

# Onesimus

Shirley F. Woods

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Onesimus

By Shirley F. Woods

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# Tongues of Mortals

*To Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*  
(Philemon 2,3)

These words, you will find, begin a brief letter appended to a collection of writings attributed to that great Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul of Tarsus. This collection is a little-known addition attesting to the teachings and faith of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth and is deserving of deep study by those who are called Christians. The letters were assembled by one whom I affectionately call “Uncle,” for my father called him “Brother.” He was indeed highly respected in his time as the Bishop of Ephesus. I tell the story now as I have heard it from the ‘tongues of mortals,’ for I am the only one left to tell it; herein I have pieced it together as it was variously told to me. I am now as old the bishop was when he went to meet the martyr Ignatius. When I leave this earthly tent, there will be none left to remember.

The story of the dinner party was told me by Apphia. She was my grandmother, and I remember her as a woman small and spare. She was brown as a leaf which an autumn breeze blows down, but she had control over her whole house. She had a tongue as sharp as a flesher’s blade. Usually she kept it sheathed within her mouth, but woe to those nearby, when it escaped.

## The Dinner Party

Archippus, citizen of Colossae, was seeking out his sister Apphia in the gynaeceum. He passed quietly and almost unnoticed through the work room where the women were spinning and weaving and tapped gently on the door of her private apartment. She was dressed, surprisingly enough for usually she was a late sleeper. "I have all of the plans in place," he burst out without further greeting.

Apphia, with her back to him, did not bother to turn but kept on patting her hair and examining her face in a mirror. There was a smile of superiority on her lips, "I still say that you should have some flute girls in."

Archippus fell into a chair and sighed, for it seemed so difficult to get the point through to his sister. "I have it well planned. It is very important to impress the new Roman prefect. Our whole future depends on it. The whole future of Colossae depends on it."

"The whole future of Colossae depends upon a couple of boorish soldiers? Oh come now. What do the Romans know of Colossae? What do they care about a village built of mud huts in the middle of Phrygia?"

Archippus felt the sting. "That's exactly the point; the prefect is not your regular soldier. He's a civilian who is earning his stripes to become procurator. That's why I am expecting so much from him. Colossae is well known. It is not just another mud village. It has a reputation in history. Alexander marched his army from the sea and on the second day he stopped at Colossae. He was on his way to Issus." Archippus began to review the history of his city when his sister stamped her foot.

"In the name of the Goddess, stop. What do the Romans care about Alexander and Xerxes? And what does it matter? Is it an earth shaking event when a couple of Roman soldiers get involved in a drinking match in a provincial town?"

Ignoring her retort, Archippus continued, "We are known, dear sister, in Rome. The prefect has with him a letter from the Emperor Claudius himself. In that letter the city is congratulated for its ameni-

ties, its wealth and its civic accomplishments. He will present that letter—”

“We are known, dear brother, in Rome, as indolent, beer swilling boors, who sell their own children into slavery rather than put in an honest day’s labor.”

Rather than pursue this argument which had already suffered much appraisal by both parties, Archippus began to muse to himself. “It is a demon; clearly it is a demon who persists in tormenting me. Every time I make my plans the demon sets itself against me, pouring discouragement from the mouths of everyone. Yes, it is the demon; the one who haunts this house, Apphia. We must take steps for further fumigation, and I have some new charms brought to me only three days ago by a wise merchant from Egypt.”

Apphia slammed down her mirror on the dressing table. “I’m tired of all your demons; According to you it was a demon who pushed my dear husband into the river and drowned him there. Yet I have the a very good witness who says that he stooped down to drink and two slaves pushed him in and held him down until he drowned.”

“Apphia, we’ve been through that. We tortured the slaves to make them confess until they were so broken that they were of no use to us again. One of them actually saw the black face of the demon in the water.”

But Apphia broke into tears as she thought of the past. “Here I was, a widow, and only sixteen years old, carrying my first child. How could I have lived if I had not had my dear, dear Philemon. And you with your stupid incense almost suffocated the poor babe with all that foul smoke.”

“But we cast out the demon, dear Apphia; and we gave him a good name so that the demon would not recognize him, ‘Lovey’; and ‘Eupator,’ ‘fortunate in his father.’ By calling him ‘fortunate in his father,’ they could not know the baby was so unfortunate in his father. You must admit the ploy has worked. Philemon is a lovely child and spreads happiness wherever he goes. Trust me, Apphia; for I am your brother and older than you. You were left a widow at sixteen with no

one else to look after your welfare.”

