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YELLOW

MATIAS TRAVIESO-DIAZ

MY NAME IS SCYLAX OF CARYANDA, AND AM KNOWN THROUGHOUT HELLAS AS "THE EXPLORER" FOR, IN THE COURSE OF OVER FIFTY YEARS, I HAVE TRAVELED TO ALL CORNERS OF THE KNOWN WORLD, MUCH OF THE TIME AT THE BEHEST OF MY PATRON, EMPEROR DAREIOS. I HAVE MADE IT MY PRACTICE TO WRITE SUMMARY ACCOUNTS OF THE MOST INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS IN MY TRAVELS ON WOODEN TABLETS SUCH AS THE ONE I AM USING. THIS IS THE TENTH TABLET, AND TEN BEING A PROPITIOUS NUMBER, IT IS FITTING THAT IT CONTAINS A DESCRIPTION OF A WONDROUS STORY THAT WAS RELATED TO ME ON A RECENT TRIP INTO THE LAND OF THE SCYTHIANS.

THE SCYTHIANS ARE A NOMADIC PEOPLE THAT DWELL IN THE GRASSY, TREELESS LANDS THAT EXTEND IN BOTH DIRECTIONS FROM THE NORTHERN SHORE OF THE PONTUS EUXINUS, ALL THE WAY TO THE KAZAKH REGION OF ASIA. SINCE THEY HAVE NO CITIES BUT LIVE IN WAGONS AND TENTS, I CANNOT NAME WHERE THE STORY I AM ABOUT TO RELATE OCCURRED. THE BEST I CAN SAY IS THAT MY ENCOUNTER WITH THIS WILD, WARRIOR-LIKE PEOPLE TOOK PLACE NORTH OF THE RANGE OF THE KAUKASOS MOUNTAINS, BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF DAREIOS' EMPIRE.

I WAS TRAVELING ON HORSEBACK AND, AFTER THE ARDUOUS CROSSING OF THE MOUNTAINS, FOUND MYSELF COMING TO A TENT AND WAGON ENCAMPMENT BY A LARGE RIVER. IT WAS CLEARLY A MAJOR GATHERING PLACE FOR THESE BARBARIANS, FOR I ENCOUNTERED A HOST OF FULLY ARMED MEN, PATROLLING THE BOUNDS OF THEIR COMPOUND, CARRYING THEIR CUSTOMARY BOW AND ARROW CASES, IRON SPEARS, AXES, AND SHORT SWORDS, AND THE DAGGERS THEY CALL AKĪNAKĒS. THIS GROUP BELONGED TO THE SKŌLOTOI, THE MAIN SCYTHIAN TRIBE THAT RULES THE WHOLE OF SCYTHIA. THERE WERE NUMEROUS HEAD OF CATTLE AND HORSES UNDER THE CARE OF THE TRIBE'S WOMEN, SINCE MEN SPENT MOST OF THEIR LIVES ON HORSEBACK, MAKING WAR AGAINST OTHER RACES OF BARBARIANS AND EVEN, AT TIMES, AGAINST CIVILIZED PEOPLE.

THE CHIEFTAIN OF THIS SETTLEMENT WAS AWAY ON SOME CAMPAIGN, SO I WAS RECEIVED BY HIS ONE OF HIS CONSORTS, WHO AGREED TO SEE ME ONCE I INDICATED TO ONE OF HER GUARDS THAT I WAS AN ENVOY OF EMPEROR DAREIOS THE GREAT, WHO HAD DEFEATED THE SCYTHIANS IN THE RECENT PAST AND NOW OCCUPIES MUCH OF THE SCYTHIAN LANDS TO THE EAST.

THE LADY WAS NO LONGER IN THE FULL BLOOM OF YOUTH, AND HAD A DISFIGURING MOLE PROMINENTLY ON DISPLAY ON ONE OF HER CHEEKS. HER MANNER WAS FRIENDLY, HOWEVER, AND SHE GREETED ME GRACIOUSLY AND INVITED ME INTO HER WAGON AND BEGAN SERVING ME PIECES OF UNCOOKED HORSE MEAT AND WASHING THEM DOWN WITH KUMYS (FERMENTED MILK LIQUOR) AND UNDILUTED RED WINE, WHICH WE DRANK OUT OF THE TOPS OF ENEMIES' SKULLS THAT HAD BEEN MADE INTO DRINKING BOWLS.

AS WE ATE AND DRANK, SHE RELATED TALES OF THE LIVES OF THE MEMBERS OF HER TRIBE AND THEIR MANY MILITARY CONQUESTS.

