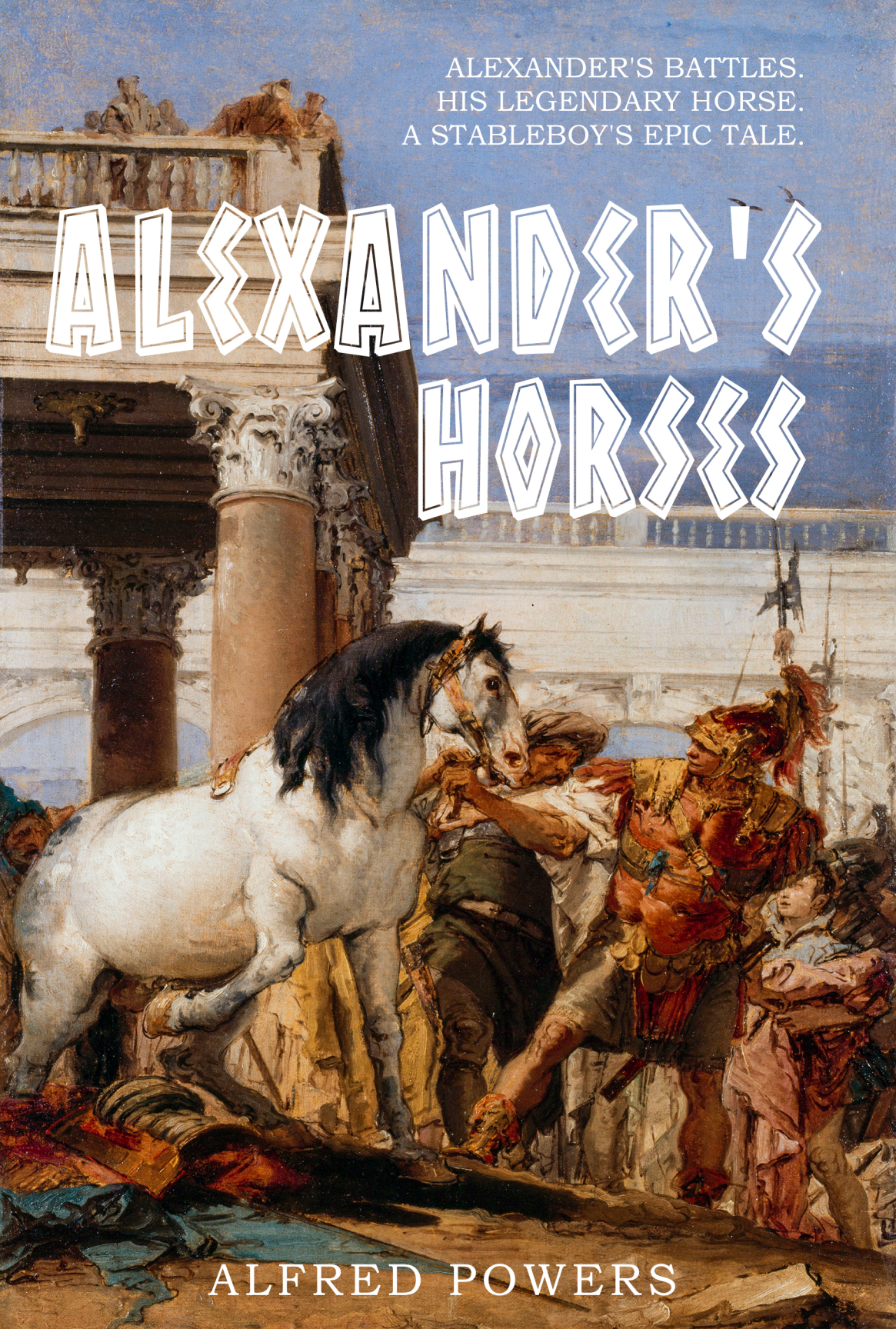
ALEXANDER'S BATTLES.
HIS LEGENDARY HORSE.
A STABLEBOY'S EPIC TALE.

