

*Joshua  
Williams  
Breaks  
A Date*

by John Allen Small

This is an original shorty story and has  
never appeared elsewhere.

**Blazing! Adventures Magazine**

*Publishers*  
2006

*New York*

**Contrary to popular belief-death and taxes are not the only constants in the universe. There are three others-**

**Every silver lining has a dark cloud!**

**A rose, by any other name, still has thorns!**

**And food served in high school and college cafeterias can be expected to be mediocre at best.**

**Accepting the veracity of that final observation as a universal law, Joshua Williams could barely hide his amusement as he entered the Bentz State University dining hall to find the digger he'd been asked to meet, downing a serving of BSU's renowned mashed potatoes faster than a child might a bowl of ice cream.**

**"Thierry Gerothanassi, I presume?" Josh inquired as he took his seat across the table from the weathered Greek. "My name is Joshua Williams."**

**Gerothanassi swallowed a wad of potatoes big enough to choke a horse, inhaled a lump of "mystery meat" and washed it down with a glass of milk. He looked up at Joshua, wiping away some milk that had dribbled down his chin with his sleeve. "So where's Tew?" he demanded.**

**Joshua answered the question more politely than it had been asked. "James extends his apologies," he said. "He was called away to Chicago on personal business, and asked that I meet with you and arrange your accommodations during your visit." He watched in wonder as Gerothanassi attacked another piece of meat. "Actually, I am somewhat familiar with your work. I assure you, any information you feel he should have will be passed along..."**

**The Greek set down his fork and belched. Joshua pretended not to notice. "My apologies, sir," Gerothanassi said in a thick accent. "I really was hoping to talk to Dr. Tew. I meant no disrespect."**

**"None taken," Josh replied.**

**"Actually," Gerothanassi continued, "I am familiar with your exploits, as well. Dr. Tew has told me about your discovery of a lost colony of Anasazi several years ago."**

**Joshua nodded. "Yes, back in '33," he said softly. That particular adventure still conjured up painful memories, having been launched by the murder of Joshua's father. The search for the elder Williams' killer had led Joshua, James Tew and several of their friends to the Four Corners area of Utah, where they had indeed discovered a small tribe of Anasazi dwelling in a hidden valley at the bottom of a canyon. Eventually Josh saved the tribe from the killer's evil plans, and was given a gift of great wealth by the grateful Anasazi, but even now, five years after the fact; he would have gladly forsaken that wealth to have his father back again.**

**He banished the memories back into his subconscious. "James has good things to say about you," he told Gerothanassi. "He said that when it comes to digging, you're the best."**

**"Dr. Tew is too kind," the Greek responded. "Actually we worked together only once, when we both accompanied Dr. Littlejohn on the Tut-Ra-Med Expedition. But Tut-Ra-Med was a toy box compared to the treasure I have seen at Sparta!"**

**Josh nodded. "James mentioned you were assisting on some project for Dr. Weize."**

**"Yes, but the university elected to withdraw his funding before we had the opportunity to fully explore the area." Gerothanassi leaned forward and continued in a hushed, conspiratorial tone. "But before the team pulled out, I took the liberty of exploring the ruins myself. And deep inside the temple complex, I found what I believe to be the final resting place of Orestes!"**

**Josh could feel his eyebrows shoot up in spite of himself. "Orestes? The mythological king whose bones Lichas supposedly interred near the Sanctuary of the Fates?"**

**Gerothanassi leaned back in his chair and smiled. "I see you are familiar with Greek mythology," he said. "I believe the ruins we found at Sparta IS the Sanctuary of the Fates. There is a life-size statue of Orestes in the chamber, made of solid gold." He shook his head in regret. "I have never considered myself a greedy man, but I admit I would have very much liked to have claimed that statue**

**for myself."**

**"Why didn't you?"**

**"It would have been a betrayal of my life's work," Gerothanassi said, not quite convincingly. "Besides, it is very heavy, and I am afraid I am not so young anymore."**

**Josh couldn't help but smile. He didn't know whether to believe the Greek's story or not, his instinct was to lean heavily in the direction of 'not', but it certainly explained why James had asked him to meet with the man in his place. "And you've said nothing to Weize?"**