Apphia sighed. “Yes, dear brother, it was fortunate for you. You came by chance to head a household you had no part in making. You became the warden of farms and vineyards, the master of slaves and maidservants, and the head of the house. And now I am approaching an age when I am no longer attractive to men. I grow old in my loneliness, forever a widow, nevermore a wife.” She burst out crying.

Archippus rose quietly and left her to her bitterness. “I must exert more forcefulness in this house.” Archippus was now a stately man in his mid-forties who generally walked with the assurance of a well-born Ionian Greek and spoke with the authority of a successful and scholarly gentleman. Somehow his sister Apphia, fifteen years younger than he, could always get the better of him, no matter what the subject under discussion. Here he was, entering upon an important political alliance for the family and his city. He had laid out his plans with the utmost care to show the polish and civility of the community; but his sister could only suggest “flute girls.”

The next afternoon one could have seen two Roman gentlemen struggling up the cobbled street.

“I must say, Porcine, this miserable lane is in no way to be confused with a street. This place was palmed off on me as a city, but cities have streets, and I haven’t seen a proper street since we disembarked in Asia.”

“Well, sir, I’m here to tell you that this is as good as it gets. I’ve spent the last fourteen years in these parts; you’ll find no paved strata here. In spite of its name, the place is not “colossal.” When I left the City my old commander said, ‘Romans are rightly contemptuous of the Phrygian wilderness. Their cities are mere country towns inhabited by well-to-do farmers; wealthy enough to claim immortality by paying to have their epitaphs engraved on their tombs.’ I agree, The place is just one big cemetery. You have been invited, sir, as the new Praefectus Castrorum, to a dinner at the house of a Phrygian gentleman. And I am accompanying you as your military guard of honor, as befits a man of your superior estate. You may expect the gentry at the party to be

impressed by your noble bearing, so smile and bear yourself nobly as a Roman governor should.”

“Thank you for reminding me, my good Metellus, I shall endeavor to represent myself as one of Rome’s best. What do you anticipate?”

“Well, noble Rufinus, you will meet your host, a certain Archippus. He is a native of the place but was educated in the Greek style. He is well mannered, a little stern, perhaps. I find him humorless. Somehow he came into his present estate through the death of his sister’s husband. She was a young widow and needed a proper guardian. I must say he has made his fortune from her misfortune.”

“And will we meet the lady, a rich widow, I take it?”

“Probably not, Phrygian ladies do not attend male dinner parties. But there might be a flute girl or two. Phrygian flute girls are appreciated even in The City.” The centurian winked and smiled to himself.

Quintus Rufinus shook his head, “Yes, but Phrygian flute girls do not come with dowries, as may be expected from rich widows; and your poor Quintus has been exiled to this vile corner of the world to repair his fortunes. You understand, Porcinus, that this may be my very last chance.”

Marcus Porcinus Metellus was silent. This was not the first Roman prefect, down on his luck, that he had escorted around the byways of the Lycus Valley. As for himself he was already savoring the thought of a country meal of roasted pig and fresh vegetables. There would be a good country wine, and, of course, the flute girls. He kicked aside a barking dog who seemed to take a dislike to his gentleman and said, “There’s the house, up that little knoll.”

Inside the house, in back of the peristyle in the triclinium, Archippus was making a quick once over of his arrangements. “Stamnion, run back and see if the pig is done. Roast pig should be almost white in the flesh, with the fat dripping down its sides and some of it crackling at the top, dressed with rosemary and our secret recipe of herbs. And while you are at it, see to it that the wine jars are open to let the wine breathe a little. Oh, we must impress our guests that we are quite as civilized as they are.” Stamnion took off without a further word; he

did not care to listen to his master's speech on refinement again.

"Asterion, have our fellow townsmen arrived? I do hope they have arrived. They must be here before our honored guests."

Asterion reported, "They have been standing in the peristyle for the past hour, sir. I do think you should give them leave to sit down."

Archippus shrugged; he did not intend that the townsmen of Colossae should be found lounging about when the gentlemen from Rome came in. Archippus turned to the remaining slave, a boy of about 10 years. "Now Onesimus, I want you to stand by me and do my bidding. You will take wine to the guests and stand by with a damp napkin to wipe any grease from their hands and lips—and oh, yes, the rose water. Where did I put the rose water?"

