

Robert F. Young, whose most recent appearances here were "Above This Race of Men" (January, 1976) and "Ghur R'hut Urr" (June, 1976), returns with a novella for us in which he retraces the events of Xenophon's Anabasis from a unique point of view, making it this time—

ALEC'S ANABIS

ROBERT F. YOUNG

Illustrated by Steve Fabian

WHEN HE SAW the driverless scythed chariot bearing down on him, "Alexander the Lacedaemonian" did the only thing he could do: he jaited.

Historically speaking, he had no more business being in its path than he had being in the Battle of Cunaxa.

He wouldn't have been in its path if "Doris the Boeotian" hadn't thrown a stone at the runaway horse, causing it to shy.

The year was 401 B.C., and Alec, who worked for a twenty-first century A. D. pastacular company named YoreCo, had been assigned the job of pasttaping the sequence of events re-corded by Xenophon in his *Anabasis*. Alec had journeyed to ancient Lydia via Transworld Timelines and, upon arriving in the capital city of Sardis, had joined the army of Greek mer-cenaries that comprised part of the heterogeneous forces Cyrus the Younger had mustered to overthrow his brother, Artaxerxes the King. From there, Alec had accompanied the Cyreian expedition through Lydia, Phrygia, Cilicia, Syria and Arabia, into Babylonia, where the Battle of Cunaxa took place.

When they heard that Artaxerxes's armies were preparing to attack, the ten thousand Greek mercenaries had formed their line near the east bank of the river Euphrates. The troops of Clearchus constituted the extremity of the right wing, those of Menon the extremity of the left. Numbered among the *taxeis*, or battalions, in be-tween was the *taxis* of Proxenus, among whose peltasts were included "Alexander the Lacedaemonian" and "Doris the Boeotian". On the Greeks' left were arrayed the rest of the Cyreian armies, commanded by Cyrus's best friend, Ariaeus. In the forefront, Cyrus himself headed some six hundred heavily armed horsemen.

Late in the afternoon Artaxerxes's armies could be seen advancing northward over the alluvial plain, preceded by a line of scythed chariots, so called because of the scythe-blades projecting obliquely from their axletrees.

Everything Alec's eyes and ears took in, the tiny tape recorder hidden in the ridge of his custom-made hel-met took in also. A slender dark-haired Athenian, whom he recognized as Xenophon, rode out and exchanged a few words with the would-be king, then rode back and rejoined the Greek ranks. A short while later, Cyrus pounded off with his cavalry toward the center of the Persian line. By this time, the opposing forces were less than an eighth of a mile apart.

Shouting "A! *la! la! la!*" at the tops of their voices, the Greeks began to advance. To augment the stentorian battle cry, those so equipped began banging their lances against their shields. The troops facing them were those of Tissaphernes, Artaxerxes's second in command. As one, they broke ranks and fled. The scythed-chariot drivers, no less intimidated, abandoned their vehicles and fol-lowed, and the terrified horses came plunging into the Greek lines, drag-ging the lethal carts behind them.

Alec, who had boned up on the battle before booking passage for Sar-dis, had known what was going to happen, and quickly got out of the path of the nearest horse and chariot. But he hadn't known

that "Doris the Boeotian" wanted him out of the picture. He still could have evaded the horse after the stone caused it to veer right, but the spinning scythe-blades were another matter. He *had* to jait—jump ahead in time—and he did.

Rematerializing on the plain approximately forty-eight hours in the future, he moved six paces to the left, tucked his javelin under his arm and, using his shield to deflect the warm wind blowing up from the south, lit one of the precious cigarettes he kept in an inner pocket of his leathern vest next to the compact cartridge case that held his micro-tapes. Water sparkled in the irrigation ditches that crisscrossed the region; the river Euphrates mirrored the blue Mesopotamian sky; distant trios and quartets of date palms formed ar-boreal bouquets. The Cyreian forces were long gone, and all that remained of Artaxerxes's armies were a few scattered wicker shields and a dead horse.

Jaiting was a common accomplishment in the twenty-first century: everybody could do it. In fact, karate contests incorporating it had replaced tennis as America's No. 1 spectator sport. Nevertheless, Alec didn't think that "Doris the Boeotian"—who, it was now clear, was an agent-assassin employed by either PastCo or AgoCo, YoreCo's two rival companies—would jump ahead in time and try to finish what he'd started. Jait-jbit contests involved two arenas, one present and one future, which, of course; was the reason for their popularity. But this was 401 B.C. If the Greeks were to see a pair of peltasts repeatedly disappearing and reappearing on the battlefield, there would be a lot of questions to answer, regardless of who the winner was, and perhaps an accusation of murder to contend with as well.

So Alec smoked his nicotineless, tarless, tobacco-flavored cigarette with a relatively untroubled mind, and not till it was half gone did he stub it out and stash the butt in the inner pocket of his vest. Then he jbited—jumped back in time—rematerializing in the Greek ranks 2.1250 seconds after he'd disappeared. Both horse and chariot missed him by a comfortable margin, "Doris the Boeotian's" face fell, and he and Alec set out with their fellow peltasts and hoplites in pursuit of Tissaphernes's fleeing forces.

Meanwhile, Cyrus led his cavalry into the phalanx guarding Artaxerxes, put it to rout and wounded Artaxerxes in the chest. It was Cyrus's final act in his ambitious bid for the throne, for a moment later a javelin struck him beneath the right eye, and he tumbled lifeless from his horse. The Persians cut off his head and his right hand. The moment Ariaeus heard the news he abandoned the Ten Thousand and fled northward with the rest of the Cyreian armies, Artaxerxes in pursuit.

THE GREEKS, busily engaged in trying to overtake Tissaphernes, knew nothing of the death of Cyrus nor of the retreat of Ariaelis, and Alec, mindful of the Ten Commandments of time travel, did not enlighten them. Victorious in their own right, they assumed that the battle was going in Cyrus's favor, and when Artaxerxes returned after plundering the Cyreian base camp and united his troops with those of Tissaphernes, they attacked the combined forces with such ferocity that Artaxerxes was forced to order a retreat.

The Ten Thousand followed their demoralized foe as far as a small village at the base of a hill. On the hill-top Artaxerxes's cavalry could be seen dispersing, and Clearchus, realizing that there was nothing to be gained in continuing the pursuit, ordered the Greeks to stack arms and rest. Alec took advantage of the lull, sought out "Doris the Boeotian" and told him in Aeolic that he'd like a word with him in private.

Presently the two men faced each other near the bank of an irrigation ditch, out of earshot but not out of sight of their nearest comrades-in-arms. "Doris the Boeotian" stood half a head taller than Alec and was half again as broad. His nose was more Roman than Grecian, and he had small porcine eyes the color of clay.

Abandoning Aeolic, Alec asked outright in Anglo-American, "PastCo or AgoCo?"

"Doris the Boeotian" grinned. "PastCo. I gave myself away, didn't I?"

"You had me fooled completely before you threw that stone, and I can't figure out why you threw it. Granted, if you'd succeeded in getting me killed and had taken possession of my helmet and micro-tape cartridges, PastCo would have acquired the pastacular by default. But why didn't you wait till after I'd finished pastaping the pastacular? Till after we'd reached Trebisond?"

"Because I think I can do a better job than you've been doing. You're an atavism. Pastacular

audiences aren't interested in watching a bunch of greasy Greeks marching, eating and sleeping. It's what they do when they shack up in the villages that counts. You haven't been out of camp once since we left Sardis!"

Stung, Alec said, "I don't think you'd know enough to tape a sore fin-ger, to say nothing of a pastacular."

"Maybe not. But I'm going to give it a try. So watch yourself, Mr. Alex-ander Vincent Henry. Old buddy. Before long, I'm going to be breath-ing down the back of your neck again."

"While you're breathing down the back of my neck," Alec said, "make sure no one's breathing down the back of *yours*."

"There won't be. If there was an AgoCo agent around, I'd have spotted him long before this."

"Thanks. I'll sleep better nights now that I know I've got only one agent-assassin to worry about."

"Doris" glowered at him for a moment, then turned and walked away.

II *Sarai*

LLEFT ALONE, Alec wondered for at least the hundredth time why the Bureau of Historitravel had abolished the free-enterprise system with re-spect to pasttravel and had taken over the distribution of pastacular equip-ment. If the three pastacular com-panies could pasttape a particular series of pastevents without having to pull strings to obtain an exclusive franchise, agent-assassins like "Duris the Boeotian" would be relegated to the ranks of the unemployed.

In addition to its other duties, the Bureau also monitored Transworld Timelines, but only routinely. Anyone could visit any part of the past so long as he took nothing with him (other than contraceptives) that would clash with the period he planned to visit. And if he wished to cheat a little, there were free-lance timeship operators called "timers" who, for the right dollar, would take him anywhen he wanted to go with no questions asked. But most people were too poor to time-travel, and the few who could afford to generally limited their past-excursions to twentieth-century Dis-neyland.

Alec decided to pasttape the village at the base of the hill and he set off toward it across the intervening fields and ditches. It turned out to be de-serted, but that was all right: it would still provide good background. He was pasttaping a picturesque street—that is to say, walking along it, look-ing this way and that—when a faint *click* came from the ridge of his hel-met, apprising him that the micro-tape cartridge in the hidden tape-recorder needed replacing. After mak-ing the change, he put the replaced cartridge in the cartridge case. Each cartridge contained ten micro-tapes. There were five cartridges altogether—just enough to cover the Up March (*Anabasis*)—Sardis to Cunaxa—and the Down March (*Katabasis*)—Cunaxa to Trebisond. Thus far, he had filled two.

He had just returned the cartridge case to the inner pocket of his vest when a girl ran out of a nearby brick-and-bitumen, dwelling and threw herself at his feet.

Her peri-like face was thin, her large eyes brown and imploring. Gaz-ing up at him, she began talking rapidly in one of the Achaemenian dialects he had hypno-taught himself while preparing for his assignment. "My name is Sarai, O Great One. Take pity on me! My people would have sold me to Orontes, had not the armies of Cyrus appeared. Now they have fled, disdaining to take me with them because I am no longer of any worth to them. Let me accompany you, O Great One, wherever you go. I will cook for you and pour your barley-wine. I will gather the choicest fruits along the way, I—"

"Stop it!" Alec interrupted, finally finding his voice. "I'm nothing but a common peltast and I couldn't take you with me even if I wanted to, and I don't. So stop groveling and get to your feet!"

Eyes still fixed on his face, she obeyed. A red and blue shawl par-tially covered her long black hair, and the two colors were repeated in the rest of her apparel—the red in her loose-fitting blouse and the blue in her calf-length skirt. She was barefoot. He estimated her age at about sixteen.

She launched another entreaty: "But if you leave me here I will surely perish, O Great One! I have neither barley-meal nor milk, nor any means of getting them. I am alone and frightened and without

friends. If my people return and find me here they will drive me away, or, even worse, sell me to the first fat prince who comes along. I am hungry, I am frightened, I do not know what to do."

Alec looked at her helplessly: He was a good ten years older than she was, which made him responsible for her in a way. Not only that, she re-minded him a little of his kid sister—an eventuality sufficient in it-self to swing the balance in her favor.

"Can you coo?" he asked.

She stared at him. "Coo?"

"Yes. Coo. The Greek army has no food with it at the moment, but in a little while we'll be returning to our base camp. So if you'll follow at a dis-creet distance and wait on the out-skirts, I'll bring you something to eat."

"But why must I make a noise like a turtledove?"

"So I can find you without you hav-ing you show yourself to the soldiers."

"But why shouldn't I show myself to the soldiers?"

"Because you shouldn't—that's why. Now stop asking questions and listen: the camp of the camp-followers is separate from the main camp. Wait outside it on the side toward the river and far enough away so the dogs won't bother you, and every little while coo like this." He demon-strated. "Try it."