ALEXANDER'S HORSES



ALFRED POWERS

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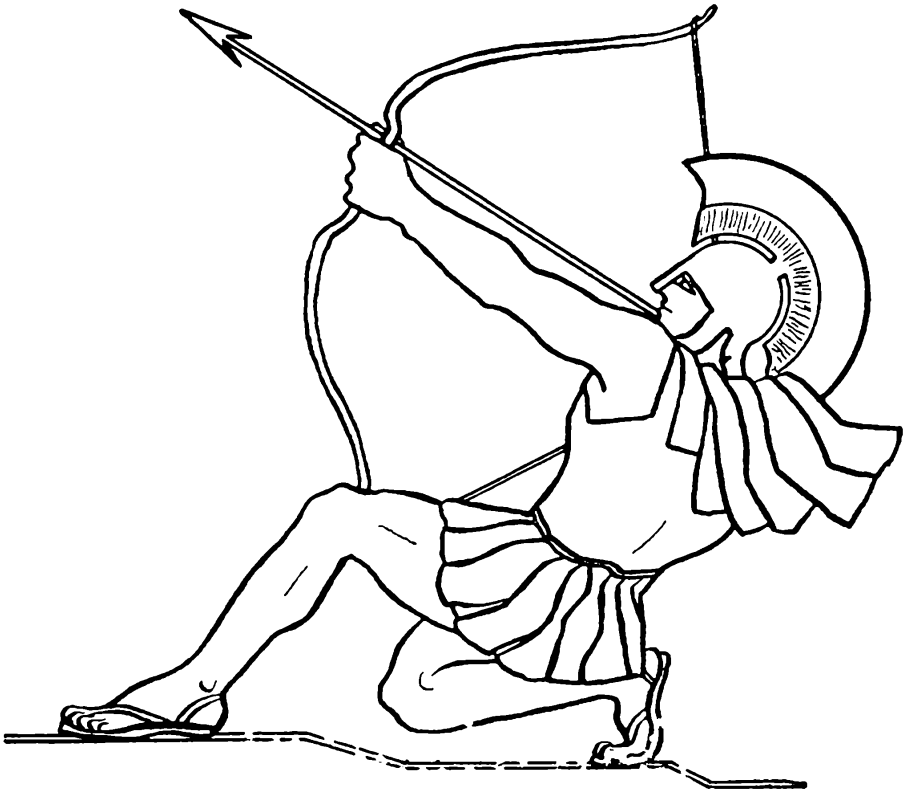

Living Book Press

Alexander exults over his conquest

Contents

ONE

Nepos was on pins and needles waiting for Phidon to return with the big black horse Bucephalus. In the stable of Alexander the Great he stood before the horse's empty stall, which he had freshly scrubbed. He looked again at the sandglass pouring the minutes into the bowl below. He went to the outer door to gaze down the street.

Phidon was twelve minutes overdue. He ought to have been back at two exactly. It was Phidon's day to exercise the great horse. Four miles had to be covered by a fixed rule. The first mile at the rate of three miles an hour. The second at the rate of four. The third at the rate of five. The fourth, through the main street with everybody watching, at the rate of six. At each mile post the boy stopped while he counted to four hundred. It amounted to an hour, not more than a minute or two off one way or the other:

And now it was twelve minutes over. In eight minutes he and Phidon had an appointment to see Alexander. It wasn't as if Phidon, in case of a delay, could get on Bucephalus and make up lost time fast. Ever since thirteen talents had been paid for the horse in Greek gold, nobody had ridden Bucephalus but Alexander. Nobody was ever to ride him but Alexander. Somewhere out there on the four-mile exercise course Phidon had run into something unexpected.

Nepos looked into the empty stall again. The manger was filled

with good-smelling hay, the trough with grain, the granite basin with fresh water, and the special dish with honey. Polymandas, the head stableman, had warned the king that too much sugar was as bad for a horse's teeth as for a boy's. The king promised to ask Aristotle, who knew everything. The philosopher didn't find it easy to say. He needed time. No facts to go on. No other horse had had the bees feeding him. Meanwhile Bucephalus went on getting his honey.

Polymandas was now sitting on his stool, not seeming to be worried. Polymandas, who was big and fat, spent most of his time sitting and none of it worrying.

Nepos went back to the outer door of the stable. Phidon was coming at last, running along with Bucephalus in a trot at his heels. They drew up abruptly in front of Nepos.

"Late," said Nepos.

"I know it," said Phidon. "Is Polymandas mad?"

"Much worse. We're to see the king at two-twenty. We've got only six minutes and it'll take us five to get there, four if we run."

"But what'll I do, Nepos? I'm damp and I'm muddy, don't you see? And I smell. I smell like horse."

"Hurry and put him in his stall."