"I have it with me, my lord, just as you have told me." They had gone through with this little drama every hour for the past two days.

Just then the doorkeeper came in to report that two Romans could be seen nearing the top of the hill. Archippus clapped his hands for the serving men to be at the ready, and went into the peristyle to alert his Phrygian guests. "Look smart, now," he was commanding no one in particular and soon enough the Romans were ushered into the peristyle.

They found a familiar scene; the peristyle surrounded on three sides with decorative columns, a pool to one side with running water into it making a miniature water-fall. Plants producing greenery and flowers were tastefully placed about in ceramic pots. On the back side there was a slightly raised dais where Archippus stood flanked by three gentlemen of Colossae.

The play which had been well rehearsed proceeded. Archippus made a pretty speech of greeting and introduced the other members of his party:

Krasos, a Colossian gentleman of Greek ancestry;  
Hierax, descendant of an old Phrygian family;  
Euporos, a moneyed gentleman of Colossae.

Gravely, the Roman Centurion made his reply: "Sirs, it is my honor to introduce to you Quintus Rufinus Urbanus, newly appointed Praefectus Castrorum, by order of the Emperor. A man of a noble

family who comes to you with a message from Claudius Imperator himself.”

Rufinus stood straight about to speak, but the centurion continued, “You all know me, of course. I, Marcus Porcinus Metellus, am a Roman Army man of seventeen years experience, fourteen of those years have been spent in this delightful outpost of Rome’s majesty. We are old friends, are we not?” and he chuckled as if to acknowledge old drinking companions. At this point he produced a scroll, saluted the new Prefect to whom he gave the scroll. Rufinus gravely acknowledged the salute, unrolled the scroll and read a congratulatory message from the Emperor Claudius. It was inscribed in a fair hand with liberal flourishes by one of the better calligraphers of the princeps. Having read the proclamation, he presented the scroll to Archippus who was beside himself with delight. And so the party was ushered into the triclinium.

The tables had been set for six, surrounded by three couches. This meant two men to a couch, “a more comfortable arrangement than the usual three,” explained Archippus, who had Rufinus settled next to him on his right. Krasos was seated on the right hand side sharing his couch with the Centurion, for Krasos spoke the Greek language well and even knew a few phrases of schoolboy Latin. Hierax was on the left side with Euporos. Hierax had impeccable credentials as a member of an old Phrygian family. He had been educated in Ephesus and so had some fluency in Greek. Euporos by his side, had once been in the wool trade, but having established his fortune he now lived as a gentleman. As a merchant he had traveled.

Archippus stood for a moment and poured a little wine into a silver bowl as he offered a brief prayer to the local gods. With that, dinner was served. It started with the usual eggs which had been dyed bright red, being cooked in water with onion skins. Then there were small salads with ceci in garlic sauce arranged nicely on greens, and a dish of cucumbers and leeks in vinegar. Everyone expressed amazement at the cucumbers so early in the season while Archippus smiled and explained that they were grown in his own greenhouses.

Krasos quoted a bit of poetry. He had been rehearsing all morning for his part in the drama.

*And Kronos established three seasons,  
summer; winter and autumn, third  
and a fourth, spring,  
when everything blooms  
but who can live on flowers?*

“The poet Alcman wrote that in old times,” he said citing the school books. “But is our good fortune to dine with Archippus who produces lettuce out of season.”

Quick to respond, Hierax produced a bit of satire with which he tweaked his learned Greek neighbor. “We do not live on bread alone. The fate of the gourmand is food for comment; our Ephesian poet Hipponax sings their fate.”

*O to spend whole days at ease at table  
Swilling down tunafish and cheese in a steady stream  
for all the world like a eunuch from Lampasacus.  
Alas, I ate up the family fortune.  
Now I have to dig rocks on the mountainside  
and munch medium-sized figs with barley loaves.*

Not to be outdone, Euporos responded with his offering.

*Nothing destroys a good man quicker than poverty:  
not malarial fever; Kyrnos, nor old age.  
Better to hurl oneself into the abysmal sea  
or over a blunt cliff—than be a victim  
of poverty. The poor man can do or say nothing  
worthwhile. Even his mouth is gagged.*

“Theognis said it, and may we bless the gods that we are not such victims.”

The three locals seemed to breathe with relief at the presentations of their contributions. The fish was being served with little cups of



steaming broth flavored with herbs. Archippus was pleased and noted to himself that not one of the boys had lost his footing or slipped his hand from the soup bowl.