"Coo," she said. "Coo! Coo! Coo!"

"That's fine. When I hear you, I'll know where to look and I'll give you the food."

However, he gave her no food that night. He'd forgot that Artaxerxes's armies had plundered Cyrus's supplies. Angrily he pasttaped the looted wagons and the fuming Greeks; then, confiscating a blanket that the Persians had overlooked, he left the main camp and began skirting the camp of the camp-followers.

"Coo!" Sarai said suddenly, almost in his ear. "Coo! Coo! Coo!"

He handed her the blanket, told her that thanks to Artaxerxes no food was available, gave her a half-daric and told her to go hack to her village. Promptly she spread the blanket on the ground, lay down on half of it and covered herself with the other half. "Good night, O Great One," she said.

He sighed. Then he pulled her to her feet, took back the half-daric, wrapped the blanket around her shoulders and led her into the camp-followers' camp. There, for a full daric, he bought wagon-space for her from a Greek weapons-repairman named Anytus and exacted from the old man a solemn promise to keep a fatherly eye on her. After making arrangements with a sandal-maker to make her a pair of sandals, he re-turned to the main camp, the richer—or the poorer—for having gained one Babylonian slave girl.

THE NEXT MORNING the Greeks learned that Cyrus had been killed and that Ariaeus had retreated and was now encamped on the outskirts of the village of Iterna, some twenty stadia distant. Clearchus proposed the Ariaeus try for the throne himself, and Menon and Cheirisophus left for the Cyreian camp to broach the idea to Ariaeus. No sooner had they left than envoys arrived from the camp of the King with orders for the Greeks to surrender. Clearchus told them that the word wasn't contained in any of the Greek dialects, and sent them packing.

Later in the day, the Greeks slaughtered some of the baggagecattle and began barbecuing the choicer cuts over fires built of wicker shields they had collected on the battlefield the day before. Alec selected a steak that looked reason-ably tender, impaled it on the point of his javelin and roasted it till it was well done; then he sought out Sarai in the camp of the camp-followers. He found her kneeling beside an irriga-tion ditch. She had just washed her hair and was combing it with a makeshift comb fashioned of reeds. Wet, it was even darker than he re-remembered it, and fell in black and glistening waterfalls past her peri-like face and patterned her shoulders with black arabesques. She looked more like a princess than a peasant, and he should have been pleased. Instead, he was annoyed, and he handed her the steak without a word, and walked away.

When he got back to the main camp, Menon and Cheirisophus had returned from Iterna. Ariaeus, they said, considered himself unworthy of the throne of Persia, and suggested that, since he planned to move his armies northward in the morning, the Greeks join him at once. Clearchus convinced the other

generals that this would be the most sensible course to follow, pointing out that the Greek army was stranded in the center of a hostile empire, Zeus alone knew how many parasangs from home, and that the armies of Ariaeus would afford them some protection at least. Accordingly, the Ten Thousand reformed their ranks and, on the alert for a possible attack by Tissaphernes, marched cross-country to Iterna. There, the two forces were drawn up, a boar, a bull and a ram were sacrificed, and Clearchus and Ariaeus took formal oaths not to betray each other.

Alec, aware of the worthlessness of Ariaeus's oath, looked on with cynical eyes from the ranks of Proxenus's peltasts. Down the line from him, "Doris the Boeotian" also looked on, his face impassive. Since the scythed-chariot incident, the two men had steered clear of each other, but it was a temporary detente at best.

To date, Alec had made only one friend—an Arcadian named Pasion. As far back as Sardis he'd felt that Pasion could he trusted, and since it was *comme i faut* for Greek soldiers to have buddies, he had made the Arcadian his.

After the arms had been stacked, he and his friend prepared for sleep in the tent they shared. They had just lain down on their woolen blankets when Pasion, without preamble, said, "I find it strange, Alexander, that a peltast with a slave such as yours prefers not to sleep with her."

Jolted, Alec sat up. "What makes you think I have a slave?"

"This morning when you took a portion of meat into the camp of the camp-followers I followed you at a distance. I reasoned that you would not go to such lengths to appease the appetite of a common Cyprian, and that this being so, you must have found someone more worthwhile. I reasoned furthermore that since you have disdained even casting a glance at any of the women in the villages we have quartered in, this slave of yours would be worth looked at—even from afar. I was right."

"You don't understand," Alec said. "She's not my slave. She forced her-self on me. She means nothing to me."

"In that case," Pasion said, starting to get up, "I will sleep with her my-self."

Alec seized his arm and pulled him back down. He got up himself. "I've changed my mind. *I'll* sleep with her. And you, Pasion, if you know what's good for you, will stay away from her."

He rolled up his blanket and put his helmet back on. Pasion regarded him with puzzled eyes. Then his eyes cleared and he smiled a knowing smile. "Forgive me, Alexander. I did not know you were in love with her." *But I'm not in love with her!* Alec started to say. Then he changed his mind and left the tent. There was no way under the sun he could convince Pasion that he was going to sleep *be-side* Sarai, not *with* her, nor that his sole motive was to protect her. Besides, he wasn't sure that it would be wise to convince him. The fourth Time Commandment might be a paraphrased bromide, but the pasttraveler who consistently broke it seldom got back to when he came from. *You will not, when in Rome, behave contrary to the way which the Romans behave.*

He found Sarai sitting just within the perimeter of firelight cast by a big bonfire round which sat a number of Greek soldiers and a half dozen "wa-gon women" drinking barleywine out of bowls. Behind her in the shadows loomed the burly figure of old Anytus.

Alec pulled her to her feet. "It's time you were in bed," he said.

He tossed the weapons-repairman another Daric and told Sarai to lead the way to the old man's wagon. She didn't say a word till they reached it; then, gazing up into his eyes, "Are we going to sleep as one, O Great One?" she asked.

He was scandalized. "Of course we're not!" He climbed up into the wagon bed, saw that she had already spread her blanket, and spread his own beside it. Despite his best efforts, it overlapped hers. He reached down and took her hand. "Up we go."

Standing beside him in the star-light, she said, "I did not think you would come tonight, O Great One. I thought you hated me."

"My name is Alexander, I'm not great, and I don't hate you in the least." He glanced down at her feet. "Didn't that sandal-maker make your shoes yet?"

"He will have them finished tomorrow."

Alec removed his helmet, automatically turning off the pressure-switch, that activated and

deactivated the battery-powered micro-tape recorder. Then he lay down on his blanket and Sarai lay down on hers. After bidding her good-night, he closed his eyes. A long while later, still wide awake, he opened them and stole a look at her. Her starlit face, relaxed in sleep, seemed a dead ringer for his kid sis-ter's. Not his kid sister's face as it was today, for Marianne had left her teens behind her, but as it had been that fateful day when she had told him the Terrible Truth. The thought of the Terrible Truth made him wince. At the same time, it intensified his feeling of responsibility for Sarai. He would have to find a good home for her, that was all there was to it. Maybe he could find a respectable family in one of the villages who would be willing to adopt her. A kid like her had no business following an army. Yes, he would find a good home for her, that was what he would do.

III *Thanatos*

CLEARCHUS and Ariaeus decided to conduct the retreat along a different route from that followed on the Up March and to try to reach the Greek colony of Trebisond on the Euxine Sea.

After leaving the village of Iterna, the Cyrean armies headed northward toward Media. On the afternoon of the second day, the Greeks discerned a number of baggage cattle grazing on a distant hillside. Obviously Artaxerxes's armies could not be far off, and it was probable that the King had the Cyreian forces under surveillance.

That night, the Greeks quartered in a group of villages from which, unfortunately, the villagers had fled, taking their comestibles and their livestock with them. Early the next morning, two envoys arrived from the camp of the King with word that Artaxerxes wished to negotiate a truce. Clearchus stalled, saying that his men were hungry and not in the mood for truces, and the envoys obligingly guided them to a village farther north where food was available. They were joined later by the armies of Ariaeus.

Within the next few days, with Tissaphernes acting in the role of plenipotentiary, a truce was agreed upon. Artaxerxes promised to conduct the Ten Thousand safely back to Greece and to provide them whenever possible with the opportunity to purchase provisions. In return, the Greek generals promised that their men would forebear pillaging.

Precisely what role Ariaeus and his armies were to play was not made clear.

Tissaphernes returned to the Persian camp to make arrangements for an escort. Twenty-one days passed. Ariaeus was visited repeatedly by relatives who were part of Artaxerxes's retinue and who assured him that the King did not hold his complicity against him. Not surprisingly, the Greek generals, who already dis-trusted Tissaphernes, began to dis-trust Ariaeus also, and when the former arrived with one Persian army and Orontes, Artaxerxes's brother-in-law, arrived with another, Clearchus issued orders for the Greeks to march as far from their escort as possible and to keep a discreet distance between themselves and the armies of Ariaeus. Five days later, after crossing a wide canal, the Ten Thousand reached the river Tigris. They had dropped considerably behind both their escort and the armies of Ariaeus, and neither of the two forces was anywhere to be seen. A bridge, consisting of thirty-seven flat-bottomed boats lashed together, spanned the stream, and Clearchus, assuming that Tissaphernes, Orontes and Ariaeus had already crossed over it and being in no hurry to cross over it himself, ordered the Greeks to make camp next to a park-like forest.

The forest fringed the western environs of the city of Sitace. Clearchus, in keeping with the terms of the truce, ordered the city placed offlimits and sentries posted at intervals along the edge of the forest. Desirous of pasttaping the city if for no other reason than to discredit "Duris the Boeotian's" snide remark concerning his pasttaping ability, Alec tried to talk one of the sentries into letting him pass. In vain. He was standing disconsolately by the arms pile when Xenophon and Proxenus appeared walking side by side along the forest's edge. Just as they came opposite the arms pile, a sentry hurried up to them escorting a frightened looking individual in Persian apparel. "This man, O Proxenus," the sentry said, "claims to be a messenger from Ariaeus and desires to speak to you." Proxenus dismissed the sentry and turned to the messenger. "Speak then."

The man stepped forward. "Ariaeus has sent me to warn you that there is a body of Tissaphernes's troops en-sconced in the forest with orders to attack the Greek forces. He also wishes me to advise you to post a guard on the bridge over the Tigris, as Tissaphernes plans to demolish it during the night."

Neither Proxenus nor Xenophon made an immediate answer. Suddenly Xenophon looked in Alec's direction with dark eyes that contained particles of starlight. "What is your judgment in the matter, peltast?"

Hiding his astonishment, Alec approached the two young men, one of whom was soon to die and the other of whom would someday set down his own version of the words he was about to hear. "I consider the message to be self-contradictory," Alec said, instinctively employing the dialect Xenophon had asked the question in—Attic. "If the Persians hidden in the forest should attack us and force us to retreat, it will be to their advantage if we retreat across the bridge and into the arms of the rest of Tissaphernes's forces. So what advantage would a demolished bridge give them? If, on the other hand, we should be victorious and force them to retreat, they will need the bridge themselves."

There was a short silence. Then, "Who are you, peltast?" Xenophon asked.

"Alexander the Lacedaemonian."

The Athenian's eyes seemed to gather more particles of starlight. "You will please accompany us to the tent of Clearchus. It is his responsibility to decide what should be done in this matter."

Four of the *dramatis personae* were already present in Clearchus' tent—Clearchus himself, Agias, Menon and Socrates—and the entry of Xenophon, Proxenus, Alec and the messenger raised the total to eight. There was yet another player, one whom only Alec could see. He wore a black cowl and his name was Thanatos. First he would hover behind Clearchus, then behind Agias, then behind Menon, then behind Socrates and then behind Proxenus.

