

VOLUME 2
**GIFTS OF
THE GODS**
SILVER AND **GOLD**



THOMAS J. BERRY

Five men and women in Ancient Greece are set on a dangerous journey of self-discovery during the bitter conflict of the Peloponnesian War. The Peace of Nicias has ended a decade of fighting between Athens and Sparta but skirmishes continue to mount as both sides try to gain the advantage. The action moves abroad where riches await the victor.

**GIFTS OF THE GODS:
SILVER AND GOLD**

by Thomas J. Berry

Order the complete book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10593.html?s=pdf>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.

VOLUME 2

GIFTS OF THE GODS

SILVER AND GOLD



THOMAS J. BERRY

Copyright © 2019 Thomas J. Berry

ISBN: 978-1-64438-118-2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

This is a work of historical fiction, based on actual persons and events. The author has taken creative liberty with many details to enhance the reader's experience.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

Booklocker.com, Inc.
2019

First Edition

Chapter 1

Syracuse, Sicily

12th day of Pyanepsion
October 23, 421BC

≈ Cathryn ≈

The smooth stone walls were cold to the touch and Cathryn felt a chill run down her spine when she landed on the hard marble floor of the quarry 30 feet below. The temperature had dropped 15 degrees since she descended the rickety wooden ladder and she unconsciously tugged her pale blue *chiton* tighter across her shoulders.

The woman derived only a small measure of comfort when she spied the large gathering of men and women watching her progress from the safety of the high ground. Four other women had accompanied her to the bottom of the quarry and were now spread out in search of the piglets. There was a rank odor to the place, and the small, lonesome sagebrush a few feet away gave her the feeling of death and decay. We're here for a reason, she thought to herself, hoping to stave off her fears. Best get on with it.

The enormous marble quarries were situated north of the city walls, two off to the west and this one, the largest of the lot, nestled among the limestone cliffs to the east. The natives of Sicily had carved out marble blocks from these parts for several centuries and their presence was influenced in the stately temples of Apollo and Zeus which stood on hills overlooking the region. There were several caverns hewn into the brilliant white marble walls but there was no natural exit down here. The only means of descent or escape lay with the thin ladders brought down from the rim high above.

She was nervous but dared not show it. Even so, she wished she could go back up now. She wasn't sure she wanted to face what lay down here. Cathryn was a mother of two young children and, at age 34, she was content with her life. Even so, she realized it was fun to break out of the normal restrictive lifestyle once in a while. Was that what had led her to jump into the middle of this cold, desolate quarry?

Cathryn approached a small rocky overhang 20 feet across the compound where the thick marble walls were cracked in long streaks that

GIFTS OF THE GODS

reached up towards the cheering crowd above. She could barely hear anything from her position, but she knew the people were there. Watching and waiting. Did they hope she'd fail? As she grew closer to the overhang, the heavy smell of death almost stopped her in her tracks. There was nothing to see as yet but the shadows were quick to hide their prize. What would they reveal?

She was so intent on the shadows and the portent they wrought that she didn't see the loose stones that dotted the landscape or the larger one that tripped her up a few feet from the rock wall. She fell hard on her hands and scrapped her nose as her face hit the hard floor. She cried out in pain and tried to lift herself off the ground...and stopped cold.

She heard the low hissing a heartbeat before seeing the long, green form of the viper coiled under the overhang only a foot away. It pushed its forked tongue out in her direction, trying to decide if this was a threat or a meal. Perhaps it might be both. Dark brown spots aided the venomous reptile in camouflaging itself from unwanted attention. This large creature with the blue robe had certainly entered its lair without warning.

The woman's eyes went wide in fright and her muscles refused to take direction. After a few tense moments, however, the snake decided to back off and slink further into the shadows, leaving Cathryn alone with their mutual companion.

With the snake gone, the woman felt her breath return slowly. She looked to her right and gazed upon the thing her nose had discovered long before her eyes did. Two feet away from her, thrust back under the shadows, was the remains of a small piglet. It had been here since the summer, she knew, and the snakes had left most of the body intact although some parts seemed missing. She had a woven satchel slung across her back and removed it slowly, careful not to disturb the serpents that lived among these shadowy cliffs. She reached out and touched the rear leg of the decaying animal and it broke off in her hand. The shadows were not going to give up their prize that easily.