Porcinus growled to his couch mate, "Enough of these lessons. Where are the flute girls?" Krasos stared him down; he knew the centurion to be somewhat of a lout, but what does one expect from a soldier?

At this point the roasted pig was brought in, dripping in its succulence, with a crown of rosemary on its head and a red apple in its mouth. The diners applauded the chef's masterpiece while the bearers carved it into large sized servings to be set before the trenchermen.

Onesimus, Asterion and Stammion stood each one behind his couch with steaming napkins so that any dripping could be wiped up daintily before it stained the wearers' clothing. This flustered the Roman Rufinus and the soldier Porcinus could hardly restrain himself from laughter.

The prefect tried to make conversation by comparing this meal to a Roman dinner party which had been ridiculed recently by a satirist. *"The banquet complete with full orchestra, singing and dancing slave waiters, rich, pretentious food and expensive wines, not to mention performances of various kinds designed to allow the host to show off his wit or his capacity for literary allusions dragged on through one tasteless exhibition after another until the host had to answer the call of nature and the guests got a chance to talk."*

"That was written by one of our Roman writers," explained Rufinus as he looked straight at Marcus the Centurion. Both of them smirked a little as their eyes said, "One down for our side."

The boys began to refill the silver goblets with a sweet wine while the tables were taken away and new servings of sugared fruits and sweet cakes appeared.

Now Archippus stood up and spoke. "My dear friends, we at Colossae are simple folk. Some of us prefer to live here rather than with our workers in the fields and vineyards. Yet, at heart we remain in the countryside. We cannot emulate the wealth and the wonders of

the great city of Rome, or even of the sophistication of the cities of the coastlands. But we enjoy our rustic pleasures and wish to share our way of life with our guests with the hope that they will understand something of our society.

“I am reminded of such a party in Athens, how the great Plato described it. *Early in the evening after the company has been fed and the serious drinking has begun, Eryximachus proposed that instead of drinking heavily and listening to the flute-girl, they should send her away to entertain the women, drink lightly and entertain one another with speeches. The subject agreed on for the speeches is Eros, passionate love.*

“Now I propose that we select a subject to discuss and entertain each other with such edifying conversation.”

The Colossians nodded in assent; after all, they had come prepared with conversational pieces with which to edify and show off their attainments to the foreign guests.

The Romans restrained themselves from showing panic. Metellus who had been subjected to such treatment before waved his hand to Urbanus that the ball was in his court.

The prefect cleared his throat and began thoughtfully, “The social context of the symposium was clearly a man’s world; the very songs we have heard were composed for symposia of men in which scurrilous songs were of the essence. We Romans are quite at home with this. The symposium was one of those institutions which, like the gymnasium, were central to the culture of the learned Greeks of ancient times. The symposium was a drinking party. The celebrants were male (the only females present were flute-girls and other ladies of the night). And so I say, in order to be authentic, it is time to pour the wine and bring in the flute girls and all those other luscious ladies who are now enjoying themselves with the music and the acrobatics of the entertainers. Let the party begin.” He raised his goblet and waved it around so that the boy had quite some difficulty in refilling it.

Metellus winced. He had not gotten through to his superior that Colossae was not Rome. He stuttered, “Gentlemen, the prefect is a

little tipsy in his cups, and he forgets that in the colonies the ladies are not so free with their presence as in Rome.”

Before he could be restrained, Rufinus continued, “It is clear that Plato’s Symposium supposes, being Greek, that such parties were a breeding ground for love attachments with boys. I have noticed that our servers are very pretty youths and I am not opposed to that. Come now, let the party begin,” and he pulled Onesimus by the tunic onto the couch. “Come on, Archipor; I see that you are our host’s pretty boy. It’s time for him to share.”

The boy looked to his master for some sign that would tell him what he was to do, but Archippus stood up frozen and then cried, “No, sir! No! No such lechery starts in my house! I won’t have it!”

Rufinus paid no attention, but continued, “Come on, Archipor, it’s your turn to sing us a song.” Now the boy was pleading with his eyes on his owner.

“Sing for him,” Archippus commanded.

Onesimus, who had never sung before company, swallowed and started a song,

*What is wisdom? What gift of the gods  
is held in honor like this;  
to hold your hand victorious  
over the heads of those you hate?  
Honor is precious forever.*

Metellus started up, “Honor—honor indeed. What kind of a song is that? What does a slave know of honor?”