Xenophon had the messenger repeat what he had said at the arms pile. Then he had Alec repeat what he had said. Clearchus listened attentively to both men. When they finished he went into a brown study, mentally sorting through the data accumulated during thirty years of military campaigns. Finally he said, "I do not think that there is a body of Tissaphernes's troops hidden in the forest. I think that Tissaphernes, employing Ariaeus as a tool, is trying to dissuade us from demolishing the bridge by threatening to demolish it himself, thereby implying that he wants it demolished. For if we did demolish it, we would have for defenses the river Tigris on one side and the canal on the other, and simultaneously we would obtain for ourselves an excellent refuge abounding in all the provisions we would need. It is clear that Tissaphernes has not been to Greece, else he would realize that the Ten Thousand would never dream of remaining in this wretched country one moment longer than is absolutely necessary. I think it is safe to conclude that the bridge is not endangered, but we will post a guard upon it in the unlikely event that it is."

Clearchus proved to be right: no attempt was made to demolish the bridge, and no attack materialized. After an uneventful night, the Greeks crossed the Tigris and were rejoined by Ariaeus, Tissaphernes and Orontes. The march through Media was resumed, and ten days later the armies encamped near the Assyrian village of Adanti, the birthplace of Cyrus's mother, Parysatis. Tissaphernes, to show his contempt for Cyrus, declared the village in bounds and told the Greeks to help themselves to anything and anyone they wanted.

IV *Jait-Jbit*

STILL SMARTING from "Duris the Boeotian's" snide remark, Alec resolved to get as much of the forthcoming action on pasttape as possible, and shortly after dusk set out for the village with his buddy Pasion. He also had another reason for visiting the village: to find a home for Sarai.

He had been sleeping beside her all this while in old Anytus's wagon, and increasingly of late he had found himself wide awake and gazing up at the stars when he should have been dead to the world. He was at a loss to explain his insomnia, but was certain it derived at least in part from the responsibility

incurred by her presence on the march.

It was his intention to try to get on the good side of one of the Assyrian families by protecting them from the marauding Greeks. Judging from the shouting and the screaming already in progress, there should be no end of opportunities.

The shouting and the screaming increased both in frequency and in volume as he and Pasion neared the out-lying houses. In places, torchlight alleviated the deepening darkness, and in the vacillating radiance Greek soldiers could be seen dashing in and out of doorways and bearing off girls, barley-wine and comestibles, in that order of importance.

A terrified girl ran past Alec and Pasion, veered right, and disappeared among a small grove of trees. A moment later, a drunken Greek appeared, looking wildly this way and that. Alec, tempted to crack the man over the head with the shaft of his javelin, did the next best thing and pointed in the direction opposite to that the girl had gone in. Her pursuer took the bait, but Alec's act of chivalry did her no good, for Pasion, when Alec made no move to do so, took after her himself.

Disgusted, Alec continued on alone. The starlit street in which he presently found himself was a place of moving shapes and shadows, harsh laughter, shouts and screams. He passed through a shoulder-wide alley to a second street, found a similar scene with an almost identical sound-track. A second alley brought him to a third street just in time to see a figure dodge into the entrance of a house across the way.

The house, although one-storied and flat-roofed like all the others, had an air of opulence about it that its neighbors lacked. Moreover, it seemed to say, "Yes, Sarai would be happy here."

He crossed the street and stepped through the entrance (the house, like many such Assyrian dwellings, had no doors). Finding himself in a pitch-black hallway, he felt his way along the right wall till he came to a heavily curtained archway. Boldly, he drew the curtain aside.

Before him lay a large room hung with rich tapestries depicting lion hunts, and dimly illuminated by the glowing coals of a brazier that stood in the center of the floor. Beyond the brazier lay four empty pallets, and huddled against the wall beyond them were three figures. A fourth figure—that of an adult male—stood just to the right of the archway and was in the process of bringing a heavy staff down upon Alec's head.

Alec caught the blow on his shield and knocked the staff from the man's hands. Then, noting his attacker's Assyrian attire and deducing that he was the head of the house, he herded him across the room to where the three figures were huddled against the wall. One of them was that of a woman in her thirties, one of a girl in her mid-teens, and one of a boy around ten.

The head of the house had dropped to his knees and was talking rapidly in a tongue similar to Sarai's. He was not a rich man, he said, but Alec was welcome to everything he owned, so long as he did not harm his wife and children. "I've no intention of harming anybody," Alec said, "so stop groveling and stand up." When the man obeyed, he told him about Sarai. "If you'll agree to adopt her and will promise to treat her as though she were your own child, I promise to protect both you and your house till the Greeks depart."

"It will be done! It will be done!"

"I'll bring her here tomorrow. Now go to bed and get some sleep." He seized the teenaged girl's arm. "Not you," he said. "I want you beside me."

He sat down with his back against the wall and pulled her down beside him. When she shrank away from him, he assured her that she had nothing to fear. He kept his shield attached to his left arm and rested his javelin across his knees. Let the Greeks come—he was ready for them.

The night began to drag. Occasionally, soldiers tramped past in the street, laughing and singing. They were probably foraging by this time, having satiated their more immediate appetites. When, around midnight, two of them came stumbling down the hallway and drew the curtain, Alec was waiting for them just within the archway, one arm around the girl to show them his intentions were no more honorable than theirs, the other gripping his javelin to demonstrate that he, had no intentions of sharing his oasis.

They were so drunk they nearly fell into the room. "Ho, Simmias," one of them said, "we have blundered into the abode of a peltast." "Let us be-gone," said the other, and they staggered back out into the street.

Alec drew the curtain, crossed the room, reattached his shield to his left arm and sat back down against the wall. The girl sat down next to him without having to be told. She no longer shrank from him, he noticed. As a matter of fact, she was beginning to shrink toward him. She looked a little like his kid sister. The way Marianne used to look when she was that age. All of a sudden he found himself hating the Ten Thousand; hating all the armies that had gone before them and all the armies that would come after; all masses of men, in short, who, the moment law and order disappeared, behaved like apes. Toward morning, by which time the girl had shrunk so close to him that her head was lying on his shoulder, he found himself hating himself.

He was new to this kind of assignment. His previous ones had involved relatively tame past events, such as the Signing of the Declaration of Independence, The Boston Tea Party and The Landing of the Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock. He had enjoyed pasttaping The Landing immensely, and afterward he had talked YoreCo into letting him pasttape the Pilgrims' first winter in the New World. The Pilgrims' First Winter had been a box-office fiasco, but Alec had loved it, and before YoreCo withdrew it from the closed-circuit networks he viewed it seventeen times.

Toward morning, a faint rustling sound brought him out of a fitful sleep. The coals in the brazier had long since turned to ashes, but dawn showed through a high window on the streetside wall, and the room was filled with gray light. A burly figure stood in the archway—the figure of a peltast, javelin drawn back for the cast.

Alec gripped his own javelin and jaited.

"JAITING", although it came under the general heading of time travel, was in actuality a defense mechanism that had taken root in the human psyche somewhere in the late 1950's.

It attained full growth shortly after the second *fin de siecle* when the electricars that were inundating the market became more numerous than the internal combustion species they had supplanted. They were nowhere near as mighty as their predecessors, but their numbers more than compensated for their individual puniness, and the full- and part-time pedestrians who had begun to breathe easier saw suddenly that the war they thought they'd won had only just begun.

The first pedestrian to jait was a harried businessman in Ashtabula, O, who, absent-mindedly crossing the street a second after the light changed, found himself in the path of two electricars, one bearing down on him from his left and the other from his right. They, no doubt, would manage to miss each other, but neither could possibly miss him, and for him to jump forward or backward in space would merely put him fully in the path of either. Forward or backward in space, yes—but not forward or backward in time. It is improbable that he reasoned this out before he jaited, but jait he did, rematerializing in the same spot approximately forty-eight hours later when the light, fortuitously, was green. He then finished crossing the street and, albeit dazed and disbelieving, jumped back in time—"jbited"—as effortlessly as he had jumped forward in it. The round trip consumed slightly more than two seconds—1.0625 to jait and 1.0625 to jbit.

A rash of similar occurrences swept the U.S. and, ultimately, the whole world. Awakened to the fact that they were no longer prisoners of time, the human race proceeded to perfect their new ability to a point where they could jait-jbit at will. The average "jump-range" was forty-eight hours; generally the jaiter could sustain his presence in the future for about fifty minutes; after that, if he didn't jbit voluntarily, he was automatically catapulted back to the moment he had jaited from, plus 2.1250 seconds.

Horse racing languished and died out. Bookies jumped off the roofs of ten-story buildings. OTB parlors were converted into pool halls. The Dow Jones Index rose to an all-time high, fell to an all-time low.

Learned men everywhere put on their thinking caps. Learned papers began deluging learned journals. There were lengthy extrapolations of Godel's world-lines, endless explorations of quantum mechanics, and interminable excursions into the field of extra-dimensional electromagnetic emanations. But for the most part the learned papers merely served to demonstrate that the learned men who wrote them knew no more about the nature of jait-jbiting than the rest of the jait-jbiters did.

One theory was advanced, however, that held at least a teaspoonful of water. It derived from Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic, and proposed that when a person jaited he unconsciously freed himself from his *a priori* interpretation of reality and—still unconsciously—moved to a different point in the noumenon. When he jbited, he simply reversed his steps.

REMATERIALIZING in the room some forty-eight hours in the future, Alec found the four members of the Assyrian family sleeping peacefully on their pallets. "Doris the Boeotian" was nowhere to be seen.

Alec's first thought was for the safety of the family. To ensure that none of them would be accidentally injured, he left the room, ran down the hallway and out into the street.

In doing so, he did exactly what "Doris" had figured he would do. The PastCo agent, having a shorter-than-average jump-range, had jaited, left the house and stationed himself just to the right of the entrance. But in his eagerness to jab Alec with his javelin, he jabbed too soon. The point missed its mark and only grazed Alec's leathern vest.

Alec jbited and leaped to the left the moment he rematerialized. But "Doris" had again outmaneuvered him. The PastCo agent had jbited a split-second earlier and had rematerialized a split-second sooner and was there waiting for Alec to arrive. Moreover, when he jabbed with his javelin he jaggged to the right (Alec's left) of where Alec had been, Alec's shield saved him this time, but not al-together: in deflecting the jab he lost his balance and fell flat on his back.

During the fleeting second before he jaited he tried to think what his next move would be if he were "Doris" and had a shorter-than-average jump-range. He thought he knew.

Re-arriving in the future, he jbited the moment he became visible; then he got to his feet and ran around to the back of the house. He tossed his shield aside, pulled himself up onto the roof of an adjoining shed and from there gained the roof of the house proper. He walked across it to the front of the house and stationed him-self just behind the spot where he es-timated "Doris" would be. Then he jaited.

He rematerialized some three feet behind "Doris's" broad back. The PastCo agent was staring disbelief-ingly down into the street where, a few moments ago, a decoy in the form of his opponent had appeared, only to disappear a split-second after he cast his javelin. The javelin, its point buried deep in the hard-packed earth, marked the spot where the decoy had been.

Alec brought the shaft of his own javelin down on "Doris's" helmet with all his might, and the agent-assassin went tumbling off the roof. Halfway to the ground, unconsciousness annul-led his future reality, and he van-ished.

After descending from the roof, Alec retrieved his shield and returned to the street. "Doris" was lying on his back and was out cold. Alec con-templated him for some time. If ever a *coup de grace* was in order, one was now, but he was utterly incapable of delivering it. Justified or not, such an act would still amount to murder.