Polymandas uplifted his heavy bulk from the stool. "I'll take him," he said. "You'll have to hurry."

"But what'll I do, Polymandas? I can't go this way. See the mud. Bucephalus drank from a muddy puddle. Then he pawed it, getting it all over me and himself. I didn't want people seeing me lead him that way through the streets. So I wiped him off with my sleeves and the tail of my cloak. It made him cleaner but me dirtier. I look disreputable, and I know I smell like horse. Will you and Nepos see?"

They both sniffed him.

"I don't smell much," said Polymandas, "but it's such a natural

odor around here I'm not able to tell in any sure way about it. What do you say, Nepos?"

"My nose is blunted too, but I think the horse scent is there pretty thick."

"Then I'll have to run home," said Phidon, "and bathe fast and put on clean clothes. Polymandas, isn't it better than going like I am?"

"How late will it make you?"

"A quarter of an hour."

"It's hard to advise you, Phidon. Alexander wouldn't like it if you showed up in the palace dirty. He wouldn't like it if you kept him waiting. But you can count on it that he won't see you for an hour, maybe two hours, after you get there."

"But Iccus is there," said Nepos, "with his eyes on the hourglass in the waiting room."

"I'll go and clean up," said Phidon.

"I'll run on ahead and be there on time," said Nepos.

When Nepos entered the outer chamber of the palace, a slender young Greek who never seemed to be glad about any thing, or sad either, motioned with a white hand for him to sit down on a bench in a far corner. He was sitting there when Phidon came in all out of breath. Phidon was motioned down beside Nepos by the young man, the king's secretary, Iccus by name, who took a quick glance at the sandglass on his table.

"He sees I'm late," whispered Phidon. "Do I smell now? I had to get clean very quick."

"You're all right now," said Nepos.

They waited and waited while important men arrived and went in ahead of them—generals, high officials, merchants, couriers. They cooled their heels and gazed at pictures by Apelles, the famous painter. They got up to stand in front of the pictures.

Phidon, happening to glance at Iccus, saw the white hand motioning them to be seated again on the bench.

At four o'clock Alexander came out and said, "Now for Phidon and Nepos."

They stood up. He walked across to them, not waiting for them to come to him.

He was straight and tall, an inch or two under six feet. His head did not go straight up from his straight shoulders to give him a proud appearance. It bent a little forward and a little to the left, as if giving special attention to the person he was talking to. His great shock of hair, the color of Thessalian gold, would not stay combed. His eyes were liquid with the moisture of dreams; they were blue, the right one bluer than the other. He was only twenty-two years old, radiant with life and the freshness of life. Phidon and Nepos did not stand in awe of him, his glory not shoving them away but enfolding them close. His words came quickly. Everything about him was magnetic, eager, and warm. He drew men to him as the south wind draws the clouds.

He laid his right arm over the shoulders of Phidon, his left over the shoulders of Nepos, and in this way led them into his own office. He stopped just before he arrived at his open door. "Iccus," he called, "a report on their punctuality."

"Nepos was on time, sir; Phidon a quarter of an hour late." He closed the door behind them. "Sit down," he said. "Over there, Nepos. Here, Phidon. Do you know why I have summoned you?"

"No, sir," they said together.

"I'm taking you with me to Asia. It's an invitation, not a command. You don't have to go if you don't want to."

"Oh, we want to, sir," said Nepos.

"We've been hoping for days you'd let us, sir," said Phidon. "Don't forget there'll be plenty of danger—wide seas, deep rivers,

high mountains, dry deserts; elephants with sharp tusks and great legs; chariots with sickles projecting out from the wheels to mow men down."

"We won't think of those things, sir," said Nepos, "just that we are there with you."

"And there with the horses," said Alexander. "That's why you're going. Polymandas is getting a little heavy on his feet."

"But take him, sir," said Phidon. "Nobody else in Greece knows so much about horses. Wisdom like his is as scarce as eagles. Nimble legs like ours are as thick as crows. Polymandas knows what to do. We will do it."

"Well spoken," said Alexander. "He will go. You two will go. You will have charge of my seven horses as you have charge of them here. Polymandas will be over both of you. But don't you think one of you should be over the other?"

"No, sir," said Nepos. "We should be equal with each other."

"I don't agree," said Alexander. "One of you should be a kind of captain over the other. Which of you should he be?"

"Phidon," said Nepos.

"Nepos," said Phidon.