Archippus was astonished, “Where did you learn a song like that, boy?”

“Philemon learned it in school,” replied the boy.

Archippus seemed to understand, but he pretended not to notice when the prefect pulled the slave to him and began to fondle him.

“Love—Eros—Amor, that’s what it’s all about. Lets all make speeches about love; that’s what a symposium is for. Pour me another drink.”

This time Archippus poured the drinks. The centurion rushed over and tried to quiet his commander. Rufinus pushed him away and stood tottering on his feet and sang his song.

*Who cares for reputation  
If he keeps his cash?*

“There’s my part, gennamen. Now let’s have the slaves entertain us with speeches and stories. Why should we entertain them? You, boy, you go first.” and he pointed to Asterion.

Asterion, somewhat older than Onesimus, took the challenge and cleared his throat. “A slave is not a thing; he is a human being. He has the moral duty of being a good slave, serving with loyalty and devotion. Still he does not belong to himself. He is a possession. If an ox or a horse or a slave dies, no one mourns.” Sweating profusely at his temerity, Asterion stopped.

At a glance from Archippus, Stamnion carried on. “At any moment death may catch you unawares: you may fall victim to shipwreck or bandits, and leaving aside higher powers, the least of your slaves holds over you the power of life and death.”

This show of thought from slaves, uneducated slaves at that, was irritating to Euporos who stood up and shouted, “A slave is inferior by nature. This inferiority goes hand in hand with legal inferiority. . . . The barrier between humans and subhumans is impregnable. It is indecent to say that a slave has been born free and sold himself into slavery. It is equally indecent even to think that a free man might sell himself that way. . . . slavery is a reality of nature that cannot be denied. It is not a charity to free a slave. One merely frees a slave because it is good business. To be a good master is to take good care of one’s property. Slaves have neither property nor wives nor children. Their lovemaking and childbearing are like the breeding of livestock.”

After this there was so much shouting going on that no one was paying any attention who was slave or free, or who was Roman, Greek or Phrygian. Archippus regained his composure and spoke with learning, “Slavery is an individual misfortune, a misfortune that might befall any one of us, for we are all men, subject to the same

tricks of fate as these unfortunates. In wartime even the noblest of men may be reduced to slavery. It is Fortune that determines each man's fate. What then is the good man's duty? To do whatever he has to do whatever fate has placed him, be he king, citizen or slave."

By now Rufinus had fallen asleep. Onesimus freed himself from his embrace, stood up and smoothed his tunic.

Krasos showed his superior learning and remembered, "Freedom, according to Aristotle, is 'doing whatever one wants—to live precisely as you wish—since no one desires what is bad, the only one who is truly free is the one who wants to do what is good. But true liberty belongs to the gods alone.'"

The dinner guests stood up and bade Archippus farewell. Archippus called the porter to help Metellus with his drunken burden. The slaves were left to clean up the mess.

On the other side of the house where the cubicles are small and ill lighted, the three serving boys talked it over.

"I thought the old man would split a gut when the captain began to yell for the flute girls. You know how he is about having the ladies at his dinner parties."

Asterion began imitating Archippus with mincing steps and sweet toned words. Onesimus looked up inquisitively, for he had not quite understood the meaning of all that had happened the night before. Onesimus was the youngest of the three, barely ten years old. This had been the first dinner that he had been allowed to serve. Asterion was possibly nineteen, but who knows the age of a slave?

"Well, first off, it was when the captain asked you to sing. He figured that if there wasn't any flute girl, you must be the flute girl, being so young and smooth cheeked, y'know. Well, hey, where did you learn that song?"

Onesimus blushed, "I had to learn it for Philemon at the school. The young gentlemen have to know how to recite properly. It's part of their education."

Stamnion looked up, "If Philemon was supposed to learn it, why did you learn it?"

Onesimus hung his head, “Well, Philemon just plays all the time and never learns anything, so the schoolmaster beats him. Only, of course, the schoolmaster doesn’t beat him, he beats me because I have to take Philemon’s beating.”

The other slaves looked on sympathetically. The situation was known to them. “Well,” continued Onesimus, “I found out that if I answer for Philemon, the master just looks at him and says, ‘very good, young sir,’ and I don’t get beat. Of course, Philemon might beat me on the way home from school, but he doesn’t very often.”

“It don’t make much sense,” opined Stamnion.

“Look, Jug Ears, does anything in the world make sense?” asked Asterion.