He examined "Doris's" limbs, hopeful that one of them, at least, had been broken. None had. His back, then? Alec didn't think so. Nor his neck either. Some problems solve themselves; some, you can solve; others, you have to carry with you wherever you go. Alec sighed. Then, employing the thong he used for slinging his javelin, he bound the agent-assassin's wrists tightly to-gether. Clustered in the doorway of the house, the Assyrian family, awakened probably by the girl, watched with wide eyes.

Suddenly "Doris" gasped and sat up. He stared uncomprehendingly up at Alec's face. Alec smiled benignly clown on him. He waited till the man's eyes cleared, then, "You have two choices," he said. "You can jait, and gamble that you can get your hands free before I show up and kill you, or you can accompany me back to camp, where I promise to release you, and where you can start explain-ing to your captain what became of your javelin, and also, since it doesn't appear to be anywhere in the present, what happened to your shield."

"Doris" got slowly to his feet. Sev-eral deep breaths were enough to restore the wind that had been knocked from his lungs but fell far short of restoring the wind that had been knocked out of his sails. "You're a fool," he said without conviction.

"Next time I won't be. You can count on it."

"Doris" said no more. A trumpet sounded in the distance, and the two men headed back to camp.

V
Harassment

“**I** REFUSE TO GO,” Sarai declared.

“I am not an old shoe that you can cast aside without a moment's notice!”

“But I'm not casting you aside,” Alec said desperately. “I've found a home for you.”

“Well, I am not going to live in it!”

The sun was climbing into the blue morning sky. The Greek army was preparing to march. The camp-followers were reloading their wag-ons. Not only was there no time to argue, Alec, who in addition to having been up all night had had no break-fast either, was disinclined to. Sling-ing Sarai over his shoulder, he set out once more for the village of Adanti.

Immediately she began to kick and scream. The camp-followers inter-rupted their preparations to watch the show. Attracted by the screams, half a dozen scrawny dogs converged on Alec and began harassing his heels. Despite all this, he probably would have been able to keep his temper if, just as he entered the encompassing fields, Sarai hadn't got free.

How she managed it, he had no idea. One moment she was lying across his shoulder; the next she was lying on the ground before him; and the next she was up and running back toward the camp of the camp-followers.

He took after her and tackled her. Angrily, he pulled her to her feet and began shaking her. A wave of raucous laughter came from the camp of the camp-followers, augmenting his anger, and he continued shaking her. Then, to his consternation, he found himself kissing her.

She kissed him back. Repeatedly. At last he came to his senses and drew away. He let go of her arms. Somehow, standing there before him, her eyes faintly misted, she no longer reminded him quite so much of his kid sister. Moreover, he had badly underestimated her age. She ap-peared to be seventeen, rather than sixteen. In fact, she might even be eighteen. Maybe even nineteen.

Could she possibly be twenty-one?

Angry once again, this time at the direction of his thoughts, he seized her wrist. “Come on!”

She said not a word as he led her over the fields to the village. Only when the Assyrian family ran to meet them did she break her silence. “Take me with you, Alexander—please!”

He saw that she was crying, and for a moment he weakened. But the problem that her presence on the march had posed before was as noth-ing to the problem it would pose now. “I'm sorry,” he said brusquely, “but I can't. Goodby, Sarai.”

He turned quickly and walked away. “It is not that you can't, it is that you are afraid!” she called after him. Then she began to cry again, and he walked as fast as he could to escape the sound of her sobs. The morning mist should have dissipated long ago, yet it continued to rise round him, making it difficult to see. It occurred to him to wipe his eyes, and when he did so, the mist disap-peared.

A FIVE DAYS' MARCH brought the Cyreian forces and their escort to the river Zabatus. Camp was made, and Clearchus, concerned over his men's increasing distrust of the Persians, ar-ranged a meeting with Tissaphernes. After Clearchus outlined the situation Tissaphernes proposed that a second meeting be held and that all the Greek officers attend it so that the problem could be discussed more fully. Clearchus agreed. Some of the other Greek generals, however, were skeptical, and when the time came only Menon, Proxenus, Socrates and Agias, plus some twenty captains, ac-companied him. The execution took place in Tissaphernes's tent. It was swift and efficient. After the five gen-erals lay dead, the twenty captains who had waited outside were sys-tematically massacred.

When the news reached the Greek camp, the Greeks panicked, officers and “enlisted men” alike. Except Xenophon.

But, strictly speaking, Xenophon was neither. The Athenian, or so it was said, had joined the Greek mer-cenaries at the behest of his friend Proxenus and against the wishes of his tutor Socrates. While

generally looked upon as an officer, he had never received an official appointment.

It was he who confronted Ariaeus, Artabazus and Mithridates when they rode into the camp of the demoralized Greeks at the head of a detachment of cavalry and demanded that the Ten Thousand lay down their arms. Only Clearchus, Agias and Socrates had been executed, they said. Proxenus and Menon had been spared and would eventually be freed. Xenophon, who knew better, demanded that they be freed at once.

Ariaeus, Artabazus and Mithridates, who had expected instant compliance, blinked. "The King will not take kindly to this," Ariaeus said.

"I did not intend that he should."

Again, the three Persians blinked. Then, angrily, they wheeled their horses and rode off at the head of their horsemen.

That night Xenophon convened the surviving generals in his tent. "Why is it," he asked, "that men become blind when they most need to see?"

"It is true that we are stranded leaderless in a hostile country," he continued. "But leaders can be replaced, and were we not stranded before this terrible thing occurred? And consider: Before, we did not know for certain who our enemies were: now we do. Before, we were parties to a truce that forbade us to rape the land: now the truce has been violated and we can take anything we need. Granted, we no longer have guides; but could worse guides be found than those we had?"

"Now, you are probably thinking, 'Yes, but we are surrounded by two forces—the armies of Ariaeus as well as the armies of Tissaphernes.' But were we not similarly surrounded before? And is it sensible to fear the armies of Tissaphernes, which we ourselves put to rout, and is it any more sensible to fear the armies of Ariaeus, which put *themselves* to rout? The tragic deaths of Clearchus and the others are to be regretted, but we have merely to tear aside the veil that fear has blinded us with to see that Tissaphernes's treachery has bettered, not worsened, our plight."

Morale was restored. That same night, new generals were appointed: Timasion of Troy to replace Clearchus, Xanthicles of Achaia to replace Socrates, Cleanor of Arcadia to replace Agias, Philesius of Achaia to replace Menon, and Xenophon of Athens to replace Proxenus. New captains were appointed also. One of them was "Alexander of Lacedaemon".

Alec's initial astonishment when a messenger brought him the news was as nothing compared to his subsequent astonishment when Xenophon summoned him to his tent and informed him he was to be his aide. He was delighted as well as astonished. As the Athenian's aide, he would be able to pasttape the author-hero of the *Anabasis-Katabasis* practically twenty-four hours a day.

Overwhelmed, he said, "But why, Xenophon? Why, with so many seasoned officers to choose from, did you choose someone like myself? Only a few short moments ago I was a mere peltast."

Xenophon, resplendent in brand new military grab that he must have packed all the way from Athens, smiled. "For the same reason I saw to it that you were appointed *locharch*. Because you can think. I saw this at once at the arms pile at Sitace. Most of the other captains and a large number of the generals, I regret to say, cannot. Oh, they think they can. But what they actually do is reshape reality to accord with the specifications of their predilections. It will be good having someone at my side who can distinguish between a javelin with a point and one with a hook. I shall expect you in my tent at sunrise."

Alec thanked him and left. As he was making his way toward his and Pasion's tent, a faint *click* came from his helmet ridge, informing him that micro-tape cartridge no. 3 had run its course. He replaced it by starlight, after ascertaining no one was in the immediate vicinity. The cartridge case now contained three-fifths of the raw material for pastacular Y-709, tentatively titled "The Trek of the Ten Thousand".

It occurred to him that it might not be proper for a captain to sleep in the same tent with a peltast. He decided that he didn't much care whether it was or not, and when he reached the tent he crawled in beside the Arcadian, who was already asleep, and laid aside his helmet, which he hadn't bothered to put back on. He closed his eyes.

Now that he no longer had Sarai to worry about, he expected to get a good night's sleep for a change. In this, he was thwarted. Something kept creeping up to the back doorway of his mind every time he dozed off, and ringing the doorbell; then running away when he opened the door. It kept

harassing him all night, and he was wide awake when the trumpet sounded reveille, the identity of his caller still unknown.

Xenophon convened the generals, both the old and the new, and prop-osed that all tents and carriages be burned to expedite the retreat. He also proposed that the Ten Thousand march in square formation with the camp-followers and baggage-cattle in their midst. Three days march to the north, he said, was a large village named Diessa where provisions could be obtained.

The Greek army had no sooner crossed the Zabatus than Mithridates, heading a sizeable body of cavalry and a detachment of bowmen, began harassing the two *taxeis* commanded by Xenophon that comprised the Greeks' rear. Lacking cavalry of his own, Xenophon was unable to re-taliate, so that night he augmented his *taxeis* with half a hundred horse-men and a company of slingers. The next morning Mithridates, upon receiving a dose of his own medicine, dropped back.

The line of march began bordering the east bank of the Tigris. After the Greek army passed the deserted city of Mespila, Tissaphernes staged an at-tack that, thanks to the accuracy of Xenophon's slingers, got nowhere. Arriving in Diessa, the Greeks loaded up with provisions and pressed on. On the fifth day of the march they en-tered a range of hills, where they were harassed by Tissaphernes. Tis-saphernes continued his harassment tactics on the plain beyond, entered the foothills of the Carduchian mountains and occupied a height below which the Greeks, hemmed in by the Tigris on their left, would have to pass. Xenophon, however, foiled him by occupying the height just above, whereupon Tissaphernes, typically, fled.

The mountains loomed closer and closer on the Greeks' right. Inevita-bly, river and mountains met, and they found themselves in a *cul de sac*, the river being too deep to ford and the mountains, at this point, being too precipitous to cross. Perceiving their predicament, Tissaphernes at-tacked, hut he was too overcautious to take full advantage of the situation and the Greeks managed to break through his lines and retreat south-ward. Safe for the moment, they set-tled down in a group of deserted vil-lages and licked their wounds.

Again Xenophon convened the gen-erals. He outlined the situation for them. Babylonia and Media lay to the south, Susa and Ecbatana to the east, Lydia and Ionia to the west, and Ar-menia to the north. To proceed in the direction of Susa and Ecbatana would mean going the long way around; to proceed in the direction of .Lydia and Ionia would necessitate fording the river, a virtually impossible task; while to proceed in the direction of Albania would involve crossing the Carduchian mountains and coping with the savage Carduchi.

It was finally decided that an at-tempt should be made to cross the mountains. If it was successful, the Tigris could be forded near its source. Two wild boars and an ass were sac-rificed. From their marmoreal palace high on the shining slopes of Olym-pus, the gods watched the weary Greeks reform their ranks and move out. If they were propitiated, they gave no sign.

VI *Rain*

XENOPHON'S *Anabasis* says that after the Greeks surmounted the first summits, the Carduchi deserted their villages in the windings and recesses below, and fled.

Afterward, however, the savage mountain people reorganized and at-tacked the descending Greeks from the rear, killing and wounding a large number of Xenophon's men.

Half the baggage-cattle were aban-doned in an effort to augment the ar-my's mobility. After filing through a narrow pass, the Greeks entered a second sequence of hills. There were a number of minor skirmishes, but for the most part the Carduchi seemed to be biding their time. Toward evening, a wind sprang up, and the tempera-ture began to drop. Sometime during the night, rain began to fall. It was still falling when the Greeks rolled out of their sodden blankets and con-fronted the new day.