"It will be Nepos," said Alexander. "The reason is that he was punctual today. Phidon was not."

"I do not mind having Nepos captain over me but my tardiness could not be helped, sir. It was my turn to exercise Bucephalus. He drank out of a muddy puddle. In the strip of woods by the river where the exercise trail goes, I couldn't keep him from drinking the water which wasn't fit for him. Then he pawed the puddle and splashed mud and water over him and over me. I wiped him off with my garments. I didn't want the people to see me leading him all dirty like that. This caused my delay. And when I returned to the stable I wasn't presentable to come to you, sir, and I smelled like horse."

"Like horse you say? Isn't Bucephalus the cleanest animal in the kingdom? If not, it's the fault of Polymandas and you and Nepos."

"Yes, sir, he's always kept as clean as can be. But he's still a horse, sir, and smells like a horse, and I smelled like one when I returned."

"I'm glad to have the explanation, Phidon, but the fact remains that you were a quarter of an hour late. Nepos will be over you but his command will be limited. He can't give you more than four orders a day. I suggest that Nepos always keep one in reserve until midnight. Otherwise, something important might come up at the last moment and Phidon wouldn't have to obey him. That will leave him three to get along with during the day."

"Many days probably I won't use any at all," said Nepos, "unless I am supposed to get in the three every day."

"No, only when necessary. It's always better to do without orders whenever you can."

Alexander looked at the hourglass. "Remain seated," he said. "I will give Phidon a lesson in punctuality. Aristotle, the great philosopher, was to be here at four-fifteen. I'll wager he is. Let's see."

He went out and came back leading a small man but one neatly dressed. His eyes weren't liquid like Alexander's but dry and cold and deep-set. This little person, less impressive than many they saw on the streets, was the wisest man in Greece, the Greeks thought the wisest man in the world.

"Aristotle," asked Alexander, "was it inconvenient for you to get here on the dot?"

"It was, sir. I had to hurry, which a philosopher doesn't like to do."

"But you got here on time," observed Alexander. "See, Phidon?"

"Yes, sir," said Phidon. He couldn't help noticing that Alexander on his part hadn't kept Aristotle waiting as he had them. "Aristotle," said Alexander, "I've just put Nepos over Phidon when they go with me to Asia because Phidon was a quarter of an hour late.

You can tell me whether I did right. In every duty they have been equally responsible. In all care of the horses they have been equally excellent. The only difference was the quarter of an hour tardiness today. Phidon said Bucephalus drank from a muddy puddle, then pawed it, and splashed it over them both. So he had to clean up before he came." Aristotle fastened upon Phidon his cold eyes, not unfriendly, just cold. "Perhaps," he said, "Phidon will wish to tell you what really happened. A horse like Bucephalus never fouls the water from which he has drunk. Phidon should very much revise his account and give us the straight of it."

Phidon went all to pieces. "I can't, sir. I can't. I took an oath not to."

"Who told you to take that oath?"

"A man, sir."

"Who?"

"I never saw him, sir. I just heard him. If I hadn't sworn by the Olympian gods not to tell you or anybody, he would have killed me and killed Bucephalus. I had to swear. If I hadn't, he would have put a lance through Bucephalus' throat."

"You didn't take the oath freely, Phidon," said Alexander. "You were forced to take it and it isn't binding. You can tell us."

"I want to, sir. But the oath prevents me."

"I'll ask the gods to release you from the oath," said Alexander. He looked up at the ceiling and said, "O Olympian gods, he who addresses you is Alexander, king of Macedon, king of Sparta, king of Athens, king of all the Greeks, and soon to be king of Asia. Alexander asks you to free his stableboy Phidon from the oath he was made to take this afternoon. Should there be any blame let it be Alexander's, not Phidon's." He lowered his head so that it leaned in a friendly way toward Phidon. "Now tell us how it was."

"I was leading Bucephalus along the trail through the grove of trees there by the river. In the path lay a dead man. Through his

throat was an arrow. Fresh blood was upon the trail. The puddle was off to one side. Bucephalus shied into it. That's the way he splashed himself and me. While I was holding him and getting him quiet, a voice came to me. It came from above, out of one of the big trees.

"'Young Greek,' the voice said, 'keep your eyes on the ground. Don't look up if you and the horse want to get away from here alive.'

"I kept my eyes low as he said. Bucephalus was still frightened, still pulling back hard on the halter rein to escape the dead man there. He was dressed like a Greek soldier but his helmet had fallen off and I saw he wasn't a Greek. He was a Persian."