This was the hardest part, she had heard. The smelliest, dirtiest task performed by the Bailers during the festivities but one in which the whole city depended. It was the first day of the *Thesmophoria* festival which was held annually to honor the Mother, Demeter Thesmophoros, the goddess of grain and harvest, and her daughter, Persephone, often called the Maiden in the writings of Homer. The rituals undertaken over the course of the seasons were done in reverence to the goddess and the Maiden as perpetuated through the hymns and stories of the fabled writer.

Cat tried to remember the exact wording of the hymn, but they seemed to elude her. Her mother would have known it verbatim, she realized with chagrin. Homer recorded a story that centuries ago, as Demeter's daughter was gathering flowers one morning, Hades snatched her away and brought her down a chasm into the underworld. Near the rocky cavern, a local swineherd was grazing his pigs, and these were swallowed up along with the pair. The people paid homage to the poor man by throwing piglets into the rock quarries or caverns each summer. Their remains will soon be used in the harvest rituals of the Maiden.

Once the remains of these piglets were brought back to the surface and placed on the altar, their bodies would be stuffed with pomegranate seeds and offered up to the gods. The piglets themselves were a symbol of fertility as were the pinecones and figurines made out of dough that were thrown into the quarries during the *Skira* festival last summer. Now it was hoped the infusion of death with life would help ensure a good crop for the coming year.

"Don't be squeamish, Cat!" Agnieszka called out. "Get in there and drag it out!"

"Quit your complaining," Cathryn retorted. She placed her hand on the small shoulder of the unfortunate animal and pulled it out into the sunlight. It looked even worse than it smelled and that was bad enough. She made short work of the body though and wrapped it up in an oiled cloth before placing it in the satchel around her neck.

The other women had dutifully collected their piglet remains and soon the small group made their way up the wobbly ladder to the surface. This was a female-directed festival, one of only a handful found in all of Hellas and the islands of the Aegean Sea. The original ceremony was held outside Athens along the road to Eleusis, but certain communities held their own versions and hoped for the blessings of the goddess. Demeter is a mother after all, Cathryn thought, as am I. This might be dirty work but it's a task I'm honored to undertake if it will help the crops.

She thought of the goddess and the horrible sacrifices she was forced to deal with each year. The woman felt for Demeter as only a mother could. After her daughter had been kidnapped centuries ago by Hades, the god of the underworld, it had taken almighty Zeus himself to arrange a compromise. Now the Mother had to console herself with having her daughter for only half the year. During this time of joy, she allowed the beautiful spring flowers to bloom and the warmth of the summer sun to grow healthy crops. When Hades came to take the girl away again, the

GIFTS OF THE GODS

goddess despaired. The countryside fell into a cold, forbidding landscape until the next cycle. Such brooding behavior was not easy for the humans who depended on a bountiful harvest for their survival.

As the small group of Bailers reached the surface once again, Cat felt much better. She handed over her smelly satchel to another woman who placed the contents in large woven baskets. It was late afternoon and the ceremonies would start at sundown. There was still much to do before the festivities commenced.

She and the other women retired to the camps they had erected near the temple of Apollo for the festival. They spent time bathing themselves with oil and perfuming their bodies with frankincense and a touch of labdanum. Unlike other ceremonies carried out during the year, there would be no wreaths adorning their heads tonight. The attendants, married women all, had been preparing for this evening for the better part of a week. Cat had sworn off intimate relations with her husband during this time, as the high priests dictated. He had taken the opportunity to visit markets along the African coast with her brother. So much the better for them, she thought. No food could be consumed that would relate to the Mother...not yet at any rate. That would be done during the celebrations on the third day.

The festival for Demeter was all about the mothers, and the men had only a small part to play in the rituals that surrounded it. The women took great pleasure in their roles today, one of the few times during the year they were allowed to come out of their houses and partake in communal events. Only the slaves or lower-class women ventured outside with any regularity. Cat was determined to make the most of it. She might not see such freedom for many months to come.