**Gerothanassi shrugged. "Dr. Weize is not what you would call a good man," he answered. "I prefer to see someone like Dr. Tew get the credit. So I telegraphed him as soon as we returned to Athens."**

**Josh remained unconvinced. "So tell me - where would we find the Sanctuary of the Fates?"**

**Gerothanassi smiled like a Cheshire cat. "As I said, Mr. Williams, I am familiar with your adventures," he said. "Surely you of all people understand that such information rarely comes without a price."**

**So much for not betraying your life's work, Joshua thought. Still, the demand had not been entirely unexpected; although he'd hoped their past relationship would eliminate the need, James had managed to coax the university museum into allocating funds for the information Gerothanassi claimed to possess.**

**"I trust you'll find this satisfactory," Josh said as he produced the envelope James had entrusted to him and placed it on the table. The Greek quickly snatched it up and peered inside.**

**"Most satisfactory indeed," a genuinely surprised Gerothanassi smiled as he tucked the envelope inside his jacket pocket. "Please convey my sincere appreciation to Dr. Tew for his efforts on my behalf."**

**"I suspect he will see your information concerning the Sanctuary of the Fates as thanks enough," Joshua replied.**

**Gerothanassi nodded. "Yes, of course," he agreed. "After all, that is what he is paying for." He picked up a paper napkin, snatched a pen from his shirt pocket and began scribbling a rough diagram of the temple, labeling landmarks as he drew. "Please forgive me," he said. "I may be an expert digger, but I've never been much of an artist. I'm afraid this is not exactly to scale."**

**"I'm sure it will be fine." Josh idly glanced around the dining hall; there were few students around this time of day, although a few stragglers were still eating a late lunch and chatting with friends before dashing off to their afternoon classes. In the far corner of the room a young man sat between two pretty coeds, an arm draped around each and both girls smiling at him as if she were the only one with him at the moment.**

**A few tables over another fellow sat alone, thumbing through some lurid pulp fiction magazine as he sipped from a half-empty glass of lemonade. Josh couldn't see his face clearly, but noticed the man's skin appeared to have the same complexion as Gerothanassi, Greek, perhaps, or possibly Turkish.**

**Finally Gerothanassi finished drawing his map. "There you are," he said. "Now, if you don't mind, I believe you mentioned something about accommodations? I'm still quite tired from my trip, and would very much like a nap."**

**"Of course," Josh acknowledged as he stuck the napkin into his jacket pocket. Both men rose to leave, and Josh noticed out of the corner of his eye that the man with the magazine was now watching them rather intently. Josh tapped Gerothanassi on the shoulder and discreetly motioned in the direction of the stranger.**

**"Friend of yours?" Josh asked quietly.**

**Gerothanassi sneaked a quick glance and nearly jumped in spite of himself. So, he does know him, Joshua thought. "Who is he?"**

**"I'm not sure," the Greek confessed, "but I believe he is following me."**

**"What makes you say that?"**

**"I recognize him from the dig at Sparta, but I don't believe he was actually a member of Weize's team," Gerothanassi said as they walked toward the center of the campus. "I thought I saw him on the plane to Chicago, as well. Perhaps I am getting paranoid in my old age, but there is something about that fellow I do not like."**

**"Yeah, I'm kinda getting the same feeling," Josh replied. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a key and placed it in Gerothanassi's hand. "I was able to get you a room in Hills Hall, the men's dormitory right over there." He pointed in the direction of the dorm. "It's on the first floor; the resident director can show you the way. You should be comfortable there until your plane leaves on Wednesday."**

**The Greek nodded. "You are most kind."**

**"James should be back tomorrow," Josh continued. "And if I know him, he'll be only too happy to give you a tour of the campus then. I'd show you around myself, but James is a far better guide and I wouldn't want to deprive him one of the true joys in his life." He pulled out a pocket watch and checked the time. "And anyway, I have another engagement."**

**An expression of amused understanding swept across Gerothanassi's features. "You have a meeting with a lady friend, eh, Mr. Williams?"**