The march was resumed. The rain continued to fall, and showed no sign of abating. The Carduchi confined their activities to harassing the Greeks' rearmost *taxeis*, and more of Xenohpon's men were

killed and wounded. That night, the Athenian brought before the other generals two Carduchi whom his men had cap-tured. The other generals interro-gated the two prisoners separately. They asked the first whether he knew of another route that the Greeks might follow. When he said No, he was decapitated in the presence of the second. When asked the same ques-tion, the second answered, "Yes, I know of such a route, and I will be honored to lead the way myself. But at one point there is a height that must be taken if a successful passage is to be made. I will conduct you there. Gladly."

The Greeks moved out early the next morning, following the new route. Alec's first impression, when he saw the height, was of a mac-rocosmic potato some cloud-tall giant had dug halfway out of the earth and left to rot in the sun. It was afternoon by then, and the rain was still falling. When Xenophon called for volun-teers, Alec was one of the first to step forward. As he did so, he thought he saw the Athenian frown. Then, glanc-ing down the long line of volunteers, he frowned himself, and wished he hadn't been quite so eager to pasttape the forthcoming assault. For "Doris the Boeotian" had also stepped for-ward.

A *taxis* consisting of five *lochoi*, or companies, was formed. Timasion of Troy commanded the *taxis*, and the five *lochoi* were commanded respec-tively by Aristonymus of Methydrium, Agasias of Stymphalus, Callimachus of Parrhasia, Aristeas of Chios and "Alex-ander of Lacedaemon".

Numbered among Aristeas's peltasts was "Doris the Boeotian".

WHEN THE CARDUCHI perceived the Greeks intent, they began rolling boulders down the side of the moun-tain. The assault force, however, had been divided into two teams, and by this time the foremost team, which consisted of the *lochoi* of Aristeas, Callimachus and Alec, were halfway to the summit, having followed a more direct and less conspicuous route.

The "potato" had resolved into slopes made muddy by the rain, which still continued to fall, and, higher up, gaunt precipices scarred by treacherous trails. Aristeas com-manded the advance company and Alec the rear. Toward dusk, the former breasted an eminence and surprised a body of Carduchi who, be-lieving themselves safe, had sat down to warm themselves around a com-munal bonfire. They fought with commendable ferocity till they saw they were outnumbered; then they fled down the mountainside like frightened goats.

Aristeas and Callimachus thought that the eminence was the summit, but they soon perceived that there was another eminence above it. How-ever, darkness had descended, so the final assault had to be put off till morning. A message was sent to Timasion of Troy updating him on their position and suggesting that Aristonymus and Agasias storm the summit from the other side of the mountain.

At dawn the advance was resumed. The rain had ceased during the night and had been supplanted by a gray mist. The trail was so badly eroded that in some places it was necessary to proceed single file. The mist didn't help matters either, although from Alec's point of view it was an asset rather than a liability. It gave the height a Gothic air and added a mys-terious quality to the deep ravines and serpentine windings far below. In a word, it provided atmosphere.

Absorbed in pasttaping the background, Alec forgot about the ac-tion, and in the process committed an unforgivable sin: he fell behind his own troops. He did not even notice when an abrupt turning of the narrow trail hid the rearmost of them from view. Enthusiastically he pasttaped a distant misted precipice, faced the steep slope of the height and pasttaped a gaunt growth of trees a dozen feet above the trail. A long-ago rivening of the rocks had produced a narrow fissure opposite where he stood. As he pasttaped it, his eyes caught a sudden movement in the shadows, a dull gleam of bronze. His absorption in his art disintegrated abruptly and he leaped to one side just in time to avoid being impaled on a javelin.

Grinning, a burly peltast with por-cine eyes stepped out of the fissure, and vanished.

Jaited.

Alec jaited too. Rematerializing on the narrow trail 1.0625 seconds later, he dodged into the fissure.

In doing so, he staked his life on the assumption that "Duris the Boeo-tian" would not be there awaiting him. "Doris" wasn't.

The fissure extended into the cliff for about ten feet before the two walls came together. Alec positioned him-self with his back against the juncture and, reasonably safe for the moment, tried to anticipate his opponent's next move.

To do so, he needed to know not only where the PastCo agent was, but when.

He got nowhere until, suddenly, he remembered the growth of trees he had pasttaped two days ago. The trees would provide an excellent position from which to cast a javelin, and provide protection as well. Moreover, they would give "Doris" an advantage analogous to that provided him by the Assyrian rooftop.

It was a good bet, then, that after jaiting the PastCo agent had climbed the slope and positioned himself behind the trees. His shorter-than-average jump-range would have permitted him to do this easily before Alec rematerialized, and he could hardly have failed to see Alec dodge into the fissure.

But if he was stationed behind the trees waiting for Alec to come out, was he still in the future or had he jumped back to the present?

It was a critical question.

The answer, Alec was certain, lay in the tendency of most jait-jbit combatants to avoid the obvious. At this stage of the game, the parallel between the present contest and the previous one was almost exact. In the previous one, "Doris" had stationed himself in the future, thus, at first thought, for him to have done so in the present one would constitute the acme of obviousness.

But not on second thought. Granted, his stationing himself in the future would be an obvious stratagem. But wouldn't his doing just the opposite be an even more obvious stratagem?

Logic, then, favored his being in the future. But it didn't guarantee the fact. Alec shrugged. Life was chary when it came to handing out guarantees. Without further hesitation, he jbited.

He rematerialized in the fissure approximately three seconds after "Doris" had stepped out of it and jaited, and exactly 2.1250 seconds after he himself had jaited from the narrow trail. The only noticeable difference between the two points in time was the character of the morning mist. In the future, it was—would be—skimmed milk; in the present, it was pea soup. This much, at least, was in Alec's favor if he'd guessed wrong.

He moved to the mouth of the fissure and, raising his shield till he could just see over its bronze rim, began backing out onto the trail. Mist-shrouded, grotesque, the height took shape above him. The trees came gradually into view, gaunt, ghost-like, unreal. Something gleamed among them, pierced the morning mist like lightning from the fingertips of Zeus. That which is obvious to one man is seldom obvious to another: the structure Alec had built faltered on its false foundation and came crashing down upon him, brick by logical brick.

His shield was as authentic as modern technology had been—would be—able to make it, but its authenticity was its Achilles' heel; a bronze rim, four layers of imitation bull's hide and a bronze boss fell abysmally short of impenetrableness. The layers of ersatz hide slowed the javelin's momentum, but enough remained to allow the point to imbed itself deeply in his left shoulder. The double impact knocked him flat on his back, and the third impact—that of his back against solid slate—tore the javelin from his shoulder and his shield from his left arm and sent both weapons hurtling into the depths below.

But he still had his own javelin and he still had full use of his right arm. A dream-like calm settled over him as he watched "Doris the Boeotian" descend the slope, cautiously at first and then with increasing confidence. Watched him advance along the narrow ledge-like trail. Watched with half-closed eyes, watched without moving a muscle. He waited—waited till he could see the globules of sweat upon the PastCo agent's upper lip; till the man's soaring confidence reduced to near zero his reactive ability to jait. And then, with a single flowing movement that consumed the last morsel of his strength, he sat up, drew back his right arm and cast his javelin straight toward "Doris's" chest.

"Doris's" right foot was mere inches from the edge of the trail and he had lifted the rock over his head preparatory to bashing out Alec's brains. However, he managed to elude the javelin by twisting his upper body to the left. Unfortunately for him, the maneuver threw him off balance, and when he got rid of the rock in the only way he could without dropping it on his head—i.e., by casting it forward—he lost the last of his equilibrium. Perhaps he could have jaited, but he didn't—probably because he realized Thanatos would jait too. Presently he began to scream as, arms flailing, he topped backward into nothingness. It was a long scream, the longest Alec had ever heard. It cut off abruptly, like a broken sound track.

IT BEGAN TO RAIN AGAIN. Alec lay upon his back, and the falling rain was cold upon his face. It came down steadily. It formed Lilliputian lakes on the rocky trail, and the lakes overflowed their banks and created Lilliputian rivers, and the rivers flowed all around him. From far above came the sound of a trumpet. It was followed by the fierce battle cry of the Greeks—"Eleleu! Eleleu!"—as they stormed the summit.

His left shoulder had gone numb a moment after "Doris's" javelin had pierced it. Now, feeling began to come back. As yet, there was no pain—only a remote throbbing that seemed less a part of him than the ground on which he lay, than the fall-ing rain. Suddenly, and for no appa-rent reason, he jbited mentally to the scene of his first jait-jbit encounter with "Doris", rematerializing in the Assyrian house where he had left Sarai. He saw again the room in which he had spent the night; saw "Doris" standing in the dawn-lit doorway. Once again, he jaited . . . saw the four pallets lying on the floor and the four sleeping forms upon them ...

"Sarai," he whispered into the fall-ing rain. "Sarai."

No, she had not been there. And she should have been. The moment had been two days in the future—two days, almost, since he had farmed her out and gone his way with the Ten Thousand. There should have been five pallets, not four. *Five* sleeping forms ...

What had they done to her, these people' who had seemed so eager to take her in? What had *he* done to her in his haste to be rid of her? Had he killed her too—killed her in the same way he had killed his kid sister? By shirking the responsibility she en-tailed? He had known all along what kind of a crowd Marianne had been traveling with, and yet he had let her go on traveling with it because her absorption with her new friends had kept her out of his hair; had freed him from her. He was completely to blame for what had happened to her and he was completely to blame for whatever had happened to Sarai. Their blood was on his hands.

His hands were lying on his chest. Lifting his head, he looked at them. Yes, there was blood on them. The blood of Sarai and Marianne. He tried to wash the blood away by splashing them in the Lilliputian lakes and riv-ers, hut it was no use and when he looked at them again there was more blood on them than before and his left shoulder was a deep dark well of pain. It was going to be a hard winter, this first one of the New World. He was glad that he would be able to spend it with the Pilgrims; glad that he would be able to suffer with them and go without. Spring would be late in coming, but it would come, and he would give thanks when the last snows melted and the first birds sang. Thanks for the suffering that had been inflicted upon him, the suffering that would wash the blood from his hands, the blood of Sarai and Marianne.

WHEN XENOPHON, at the head of a detachment of Rhodesian slingers, found him, his mind cleared briefly and he said, "See to it, Xenophon, that Pasion wears my helmet instead of his own and order him to wear it at all times, except when he sleeps." Then the moment of clarity faded and he was back home in his study, wait-ing for Marianne to come in and tell him the Terrible Truth; and then, for some mysterious reason, the study dissolved and he was standing in a golden field, kissing a girl with night-black hair; and then the field dissolved too, and with it the girl Sarai, and log walls, their chinks filled with mud, rose round him, and it was night, and cold. Cold night, night cold, cold night.

VII *Reunion*

THE NIGHT ENDURED for eight days. Toward dawn, Alec had a "dream". In it, Xenophon came into the tent where he was sleeping, and said, "Let us talk about your little sister, Alex-ander."

The tent was poorly lighted, and Alec had difficulty seeing the Athe-nian's face. "How did you know I have a little sister, Xenophon?"

"During your moments of fever you have spoken much, and it is wise that we discuss this matter now

so that your recovery will not be further de-layed. How many summers has your little sister seen?"

"Twenty-two."

"Then she is not really such a little sister after all."

"No."

Xenophon leaned over the pallet where Alec lay. "But having married very young, she is unhappy—is that not so?"

"Yes, Xenophon. She is unhappy."

"How many children has she borne?"

"Three."

"And are all of them ugly and mal-formed?"

Indignant, Alec tried to sit up. He discovered that he couldn't. "No, Xenophon, they are *not* ugly and mal-formed. They are beautiful."

"But do you not find it strange that this unhappy sister of yours who was married so young to a man she was not suited for and who was not suited for her should have borne three beautiful children?"

"It—it is strange in a way, I suppose."