“There’s a lot of things I don’t understand about the Roman gentleman,” ventured Onesimus. “Why did he call me *Archipor*?”

“That’s Latin,” explained Asterion. “It means ‘Archie’s Boy.’ ” The Roman’s call their slaves by names like that. We’re given Greek names, only they aren’t really Greek names; they’re names like you might give to a dog or a cow. *Stamnion*, that means Jug ears; *Asterion*, that’s a star; I think it’s because of my birthmark; and you’re *Onesimus*, Useful. Really, I think Useless would be a better name.”

Onesimus picked up a sandal and threw it at the older boy who ducked laughing. “Archipor, Archipor—by that he meant you were the Old Man’s special pet. That’s why he pulled you down, to pet you.”

Onesimus blushed and became tearful. “I don’t understand you.” Both of the older boys laughed. Onesimus wasn’t for real.

This Archippus was a philosopher of the ancient school. His studies had brought him to the understanding of all mysteries and he boasted of much knowledge, but in spite of that there was not much love for him as perhaps you have already sensed. He was accustomed to go to his private place, an aerie which he had constructed for his meditating, away from domestic interference, and overlooking the whole valley.

## The Aerie

Archippus left the house alone and walked along a customary path until he reached a viewpoint which opened up the entire valley below. This was his favorite place. There he was likely to spend a whole morning in contemplation. Sometimes he would take with him a scroll with a bit of poetry to memorize. It was a habit he had formed in his youth while he was away at school, that very fine school on the Island of Rhodes. On this morning he was thinking of how he had returned to Phrygia because he had learned that his father had died leaving him a small piece of property. His only living relative, a sister, had married a farmboy, son of a small landowner from Colossae. Upon her father's death, his sister's husband was laying claim to the father's small estate as part of his wife's dowry. Quickly Archippus consulted a scribe, practiced in the law, who listened to his plight and commented that Black Fortune had certainly sent upon him a special demon for his torment.

Archippus took the word of the lawyer seriously and sought out a magician who had a reputation for bringing about success in legal matters. The magician worked out a special curse which he had learned from the Egyptians. The two of them went with a black rooster to a small temple built next to an evil smelling spring that spewed hot water from the ground. There they sacrificed the rooster. The snivelling caretaker of a priest took the parchment on which the curse was written and tacked it on the wall for all to read. The fees for all of this just about bankrupted the already poor student, but when destiny dogs you with misfortune, it is best to risk what little there is left on hope.

At home, that decaying house which he had inherited from his father, he found a long time friend bearing a letter. There was no regular post in those days; one had to rely upon such private messengers as could be found. Archippus broke the seals and frowned while reading.

"Bad news?" the friend was solicitous.

By this time Archippus was shaking. He could hardly speak.

"My sister's husband is dead, murdered by his slaves," she says.

“We have not shaken off the evil demon.”

The friend spoke cautiously, “Ah, your sister’s husband. Was he rich?”

Archippus knew little of his sister’s husband other than that he owned a tilled farm in the valley near Colossae. The two sat down and considered who might be the heirs; for he was the very one who was claiming the estate as his dower right. This news changed the whole picture. Now there was no husband to make this claim. Surely the widow might have some rights; and an unborn babe, if it should be a boy . . .” It might be wise to consult someone familiar with the law.

“It was supposed to be a very potent charm; perhaps it is working. Still I would not want to be blamed for my brother-in-law’s death,” Archippus paused. “Perhaps I should go to console my sister.”

When Archippus arrived at the dead man’s small cottage in a cluster of rustic dwellings set off from the fields he found a shambles. The terrified widow, a girl of only sixteen years, was large with child. The villagers were pillaging the house of its belongings all the while shouting “Death to the slaves.” The two accused slaves were already almost dead, and now the fire torture was being applied to their feet. Archippus called out in a loud command, “Begone.”

When they saw the commanding figure of a gentleman, the loutish peasants fled with such loot as they already held.

The girl looked up and cried out, “Brother, is that you?” Archippus knew then that his fortunes had changed.

Apphia’s husband proved to have no heirs other than his wife, for his child was yet unborn. As the brother of the widow, Archippus quickly became her guardian for Phrygian women do not rule in their own right. The two slaves still protesting their innocence gladly acknowledged that their master had been drawn to the river by demonic forces as this new savior suggested. Archippus made a special trip to the spot. There in the bottom of the Lycus glittered specks of golden sand. It has been said that this was one of the places where in ancient times Phrygian King Midas bathed hoping to rid himself of the golden curse. Archippus shivered as he felt a cold wind off the mountain Miti,



for so it is called since Midas is still known to haunt it. Close by at river bend the Lycus leaves its course and plunges into the dark netherworld from which it emerges again a dozen stadia away. Archippus could almost see the beckoning hands from that underworld which would lead him to a similar fate.