"You're sure, Phidon?" demanded Alexander. "You're sure he was a Persian?"

"Yes, sir. I know he was. The voice in the tree said, 'Swear by the Olympian gods you'll never tell what you saw here, not to Alexander or anybody. If you don't, I'll put a lance through you and one through the neck of the horse.'

"'Me but not the horse,' I said. 'Let the horse go. He can't talk. He can't say anything.'

"'Swear—and you know what happens if you don't keep an oath—swear by the Olympian gods you will never tell, and both of you can go on safe.'

"'Eyes on the ground,' commanded the voice, as I led Bucephalus several yards around the dead man, and hastened on."

"Did you recognize the voice?" asked Alexander. "Was it one you'd heard before?"

"It sounded forced and unnatural, sir."

Alexander rose and summoned his secretary. "Iccus," he ordered, "send two soldiers to the grove by the river to pick up a corpse. Let them go by horse and hurry. Have them bring an extra horse for Phidon." To the latter he turned. "Phidon, take them to the place. If the body is still there, you and the men bring it here."

"Why," asked Aristotle, "were they so careful to conceal the killing of a Persian? In these times in Greece a dead Persian is no particular crime."

"Some agent of Demosthenes," declared Alexander. "Some agent who knew too much."

"I don't think so, sir," said Aristotle. "Demosthenes orates against you all the time, but this doesn't look like his work. He is brazen in what he does. Messengers openly go back and forth between him and the Persian king. Give the old orator credit for being aboveboard in opposing you."

"I give him credit for nothing," said Alexander. "He is my worst enemy. And many people listen to him. I have never set eyes on him myself, since he takes good care to keep his cowardly carcass off there in Athens. But you know him, Aristotle, and this talk of how he became a great orator, isn't it mostly nonsense—pebbles in his mouth to cure his stuttering, sharp knives over his shoulders to cure his shrugging, yelling out above the sea surf to cure his weak voice?"

"Not nonsense, sir. Nobody had less to begin with or more when he got through with himself."

"Then Demosthenes made Demosthenes?"

"Just so."

"And, by Zeus, Alexander will unmake him if he doesn't curb his evil tongue. I still think this dead Persian was an agent of his."

"I wish I could think so too, sir. But I must believe you have other enemies, hidden ones, harder to cope with, and this is their work."

Iccus led Phidon into the room. Behind Phidon walked the two soldiers.

"Did you bring the Persian's corpse?" asked Alexander. "Is it out there?"

"The body was gone," said Phidon.

"Was there any sign he had been there?" Alexander asked one of the soldiers, as if hoping Phidon's report had been a boy's wild imagining.

"There was blood upon the trail, sir. Dirt had been scraped over most of it as if by a foot but some of it could still be seen. And there were marks in the brush where the Persian had been dragged to the river."

"They thought they had silenced the boy," said Alexander. "Then they got the body out of the way. All this so we wouldn't know a Persian courier had been in Alexander's capital. We do know it, but who was it he came to see?"

"Not Demosthenes," still insisted Aristotle. "He's in Athens."

"Who then?" asked Alexander, troubled. "Phidon, Nepos, soldiers, you are dismissed. You will say nothing of this. Not a word of it will be upon your tongues."

TWO

Straight, helmeted, soldierly, Nepos and Phidon walked back to the stable from a late-afternoon errand upon the streets to find Iccus standing in front of Polymandas who was sitting as usual on his stool.

Iccus would listen attentively to the old stableman, put some things on paper, listen eagerly a while longer, and write it down.

The boys thought he was getting the records of the horses as part of the facts about the army. But why didn't he have an assistant do it? As far as they knew, he had no special interest in horses. He hadn't previously been around the stable at all.

Now he came several times. He would inspect the animals as carefully as if he were going to buy them, make notes, look at them some more, and write again. Yet his manner toward the horses was cold and aloof. He didn't scratch them between the ears which they liked so much, or lean against them, or cup their noses in his soft white hands, or pet them in any way. He didn't even caress Bucephalus, being about the only visitor not quick to stroke that shining and animate hide.

The boys still thought he was making a checkup but decided he was spending overmuch time doing it, in light of all the check-ups necessary for the expedition. His visits were not made during regular working hours but when he was off duty.

"What's Iccus doing around here so much?" finally asked Phidon.