"Your sister cries frequently, does she not? And wishes she were dead?"

Again Alec tried to sit up. This time, he almost succeeded. "She never cries!" he said. "And far from wishing she were dead, she loves life more than anyone I've ever known!"

"But do you not find this strange also? That a woman who is unhappily married to a man she does not love and who does not love her should never cry and should have an over-whelming desire to live?"

Alec did not answer.

"Do you think it is possible that your sister may be happy?" Xenophon asked. "That through sheer good fortune she may have married someone for whom she was ideally suited and who was ideally suited for her?"

"But she *had* to marry him, don't you see? And it was my fault! Our parents were killed in an accident when she was fifteen. That made me automatically responsible for her. And I failed to live up to that responsibility. I failed *her!* Every time I look at another girl I see her face! Every time I—"

Xenophon raised his hand. "I have seen you torture yourself long enough, Alexander. Ever since we found you on the mountainside you have been crying out over and over not about the crime which 'Duds the Boeotian' clearly committed against you, but about imaginary crimes you yourself committed against your sister and against a slave girl named Sarai. Do you not understand that if the presence of tears denotes unhappiness, their absence can very well denote the exact opposite? Do you not understand that if a desire to die denotes despair, a desire to live must almost of necessity denote a *lack* of despair? And do you not know that a husband and wife who are deeply in love are more apt to have beautiful children than a husband and wife who are not? Your crimes are made of mists, Alexander—the one against your 'little' sister, and by extension, the one against the slave girl Sarai. So sleep, and cry out no more."

WHEN ALEC NEXT AWOKE, it was dawn, and Pasion was standing beside his pallet. Through the goatskin walls of the tent came the multifarious sounds an army makes when it is getting ready to move. There were shouts, curses, the whinnying of horses and the rattling of weaponry. In the background there was another sound—a roaring rushing sound, as of great quantities of water flowing.

He must have frowned, for Pasion knelt beside him and said, "It is the river Centrites that you hear, Alexander. Eight days have passed since you were wounded, and the army has crossed the Carduchian Mountains." Alec's first thought was for his helmet. At first glance, there was nothing to distinguish the one upon his friend's head from a thousand others of similar design; but a second glance revealed the technological nuances that marked it unmistakably as a product of YoreCo's Special Equipment Shop.

His next thought was for his micro-tape cartridge case. Panic touched him when he realized that his leather vest had been removed, then receded when he saw the vest lying beside the pallet. A quick palpation of the inside pocket assured him that the case was still there, and simple logic assured him that the tapes were too.

He fought to keep his relief from showing on his face. "Whose tent is this, Pasion?" he asked.

"Xenophon's. You would appear to be his favorite captain, Alexander, since it is the only tent the army has, and seems to have been obtained for your benefit alone, as Xenophon seldom sleeps in it himself. Yes, I would say definitely that you are his favorite captain. Else why did he delegate me, the same day you were wounded, to oversee your recovery, and relieve me of all other duties?"

A deep lethargy dulled Alec's curiosity, and he said only, "Have we crossed the Centrites?"

"No. We are still on the Carduchian side. The Carduchi still threaten our rear, and on the heights across the river there is an army of Armenians, Mardians and Chaldeans waiting for us to attempt a crossing. Downstream there is a place where we can more easily ford the stream: that is why we are moving out."

A Cilician slave entered the tent, bearing a steaming bowl of noisome gruel. He knelt down opposite Pasion and began spoon-feeding the patient. The gruel had a familiar taste that resurrected in Alec's mind memories of having been similarly fed during his eight-day bout with the infection engendered by "Duris's" dirty javelin point. As soon as the Cilician slave departed, two Syrian slaves came in carrying a crude litter made of saplings and sheepskins. Under Pasion's directions, they lifted the patient upon it and bore him outside.

The slanting sunlight blasted Alec's retinas and for a while he could not see much of anything. Then, gradually, he made out the ranks of Greek soldiers that were being formed, and presently, beyond them, he saw the gleaming ribbon of the Centrites, and the sheer cliffs that comprised the opposite bank. Upon the clifftops he distinguished the tiny figures of horses and horsemen.

The litter swayed soporifically as the bearers bore it along the river bank in the army's wake. The river widened, grew shallower. The wily Xenophon had divided the army into two main groups—super *taxeis*, as it were—one under his command, the other under Cheirisophus's. Cheirisophus's half entered the stream first, and Xenophon's half remained behind with the camp-followers and the baggage-cattle. The Carduchi, high in the hills behind, unleashed successive volleys of arrows, all of which fell short. The Greeks crossing the river began shouting *A! la! la! la!*, the peltasts and hoplites hanging their lances against their shields. But the Armenian, Mardian and Chaldean troops, who had abandoned the heights and formed their line directly opposite their advancing foe, did not budge.

Then the wily Xenophon led a large body of cavalry upstream and made as if to cross at the site of the recently struck camp. Immediately the forces facing Cheirisophus, fearing they might be outflanked, retreated. Instead of pursuing them, Cheirisophus, when he gained the Armenian side of the river, charged the heights, where only a token force remained, and took them with ease.

Meanwhile, Xenophon came back downstream and drove off the Carduchian bowmen, who had ventured partway down the hillsides. Afterward, the camp-followers and the baggage-cattle began crossing the river. Alec's bearers set their burden down on the lip of the gently sloping bank and awaited their turn. The camp-followers were a colorful lot. Somehow they had managed to hang onto one of their wagons and had accomplished the herculean task of getting it across the mountains. Drawn by a team of oxen, it lurched alarmingly as it entered the river, regained its equilibrium as the water rose past the hubs of its flimsy wheels. Alec recognized it as old Anytus's.

Presently he saw old Anytus himself. The weapons-repairman was wading behind the wagon, thigh-deep in water. Wading beside him, hip-deep, was a girl. A slender girl with a peri-like face and long black hair. A girl wearing a red blouse and a blue skirt, frayed and faded from innumerable washings. A girl with a red-and-blue shawl draped over her shoulders. Her name got as far as his lips, but for the life of him he couldn't utter it, and then, intuitively, she turned and looked straight at where he lay, propped painfully on one elbow, and when she recognized him she gave a little cry and began floundering through the water, falling once and vanishing from view, and finally running up the bank and kneeling beside him, crying, "Alexander, Alexander, I did not know you were ill!"

Still he could not utter her name, but there was a good reason now, a sound reason, for his lips were covered with hers. The river water that drenched her hair ran down upon his face and neck. It was only when she raised her head to catch her breath, when, defying the law of gravity and his own weakness, he put his arms around her waist, that the name at last found freedom. "Sarai."

Tears began intermingling with the river water that fell like rain upon his face. "I would have stayed in the vil-lage, O Alexander, but I could not bear to be so far apart from you. I ran away as soon as you left and came back to the camp of the camp-followers. I promised Anytus that I would cook and wash for him if he would take me along, and he agreed. Dear Alexander, I hope you are not angry with me."

He looked up into her large brown eyes, realized for the first time how deep they were. Saw for the first time the promises they held. "I'm glad you ran away."

She fell to kissing him again, then abruptly drew back. He saw her blush; then he, too, became aware that they had an audience. It was quite a large one, consisting, in addition to the two bearers, of several hundred grinning peltasts and several hundred grinning hoplites. Sitting on his horse a short distance away, regarding the reunion with luminous dark eyes, was Xenophon himself.

Alec found himself not only equal to the occasion but capable of taking advantage of it. "I request, Xenophon," he said, "that in addition to the favors you have already accorded me you accord me one more. I would like to have this slave girl at my side for the remainder of the march in order that I may look after her."

Zenophon smiled. "It would seem, Alexander, that you need more looking after than she, but how better could such a purpose be served? Request granted."

VIII.

Snow

TWO DAYS AFTER entering Armenia, the Ten Thousand passed around the source of the Tigris. At this point, Tiribazus, the deputy-governor, put in his appearance. The Greek generals met with him and agreed, in exchange for his promise not to interfere with the march, to refrain from vandalizing any of the vil-lages in their path. Three days later, with Tiribazus following at a discreet distance with a large body of cavalry, the Greek army arrived at the palace of Sequanor and quartered in the vil-lages encompassing it.

That night, it snowed heavily, and in the morning none of the men wanted to get up. To shame them into doing so, Xenophon began cutting wood. Pasion was the first to follow his example, and soon he and Sarai had a roaring fire going in front of Alec's/Xenophon's tent. Meanwhile, Alec, who had recuperated sufficiently to do for himself, discovered that some time during the night his micro-tape cartridge case had been stolen.

He knew it had been in the pocket of his leathern vest last night because he had replaced it there after inserting the fifth and final cartridge in "Pasion's" helmet while the Arcadian was out foraging and while Xenophon, during one of his rare visits to the tent, was napping on the pallet he had procured for Sarai. Sarai had remarked on what a strange little box it was and had asked what it was for, and Alec had answered, "To keep strange little things in."

Clearly, "Doris the Boeotian" had been wrong in assuming AgoCo didn't have an agent-assassin on the March. Just as clearly, that agent was either Sarai or Pasion.

Sarai could safely be ruled out. AgoCo would hardly have sent a nine-teen- or even a twenty-one year old girl on a mission that involved a 3,000 mile hike. It was true that she hadn't shown up till half of it was over, but the second half was by far the more arduous, and it was unlikely that a twenty-first century American girl would be able to survive it. The fact that Sarai had managed to survive it thus far merely served to argue that she was what she both seemed and claimed to be—a Babylonian peasant girl.

That left Pasion. Pasion slept just within the doorway of the tent and had strict orders to rouse Xenophon and/or Alec should anyone try to enter. Since Alec removed his vest each night before going to bed and used it to augment his rather thin blanket, the Arcadian could easily have lifted the cartridge case after Alec and Sarai had fallen asleep. Xenophon had left early in the evening, so there would have been no witnesses.

Before passing judgment on his friend, however, Alec inspected the tent's goatskin walls. None of them had been cut. Next, he went outside and checked the tent stakes. All were securely in place, nor

were there any footprints in the snow.

It had to be Pasion. Not only was he the logical candidate, he was the only candidate.

It was he who had made friends with Alec, not the other way around as it had at first seemed. Probably he hadn't intended to steal the cartridge case till the Ten Thousand reached Trebisond, but when Alec's helmet had been handed to him outright he had changed his mind and decided to pasttape the rest of the pastacular himself. To do so, he had needed the fifth and final micro-tape cartridge, and not knowing Alec had secretly inserted it, he had stolen the case.

Alec still might have had doubts concerning his friend's guilt had there not been still another factor. In accepting Alec's helmet, Pasion had turned over his own for Alec to wear. Now that Alec was up and about, Pasion should have asked for his own back. He hadn't.

Alec sighed. He supposed he could expect to be assassinated any minute of the day or night now. But he rather expected Pasion would hold off till they got to Trebisond. He was, after all, responsible for Alec's well-being, and would be the first to hear about it if something untoward happened to his charge.

For the time being, Alec decided to wait and watch.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, after again quartering in the villages, the Ten Thousand reformed their ranks and resumed the march. Tiribazus proved no more trustworthy than had Tissaphernes—an eventuality that surprised no one—and set up an ambush in a range of rolling hills; but Xenophon, anticipating such a move, went on ahead with a *taxis* of peltasts and a detachment of cavalry, attacked the deputy-governor's forces from the rear and put them to rout. Three days later, the Greek army crossed the Euphrates near its source.

Now, a fierce north wind began to blow. More snow fell, and the wind piled it into knee-deep drifts. Many of the baggage-cattle began dropping from exhaustion. On the fourth day after the crossing, some of the men began collapsing from malnutrition and fatigue. The rest staggered on on frostbitten feet, blinded by the whiteness of the snow.