**"Yes I do, as a matter of fact." Somehow Joshua managed not to blush. For a long time he'd made it a point not to get involved in relationships of a romantic nature, no matter how strong the attraction. It had been a hard rule to live by, one he'd forced himself to adhere to for what he thought were the best of reasons. The adventurous life he'd chosen guaranteed that he would occasionally find himself in conflict with criminal types; Josh had decided early on that the only way to avoid the possibility that a loved one might be harmed in any way because of him was to not allow himself to get that close to anyone.**

**But with time he'd come to question the wisdom of that decision. He'd regretted the pain it had caused several special young women over the years. Then, too, he had grown tired of denying himself the type of happiness his parents had so enjoyed.**

**Gerothanassi simply nodded, no doubt recalling a time in his own life when such matters had commanded his attention. "Your young lady, she is very pretty, no?"**

**High above his head a small flock of birds sang joyously in the trees, and Josh found himself thinking ahead to what he hoped would prove to be a most pleasant evening. "I think I can honestly say she's the most beautiful girl I've ever seen," he said.**

**Now Gerothanassi laughed out loud, but it was a joyous laughter, one born of pleasant memories. "Every man believes that his woman is the most beautiful woman who has ever lived," he said as he slapped the younger man on the shoulder. "And you know something, Mr. Williams? They're right!" He shook Josh's hand and turned towards the dormitory. Joshua smiled again as he headed in the opposite direction to where he had parked his car.**

**Several hours later, Joshua was somewhat embarrassed to find himself doing something he rarely did: studying himself in the mirror, to make certain everything was just right.**

**Although blessed with what some would probably call 'ruggedly handsome' features, Josh had never been one to pay attention to such things. For most of his adult life he'd been pretty much oblivious to the effects that his appearance seemed to have on members of the opposite sex; now that he was consciously trying to make a good impression, he wasn't at all sure how to go about doing so.**

**He needn't have worried. Tonight the renowned scientist, explorer and two-fisted adventurer was very much the model gentleman: freshly shaved and showered, dressed in his best suit, granted, the same old one he'd worn when he delivered that speech to the members of the Cobalt Club in New York last year, but it still looked good, and wearing a pair of brand-new shoes he'd bought for the occasion. He'd even borrowed a bottle of cologne from his friend Ian MacGregor, and had Ian show him the**

proper amount to put on, just to be on the safe side, a request which had left the Scotsman doubled over in good-natured laughter and Joshua's face burning bright red.

Josh placed two phone calls before heading out for the evening. The first was to Bryan Manion, one of his oldest friends, owner of the Avondale Club and stalwart companion on many adventures over the years, to confirm the dinner reservations he'd made; and the second to Hills Hall, to make sure Gerothanassi was doing okay. The resident director said James had returned from his trip earlier than expected, and apparently had taken the Greek on that promised tour of the campus.

With a bouquet of roses in his hand and a box of chocolates tucked under the opposite arm, Josh walked outside and climbed into the black Packard that had been his father's. As he drove Josh thought back to what Gerothanassi had said about every man thinking his woman was the most beautiful in the world. There was probably something to that, Josh decided, but there was also something to the theory that any man who didn't gaze upon Sherri Sims and find her to be drop-dead gorgeous probably needed to have his pulse checked. And she was, too: long honey-blonde hair, bright blue-green eyes and, oh, fellas, what a body!

He'd met her two days earlier at the newsstand downtown. He'd been thumbing through the latest issue of Time; she was busy reading one of those Hollywood gossip magazines that seemed to be all the rage. They were walking in opposite directions, and neither noticed the other as they approached; when they collided, Sherri ended up flat on her bottom and Joshua had stumbled and landed right on top of her. Joshua was terribly embarrassed and a little afraid that she might haul off and slap him. But at some point while in the process of becoming disentangled their eyes connected and the next thing either of them knew she was giggling and he was developing an honest-to-goodness schoolboy crush on a girl for the first time in years.

