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Now victorious, the older Macedonians in Alexander's army wanted to go home. In their minds, the war was over. In Alexander's mind, and in the minds of younger soldiers loyal to him, Darius' army was in total disarray. The way was now clear to roll up the rest of the Persian empire and take the Greek army all the way to India. In that way the Greeks would have an empire even greater than the Persians. I often wonder if this is what the oracle foretold, or if it is how Alexander interpreted it. Either way, we were on the move to the east again.

We approached the great capital at Persepolis that winter. The Persian capital lay abandoned before us. Our occupation of it and the resulting inaction over five cold months of winter was a terrible time. Alexander had taken on some of the attributes of a too-proud conqueror. Worse were his affectations of Persian habits and demeanor. He occasionally wore some of the flowery and colorful fashions worn by Darius III and his sycophants at court.

Though this time was difficult and troubling for Alexander, I will never regret it. It led to a more intimate relationship between me and Petros, and we quietly moved into the same tent near my father's forgery. The smithy kept us warm through that harsh winter.

When spring came, Alexander was ready to move on to India, but first he would have to secure Bactria and Gandhara—a place of high mountains and regional tribes led by strong warriors. In order to establish the influence of the Greek city-states, he would need to keep the Macedonians with him and willingly under arms with his leadership.

My father has remained closely attached to Alexander's army since we departed Memphis. He has found favor with Alexander and his closest military advisors. With daily forge operations under Nikola's supervision, Father has been free to work closely with Alexander's operations planning staff to find sources of ore and other materials necessary for the manufacture and maintenance of weapons, armor, and other battle gear.

Increasingly, Alexander seems to grow firm in his belief that he is the son of Zeus. This belief has been growing since the Egyptians named him pharaoh four years before and has intensified with the successful battles at Gaugamela and at the Caspian Gates.

As we followed Alexander's army closer to India, my bond with Petros deepened. I became pregnant and gave birth to our beautiful son, Balio. Together, as a new and loving family, Petros and I think about our future. We are not certain that it lies with this army for much longer.

As the ethnicity and language of the local armies drawn under Alexander's banner increases, though, Petros' work as an interpreter has become increasingly important. In the negotiations needed to persuade conquered armies to join us, Petros has become almost inseparable from his King.

Whenever he goes with Alexander or his staff on a diplomatic mission, Petros asks, usually through his friend and colleague, Kallias, to have me accompany them. Petros knows that Alexander will want me to evaluate weaponry problems, issues, and needs. We believe that he agrees to this because he is showing favor to two of his personal favorites. We are grateful for this. We have never weakened in our public support for his decisions and his policies, and never fail to tell him privately what he needs to know—no matter how uncomfortable the realities behind them might be.

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It has been a long day for Alexander. I am conscious of this as I approach him in one of his all-too-frequent meetings. He must confer regularly with his senior staff regarding the establishment of a military garrison that would be at the economic heart of the new city of Alexandria in Arachosia. In his vision of empire these garrisons will permanently support his armies through expected growth that is to include all of India and much of the territory north of the Hindu Kush mountains. He has had no problem finding volunteers to settle in these garrisons. Many of his most loyal soldiers, weary now of the years of war over harsh terrain, welcome his offer of land and a significant share of the spoils of war.

We are among these volunteers.

“Petros and I have decided that our lives now belong to our son, my King,” I say as we explain our plans to him. “There is no place for him on the long, hard trail over the mountains that you foresee over the coming months. My father, who began this journey with you four years ago in Memphis, is now, himself, old and tired from the effort to keep your soldiers well-armed. Even so, with the help of me, Petros, and Tabu, we believe we can continue to supply your army with significant quantities of weapons from the shops we will build, with your support, in this new city.

“Alexandria is rich with resources. Abundant fresh water from the mountains and from the river that flows through here from the foothills will enable a great agriculture. When your soldiers who agree to remain here turn their hard-won skills to these resources, they will create a paradise on earth. I and my family believe that our knowledge and skills with metalworking and our understanding of your vision will be important in helping guide this rough land into a new seat of power.

“We seek your support in this, my King. We are available to work with you and your city planners and architects to help make this shared goal into reality just as you and I did two years ago to layout the first City of Alexandria on the bright shores of the Mediterranean Sea. May we have your thoughts on this?”

At first Alexander seems taken aback by our bold proposal. I hope that it is clear that I, who have always been a relief from the intense and often destructive wrangling of his lieutenants over irrelevant details, have thought deeply of this and have discussed it fully with all who will be affected.

“Leave me now,” Alexander says. “You have given me much to think about, and I am sure we will have more to discuss as I prepare for our expedition north. Our time for travel in the high mountains grows short as winter snows approach.”

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As the military commander of an army in the process of conquering much of the known world and, now, extending the limits of his empire to encompass all of India, Alexander knows that such considerations cannot be given much weight. As his mother always trained him, and as he has always done, our King and our friend seems to know the decisions must be made and the march north commenced without pausing to consider possible alternatives.

As Olympias always told him — as he is the son of Zeus — all errors of judgment will eventually be forgiven to a god.

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