On the evening of the fifth day, Cheirisophus, in the lead, looked over a group of Armenian villages. Several were set aside for Xenophon's rear *taxeis*, which were being harassed by the remnants of Tiribazus's cavalry. When the inhabitants of one of them turned out to be inhospitable, Polycrates, one of Xenophon's captains, asked permission to move in on it with a company of peltasts. Xenophon gave his okay, but suggested that Polycrates wait till morning. Despite the rigors of the march, Alec had fully recuperated, and, sick of waiting for Pasion to make some untoward move, decided to provide the Arcadian with an ideal opportunity. So he asked Xenophon if he could accompany Polycrates. When Xenophon said he could, Pasion, as Alec had anticipated, promptly insisted that he be allowed to go along. After a moment's hesitation, Xenophon gave his approval.

The company set forth in a gray morning murk. Predictably, Pasion wasted no time in gaining Alec's side. "Have you ever visited Arcadia, Alexander?" he asked.

"No."

"I hope someday you will. It is lovely there. The greenness of the fields is surpassed in beauty only by the greenness of the olive groves, the blueness of the sea only by the blueness of the sky."

The nostalgia sounded genuine, but Alec didn't buy it. The company, by this time, had reached the perimeter of the village. The houses were underground, but the warmth rising from them had melted the snow, betraying their location. As the peltasts moved in, scores of Armenian peasants armed with clubs and spears boiled out of a dozen well-like doorways.

The peltasts met them head-on, and hand-to-hand combats, became the order of the day. Alec, keeping a wary eye on Pasion, engaged an ape-like Armenian wielding a heavy cudgel. He was about to jait-jbit and overcome the man from behind when Pasion leaped between them and caught the Armenian's descending cudgel on his shield. The force of the blow knocked the Arcadian to his knees and broke the straps that held the shield on his left arm. The Armenian raised the cudgel for a second blow. Alec jaited, got behind the Armenian, jbited and grabbed the cudgel. Twisting it free from the man's grasp, he hit him over the head with it. The Armenian collapsed. A few moments later, hostilities came to an end as those of the villagers who were still on their feet took to their heels and disappeared

into the gray murk.

The Armenian's cudgel, if it had connected with "Pasion's" helmet, would have demolished the tape re-corder hidden in its ridge. It had been a close call, both for Pasion and the pastacular.

Alec helped the Arcadian to his feet. It was the latter who spoke first. "You move with the swiftness of Zeus' lightning, Alexander. I owe you my life."

Alec sighed. "No more than I owe you mine."

And it was so. Further proof of Pa-sion's innocence was unnecessary.

Nevertheless, Alec exacted it. "I would like my helmet back," he said.

"And I, mine. Yours hums some-times and makes my head ache." The exchange was made. "Your thoughts seem far away, Alexander."

Alec's thoughts were. They had flown all the way back to Adanti, to a moment he had half forgot. Again he left the camp of the camp-followers carrying a dark-haired girl across his shoulder. Again she appeared ab-ruptly on the ground before him. No, not abruptly. The time-lapse could be stated more specifically than that. *Exactly 2.1250 seconds after she van-ished from his shoulder.*

Jait-jbit, jbit-jait, the name of the game was "Dissimulate".

IX

Aphrodite Pandemos

THE CHASTE SLOPES of Olympus had become an anathema to her azure eyes. The marmoreal palace of Zeus a fulsome rookery.

"Was it for this I rose from the sea?" she asked the other gods and goddesses one day. "To languish here and supervise sex from on high?"

"Look below and to the east. Do you see that execrable mortal standing there? Ever since the Battle of Cunaxa he's had at his very fingertips the most luscious piece of ass you ever saw, and not once has he fucked her—not *once!* It's enough to bring a love goddess to tears. Not long ago, he even tried to get rid of her, and now, just as he was starting to get turned on, a complication has arisen and turned him back off.

"Well, I'm not going to let it hap-pen that way! This time, I'm going to do my supervising on the scene. Farewell Zeus, Hera, Hephaestus, Apollo, Athena, Ares, Artemis, Hermes, Hestia, Helios, Selene, Iris, Hebe, Ganymede, Poseidon and Am-phitrite. I go to join the Ten Thousand on their march to the Euxine Sea!"

HALF-STARVED, half-frozen, half-dead, the Ten Thousand took up pro tempore residence in the underground Armenian villages. They were forced to share their quarters with the villag-ers' livestock as well as with the vil-lagers, but there was an abundance of food and warmth and wine.

As Xenophon's aide, Alec had been assigned a room of his own. Sarai had already moved into it, but he put off doing so till evening, phrasing and rephrasing in his mind the bitter ac-cusation he intended to hurl at her the minute he stepped in the door.

The room was at the end of a long tunnel-like corridor. The door con-sisted of a heavy curtain of sewn-together goatskins. He paused outside it, breathing a little hard. Then, im-pulsively, he drew it aside and step-ped into the room.

He paused.

The room was about eight feet long by six feet wide, and the pallet on which Sarai was lying took up most of the floorspace. As a matter of fact, in stepping into the room he had almost stepped on her.

A primitive oil lamp hanging from a rafter cast unreliable light from wall to wall. When his eyes grew accus-tomed to it, he saw one of Sarai's sandals lying in one corner of the room and the other in the opposite corner. It was as though she had kicked them off.

Just to the right of the doorway lay a tangle of garments comprising a red blouse, a blue skirt and what looked like a pair of cotton drawers. It was at this point that he confronted the fact that the girl lying

face down on the pallet didn't have a stitch on and that the part of her he'd almost stepped on was her bare behind.

He must have gasped for she turned over on her back and looked up at him.

"Sarai, what in the world. . ."

"All—all of a sudden the room grew so warm that I could not stand my clothes on another moment. I just *had* to take them off. I—I know it is unseemly for you to find me like this, Alexander, but as long as you have. . ." She smiled tentatively and raised her arms.

Around him bastions crumbled, ramparts fell. He realized suddenly that he was removing his vest.

"It—it *is* kind of warm in here at that."

"Let me help you with your skirt."

"DOES IT HURT, Sarai?"

"It hurts wonderful."

"I wanted you before, I wanted you all along, hut I—"

"I wanted you too."

"Not as much as I wanted you."

"More."

"Think of all the time we wasted."

"Are we going to make up for it Alexander?"

"Every seond of it."

"Ohhhh. Push harder, Alexander."

"I am pushing hard."

"Harder, harder, harder! Ohhhhh."

"Sarai, I think I'm—"

"Oh, Alexander. Ohhhhhhhhh!"

"Sarai!"

"YOU READY again already, Alexander?"

"Yes. Let's try it from the side this time."

"All right."

"I LIKED IT that way, Alexander. Let's do it that way again."

"Come on."

"SARAI, I thought I heard someone laughing. Was it you?"

"No."

"That's funny. I. could swear it came from someone right here in this room. From a woman."

"Alexander, it's getting hard again!" "How should we do it this time?" "The same way as before."

SOMETIME DURING the night, he awakened. The lamp had gone out hours ago, and he lay for a long time staring up into, the darkness. Beside him, Sarai slept soundly. He reached over and rested his hand upon her belly. It was soft and warm and moist. Desire for her stirred in him again. How could he conceivably have thought that this sweet, passionate, warm, wanting, outrageously luscious creature was an agent-assassin? That she had stolen his cartridge case and planned to kill him? Surely he must have been out of his mind!

In the morning, he wasn't quite so sure. Had she really taken off all her clothes because the room was warm, he wondered, or had she done so to deflect his thoughts from the missing cartridge case? Perhaps he was the victim of a subterfuge designed to keep him so busy exploring the hills and dales of her body that he wouldn't have time to explore the windings and turnings of her mind.

Her clothes were still lying in a tangled heap by the door, and for a moment he was tempted to go through them on the chance that the case might be hidden in a secret pocket. But he couldn't quite bring

himself to do so.

His doubts continued to build up throughout the day as he accompanied Xenophon on a tour of the villages and helped the Athenian obtain an accurate count of the wounded and the sick. By evening, the doubts had built up to such an extent that his head was beginning to ache; but the moment he returned to his under-ground room and saw Sarai lying on the pallet, they disappeared and did not reappear till morning.

Thus it was throughout the seven days the Ten Thousand quartered in the villages. Thus it was throughout the remainder of the march.

After leaving the villages, the Ten Thousand passed through the territories of the Phasiani, the Taochi and the Chalybes, climbed the slopes of Mount Theches and saw the distant sheen of the Euxine Sea. After fighting their way through the country of the Macrones, they arrived at last at Trebisonde.

The Greeks proceeded to celebrate their arrival by holding a series of gymnastic games—a weird way, if you asked Alec, to commemorate the conclusion of a 3,000 mile hike. Meanwhile, credit was arranged for by Xenophon, and on the outskirts of the colony a second sea appeared—a sea of tents. Shortly, shopping excursions to Trebisonde became a daily affair.

Alec had a week to wait before making rendezvous with the Trans-world Timelines ship that "stopped" twice yearly in the hills southwest of the city. A week to find his missing cartridge case. A week to make up his mind whether Sarai was the AgoCo agent-assassin who had stolen it.

And she—if she *was* the AgoCo agent-assassin—had a week to complete her assignment.

In view of the fact that she was the only logical candidate, she *had* to be the agent-assassin. He was perfectly well aware of this—when he was away from her. But when they were alone together in the new tent Xenophon had bought for them, he was aware only that he was in love with her; and instead of spending his time trying to figure out a way to trick her into betraying herself, he spent it trying to figure out a way to sneak her aboard the Transworld Timelines ship and take her back to the twenty-first century with him.

The days went by. The nights—

"SHALL WE do it from the side again, Alexander?"

"Do you want to?"

"Yes."

"Slide your leg up a little higher."

"Like this?"

"That's it. There."

"Oh."

"Turn toward me a little more. There."

"Ohhhhhh."

"I'm going to roll you over now—all right?"

"Hurry, Alexander. Hurry."

"There."

"Oh, Alexander. Ohhhhhhhh!"

ON THE EVE of the seventh day when Alec suggested that they go for a walk, Sarai asked him to hand her the new tunic he'd bought for her in the colony several days ago and charged to Xenophon's account. It was lying in the middle of the floor where she'd stepped out of it. When he picked it up, an object fell out of its inside pocket, which was odd, because when he'd bought it it hadn't had an inside pocket, or an outside one, for that matter. The object was odd too—for 401 B.C. No, it wasn't his missing cartridge case, it was a small vial. Of pills.

He picked it up.

There was no prescription label, but it wasn't hard to figure out what the pills were for.

Sarai snatched the vial out of his hand. Grabbed her tunic.

Without looking at her, he got into the tunic he had bought for himself when he bought hers. But he

had to look at her eventually, and when he finally did he saw that she was looking at him. She was fully dressed, and the vial was safely out of sight. In the vacillating light coming from the oil lamp affixed to the center tent pole her peri-like face seemed to be falling apart.

"Oh Alexander, I'm so sorry!"

Alec shifted to Anglo-American. "What's your real name?"

She shifted as easily as he had. "Sarah Smith."

He stepped closer to her and held out his hand. "If you'll give me the cartridge case, I'll leave, and try to forget any of this ever happened. Or maybe you haven't got it with you. Maybe you hid it in old Anytus's wa-gon."

She stared at him. "You mean that oblong little box I asked what was for? I haven't got it. I didn't even know it *was* a cartridge case!"

"Liar!"