WE BOTH BECAME SOMEWHAT INEBRIATED, SHE MORE THAN I. AT ONE POINT, SHE DECLARED: "I ROSE FROM MY EARLY LIFE AS A PEASANT TO BECOME A CONSORT OF IDANTHURSOS, RULER OF ALL OUR PEOPLES. MY ASCENSION TO A HIGHER RANK WAS A REWARD FOR AN ACT OF PERSONAL SACRIFICE I PERFORMED. IT WAS A HARD TASK, BUT I UNDERTOOK IT FOR THE GOOD OF OUR TRIBE."

I COULD NOT REFRAIN FROM ASKING: "WHAT SACRIFICE WAS THAT?"

SHE ANSWERED MY QUESTION WITH ONE OF HER OWN: "HAVE YOU EVER HEAR OF A TARAND?"

I SHOOK MY HEAD.

"A TARAND IS AN ANIMAL AS BIG AS A BULL, WITH A HEAD LIKE A STAG'S, CROWNED BY LARGE, POINTY, BRANCHED HORNS. IT HAS CLOVEN FEET, LONG THICK HAIR LIKE THAT OF A BEAR, AND A SKIN ALMOST AS HARD AS ARMOR. ITS MAIN PECULIARITY IS THAT IT ADOPTS THE COLOR OF THE THINGS THAT SURROUND IT, SO THAT IT IS ESSENTIALLY INVISIBLE UNLESS IT CHOOSES TO DISPLAY A PARTICULAR COLOR."

"THAT SEEMS LIKE A VERY INTERESTING BEAST" I REPLIED. "I WOULD LOVE TO SEE ONE."

"TARANDS ARE ONLY RARELY SEEN IN THESE PARTS, FOR THEIR NUMBERS ARE FEW AND THEIR ABILITY TO BLEND WITH THEIR SURROUNDINGS CONCEALS THEIR PRESENCE. THEY ARE ALSO SHY; DESPITE THEIR MASSIVE SIZE, MOST TARANDS CONTENT THEMSELVES WITH GRAZING IN THE MEADOWS, OUTSIDE AREAS OF HUMAN HABITATION."

"WHY ARE WE THEN TALKING ABOUT TARANDS?"

"SEVERAL YEARS AGO, THROUGH A CAPRICE OF AHRIMAN OR SOME OTHER EVIL SPIRIT, A TARAND APPEARED IN OUR LAND THAT WAS UNLIKE ANY OTHER. IT WAS LARGER AND MORE POWERFUL THAN THOSE OF ITS KIND, AND WHEN IT CAME UPON OUR ENCAMPMENTS IT WOULD ATTACK AND DEVOUR OUR HORSES AND CATTLE, WHOSE HALF-EATEN CARCASSES WOULD BE FOUND STREWN ALL OVER OUR FIELDS. OUR MEN ORGANIZED HUNTING PARTIES SEEKING TO DISPATCH THE BEAST, BUT WERE UNABLE TO DO SO BECAUSE OF THE DIFFICULTY IN SEEING THE TARAND UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE AND THE MONSTER WAS RIGHT NEXT TO THEM AND WAS ABLE TO ATTACK THEM. WE LOST MANY BRAVE WARRIORS THAT WAY."

“SO, WHAT DID YOU DO?”

“OUR PRIESTS OPINED THAT THE SACRIFICE OF A MAIDEN WOULD BE NECESSARY TO APPEASE THE TARAND AND DRIVE HIM AWAY. THAT CREATED A PROBLEM, BECAUSE AMONG US SCYTHIANS A GIRL BECOMES BETROTHED AT A VERY EARLY AGE, AND ASKING A YOUNG WOMAN TO GIVE UP HER LIFE TO BENEFIT THE TRIBE IS A GRIEVOUS OFFENSE AGAINST THE WARRIOR SHE IS BOUND TO MARRY. CONSEQUENTLY, ALL NAMES THAT WERE RAISED WERE CHALLENGED BY THE GIRL, HER FAMILY, AND THE INTENDED HUSBAND.”

“THE CANDIDATE SELECTION REMAINED UNRESOLVED UNTIL SOMEONE MENTIONED MY NAME. I WAS KNOWN TO HAVE ENJOYED THE PLEASURES OF THE FLESH SINCE MY EARLY YEARS, AND HAD GONE THROUGH MY YOUTH UNCLAIMED BY ANY MAN BECAUSE OF MY APPEARANCE, SO SELECTING ME FOR THE SACRIFICE WAS LESS PROBLEMATIC. ON THE OTHER HAND, I WAS NO LONGER A MAIDEN. AT THE END, EXPEDIENCY WON THE DAY AND I WAS SELECTED FOR THE SACRIFICE.”

