

Ancient FanFiction

The Uluburun Shipwreck by Pinar Durgun

Part 1:

"Careful!" yells the big man holding a wooden tablet, as the young boy carries the bright red pots into the cargo hold. The intricate designs are good indicators of the high quality of the olive oil they are filled with. I pass the men smiling, holding two heavy stone anchors.

"Are those the last ones?" says the big man looking at his wooden writing tablet.

"I just got here, man! No, the rest are by the dock."

"Well let's get to it!" he says (encouragingly but also nervously).

I feel the warm Mediterranean breeze on my face as I step onto the deck. After spending four days on land, I feel wobbly being on the ship. Still, the feeling is comforting as it is familiar. The deck is getting busy with merchants loading goods. I put down the anchors to open the hatch and jump into the hold. It is already filled with stacks of copper we bought from the copper island last week, baskets filled with precious stones, glass ingots, and colorful textiles. Soon the baker's wife will bring the freshly baked loaves of bread, and we can stack them in the baskets at the top next to the dried fish. This will last us until our stop on the northwestern coast.

After about three trips to the dock, I manage to load all the anchors in the hold. I look at them and the new ones we already had from before. Every trip we lose at least two of these trying to drop anchor at the shore, especially on the northwestern coast. The coasts there are tricky. It gets shallow unexpectedly, and there are lots of sharp cliffs and rocks that you can't see until you feel them hit the hull. The water is the most beautiful on that coast though, it is the color of the glass ingots we sell.

I get out of the dark cargo hold and try to get used to the light again. It is one of those perfect mornings for sailing into the Great Green. I smell the salt of the sea, which makes me feel hungry and thirsty at the same time. I decide to head to the harbor to get a nice quick breakfast before everyone is done with the loading.

The waitress comes over as I enter the small quiet tavern. There are only a couple people in here this early.



"We have the freshest fish cakes" she says with a forced smile, "My father just made them." "No fish please," I say politely, trying to make it clear that I am not one of those rude sailors who says nasty things to young waitresses like her.

"I will be eating so much fish in the next couple of days," I say, smiling to assure her that I don't mean disrespect to her father's fish cakes.

"I will bring you a chicken pie and some pomegranate juice then. I assume you won't have chickens or fruits on board?"

"Great suggestion," I say. She turns around and rushes into the kitchen. I sit down at a table by the door.

When she is back, she puts down the delicious-looking chicken pie with fresh rosemary on it, I put my face closer to smell it.

"You must love chicken," she says in a friendly voice.

"I love rosemary," I say. "It reminds me of home."

She leaves without saying a word. I appreciate eating alone quietly without being questioned by any strangers or acquaintances. I eat my chicken pie and wash it down with the tasty sweet and sour pomegranate juice. Then I put my hand into my pocket to find some scraps of silver to pay for the delicious breakfast and this nice service. My fingers feel the smooth edges of a small round object that I bought the other day for ... way too much silver.

"It belongs to the queen of the south" said the guy I met while drinking at the tavern. "I can't sell it anywhere because then they will ask me where I got it".

"Well, where did you get it?" I asked.

"Ohhh, you got me!" he laughed.

I admit, it was definitely an impulse buy, or maybe a poor decision made because of too much alcohol, but this object was definitely worth it. A small golden scarab with a text written underneath that I know came from the south, but I don't know how to read it. I am better at reading the wedge-impressed clay tablets.



"Here you go!" says the waitress nervously, as she drops a bundle of rosemary on the table. "I pick them from the mountains every week."

"Oh... " I am caught by surprise. "Thank you... that is very kind of you."
SNIFFFFFF.

"Oh so nice..." I say, and she gives me a genuine smile for the first time. I get up and leave all the silver scraps I have left in my pocket on the table. It is more than enough, but you can't really pay enough for kindness. I will make more when we make a stop in a couple of days. "Thank you very much!" I yell as I leave the tavern.

I put some of the rosemary leaves underneath my shirt and some in my pockets, as I get on the boat.

Part 2:

"Offf," I huff, wiping my forehead sweat on my linen sleeve.

The sun is high, and the rosemary leaves are itching me now that I am all sweaty. I pull the water gourd attached to my belt and chug the water.

"It is *yumid* heavy hot," says the foreman with an accent, "never a good sign that is". The big man nods in agreement.

"The breeze is uneven too," notices another man looking up to the sails.

I chew on some dried fish for lunch, sitting by the hatch with my back against the mast. The heat and all the meat in my belly is making me sleepy. I close my eyes to take a quick nap.