As the women gathered together for the procession to the altar, the Bailers carried the woven baskets containing the remains of the piglets before them. Colorful banners adorned the trees leading to the marble altar erected on the high ground near the temple where hundreds of spectators watched with anticipation. Flaming torches were stuck on poles along the way, illuminating the scene in a ghostly fashion.

50 married women wearing flowing robes of pale blue, soft pink, or deep maroon walked proudly between the throngs of people. Some wore sandals upon their feet and more than half had flowers nestled in the braids of their hair. Cat looked forward to the day when her own daughter would one day march with her. As of now, two-year-old Brigida had at least a few years to wait.

SILVER AND GOLD

As two high priests took the offered baskets and arranged the smelly carcasses across the altar, a third sprinkled sacred seeds over them all. They performed their duties with deep solemnity and chanted prayers as the crowd looked on. Cat took it all in with wonder and reverence.

Dancers came forth, both young and old, and shook their bodies to the beat of mystic drummers. The audience cheered and applauded until another group took their place. This second troupe was made of women who paraded themselves naked before an admiring crowd. They threw themselves into their dance with a passion that Cat could only marvel at. She knew a few of them out there, her sister first and foremost. She didn't think she would be brave enough to throw off her *chiton* for the crowd.

Cathryn thought of her kids tonight. Brie and seven-year-old Vincenzo were being looked after by one of the household slaves, Demetria. Her husband, Biaggio, would be out with his cohorts tonight in the ports near Carthage, she guessed. He was a moneylender and a prominent one at that, but she disliked the crowd who always seemed to hang around him anymore. It was anyone's guess when he might show up at home.

The small family lived with Gio's parents but his father, Ramunnu, had been sick for some time and rarely left the house. His mother, Natalia, was in the crowd tonight, just as excited to be out and about as her daughter-in-law. Their house was built in the new suburbs along the city walls to the north, not far from the quarries she had spent most of her afternoon today. She hoped she smelled a little cleaner now.

She gathered herself together, closed her eyes, and smiled. She wanted to take it all in and never let go. Despite the horrendous task she had volunteered for today, she had to admit it was an adventure and a rare one at that. The festival would continue for two more days before she would have to return to her old, boring life. I love my family, she thought, but I don't want this night to end.

Chapter 4

Piraeus

2nd day of Mounichion
April 8, 420BC

≈≈ Alcibiades ≈≈

Dust billowed up like a wispy cloud as the large, sleek animal raced past the small group. A fine layer of gray soil was visible upon their colorful robes and stylish sandals, bearing witness to the frequent trips the white stallion had made along the straight track in the last half hour. It was a fine spring morning with the touch of a cool breeze coming off the waters of the Aegean just a quarter mile distant.

“I could get used to this place,” Doro said absently. There were no neighbors along this stretch of land, two miles south of Piraeus which the mighty city of Athens used as their central port. The rolling, grassy hills to the east were unbroken to the naked eye except for the occasional farmhouse or grove of olive trees that dotted the pastures.

“Beats the busy streets of the city, that’s for sure,” Memo replied with a nod. “Alcibiades has the best of both worlds, I’ll give him that.”

As the tall, stately rider swung the magnificent horse around and trotted back to the group, he couldn’t hold in his excitement any longer. “She’s as beautiful as she is expensive!”

The cadre of long-time friends had gathered today on Alcibiades’ newly renovated horse farm where he paraded the highly-praised stallion recently acquired from the plains of Thrace a month before. The farm sat on ten acres of pristine grassland with an expanded main house, two barns, and a half-mile long track on which his eight horses were run through their paces. Adjacent to the barn, the 30-year-old aristocrat had erected a wide storage facility where he housed and maintained three chariots outlaid in gold and silver. A trio of hired hands, all native of Macedonia, worked the farm year-round. In the lofty circles of the very wealthy, such trappings were a sign of power and prestige. None were finer.

“Indeed!” Doro remarked as he observed the great stallion. He reached out his right arm to touch the sleek coat as Alcibiades sauntered past. He kept his other arm nestled in the folds of his light blue *chiton*. It was almost useless now, burned from elbow to wrist fleeing a collapsing fort in Boeotia

four years before. He looked up at his friend with dark brown eyes. Doro's face was oval and his stature short. However, there was remarkable strength in his compact frame and he was swift of foot, at least in the days of his youth.