The brother returned and consoled his sister by saying that indeed her husband had been entranced by the face of a golden demon who had lured him to the river and whose devilish hands had pulled him to his death. He took the girl with the offering of a dove to the goddess to protect her from such demons and give her safe delivery. How otherwise can anyone act when very nature proves false?

These memories besieged the mind of Archippus as he looked across the fertile valley. Gone were the impoverished shanties that he had visited when he first found his sister there. The haphazard fields of scattered barley and spelt had been replaced by irrigated vineyards in straight rows. An orchard of olive trees separated the vineyard from a field of wheat, already red-spiked and waving in the wind. Beyond were fig trees heavy with unripe fruits. He could see the figures of the field slaves who were examining the fruit, for figs demand a special treatment. Along the fertile rows the poppies were in bud, soon to flower and produce their sweet sleep inducing seed. And closer yet, where the plain begins to meet the hillside were the gardens which produced the melons and the onions, the bitter herbs and the beans, so precious and so tender. These need special care and watchfulness. All of this was the work of Archippus, and of his field slaves. The slaves provided the labor; the farmer provided the mind that planned the harvest. Archippus understood this well, and he often reminded his sister of her good fortune in that she had a philosopher for a brother rather than a know-nothing Phrygian peasant for a husband.

“One would think,” mused her brother, “that she would show more gratitude. Philosophy can serve the prudent man well. If one recognizes the work of the Demiurge and his angels, one can turn a bad fate into prosperity.”

When Archippus walked along the Lycus, he too saw the golden

face of the River god as it glittered in the sands. He too reached down and scooped up a handful of that sand and studied the shining flakes that shone so enticingly in the sun.

“Fool’s gold,” he said; but then he applied the logic of philosophy. “All that glitters is not gold. But the syllogism has not been drained of all its meaning. All is not gold; but some is gold. The secret is to separate the *some* from the *all*.“

Archippus was cautious in his mining. He had no wish to raise false hopes and wild suspicions. Day by day he found the flakes of real gold and small nuggets in the river bottom. It was not long before he could buy the fields from their idle owners who were eager to change the land which brought them only labor for minted gold pieces which, like the demons who occupy them, lead them from greed to poverty. Too late they learn that the fields are gone, the gold is gone and starvation is only stayed by selling their children into slavery.

Archippus noted that the shadow of Mt. Miti to the East had withdrawn from his now sun drenched fields, and now the shadow from Mt. Cadmus in the west was lengthening down to the river. The cool western breeze fanned his hair and beard, and the slave boy Onesimus came down the path seeking him.

“You’ve come to draw me from my morning meditation, have you? Tell me, boy, do you know your letters?”

Onesimus’ performance of the previous day had given Archippus cause for consideration.

“You mean the alpha to omega? Yes, sir I can recite them and I can draw them on the wax tablet.”

“Then you should turn to good old Cadmus behind you and thank him for his gift,” smiled the philosopher.

“Yessir, I know it was Cadmus brought the gift of letters from our Eastern land to Western Thebes. But he only brought them 13 letters. I do not know where the other letters came from,” pondered the boy.

“You know that too?” said the master in astonishment. Onesimus paused and considered his words. “Philemon knows it, sir; I only carry his burdens.” Archippus was silent, but patted Onesimus on the head.

The house which Archippus was approaching was not the same structure to which the returning student had come a dozen years past. In those days the house stood as it had for centuries with minimal remodeling, built in the old Greek style. A central doorway had opened to the street; to its left the porter's lodge furnished with wooden benches for those who might be waiting there, and to the right a minimal stable for donkeys or mules.

A narrow hallway once led from the door to the courtyard, which contained no pools or flowering greenery. On one side there had been a hearth, with an open cistern close by. Rough benches provided seating for residents who shared the space with chickens and perhaps a dog or two. Around the courtyard were built small chambers which connected with each other by inside doors. At the very back were two larger rooms. One was called the *andron* where men gathered for talk and entertainment, and the other, the *gynaecium* in which the women gossiped and did their work. Time was when the house was considered spacious. The father of Archippus and Apphia had inherited it from his grandfather. Indeed the house and land had belonged to the same family from old times when the Ionians had first conquered the Phrygians. Somewhere in the Catalogue of the Iliad you will find the name of our ancestor, it is said. Archippus and Apphia spoke in the Greek tongue, though they knew Phrygian well enough, but chose to use it only in front of their slaves.