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"Lower it, lower it!", yells the foreman stepping right next to my head. I wake up. The sun is gone but it is not dark. As I sit up, the strong wind on my sweaty face feels good. Then I quickly stand up to understand what is going on. Two of the men are holding onto the sails trying to lower them down, as the wind stubbornly fights them. I rush to help them, and we contain the sails.

"Did we offend the storm god?!" shouts the young boy scared from the other corner.



I don't know why, but I put my hand in my pocket and rub the golden scarab. Touching its smooth edges comforts me somehow. I imagine myself holding the hand of the powerful queen of the south who used to hold the scarab in her hands. It doesn't really matter if the seller guy lied to me. This is a beautiful thing, and I now own it, whether it belonged to a queen or not.

"I am sure we didn't." I respond to the boy putting my arm around his shoulders.

"You made the anchor offering yesterday at the temple, yes?" I ask the big guy who is clutching his tablets in his hands. "Yes, yes of course I did. Two of them: one for our storm god and one for theirs." He points with his head to the two men who are now sitting tired from fighting the sails.

I look at the boy's concerned face and remember the jars he was carrying earlier. I run down the hatch to check on them. All this rocking, I think, I hope the boy stacked them properly. And just as I thought, the divider was shiny with the olive oil spilled from two broken jars. I find an empty jar and leave it under the divider to collect the dripping oil. I create little buffers between the jars using hay and bread baskets.

I pull myself up the hatch and walk across the deck which is now almost swinging from side to side. I sit down next to the big guy who is stacking his tablets in his bag.

"Well don't you smell nice?" He sniffs my shirt. "You smell like olive oil and rosemary."

"He would make a good roast then!" laughs the sail man on the port side. All the others join him. Except the guy at the helm.

"Visibility is low but we must be getting closer to the coast," he says.

"Which coast?" I ask looking around. It seems like we had at least 2 more days to travel.

"A coast" he responds. His face is wrinkled with worry and annoyance.

"Ok good, good" I hear the boy whisper to himself next to me.

We all sit in our corners quietly and nervously. The boat is still rocking from side to side. We are soaked from the rain and grumpy from the grey fog. All this swinging is making me sleepy.

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I wake up to the loudest noise I have ever heard. I roll over and get up from my corner. The deck is no longer rocking from side to side. It feels like we are wobbling up and down. I hear the boy screaming and the other men shouting as they wake. The deck is suddenly too close to the water. I look down from the deck and see a huge cliff stuck into the port side. The shore is close but the waves are huge.

I want to put my hand in my pocket, but instead, I grab a wooden crate, tie a rope to one handle and tie the other end around the boy's waist.

"Swim towards the shore," I say. "If you get tired hold on to the box. Do you understand me?" The boy's horrified face gets whiter as he turns towards the coast. He walks into the water holding the box.

The big guy is tying his tablet bag to his belt but he drops one of them while scrambling. "Dang!" he says and makes another knot to the bag. Then he jumps in the water carefully. The helmsman is already in the water swimming away from the boat. I put my hand in my pocket but I can't find the scarab among the wet rosemary leaves. I panic and look around. I am the only one left on the deck. The water is now past my ankles. I take a deep breath and jump into the water. Despite the harsh stormy weather, the water is the perfect temperature, and it soothes my tight muscles. The waves don't seem that high in the water either. As I swim towards the shore amongst the men and the sharp cliffs, I hear the crackling noise of the wood and for a second I worry about the oil jars...

Context:

The Uluburun shipwreck is the oldest excavated shipwreck in the world. The radiocarbon dating suggests that it is dated to the late 14th ce. BC. It was discovered on the southern coast of Turkey, but had a cargo that was very "international." There were materials and objects such as ivory, copper, tin, glass, pottery, lapis lazuli, amber, oil jars, indicating that the ship travelled across the Mediterranean as a merchant ship. The ship itself was about 15 meters long.

Resources:



Information about the underwater excavations:

<https://nauticalarch.org/projects/uluburun-late-bronze-age-shipwreck-excavation/>

Read more about the Uluburun Shipwreck here:

https://www.ancient.eu/Uluburun_Shipwreck/

More information about the Uluburun shipwreck:

<https://www.ancient-origins.net/ancient-places-asia/uluburun-one-oldest-and-wealthiest-shipwrecks-ever-discovered-001962>

Lesson Plan for the Uluburun shipwreck and trade in the Mediterranean:

https://www.archaeological.org/pdfs/education/cargoes/Cargoes_Chapter7.pdf

Bodrum Museum of Underwater:

<http://www.bodrum-museum.com/uluburun-ship-wreck-hall/>

Recreation of the Uluburun ship:

<https://www.uw360.asia/uluburun-oldest-shipwreck-in-the-world/>

Slide show of Uluburun finds:

<https://www.slideshare.net/fruittingles2605/uluburun-wreck>