Like his friends, Theodoras had grown up among the privileged families of Athens in the prosperous years before the war. They had been privately tutored in mathematics, science, and astronomy when most of the city could neither read nor write. In the ensuing decade, young Doro had seen his family decimated by the deadly plague that swept through the city, and watched their fortunes sink to the brink of ruin. Only with the economic resurgence of the last few years had his prospects begin to rise once again.

"I took her for half the price after the fiasco with the dealer from Corinth," his host remarked. "I told him I'd take my business elsewhere if he didn't make amends. I used the balance to upgrade the fences along the north side." The day was warming up and the breeze was blowing lightly over the plains where four of his large steeds were grazing lazily. The thick grass was green and tall along the flatlands, the product of a myriad of small streams and rivers coming down off the hills to the east.

"Bridle's Horn is the pride and joy of all Athens," Memo exclaimed with enthusiasm. "But raising horses can be an expensive task as I'm sure you know, Alcibiades. How have you managed to make all these renovations on top of the normal upkeep?"

"When Hipparete gave me a son last year, she provided me with more than an heir," he responded. "I collected ten Talents from her brother that was built into our dowry arrangements years ago. I don't think he appreciated the gift as much as I did, however! I'm sure he hates me now," he said with a grin. "A good deal went into building up the facilities. The bigger they are, the most prestigious they seem! I want to be the talk of the city!" The crafty horse-owner had financed his farm on the riches of his in-laws with a stipulation of additional income for each son born to him. The sum of ten Talents was an exorbitant amount which could have fed a village of 200 families for an entire year.

"You need to have the best of everything," Three-Fingers retorted as he drained the flask of wine and wiped his mouth with the hem of his rose-colored robe. He was larger than his two friends standing with him, both in height and girth, and his curly red hair helped him stand out even among a crowd of a hundred. A Hellene by birth, Euthydemus could trace his ancestry to the wild plains of Macedonia and the horse tribes that lived

alongside the noble beasts. A childhood accident had left him with his unusual moniker, but he had still proven his usefulness with a sword on many occasions.

“Is there another way to live?” Alcibiades had always been precocious, even as a child running through the great halls of his uncle, the noble and famed leader, Pericles. His own father has been killed in battle when he was only three and he had been raised among the rich and powerful families, carving out his own rules through life with little thought of the consequences. With a fortune of his own backed by extensive claims in the silver mines of Laurium, he married for money and secured his expensive pastimes on the coin of others. He was a tall, handsome man who had a temperament for action and excitement. The present peace was driving him to seek distractions elsewhere.

“Not for you,” Doro replied with a laugh. “Bridle’s Horn is everything you wished, my friend. Too bad you couldn’t ride this one into battle at Delium. Perhaps it would have changed the outcome!”

“Put a sword in my hand and this beast under me and I would have slain half a legion!” The rider laughed heartily. He had spent the better part of the war as a cavalry officer, a glorified position where he learned to develop his love of the swift and powerful animals. He had always sought a direction that would bring him fame and prestige, much to the chagrin of his friends in the infantry.

“You may have to if the rumors are any indication,” Memo responded. Troezenus was his given name but hardly anyone used it anymore. He was the most educated of the group, having spent many years learning the intricacies of treaties and documents at the knee of his father who had been a cabinet member in the days of Pericles’ long reign. He was youthful looking and, while one would not call him plump, seemed far removed from the lean figures of most of his contemporaries. He had dark green eyes, long, wavy black hair, and could often be found reading the works of Homer when not calculating figures and tallies for the city’s treasury department. Doro had stuck him with his nickname when he was only six. Old habits never die.

“Mark my words, the new *ephors* at Sparta detest this peace as much as I do, albeit for different reasons,” the host replied gamely. “They feel there is much to gain if they force Athens to the bargaining table under new pretenses. I have always made my own position very clear as well. Athens needs to conquer new territories and expand their influence in order to survive. Only an army can do that. Peace leads to atrophy and decay.”