She winced but she didn't drop her eyes. "Very well, I'm a liar. But I'm not lying now. I had to lie before or you wouldn't have taken me on the March, and even as it was, you almost didn't. And after that, I had to keep on lying. I knew you were with the Ten Thousand—I obtained a copy of your dossier from YoreCo before I left the present. My parents are rich, and rich girls can usually get just about anything they want, except, of course, the things they really want. From your dossier I learned all about you, and decided you were just the sort of person I needed to see me safely through the Down March. I pinpointed the time almost to the hour when the Greek army was in the vicinity of the village Artaxerxes's forces had fled through, and I hired a 'timer' to bring me back. I knew your face by heart from the photo contained in your dossier, and I was going to follow the Greek army when it returned to camp, and somehow seek you out. I knew that if I put on a good enough act you'd buy it, and that you wouldn't dream of leaving me defenseless among ten thousand men. But I didn't have to find you: instead, you found me, entirely by accident of course. All I had to do from that point on was lie, lie, lie, and so I lied, lied, lied in that silly language I'd hypno-taught myself along with half a dozen others. And you believed me. So utterly that even when I jait-jbited while you were carrying me to that wretched Assyrian village you still didn't catch on. Look at me! Look at this monstrous prevaricator! This deceiver, this dissimulator. Look at her and try to believe that she'd go to such preposterous lengths for the sake of a histori-thesis!"

"A histori-thesis?"

"Yes. On Books Two, Three and Four of the *Anabasis*. The *Katabasis*. I'm majoring in Greek history and happen to have total recall, and I guess I've always liked doing things nobody else would dream of doing. Anyway, I decided that for my histori-thesis I'd do an eye-witness account of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand. So I booked return-passage on the Transworld Timelines ship that's due here tomorrow morning and hired a 'timer'. Then—"

"Then you went to the corner pharmacy and refilled your instant birth-control pill prescription—right?"

"That's a dirty implication to make, Mr. Alexander Vincent Henry! It just so happens that *enlightened* twenty-first century girls carry instant BeeSees with them at *all* times, but coming from an old-fashioned neo-Victorian family, you wouldn't know that. And coming from an old-fashioned neo-Victorian family, you wouldn't know either that when a girl falls in love with someone and experiences an overwhelming desire for him, she has as much right to make advances as he has, especially when he doesn't know enough to. It's bad enough that you should think I'm a common thief without thinking I'm a common tart too!"

"I don't think you're a common thief," Alec said. "I think you're an uncommon one. And I also think that before this night is out you're probably going to try to kill me, or hire someone to do the job for you, so that you can take possession of the final micro-tape cartridge and so AgoCo can acquire the franchise for the past-acular by reason of YoreCo's subsequent default."

She had taken a backward step and her face, so ruddy a moment ago from the sun and the wind, was now white. "You think I'm one of those horrible agent-assassins? Alec, you *can't* believe such a thing!"

"Oh yes I can." Alec held out his hand again. "Give me the case. I know you have it hidden somewhere. If it's in old Anytus's wagon, we'll go to the camp of the camp followers and you can hand it over to me there."

For want of a better weapon she tore off one of her sandals and, before he caught on to her intention, brought it down with all her might upon his palm. "There's your case, Mr. Alexander Vincent Henry! The only case you're ever going to get from me!" She turned her back on him. "Go away! You neo-Victorian hypocrite! You seducer. You—you sex fiend!"

Alec blinked. Then someone coughed just outside the tent flap. A discreet moment later Pasion stepped into the tent. "Xenophon requests your presence, Alexander."

Shaking his right hand to quell the tingling of the palm, Alec pointed to Sarai with his left. He shifted from Anglo-American to Doric. "Keep her here till I get back, Pasion," he said unthinkingly. Then he strode out into the night, the richer—or the poorer—for having lost one Babylo-nian slave girl.

X. *Apologia*

XENOPHON'S TENT was considerably larger than any of the others and was pitched on slightly higher ground. Alec found the Athenian sitting at a portable wooden table, a roll of papyrus before him, a reed pen and a small cruse of ink adjacent to his right hand. He had purchased a new mili-tary outfit in Trebisond that was even more resplendent than the one he'd packed from Athens, and lie fairly shone in the combined radiance of a pair of klieg-like oil lamps.

After the two men exchanged greet-ings, Alec sat down on a bench oppo-site the Athenian. Casually Xenophon reached beneath the folds of his golden mantle, withdrew the missing cartridge case and laid it on the table. Alec gasped.

Sure, Pasion would have roused him if an *outsider* had entered the tent. But not if Xenophon had en-tered it. And if Xenophon, after re-moving the case from Alec's vest, had sworn the Arcadian to secrecy. Pasion naturally would have told no one.

"Why, Xenophon?"

"You are an intelligent man, Alexander, and so, indubitably, are your masters. Yet you failed to anticipate that someday one of your enemies would, by making greater use of the simultaneity of time, gain an insuper-able advantage in the profit war you are waging.

"Let me elaborate. You, for the sake of simplicity, shall be this enemy. Very well. You find among your slaves a husband and wife who have known semi-poverty all their lives. The woman is with child, and the advanced science of your era en-ables you to determine that the child will be a male. You then hold the prospect of riches before the man's and the woman's eyes—not great riches, but modest ones, for to some-one who has never owned a half--daric, a full daric represents a for-tune. You then present your proposal, and they accept it. Then, after teach-ing them all they will need to know, you send them back to a point in the past that precedes the Expedition of Cyrus by some thirty years. The child is born, and the parents rear him in accordance with their instructions, preparing him throughout his youth for a mission whose full meaning is beyond his comprehension because he belongs to a different thought-world than they, but a mission which he should nevertheless be able to com-plete. The parents name this child—perhaps by accident, perhaps by design—'Xenophon', and they explain to him exactly what he must do when the time comes and assure him that after he has done it he can, if he wishes, remain in the age to which the mission ultimately will lead him and in which he rightfully belongs. Are you beginning to understand, Alexander?"

Dazed, Alec said, "I think so . . . I think your parents' so-called masters probably gambled on your turning out to be the real Xenophon. But why are you telling me all this when the main purpose of your mission is to murder me?"

"That is no longer so, Alexander. It is no longer so because of three reasons, none of which my parents' masters took into consideration. In my youth. I was walking down a nar-row thoroughfare one

day when a barefoot old man with crooked legs and a misshapen face barred my path and asked me where men were made honorable and good. When I could not answer, he said, 'Follow me, and find out'. I followed him and became his pupil. The pupils of Socrates, Alexander, do not commit murder.

"The second reason is that the society of which I am a part is a vastly different one from the one that molded my parents. I do not say it is a better society; I say only that, being a product of it, I cannot act in quite the same way that I could were I a product of yours. Nor am I any longer compelled to. Freedom from poverty has had an ennobling effect upon my parents—my father, in fact, has attained the status of knight. Although they instructed me in accordance with the wishes of their masters, they told me that when the time came to complete my mission, the manner of its completion, or whether I completed it or not, would be entirely up to me."

"And the third reason?"

Xenophon ran his fingers over the chrome-plated surface of the cartridge case. "What would I do in an age capable of workmanship such as this, Alexander? In an age capable of recording reality on tiny spools no larger than a pebble? I would be fit only to sweep floors or to carry out refuse. Both you and my parents are honor-bound not to reveal my future to me, so I do not know whether even in my own age I shall amount to more than I already have. But I do know this: in your age, I would amount to nothing, and even though I am a quiet man, given mainly to hunting and fishing and to philosophical thought, to amount to nothing would be more than I could endure. Nor would I be able to endure the feeling of inferiority which would be bound to be my lot were I to pay even a brief visit to an age so vastly superior to my own. So you see, Alexander, even if I were capable of murdering you, there would be no point in my doing so."

"One thing still puzzles me," Alec said. "If it was your intention to return the cartridge case to me, why did you steal—why did you appropriate it in the first place?"

Xenophon smiled. "I thought that would be clear to you by now. I appropriated it in order to safeguard it. The play which its contents contain is even more important to me than to you. I am the protagonist, am I not?"

Alec sat there stunned. "I see now why you made me your aide," he said finally. And then, "When did you first find out I wasn't quite what I seemed to be?"

"At the arms pile near Sitace when you, a supposed Lacedaemonian, addressed me in Attic. I failed to detect 'Duris the Boeotian' in time, or I would have seen to it that he was expelled from the Greek army. The play became increasingly important to me. When you named Pasion to wear your helmet, I arranged for him to be near me; and after you recovered from your wound and fever, I made certain, by appropriating your cartridge case, that the major part of the march, at least, would live for posterity. Like all men who wish to rise above mediocrity, I am vain. I *want* to be remembered and admired. I have kept notes since the beginning of the expedition, and probably someday I shall write an account of all the events that occurred and of my part in them; but what I write, no matter how excellent it may be, can never compare to the records contained in the cartridges in this case and in the cartridge in your helmet." He shoved the case across the table. "Take it, Alexander. Do not let it out of your sight. I hope you will forgive me for whatever distress my vanity may have caused you, and I hope you have not mistakenly accused someone else of an act that was entirely my own doing."

"Sarai!" Alec gasped. He stood up. "I must go, Xenophon. I have indeed accused someone else."

Xenophon sighed. "It is as I feared, then. I wish I could help you, but I cannot. I can only give you advice. When dealing with a woman, never be forthright or outspoken. Be devious."

"Thanks," Alec said. "I'll try to remember."

XI.

Alexander the Greatest

IN HIS and Sarai's tent he found a bewildered Pasion but no Sarai. "One moment she was here, Alexander, the next, she was gone. I cannot understand how she could have disappeared right before

my eyes."

"I can," Alec said. "And I think I know where she can be found."

He looked at his friend, remembering the hardships they had endured together, the adventures they had shared. "Good-by, Pasion," he said.

"You would follow her then? And never return?"

"Never."

"Then it must be so. She will make a fine wife for you, this Babylonian slave girl—if you can convince her you are none of the things she said you were when I asked her what had gone wrong between you."

"I have a plan, Pasion."

"Farewell then, Alexander. I will sacrifice a goat and a sheep upon my return to Arcadia, that she may bear you many fine sons."

The time station lay four miles southwest of the city. Like all such stations, it consisted of a concealed locator-unit—buried, in this instance, in a grassy hillside—that beamed a signal over a radius of ten miles during the twenty-four hour period that preceded the timeship's arrival. The signal grew louder when you neared it, fainter when you moved away, but never did it become noticeable enough to be attributed by the uninitiated to anything more than a mild ringing of the ears.

When Alec reached the hillside, Sarai was already there. It was dawn, and in her chic Grecian tunic she looked like a modern office-girl waiting for an electric bus to arrive and whisk her off to work.

He had one cigarette left. He lit it nervously, and went over and stood beside her. "Well anyway, Miss Smith," he said, "for once, I won't have to do any cutting."

Miss Smith did not even so much as turn her head.

"You see," he elaborated, "the person who does the pasttaping always gets first crack at the cutting, just in case there happens to be something personal on the tapes that he wouldn't want the general public to see. But I don't think there's anything that personal on these tapes. Do you, Miss Smith?"

Did his eyes deceive him, or did she give a little start?

"Most of the really *personal* scenes," he went on, "are incomplete in any case, because sooner or later I'd remember to take off my helmet. Then, too, sometimes we'd remember to extinguish the lamp. Not always, but sometimes. Do you remember that time in our underground love-nest when you—"

"Alexander Henry, this is outright blackmail!"

He looked at her sideways. "Of course, if I had a good enough reason, I might consider eliminating them. But it would have to be a real good reason. Such as preserving them for exclusive inclusion in a certain His-Her micro-tape album that hasn't come into existence yet but which very well could if a certain party would consent for a certain other party to make an honest woman of her and to become her slave."

For a moment she stood there staring at him. Then, just as the timeship shimmered into view on the fifth-century B.C. hillside, she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Oh Alexander, you're the Greatest!" she said.

—ROBERT F. YOUNG