Josh had endured a fair amount of ribbing from his friends over the whole thing, they thought it funny that a man like Joshua should fall for someone who seemed the living embodiment of the stereotypical empty-headed glamour girl. In all fairness, Josh had been a little bothered about it himself at first. But the more he thought about it, the less he cared what anyone else thought.

After all, man cannot live on two-fisted adventure alone!

**Josh parked the Packard on Schuyler Avenue, preferring to walk the last couple of blocks to the Avondale Club. He was just across the street when he caught sight of Sherri climbing out of a cab just outside the restaurant. As much as he was looking forward to spending the evening with her, Josh couldn't pass up the opportunity to just stand back and admire the view unnoticed. She was wearing a tight red dress with sequins, and her hair was tied up in what he guessed to be the popular style of the moment. She glanced around before heading into the restaurant, obviously looking to see if he had showed up yet himself, before heading inside.**

**Josh leaned against someone else's car and grinned. "Williams," he said to himself, "you'd better not let this one get away."**

**Before he could start across the street to join her, though, Josh felt a tap on the shoulder.**

**"Mr. Williams?" he heard a small voice mumble from behind him.**

**Josh turned and found himself face-to-face with the olive-skinned man he had noticed earlier in the campus dining hall. "That's right," Josh answered. "Is there something I can do for you?"**

**"I certainly hope so." The Mediterranean grinned. "I need the map."**

**"Excuse me?"**

**The grin faded from the other man's face. "Please do not play games with me, Mr. Williams," he said in a low, threatening tone. "I saw Gerothanassi draw you a map of the dig site at Sparta. I must have it."**

**Josh cocked his head to one side. "Just what is your interest in the site, anyway?"**

**"That is none of your concern. This entire affair is none of your concern."**

**"That may or may not be true," Josh conceded. "Either way, I'm afraid I can't help you at the moment. There's a certain young lady in that building waiting for me, and I'm already late. So if**

**you'll excuse me..."**

**He never finished the sentence; a swift punch square in the face saw to that. Later Josh would not recall stumbling backwards into the car he'd leaned on as he lapsed into unconsciousness...**

**He was literally knocked back into consciousness, as the back of his head banged against one metal step, then a second, and then a third. By the time he'd managed to turn his head enough so that his left ear, rather than the back of his skull, absorbed the brunt of the impact of the fourth step, Josh was awake enough to realize that he was being dragged up the Avondale Club's fire escape.**

**Josh managed to raise his head enough to keep it from smacking against the remaining steps, still too groggy to put up much of a struggle to escape his assailant's grasp. The man had a firm grip on Josh's ankles and was dragging him up the steps feet first; he laughed at Josh's futile effort to break free from his grip.**

**Finally they reached the roof, at which point the Mediterranean dropped Josh's ankles like a big sack of bricks. Josh quickly scrambled to his feet and assumed a combat stance. It was a fluid move, the result of reflexes developed over years of globetrotting adventuring; his attacker appeared unimpressed at best, taking one step forward and throwing a single punch that split Joshua's lower lip and knocked him flat on his back.**

**A drop of moisture hit Joshua in the face. Another. Then several all at once. Suddenly it was raining, and the cool shock of it was enough to clear Josh's head and help him pull himself up into a crouching position.**

**But the Mediterranean was on top of him in a flash, and before Josh could execute a counter-move the other man had wrapped his arms around Josh's waist like a vise and had hauled him over to the edge of the roof. With a malicious grin he clamped his iron grip upon Josh's shoulders and held him there on the edge, as if preparing to push him over the side.**

**The Mediterranean's eyes narrowed as he bore his gaze directly into Josh's. "I must have that**

napkin," he growled.

"Okay, okay," Josh said sheepishly. He reached into the breast pocket of his suit coat, pulled out the red silk handkerchief that Ian had insisted he borrow, and reached forward and used it to wipe away a small bit of froth that had accumulated in the corner of the Mediterranean's mouth. "There," he said in a helpful tone. "That better?"