“DID YOU CONSENT?”

“A LONE WOMAN CANNOT PREVAIL AGAINST THE WILL OF A BAND OF FRIGHTENED MEN, AND I RELUCTANTLY HAD TO YIELD TO THEIR DECISION TO OFFER ME TO THE BEAST. SO, AN ALTAR IN THE FORM OF A BED OF FRAGRANT BRANCHES, LEAVES AND FLOWERS WAS CONSTRUCTED IN AN OPEN AREA IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR ENCAMPMENT, AND I WAS MADE TO LIE ON IT FROM SUNSET TO SUNRISE, IN EXPECTATION OF A VISIT BY THE TARAND. THIS WAS REPEATED TIME AND AGAIN UNTIL, IN THE FOURTH NIGHT, THERE WERE LOUD POUNDINGS ON THE GROUND AS AN UNSEEN BEAST APPROACHED THE SPOT WHERE I LAY. I WAS ANXIOUS WITH DREAD AND ALMOST ROSE TO ESCAPE; ONLY FEAR OF BEING SHOT TO DEATH BY THE HIDDEN WARRIORS STATIONED AROUND THE CLEARING FORCED ME TO LAY STILL AND AWAIT MY PROBABLE DEMISE.”

“I FINALLY WAS ABLE TO DETECT THE APPROACHING MONSTER, OR AT LEAST PART OF IT. I SAW A VERY LARGE ROD THAT SHONE BRIGHT YELLOW UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE MOON, LIKE A GIGANTIC BANANA FROM INDIA. IT HOVERED ABOVE MY HEAD AND WAS CLEARLY MOVING IN MY DIRECTION. IT TOOK ME A FEW MOMENTS TO MAKE SENSE OF THE THING THAT WAS DRAWING THREATENINGLY CLOSE; THEN, REALIZATION CREPT INTO MY SENSES AND I UNDERSTOOD WHAT I WAS SEEING: A MONSTROUS MALE MEMBER, UNRECOGNIZABLE BECAUSE OF ITS INHUMAN LENGTH AND GIRTH, DRIPPING PRECUM AS IT CAME TOWARDS ME.”

“I ROSE FROM THE ALTAR AND SAT, CROSS-LEGGED, WATCHING IN STUPEFIED HORROR AS THE TARAND CAME TO A HALT ABOVE ME...”

...I STILL COULD ONLY SEE ITS FLOATING PENIS, BUT I WAS ENGULFED BY A DETESTABLE ANIMAL SMELL THAT MADE ME RETCH. FINALLY, THE MEMBER DESCENDED SLOWLY TOWARDS MY FACE, AND RUBBED IT COARSELY. THE TARAND WAS MAKING CLEAR WHAT IT WANTED.”

“I WAS NOT SURE WHETHER IT SOUGHT TO HAVE INTERCOURSE WITH ME, BUT I WAS CERTAIN THAT SUCH AN ACT WOULD KILL ME IN A MOST HORRIBLE MANNER AND HAD TO BE AVOIDED. THEREFORE, I RESORTED TO A LOVEMAKING TECHNIQUE WITH WHICH I WAS FAMILIAR. I RAISED MY ARM SLOWLY, NOT TO STARTLE THE TARAND, AND HELD ITS PENIS IN MY HAND AND BROUGHT IT TO MY LIPS, WHEREUPON I KISSED IT VERY GENTLY. THE BEAST SHUDDERED AND ITS MEMBER, WHICH WAS ALREADY TWICE THE SIZE OF A HUMAN WARRIOR’S, SHOT OUT TO AN EVEN LARGER SIZE. I LICKED THE PRECUM GLISTENING ON ITS SURFACE, AND HOLDING IT IN MY HAND, INSERTED THE MEMBER IN MY MOUTH. I PRESSED THE SHAFT WITH MY LIPS AND TOOK IT OUT SLOWLY, MAKING THE ANIMAL SHUDDER WITH ANTICIPATION.”

“I THEN PROCEEDED TO LICK THE MEMBER UP AND DOWN ITS ENTIRE LENGTH, AND CARESSSED ITS END WITH MY TONGUE BEFORE REINSERTING IT IN MY MOUTH. THE TARAND POUNDED THE GROUND WITH ITS HOOVES, RELEASING A CLOUD OF DIRT INTO THE AIR, AND ISSUED A HOARSE UTTERANCE THAT SEEMED BOTH A PROTEST AND A SHOUT OF PLEASURE. I PUT ABOUT HALF OF THE MEMBER’S LENGTH INTO MY DISTENDED MOUTH AND STARTED SUCKING, BEING CAREFUL NOT TO BITE INTO THE ROUGH FLESH. I WAS IN NO POSITION TO OBSERVE THE BODY OF THE BEAST IN ITS ENTIRETY, BUT IT SEEMED THAT IT WAS NO LONGER CHANGING COLORS AND THE HAIRS COVERING ITS BODY HAD ASSUMED A VISIBLE REDDISH HUE, AS IF BLOOD WAS COURSING VIOLENTLY THROUGH THE BEAST’S VEINS.”