“Argos is the linchpin,” Memo interjected. “Both sides fear her...”

“So naturally we both want to take her to bed,” Doro chimed in. “It’s easier to control someone if they think they are on friendly terms.”

The ten-year war between militant Sparta and democratic Athens had left both cities drained. The ensuing peace treaty and subsequent alliance last year orchestrated by General Nicias had been received with mixed reviews at home. Alcibiades carried a great deal of weight in council chambers and spent the winter months denouncing the terms which forced them to hand over their most tangible bargaining chips. Land and life were things both cities held dear and returning the Spartan prisoners had rubbed him the wrong way. Many came to agree with him, however, and soon forced the Council to hold on to their foreign territory a while longer.

“Sparta has to honor their end of the treaty before we agree to relinquish Pylos,” Alcibiades said of the key fort the democrats maintained on the shores of their fierce rivals. “And much of it is out of their hands. Since Boeotia is their ally, it was up to Sparta to retrieve our prisoners held in those lands and regain the fort we lost at Panactum. We got our men back but the fort, as you know, was razed to the ground. My protestations before the Council proved quite accurate, don’t you think? We were right to keep Sparta’s territories after all! We hold the upper hand now. When Sparta approached the Council last month, we rejected their plea to return Pylos and sent them home with their tail between their legs. It was a grand day, I tell you!”

“Boeotia has a lot to answer for,” Doro remarked. “That’s big territory and all those cities, especially Thebes, can still make a major ally for Sparta.” Their neighbors to the north, just over the Cithaeron mountain range and the fertile plains of Attica, covered over 1,200 square miles and its low-lying river basin served dozens of towns and small cities bordering the Corinthian Gulf to the west and the waters of the Aegean to east.

The local politics of Boeotia leaned towards the oligarchs of Sparta and they resented the constant designs of expansion favored by Athens. It was here at the small village of Delium just over the borderlands where the local tribes crushed the Athenian invaders a few years before. Alcibiades earned high praise for his conduct and Doro lost the use of his arm. The thought of the incident still rankled him.

“It’s Argos the Spartans want,” Memo responded. “It’s the ally everyone covets, and Boeotia is but a pawn in their grand scheme.”

“I have already seen to that,” Alcibiades replied as he dismounted from the white stallion. He held the reins and began to lead the horse back to the

barn as the small group followed close at his heels. The sun was getting warmer as the morning wore on. Doro hoped he'd offer some wine soon. Diluted would suffice but he'd even take it straight, barbaric as the practice was.

"What does that mean?" Three-Fingers asked.

"Simple really. I felt Sparta's interest in Argos was more than just self-preservation. Once they unite, there is nothing to stop them from turning on Athens! When I realized their intentions, I sent my own envoys to Argos to seek their favor on our behalf."

"Spartans are not as duplicitous as we are," Memo retorted. "It's highly unlikely their intentions are any more ambitious than they claim."

"I know your heart, Alcibiades," Doro replied as they reached the open door to the spacious barn. A stable boy came to meet them and took the reins from his master. There was one other animal within, a brown mare sitting on a bed of hay along the north side. His friend had told him she was due to deliver soon. It might be only a matter of hours.

"Do you now?" he asked more subdued than normal. Alcibiades was tall and strong, built more like an Olympic god than that of a mortal man. His long, wavy locks of brown hair were pulled back with a cord of ox hide and his sandals were the only thing about him that seem touched by the mud and dirt.

"You are a man of pride, my friend, and you were hurt when the Spartans reached out to Nicias for the peace instead of you. As you have often stated, the prisoners had been well-cared for under your protection and your family's position as *proxenus* had been a long-standing post with them. If anyone deserved their gratitude and respect, it was you. But I have to warn you not to let your personal feelings get in the way of what's best for Athens."

The group made their way in silence to the farmhouse, a two-story structure with a large courtyard filled with newly planted sage and thyme bushes, and small olive trees. Two altars had been erected on either side of the gated fence, an honorable nod to both Apollo and Athena. The building was constructed in a similar style to those in the town, with a strong foundation of stone and dried brick upon which a wooden frame was constructed on the upper floors. The courtyard provided a cool environment in the hot summer and circulated air to all the floors within. The rooms of the interior were situated along the perimeter with a balcony looking down from the upper levels.

