stood to meet him, my body ready to react when he got close enough. He put his head down as he ran, shoulder turned to catch me square in the chest. I waited until he was almost on me, then crouched down, catching his legs as they sailed over and ensuring he landed hard in the dirt behind me. I gathered the bow, slid the arrow into place and fired it into his throat as he rolled to his feet. He was dead before he hit the ground again.

I looked for Lysistratos, finding him as he dispatched of the soldier he fought. He caught my eye and gave me a curt nod and a wicked smile – a silent acknowledgement of another step towards avenging my mothers, and his wife’s parents. I returned both and threw the bow aside, gathering my shield and pulling out my sword, leaving the Athenian soldiers to the last of the Persians on our side.

I ran towards the Persian cavalry. Their horses had fled, some remaining nearby, but most near the base of the mountains on either side of the path. I started to hack at their unprotected backs and legs with renewed ferocity, satisfaction growing with each enemy soldier’s life I ended. As more of the Athenian army joined me, the Persians started to panic; realising how far they had been drawn into our trap. They shouted unfamiliar words but the meaning was obvious: retreat. The Athenians let a number of them do just that, laughing at their cowardice before giving chase and putting them down on the short grassed area, or on the sand if they were lucky enough to make it that far. None of them made it to the boats but it became obvious that they had not sent all of their soldiers ashore. At least half of their fleet pulled anchor and were well into the bay by the time we had slaughtered most of the remaining Persians.

I caught one man on the sand, ripping the yellow cloth from his head and holding him up by the hair, my sword across his throat to stop him squirming in my grip. “Where are they going?” I wondered if he would even understand my question. He shook his head, more of those unfamiliar words spilling from his lips.

Moeris arrived beside me, taking the man so I could stand in front of him and ask my question again. “Your boats,” I said, pointing to them with my sword. “Where are they sailing to? Are they going back to Persia or to fight somewhere else?” I mimicked rowing and battle. Finally he understood what I was asking.

“Cape Sunium,” he replied clearly.

“Gods,” Moeris murmured. “We have to get to the Cape before they do, or else Athens shall fall.”

The man tried to reach the spear lying in the hand of one of his fallen comrades nearby. I pressed the tip of my sword to his throat, lifting it so our eyes met. I shook my head and he returned his hand to his side.

“Callimachus and another of the generals, Stesilaos, are dead, but we shall have enough to stand against them at Sunium,” Moeris said.

I nodded. “Warn Miltiades and the other Generals, I will collect our soldiers and meet you on the path.”

He released the Persian and before he could move again, I drove my sword through the pathetically thin layers of the linen cuirass and stopped his heart.

Lysistratos arrived beside us, puffing, helmet pushed up and revealing a cut above his eyebrow, blood streaming down the side of his face. “One of the Athenians got a Persian to talk; their boats are headed for Cape Sunium,” he said.

“We know,” I told him, nodding at the dead Persian at my feet.
“You believe him?” Lysistratos asked.
“What advantage would they have to lie?” I shrugged. “It is logical given that their target has always been Athens.”

Lysistratos nodded. “Perhaps it wise for some of us to remain here to make sure it is not a ruse. Once we have fled to Sunium, the fleet could sail back and take Athens from the north, while we await them in the south.”

I opened my mouth to object, wanting to take down the remaining Persians at Sunium, but Lysistratos shook his head slightly and I did not argue any further, or try to convince him otherwise. There was something else going on in his head.

“It is a good plan,” Moeris nodded. “Have our soldiers remain here. I shall ensure thirty or so ranks of Athenians stay as well. I shall go to Sunium. Whoever encounters the Persians first shall send word to the other and we can meet again either here or at Sunium and finish what we have begun with them.”

“Very well,” I nodded.

Moeris offered his hand to Lysistratos and me, both of us taking it in the familiar grip. “Stay alive, for I have heard the Athenian celebrations are not to be missed.”

“And you,” Lysistratos replied with a grin. Moeris gave us a final nod and turned, dodging the fallen bodies as he made his way to the gathered Athenian Generals.

“I knew he would want to go to Sunium,” Lysistratos muttered when the commander of our army was out of earshot.

“So why are we not joining them?” I asked, turning back to him.

“I received word that Eumelia has birthed our son,” he replied, a smile bursting forth.

“That is wonderful news,” I grinned, ensuring the other soldiers were sufficiently occupied before I reached out and hugged my friend. “They are both well?”

“Yes. The messenger arrived overnight with the news. Our quick victory here, along with the opportunity for Moeris to be occupied elsewhere, ensures we can return to see them and be back in Athens before he realises we have gone.”

“Would it not be smarter for me to have gone with Moeris so he was not suspicious?”

“He would be more suspicious if we agreed to be split up during an impending battle; we have trained together too hard and for too long to trust anyone else to be protecting our sides. This way, should we be wrong and the Persians return to the bay, Kleitos can cover for us with Moeris. But I do not think they shall return here, do you?”

“No. I saw many run towards the marsh and succumb to it, as well as fall by our swords. Sunium does not have such dangers so it would make sense for them to attempt victory there. When do we leave?”

“At nightfall. We shall assist in burying the dead Athenians on the battlefield to ensure the other soldiers recall us being here in case it is warranted, but as soon as it is dark overhead, we shall go.” I nodded in reply, happy for the news my friend had received, and flattered he wanted me with him when he returned. “I wish Nikomachos was here with us. He would have enjoyed our defeat of the Persians,” Lysistratos mused.

I nodded before replying. “You still think of him often?”

“Yes. And though Eumelia does not speak of it, I know she does as well. I just wish I had answers for her. I wish I knew why he never joined us the day of the induction, and where he and Pamphilos have been all these winters.”

I shrugged, having silently also wondered the same on many an occasion. “Unless we see him again, I doubt we will ever know.”
“I know,” Lysistratos nodded. “Perhaps when my time in the army is done, I shall take Eumelia and our son and look for them.”
“A fine idea, and one we can talk about later. For now, we have soldiers to bury and your son to meet.”
“Indeed,” he grinned.
I let Lysistratos lead the way back to our men. We could only hope the Persians kept to their word and engaged Moeris and the Athenians at Sunium, otherwise our commander would punish us severely for leaving for such a reason.
And I would rue the opportunity not to face the Persian scum again.