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies," Polymandas answered.

About ten days later, along toward evening, when Phidon and Nepos returned from some outside chore, they saw Iccus standing very straight at one end of the stable and hacking to clear his throat.

At the other end of the stable Polymandas was sitting on his stool, worn smooth from all his sitting on it.

"Don't begin for a minute," Polymandas called out. "You'll have a bigger audience now."

"Are the windows all closed?" Iccus asked. "That door which the boys just came through isn't shut tight."

Nepos closed it. Then he said to Polymandas, "I don't under stand what's going on."

"You will," said Polymandas, "some oratory, very private."

At the old stableman's direction, the boys spread some straw on each side of him and sat down. As they looked forward the length of the stable at Iccus, his pale face showed pale even in the shadows. Three or four horses had their heads extended beyond their stalls.

"Horses listening about horses," commented Polymandas, who called out, "Iccus, we're ready if you are."

Iccus hacked and cleared his throat again and then started out in a voice that had a surprising fullness and reach.

"Macedonians, Spartans, Athenians..."

"What's he doing?" whispered Phidon.

"Keep quiet and you will see," said Polymandas, who called out, "Stop for a moment, Iccus."

"I'm sorry," said Phidon.

"This is Iccus' oration on Alexander's horses," explained Polymandas. "The horses themselves are interested, if you aren't."

Indeed every stall occupant had his head out now. The three

stentorian words of Iccus had caused them to respond as if they were the three kinds of Greeks.

"Start over, Iccus," said Polymandas. "There'll be no more interruptions."

The channel of Iccus' voice seemed cleared so he didn't have to hack again.

Macedonians, Spartans, Athenians, all Greeks everywhere, the number of the days in the week is the number of Alexander's horses. Seven he has, seven he rides. Seven will go with him to Asia—to danger, to glory, perhaps to death.

Seven colors have Alexander's horses, not matched and paired but each individual in his hue, individual and supreme. One is like the midnight if the midnight had gloss. One is like the summer clouds if the blue sky did not fret them. One is like the desert dunes. One is like an oak leaf after frost upon which the rabbit treads. One is like the red rocks of Mount Olympus if they were not rough and porous but smooth and shining. One is like Parian marble or butterfly wings. One is islanded with two colors like an agate picked up from the washing waves.

Men of Greece, hear their names. The White, as a colt, grazed in the high green meadows around Mount Parnassus. He is called Earthly Pegasus.

The sorrel with stilt-like legs daily growing into harmony and grace roamed with his mother about the slopes of Mount Ida and in the precincts of Troy. His forming hoofs trod the ground that Achilles trod; his clear, deep eyes saw the landscape that Helen saw. He is named Trojan.

The tawny, the dun one, comes from a country where wild horses may live out their lives without seeing a man and where tame ones sleep with the children. He comes from the country of the Scythians and he is called Old Tartar.

The bay came from Macedonia itself and in Macedonia for a hundred years there has been none like him. His owner, being poor, sold him to Alexander for three thousand drachmas, and then with all that money went weeping away. Swift Hoof was the name he originally had. It was the name he kept.

What land the roan came from nobody knew at the time he was bought; nobody knows to this day. The most famous horse market in the world, as you realize, is Cappadocia. There the roan was taken, without history and without pedigree. Yet the manager soon saw that never before had such a horse found its way into that celebrated market. The man who sold him said, "There is no proof of him except the proof he gives of himself." He was held until Polymandas went to see him and paid for him a talent of the king's money. "Unbred but great for great occasions," quoted Polymandas upon his return. "By Zeus," declared Alexander, "Great Occasion shall be his name."

The spotted horse was seen in a country pasture in Thebes by Alexander himself. He had planned before then to have only six. The first time he went away without him, but the next day he went back and bought him from the countryman for a third of a talent or two thousand drachmas. Number Seven, just that and nothing else, is what Alexander called him.

These are their names, then: Earthly Pegasus, Trojan, Old Tartar, Swift Hoof, Great Occasion, and Number Seven, only six, though there are seven. The six would be considered incomparable if it were not for the hitherto unmentioned one, if it were not for Bucephalus.

When Alexander was about thirteen and his father Philip was king, a Thessalian by the name of Philonicus offered to the monarch a horse at a very large price. He was black except there was a white spot on his face the shape of an ox's head. Wherefore he was called Bucephalus. He was a large animal and the most perfect one ever seen in the capital of Macedon. At a tryout of the horse Philip went into the field with Alexander and a large number of others.