As they strolled past a large storage room to their left, Doro took in the great *andron* that was the pride and joy of his host. It was the largest room in the house and filled with expensive couches, rugs, and tables, all imported from the far reaches of the Empire and probably beyond. Carved busts of several gods and even a few men of great renown sat on stone pedestals along the south wall.

Doro recognized one in the center as the spitting image of Pericles, the most revered leader Athens had seen in generations, and the man who raised Alcibiades since he was a toddler. He had been in the grave for almost eight years now, a victim of the plague that had taken out half the city's population in the early part of the war. A helmet sat prominently on the figure's head as was his custom. The old man had been sensitive about his long features and forbade any statue or image be made of him without adequate covering.

The interior was far cooler than the hot outdoors and Alcibiades took a large cylinder of wine from a side table and opened it with his usual flair. After passing around several flasks, he drank heartily from his own goblet. "Everything I have ever done, my friends, has been for the good of Athens," he declared finally. "When the Spartans come in a few days, you will see just how far I'm willing to go to make sure our fair city is well served."

Chapter 7

Corinth

30th day of Hekatombaion
August 2, 420BC

≈≈ Ozias ≈≈

The air simmered with intense heat and the young man wiped his brow with the back of his hand. He had been here for hours and would not see the light of day for many more to come. His lean muscles rippled as he pushed down hard on the pot bellows, again and again, one quick movement following another. The leather stretched and pulled against him, but he couldn't afford to let up now. The color was just about right.

"Almost there, lad," his master called out. "A few more minutes and we'll be ready."

Ozias just nodded silently and kept at his task. The clay pot beneath the animal skin pushed air through the bottom of the stone furnace where coal glowed a brilliant orange flame under the watchful gaze of the tall, strong looking blacksmith. The pair stood in a room with stout stone walls and a dirt floor. Metal instruments hung on great hooks from ceiling beams while a dozen swords and pieces of bronze armor plating sat on shelves along the south wall. The fiery stone furnace, measuring more than three feet across, was the centerpiece of his master's domain. The smell of sulfur and burning cordite filled the room from end to end as the sparks flew off in fiery embers in a small but brilliant display.

The blacksmith held iron tongs in his left hand and used it to hoist a long sword out of the furnace. Sweat poured off his brow and dripped down to his greasy leather apron. Serafeim was in his late forties, a tall man built like a tree trunk with strong, arms covered in scars and burns. His hair was cut short, a necessity in his line of work. As he brought the glowing piece of iron out of the fire, he set it on the heavy anvil next to him. With his right hand, he brought down a mighty hammer upon the edge and watched with satisfaction as the tempered metal narrowed and sharpened. He continued to strike the edge of the blade for several more minutes before lifting it up for inspection.

“The Captain is going to like this one,” the slave remarked with a confident air. He had served the family well for over a decade and had been treated in like accord by those who fed and clothed him. Originally from the island of Corcyra, he had been captured along with his mother and two sisters when Corinth invaded at the outbreak of the war 12 years before. He had been sold to a factory near the docks at the tender age of six where he labored for several years. It was good providence that brought him to the smithy when the factory owner needed to pay off a gambling debt. He was soon apprenticed to the forge and all its fiery instruments, a trade which would serve him well as he grew to manhood.

“We only got a few days to get ‘er done,” the master replied. “The Captain wants it by week’s end.”

“I’ve been working on the handle,” Ozi stated proudly. “It’s a thing of beauty if you ask me.”

“No one’s asked you, boy,” the master growled a little under breath, but he took heart with the young man’s initiative. He was 19 and a man fully grown but he still remained a boy to his employer. Truth be told, he was proud of his apprentice and the skills he had picked up at his side. He didn’t have many slaves and the boy was the only one he trusted enough to help him with the difficult work in the fires.

“I patterned it from Achilles’ blade during the war in Troy,” the young man continued as if he hadn’t heard. “I want to inlay it with...”

“No time for that,” the smithy grunted. “I’ve got orders to fill. We can’t spend an eternity on each one, especially for what little the Captain’s paying me.”