In response, the Mediterranean shoved Josh back down to the floor of the roof, then quickly reached down and grabbed him again by the ankles. He laughed as he spun Josh around once in a full circle, then hung him upside-down out over the edge. Josh grunted as his face smacked against the Avondale Club's uppermost front window; though his view was somewhat awkward, he could see dozens of elegantly dressed couples dancing or conversing pleasantly at their tables as a handful of waiters bustled about, taking orders and carrying trays of food and tending to the needs of their customers. And not one of them noticed the well-dressed but now somewhat battered man hanging upside down just outside, despite the fact that Josh was flailing his arms about in a desperate bid to attract their attention.

After a moment Josh gave up and dropped his arm his frustration, and suddenly caught sight of Sherri sitting alone at a table in the far corner, her beauty marred by the peevish expression on her face as she glanced at her watch and tapped her fingers on the tablecloth impatiently. Josh saw Bryan Manion walk up to Sherri; he mouthed a question, and Josh could see her shake her head with a polite smile, then go back to drumming her fingers on the table as Bryan moved to talk to another customer. Her expression betrayed her thoughts, she thinks I've stood her up, Josh realized, and he renewed his efforts to make his predicament known.

"Hey! Somebody help!" he called as he beat a fist against the heavy plate glass window. But Sherri and the others still remained oblivious to his plight.

Josh felt himself being yanked back to the top of the roof like a yoyo on a string. The Mediterranean whipped Josh around and sent him flying through the air into a grimy heating vent. The impact actually seemed to reinvigorate him; Josh immediately jumped to his feet and angrily glared at his attacker. He was tired. He was wet from the rain, covered in soot, bleeding from his lip

and now from a new cut over his left eye from being thrown into the vent. He was being tossed around like some little kid's rag doll. And his preferred companion for the evening sat at a table just one floor below him, silently stewing because she thought he had decided not to show up for their date.

And Joshua Williams didn't like it. No, sir, not one little bit.

He brought up his fists in a fighter's stance, but the action made the Mediterranean laugh. "You lady friend," he said with a toothy grin, "she must be quite beautiful, no? I like your American women. Beautiful as butterflies and just as frail, but touch them just the right way, and they become like animals. Your woman, she is like this, no? Perhaps when we are finished here, I'll have the chance to find out for myself..."

Josh threw a wild punch, which his opponent easily blocked. He quickly countered with a punch of his own; Joshua somehow managed to avoid the blow, leaving the other man's fist to collide with the vent behind him. The vent collapsed like an old piece of used tinfoil.

"You know, the biggest problem with you is you talk too much," Josh muttered. The Mediterranean threw back his head and laughed again, but his mirth was cut short by Josh's fist, which delivered a crushing blow to the jaw. As the stunned foreigner took two paces backwards, Josh seized the advantage and threw all his weight against him.

Unfortunately, in his haste to try and gain the upper hand, Josh had temporarily forgotten where they were. Either that, or else he had grossly underestimated the distance to the edge of the roof, the momentum of the tackle, or both. Either way, his lunge sent both men over the side of the building.

His opponent hit first, and Josh heard a horrific cracking sound as the man landed on his back with his right arm folded behind him. Josh landed just a split-second later, having bounced off the edge of the awning over the front door before hitting the sidewalk in front of the club with an extremely undignified thud.

Josh lay there on the cement for a moment, fully aware that if he was sore for the next week

he'd be getting off very lucky indeed. He drew in a deep breath, just to make sure his lungs still worked, then slowly rolled over onto his back and pulled himself up into a sitting position. Mere inches away lay his assailant, quite unconscious but still breathing; Josh had almost landed on top of him, and wondered if he'd be hurting any less himself right now if he had.

He glanced up into the heavens, barely feeling the cold sting of the rain against his face. "You know, Dad," he muttered under his breath, "I think I'm getting too old for this."

Josh looked back down and shook his head, suddenly noticing the murmurs of the crowd that had gathered there at the front door of the Avondale Club. Oh, sure, he thought, NOW you notice me.

The crowd parted as Bryan Manion emerged from the club and sprang to his friend's side. "Josh, are you okay? What happened?"

"Yes, I'm a little curious about that myself," another voice chimed in. Josh looked up and saw an older man standing just behind Bryan, a big cigar in his left hand and a look of concern etched upon his features.