Bucephalus appeared to them to be vicious and unmanageable. He refused to be mounted by any one of the owner's men. Each time they tried he turned fiercely on them. The men on their part were plainly afraid of him. Alexander beside his father fidgeted in his seat at their bungling.

Philip was angry and said to the owner, "What do you mean bringing me such a wild, ungovernable horse? Take him away."

The owner, crestfallen enough at losing such a sale, ordered him to be removed from the field.

"What a horse you are losing," put in Alexander.

Philip paid no attention to his son's remark as he watched the men having trouble even leading the horse off.

"What a horse you are losing," repeated Alexander, "because no one has the skill to manage him."

Then Philip took notice of the boy's remarks but took notice of them with irritation. "Young man," he said, "you find fault with your elders as if you could manage the horse better."

"I certainly could," answered Alexander.

"If unable to ride him what penalty will you pay for your rashness?" asked Philip.

"The price of the horse, sir."

Whereat all the important men around Philip laughed.

Alexander ran forth to the great black. The first thing he did was to take hold of the bridle and turn him facing the sun. He had noticed that the horse had been frightened by his own shadow moving in front of him, and the more he moved the more terrified he became at that counterfeit activity there upon the ground.

Then Alexander spoke to him softly and stroked him. He kept doing this without hurry while the king and his company looked on. He gently let fall his mantle so its flapping in the wind would not be a cause of alarm. Next he leaped quickly but lightly upon the back of the horse. He sat there a moment, getting his seat firm and safe.

The next moment Bucephalus was off. Alexander did not use whip, he did not use spur, he did not pull the reins too hard. As soon as he saw the horse had lost the worst of his uneasiness and wanted only to run, he put him into a full gallop, and then with voice and spur pushed him on as fast as he could go. And the king and the others had never before beheld a horse move over the ground like that. Seeing the animal at such speed and his son upon his back, Philip sat in dismay, and those around him were tense and silent.

Then cried one of them with relief, "Look, the boy has tamed him!" They stood up, the king's face all joyous with pride. They shouted as at a big moment of a great game. Alexander brought Bucephalus straight back and halted him close in front of them, and slid to the ground and stood there with his left arm across the withers of the untrembling horse and his right arm lifted to his father and to them.

"What price did you name?" asked Philip.

"Alexander's weight in gold for Alexander's horse," said the owner.

"Without Alexander he is worth nothing."

"With Alexander he is beyond price, and you have Alexander."

"I will pay half his weight in gold."

"No."

"Two-thirds the boy's weight—thirteen big gold talents, the most ever offered for a horse in Greece."

The owner hesitated and looked calculatingly into the king's sober face. "Let it be for that amount," he said. "Let it be for thirteen gold talents."

So it was at thirteen Alexander had shown himself the best horse man in Macedon and so it was at thirteen he came to own the best horse of which men have knowledge.

From that day to this no one has ever ridden Bucephalus but Alexander. There is no sterner order in the kingdom than that no one else shall ever ride him. It is a decree that allows of no exceptions, a decree that is absolute. No circumstances, no urgency, no danger, shall ever put another on his back.

The six great horses and the one greatest have as chief stableman to tend them—Polymandas, grandson of the celebrated wrestler. Polymandas has as assistants Nepos and Phidon, each aged twelve. These three will accompany the horses to Asia, will be with them in Babylon, will curry them in the stable of the Persian king. Seven horses and three persons to care for them—but do not conclude that the three have time idly upon their hands. Each horse must be exercised each day for a distance of four miles, for the time of an hour. This means twenty-eight miles;· it means seven hours. This duty is divided between the two boys, who walk and lead. It is not to be doubted that they are pleased when the king rides a horse; it subtracts an hour from their work.

The king's stable has seven stalls, all on one side. The stall of Bucephalus is in the center, a yard bigger than the others. To the south of him are the stalls of Earthly Pegasus, Trojan, and Old Tartar. To the north are the stalls of Swift Hoof, Great Occasion, and Number Seven.

On the other side of the stable are the feed and supplies, the bridles and halters, and all the necessary leather.

All is spotlessly neat. Sweeping and scrubbing and currying and combing go on endlessly. Every bridle bit is kept as clean as a knife at table.