Ozi nodded meekly as he watched the hammer strike the hot surface again and again. Sparks flew off in all directions as the layer of heavy iron flattened out in a thinner, more refined shape. He was a skinny man with a tough, wiry frame. His dark hair was cut short and his good-looking features were accented with strong cheekbones and blue eyes. He wasn’t sure where the blue had come from. He has last seen his mother on the auction block years ago as she was taken away and his father, from all accounts, was killed in battle. He had very little memory of those times or of his sisters either. Their heritage and history were as lost to time as he was.

A few hours later, the pair closed up shop and returned to the main house. Serafeim had built his forges on the same premises where he slept, in a converted barn off Admiralty Street a few blocks from the *agora* north of town. The house sat next door, a quaint two-story home with a wrought-

GIFTS OF THE GODS

iron gate surrounding a substantial courtyard. His wife, Kassiopeia, enjoyed it when she could get out but that was often a rare event. She was too busy with their three-year-old daughter, Xenia, and overseeing the efforts of their domestic servants. His son, Panos, was ten now and would soon be joining him at the forge. He was a very active youth if his father chose to be kind. Most days he was a terror and his wife would be grateful to get him out from underfoot.

Ozi waited outside after the master entered the house. The old man would soon eat in his *andron*, often in the company of some of his influential cronies from town. As a skilled smithy, he was looked upon with high regard in the community and served Corinth in several different capacities. The most important position he held was town magistrate who was responsible for administering justice in both criminal and civil cases. Councilmen and commoners alike called upon him at all hours seeking his favor or opinion and he often attended meetings after the day's work was finished. Ozi was proud to be in his employ and looked upon his master with unabashed reverence. He wasn't the only one.

He washed his face in the large, old, water barrel nestled in the corner of the yard next to a tall olive tree. He was tired from the day. The Captain's sword was almost complete now and he looked forward to seeing the man's face when his master finally presents it to him. Maybe tomorrow. His thoughts drifted to another figure, this one with softer lines than the heavy iron sword that had filled his day.

Ozi sensed the presence of someone behind him. The person did not make a sound, but he had an idea who it might be. A member of the family would have called him by name. An associate of his master would not have given him a second glance. This one was clearly aware of him yet remained as silent as the dead.

He whirled around, catching the visitor by surprise. The girl giggled as he held her in his arms. "Ozi, you are incorrigible!"

"Only when you sneak up on me, Gaia," he replied with a smile. "You deserved that."

Gaia grinned like a girl half her age. He gave her a kiss before she broke his hold on her. "The mistress needs me for supper. I've only got a moment. I'll be free later tonight."

"Meet me in the storage room after she's gone to bed," he replied. With that, the girl turned on her heels and entered the house. He looked after her with a longing desire. She was 17, two years his junior, and worked as a domestic for the household, together with another girl, Diona. He had been

in love with Gaia ever since the master had purchased her three years ago following the birth of little Xenia.

The girl was a beauty, he thought. She had short black hair, not as closely shaven as new slaves were, but just long enough to give it a little body. Her delicate features were paired with an oval face and her smile took his breath away every time he saw her. She was small, no more than four foot ten, but had a resolve and temperament of someone twice her size.

He heard a chuckle nearby and turned in surprise. Two newcomers stood at the iron gate, a local merchant and his servant who lived down the street. The older man wore an amused expression. "That girl is going to be the death of you, boy," he stated matter-of-factly.

Ozi's face grew flushed but he remained silent. This one could cause trouble for him if he had a mind to.

"Is your master at home?" the man asked. He wore an expensive *chiton* over a short, portly frame and his grey hairline had lost much of its luster years ago. Pylome was a local merchant but fancied himself an importer of rare and exquisite artifacts. Standing behind him and off to his right was his servant, Wilheme. The man was in his early thirties with a wiry build and eyes so blue they reminded him of the deep waters of the Corinthian harbor. Ozi had met him a few times over the last year and the two had gotten along well.