Josh squinted in the rain. "Uncle Vince?" he asked weakly.

Then, for the second time that evening, he blacked out...

A quarter-hour or so later, tired, bloody and soaking wet, Joshua Williams sat at a table holding one of Bryan's steaks to his face and answering questions posed by two uniformed cops and their boss, who as it happened had just arrived at the Avondale Club for an anniversary dinner with his wife when Josh had landed on the sidewalk.

Police Chief Vincent Gilmore was an old friend of the family, he and Josh's father had gone to school together, and knew full well how trouble always seemed to follow Josh around. Gilmore cared for Josh a great deal, but worried about the young man's apparent need for excitement; he often found himself wishing that Josh would stick to his scientific pursuits and leave things like crime fighting to

**the professionals.**

**Josh looked out the window and saw a paddy wagon pull away as his sparring partner pressed his face into the bars on the back window, shouting what were no doubt obscenities in his native tongue. The Mediterranean had come around just moments after Josh had passed out, and proceeded to make things as difficult as possible for the officers who had responded to Gilmore's call to the precinct; that, coupled with the man's refusal to show a passport, was enough to convince Gilmore to have him hauled in for questioning. Josh didn't figure the police would learn much, and he'd told Gilmore so. But he also promised that he would stop by the station first thing in the morning to fill out the necessary paperwork and let the police in on what little he knew.**

**Gilmore just looked at him, a slight look of disapproval playing upon his features. "Then I suppose you'll be rushing off and jumping into the thick of things again, eh?"**

**Josh grinned, though it hurt to do so. "Yeah, probably," he admitted. "You know me, Uncle Vince, I'm not the sort to just stand around when there's a perfectly good adventure to be had somewhere."**

**"Uh-huh, I know." Gilmore shook his head. "What I don't know is why you don't just take that fortune your father left you and start yourself some nice, safe research facility some place."**

**"I've thought about it-but I'd probably have to hire somebody to run it for me."**

**Bryan walked up about that time, took the steak from Josh's hand and replaced it with a glass of brandy. "A bracer," he explained. "I think you're about to need it."**

**Before Josh could ask what his friend had meant he caught sight of Sherri Sims marching up behind Bryan, her lovely features twisted into an expression of anger. She pushed her way between Bryan and Gilmore and glared down at Josh with fire in her eyes.**

**"Joshua Williams," she stammered, "you're late!"**

**"I can explain..."**

**"Save it!" She stomped her foot like a child throwing a temper tantrum. "I've wasted a perfectly good evening here waiting for you when I could have been out having a good time with Kong McGillicudey!"**

**Josh looked up at Bryan. "Who's Kong McGillicudey?"**

**"He boxes down at the Y," Bryan answered. "I hear he might have a shot at the next Olympics..."**

**"Well, at least HE knows how to show a girl a good time!" The blonde goddess grabbed the glass Bryan had just given Josh away from him, flung its contents into his face, then added injury to insult by kicking him in the shin. Josh wanted to scream in pain; instead he just clamped his eyes and mouth shut as he collapsed to the floor. Sherri handed the glass back to Bryan and stepped over Josh as she made her way towards the door in a huff.**

**Bryan and Gilmore knelt down quickly and helped pull Josh back up into his chair. Bryan glanced out the door in time to see Sherri climb into a cab and disappear. "Nice dress," he observed.**

**"I hadn't noticed," Josh said mournfully. He struggled to his feet and reached into his soiled suit pocket for his car keys; instead he pulled out a wet napkin. It was the map Gerothanassi had drawn for him earlier, and for which the unknown Mediterranean had pummeled him in an effort to obtain. The ink had smeared in the rain, and when Josh tried to unfold it it fell apart in his hands.**

**Ah, well, maybe he could get Gerothanassi to draw him another copy, more to scale, this time, before he left on Wednesday. In the meantime, Josh would talk to James Tew about arranging an expedition to Sparta. Obviously there was something there worth looking into.**

**Besides, he'd recently heard good things about the women in that part of the world... Josh turned to Bryan and grinned sheepishly. "Check, please."**

**THE END**