When the widowed Apphia and her brother returned to the house, it was in sad condition. The thatch above the *andron* had fallen in and the weather and water had undermined the entire back wall. The cistern was filled with trash and the private rooms had long provided space for mice and even larger animals. Because of its unlivable condition, Apphia's young husband had chosen to live in the village of the Phrygian farmers. Now that possibility seemed untenable, and so one morning Archippus ordered that their few belongings loaded on a cart and moved back into the old ruin. They had not so much as a donkey to pull the cart but pulled and pushed it themselves up the road that had once been cobbled. This part of the city had long since fallen

into disrepair and was more or less abandoned.

With them came Phryx, an old serving man who had been many years with the murdered man's family. Now he had no place to go except with the poor man's widow. Had he been younger he might well have disappeared into the town or sought his fortune on the road, but as it was he had no mind for taking charge of his own life.

With Apphia came her maid servant, Sambatis, a skinny wench of no more than 14 years whose father had sold her to a farmer in a neighboring village. Apphia's father-in-law had bought her and given her as a gift to his son's bride. Sambatis had no sandals for her feet and only one thin garment to cover her nakedness. Her dark hair hung to her shoulders in snarls; her skin was dark and rough from working out-of-doors both at planting time and harvest. Sambatis did not respond to Greek; the old language was all she knew. Apphia who desired, if not a lady's maid, at least a house servant, had found Sambatis difficult to educate. Sambatis for her part took the blows from Apphia's hairbrush stolidly and found no reason to complain as long as there was food for her to eat. When they reached the old house the four of them set about to clean it out and make it livable.

The second night of their occupancy, Archippus and Apphia sat at a table where Archippus produced a tablet with a plan for the house that he proposed to build. Apphia looked on in astonishment and chaffed her brother as a dreamer.

"Where, dear brother, can we find the money to take on such a project? We do not have two leptas to share between us; Certainly we do not have the skills to build a house, and our slaves are uselessness itself."

She laughed as she pointed at Phryx and Sambatis each curled in a corner like a sleeping dog, snoring at their rest.

Archippus patted her hand. "Do not worry, little sister. I have learned a thing or two at Rhodes; and I have a charm with me with which I shall control the demon of the river."

He continued, "This rude courtyard will become the forward peristyle with columns here at the end of the entrance hall which will frame

the beauty of our outdoor garden. We will do away with the stable and enlarge the space so we can rent it out as a shop. We will make the hallway from the door wider so that more than one visitor at a time can enter, and the porter's lodge will be enlarged to enhance our prestige. You will see that an education at Rhodes is not for wastrels, nor merely set up for a rich man's pleasure."

It may have just been talk to lift up their spirits, but he was earnest in believing it. Archippus had no intention of taking up trowel and mortar to start building his house himself. He had been brought up, after all, as a member of the gentility; this did not mean that he was wealthy; many gentlemen down on their luck find ways of eking out their sustenance without resorting to the labor of hands. At this point in his life Archippus had not truly experienced the poverty that comes from having no means; with a certain bravado he pointed to his higher education and introduction to philosophy as being sufficient to sustain his needs and help him to find a way out of his predicament. He had tried the magic arts and seemed to have some proof that "there was something in it."

However, he was the first to admit that in his experience pure magic was an insufficient inducement to use as a way of life. Philosophy counseled against it, though philosophers were not totally inoculated against its infection. It would seem that his discovery of gold was pure chance; chance, fate, is an acceptable explanation for the differing circumstances of almost anyone, rich man, poor man or even slave. Still it was more than mere good fortune that he was able to separate the glittering mica from the true metal. In the school he had been taught that the mica floats away with the stream while the real nugget drops heavily to the bottom. Native intelligence taught him that heavy nuggets collect in certain cul-de-sacs being washed along with the flow of the river. Native intelligence also told him that it would be foolhardy to advertise his luck or even to be seen with a trove of golden nuggets in his possession. He therefore took care of how he displayed what fortune had seen fit to reveal to him. After a trip to visit a friend in Ephesus he returned with sufficient minted gold pieces to buy a field,