"Yes, I'm sure he's in the *andron*," Ozi replied with a small nod. He opened the gate and led the guest and his servant into the house. It was not as spacious as the outside made it appear. Smaller rooms were situated against the three outer walls that surrounded the inner courtyard. The kitchen was in the rear next to a storeroom while the master's private study lay along the south wall.

He had been given quarters next to his master in a room only half as large. The women of the house, including the domestics, had bedrooms upstairs. Hidden away from public view, these rooms were off limits to men. The foundation of the main house was made of strong stone and sun-dried brick while the upper floors were constructed with timber cut from the forests south of the city.

"There is much to discuss, boy," the merchant replied with a smile. "The Eleans have declared the festival of Olympia will start in just a few weeks."

The Olympics? The young man stopped before the door of the *andron* and announced the visitor. Serafeim hadn't mentioned it to him before but the lad wasn't privy to all the news coming across his master's desk.

GIFTS OF THE GODS

The *andron* was a special place in the home of each man. It was his own private domain in a house busy with family, servants, and guests coming and going as their needs dictated. For Serafeim, it was also a place to entertain important visitors and showcase the splendor that Corinth was famous for. Merchants from all over the known world made the city one of their first stops on their way to new destinations, buying and selling exotic and lavish items they couldn't find anywhere else. The smithy had colorful ornate rugs from the vast corners of the Persian Empire adorn his walls while soft, plush Egyptian couches were lined along the southern perimeter. Intricately carved marble busts of Apollo, Zeus, and Hermes sat on stone pedestals. Their fierce columns and artful detail were characterized as the work of Ionian craftsmen.

As Serafeim came to greet his guest, Ozi looked at Wilheme with an amused expression. The older slave was a former sheepherder and war veteran who had seen action on the fields of battle before his untimely capture. He was a quiet guy and Ozi never got much out of him. He thought he might have a girl in his life as well, but such relationships were often a taboo subject. Masters often sold one or the other if their dalliances began to interfere with their work. His own feelings for Gaia were now out, he reminded himself with chagrin, and he would need to keep the affair from getting out of hand.

"The festival at Olympia is one-of-a-kind, Ozi," the servant said with a slight smile. "My master is hoping Serafeim will join our party. Do you think he will?"

The smithy apprentice nodded. "He's not one to pass up an opportunity to mingle with the right crowd," he remarked. "He went to the last one at Olympia, but I was kept home. I probably will again. Have you seen it, Wilheme?"

"Once, years ago. I was a freeman then, working the lands. I made the journey with a friend of mine one summer. We lived near Athens at the time. It was a long walk, but I had heard many stories and wanted to see it for myself. It's much like the games here in Corinth except on a little grander scale if you ask me."

"Did anything memorable happen?" Ozias asked. He had lived all but a few years of his life under the roof of one master or another. He had never had the freedom to travel and see such adventure. Probably never will again, he reflected.

"Well, now that you mention it, I did see something out of the ordinary. I was watching the boxing finals. They have separate categories for adults

SILVER AND GOLD

and youths, you understand. It's brutal, I tell you. The bloodiest sport you'll ever see. Well, this kid wins it all and his trainer runs out to meet him. However, his robe got caught on the fence and tore off. Turned out the trainer was a woman! The whole crowd saw her in all her naked glory!" he laughed mightily. "Can you imagine? I think it was his mother, actually. The judges wanted to execute her right away for such a sacrilegious offense, but she was spared in the end."

"A woman trainer! That's rich! Musta' taken balls to do that," Ozi replied. He wondered what would have compelled the judges to spare her life. Men in power rarely showed such mercy. He hoped his own master would let him see the Olympics himself this time. It would be a truly memorable experience, of that he was certain.

VOLUME 2
**GIFTS OF
THE GODS**
SILVER AND **GOLD**



THOMAS J. BERRY

Five men and women in Ancient Greece are set on a dangerous journey of self-discovery during the bitter conflict of the Peloponnesian War. The Peace of Nicias has ended a decade of fighting between Athens and Sparta but skirmishes continue to mount as both sides try to gain the advantage. The action moves abroad where riches await the victor.

**GIFTS OF THE GODS:
SILVER AND GOLD**

by Thomas J. Berry

Order the complete book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10593.html?s=pdf>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.