“I THEN PUT THE WHOLE ROD INTO MY MOUTH, AND PRESSED IT TO THE VERY END, AS IF I WERE GOING TO SWALLOW IT UP. I WAS CLOSE TO GAGGING, AND WOULD HAVE RETCHED IF MY FULLY OCCUPIED THROAT HAD ALLOWED IT. THE TARAND SHOOK VIOLENTLY AND DISCHARGED A BITTER FLUID INTO THE BACK OF MY THROAT WHICH IMMEDIATELY OVERFLOWED MY ORAL CAVITY AND BEGAN DRIPPING OUT OF THE CORNERS OF MY MOUTH.”

“IT WAS THE FOULEST SUBSTANCE I EVER TASTED, AND I FINALLY MANAGED TO THROW IT UP, TOGETHER WITH THE WHOLE CONTENTS OF MY STOMACH; ABOVE ME, THE TARAND WAS MEWLING WITH WHAT I ASSUME MUST HAVE BEEN PLEASURE – A SOUND THAT TURNED INTO SHEETS OF PAIN AS A CLOUD OF ARROWS PIERCED ITS IMMENSE BODY. I HAD THE PRESENCE OF MIND TO QUICKLY CRAWL TO THE SIDE AS THE ARCHERS IN MY CONSORT’S PERSONAL GUARD PELTED THE BEAST WITH VOLLEY AFTER VOLLEY OF PROJECTILES.”

"I MUST HAVE FAINTED, FOR MY NEXT RECOLLECTION IS ONE OF BEING CARRIED AWAY BY TWO SOLDIERS. MY LAST LOOK AT THE CLEARING WHERE I HAD LAIN SHOWED THE TARAND, TWISTING IN AGONY AS A DOZEN ARROWS PROTRUDED FROM ITS BODY. THE BEAST WAS BEING HACKED TO PIECES BY SEVERAL MEN BRANDISHING BATTLE AXES. BLOOD, BITS OF FLESH, THE TARAND'S DISCHARGES, VOMIT, AND GORE LITTERED THE GROUND. IT WAS CARNAGE ON A SCALE I HAD NEVER WITNESSED BEFORE AND HOPE NOT TO EVER SEE AGAIN."

SHE MUST HAVE OBSERVED THE DISGUST SHOWING ON MY FACE ONCE HER RECITATION WAS OVER, FOR SHE SMILED BEATIFICALLY AND ADDED: "SO, I ACCOMPLISHED TWO GOOD DEEDS THAT NIGHT: I SAVED MY PEOPLE FROM THE THREAT FROM A FEROCIOUS BEAST, AND GAVE A POOR ANIMAL ONE FINAL PLEASURE BEFORE ITS DEMISE." SHE PAUSED FOR A MOMENT AND ADDED: "AND, ALTOGETHER, IT WAS NOT AS DISTASTEFUL AS SOME COUPLINGS I HAVE BEEN FORCED TO ENDURE THROUGHOUT THE YEARS." WITH THAT, HER EXPERIENCED THROAT FINISHED THE REST OF HER CUP OF RED WINE IN A SINGLE GULP.

I ASKED TO SEE THE REMAINS OF THE TARAND BUT SHE INDICATED THAT THE DEAD ANIMAL HAD BEEN CAST INTO THE RIVER THAT FLOWED BY THE SCYTHIAN CAMP AND HAD BEEN CARRIED AWAY BY THE CURRENT. THUS, I HAVE NO WAY TO CORROBORATE THE LADY'S STORY, BUT I OFFER IT AS PROOF OF THE SAVAGE AND DEBAUCHED NATURE OF THE SCYTHIANS AND THE WILDNESS OF THE LANDS THEY OCCUPY. PERHAPS SOMEDAY ANOTHER TRAVELER WILL BE ABLE TO CONFIRM THE EXISTENCE OF THIS FABULOUS ANIMAL OR DEMONSTRATE THAT THE LURID TALE THE WOMAN RELATED TO ME AROSE FROM HER DEBASED IMAGINATION, FANNED BY THE BARBAROUS TRADITIONS OF HER PEOPLE.