It is now known that Alexander, in preparing to march to Asia, has disposed of all his lands and houses, and valuables, and has given his money to the army. A friend, seeing him thus strip himself, said to him, "Sir, what do you have left?"

"Much," said he, "my horses and my hopes."

Iccus came forward to them, wiping his face of the sweat upon it. "Give me your opinion," he said. "Give it to me straight and honest. Was it very bad?"

"Listen to him," answered Polymandas, going to the trouble of lifting his heavy bulk from the stool. "We may be prejudiced, being in a way like three more horses, but it seemed like the great oration of which one man said, 'I never heard a better speech,' and another said, 'And I never heard so good a one.'" The impassive face of Iccus had remained impassive. It hadn't lit up during all his discourse on the horses; it didn't light up now at the praise of Polymandas.

"I hardly breathed all through it," said Nepos. "Everybody in Greece ought to hear it."

"Oh, Iccus, it was..." But whatever Phidon was going to say was interrupted by a heavy hammering at the door.

"Open up," called Alexander.

Both boys jumped to their feet to do so. Before them stood the king with two soldiers.

"Is Iccus here?" he asked. "Yes, sir."

"Iccus, I want you; I need you."

Polymandas offered his recently vacated stool so shiny from all his sitting, but Alexander continued to stand.

"A Greek soldier was caught on his way to the Persian king," Alexander began to explain with his quick words. "He was picked up by the outer sentinels of the cavalry. He didn't know the password changed late this afternoon, 'When Alexander's in Babylon.'

He gave the previous one, 'Pay no attention to Demosthenes.' He was brought to the captain of the guard. He had four papers on him, two of them sealed, each numbered from one to four. Three were taken from him at first and the captain of the guard thought they were all. Then as he stood before the large brush fire of the off-duty guardsmen, he tossed a fourth into the flames, and the blaze was so big it couldn't be retrieved.

"The first one was a pass signed by me, the forgery being hard to tell. It gave him exit through all Greek lines. With it was a pass from King Darius to let him go through all Persian country. The second unsealed paper was a map, showing the route he was to follow, with markings where he was to take ship, take horses, take camels, take elephants, go by foot, take horses again. The third, sealed, contained three grim words and a number for a signature, 'Kill this messenger. 77.'

"The latter was given him to read and his face turned white. "He asked did they think he would have carried that if he knew what it was, did they think he would knowingly be a courier of his own destruction?

"Then would he tell them everything?

"Yes, he would.

"He was an Athenian recruit in the picked cavalry. He was riding his own horse, a fine animal. He had returned to his cot yesterday to find a packet marked in big letters 'Secret.' There was a letter signed Alexander telling him to go to the king of Persia, to start late this afternoon. It gave him the password. It enjoined him to speak not a whisper of it to anyone and to burn the letter. The package contained money for his expenses. In case he was captured he was directed to hand over the two unsealed papers and the sealed one marked 'No. 3.' The one marked 'No. 4' was to be carried separately and to be destroyed at all costs.

"The captain of the guard, unable to believe the man didn't know who sent him but unsuccessful in getting him to change his story, appealed to Philotas, commander of the picked cavalry.

"'The man is lying,' said Philotas. 'He knows who sent him. Make him tell. Wring it out of him or run him through.'

"The captain of the guard used persuasion, used threats, used pain, but couldn't budge him from the original account. Finally the captain put his sword point to the man's heart and told him if he didn't speak the truth in one minute he would die. He still refused to recant and the sword pierced him. The picked cavalry have his body. The report came to me just a few minutes ago from General Philotas.

"Iccus, I want you to go with me to the palace to help me sift through handwriting and signatures so we may find a clue to the author of the forgeries. The pass was written in your hand, Iccus, as it customarily would have been. The signature was mine. A double forgery.

"Nepos, you come and help Iccus and me. Phidon, you go for Aristotle. He can be of much assistance, as he ought to be willing to be, since he believes Demosthenes innocent. Ride Old Tartar there; you will need ·to lead him back, for Aristotle will walk and you with him."

Walk, would he? Phidon thought it odd business that this philosopher who figured out the stable rules, this horse expert Alexander banked on, wouldn't ride a horse, or couldn't.

"Soldiers," Alexander commanded, "ride fast back to the cavalry and tell General Philotas to come so he can report more fully and bring with him the captain of the guard. I have spoken freely because I can completely trust all of you who have listened."

"Will General Philotas bring the papers the man had?" Iccus asked. "We'll need them, sir."