

This is the first chapter of a novel entitled [*Wind from the Hospitable Sea*](#),
by Witold Makowiecki and Tom Pinch,
which is the second volume of the [Fleeing Carthage Series](#)
now available on [Amazon](#) and
all major online booksellers in both electronic and print format.

Chapter One

Three Friends



Diossos was a lovely boy. Among his peers – other eleven or twelve-year-olds – he stood out for his uncanny beauty. He was eye-catching, swarthy, and his eyes and hair were as dark as those of any Greek. And yet, somehow, he seemed different. Passers-by stopped to look whenever he played with other boys by the marina in Isthmia, the eastern port of Corinth.

“Look, what a beautiful child!” they said.

But women always added:

“Yes, but I would not want mine to look like that. He looks delicate, ill-nourished.”

And that was true: Diossos mostly went hungry. Sometimes, when he managed to catch a fish in the bay, his mother made a feast for the whole family. And then, for many days running, they had to settle for barley cake and a handful of dried broad beans. And those beans were always a bit musty because musty beans were cheaper.

Sometimes, he managed to earn a few obols¹ by scrubbing decks on great sailing galleys or by helping to arrange dried fruit in crates for export to Phoenicia or Egypt. The wages were tiny, but he always gave everything to his mother. Or, rather, to his sister, because his mother worked all day and returned home only late, leaving the household in the care of her daughter.

And what a household that was! A couple of rooms in an old, dilapidated house, situated

¹ Obol: the smallest coin, a penny

right by the port pier; a tiny garden with a few rows of beans and parsley; and one old goat, thin and always hungry, like its owners.

These Carians were a destitute lot!

Other children called him “Carian” because his mother was not Greek. Her first husband, Phemon the Driver, had brought her to Corinth from Caria, in Asia Minor, many years ago.

Once upon a time, they lived a life of plenty, but Diossos did not remember those times. When Phemon perished in a fire – with their house, possessions, horses, and the cart – their lives were ruined. This happened eight years ago, and, for little Diossos, poverty was all he could remember.

For a short while, three years ago, it seemed that better times would come because Diossos’s mother remarried. But her hopes that she could improve their lot vanished quickly. Her new husband, Diossos’s stepfather, Dromeus, a guard on a great merchant galley, turned out to be a wretch. A drunkard and gambler, he spent his days playing dice with other sailors and lost all his earnings and eventually his job. He lived for a while on his wife’s wages and by selling her possessions, but when these sources exhausted themselves, he abandoned her without scruples, disappeared for a long time, and returned only after one and a half years. He promptly sold everything out of the house again, then moved to the opposite end of the port and gave no further sign of life. All the while, he descended lower and lower in the world, ultimately becoming a slave catcher – the most despised occupation in the world.

Slavecatchers hunted down runaway slaves and received a bounty for every man, woman, and child they captured. Business opportunities were plentiful because Corinth swarmed with slaves; it was the largest slave-trading center in all of Greece. Every year, Corinthian merchants sent huge shipments of live cargo to the great slave markets in the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon.

Also, because the only land route from the Peloponnese to central Greece ran through Corinth, *helots*² running from Sparta and runaway slaves from Arcadia or Elis had to come through here unless they somehow managed to find passage on a ship. Mostly, they tried to flee to Athens, where, under the rule of the wise and honest Solon, the lives of slaves had improved. There, their owners were no longer allowed to kill their property with impunity.

Word of this spread widely throughout Greece. These Athenian new-fangled inventions provoked indignation in aristocratic Sparta and its allied states, such as Corinth. But for the

² The people of Messenia, conquered and enslaved by Sparta

hundreds of thousands of slaves living in the Peloponnese, Attica³ seemed like a paradise.

And so, the slavecatchers in frontier Corinth had their hands full, and Diossos's stepfather, Dromeus, did quite well at times. But, invariably, he quickly spent all his wicked earnings and was soon poor again. And then he showed up again – emaciated, angry, and hungry – in the home of his family, searching for something to sell, and then went away, bidden farewell by all with a sigh of relief. He inspired in them fear and disgust. He was their misfortune and their shame at the same time.

Before their mother remarried, they had never had it so bad. They didn't really have friends, but they had acquaintances who liked them, took pity on them, and sometimes helped with small things.

It was much worse now. Instead of need, there was dire poverty; instead of relative social isolation – contempt. Formerly, Diossos's mother had been able to find work easily.

"She is the widow of the noble Phemon," people said.

And now, everyone turned away from her.

"She's the wife of that slavecatcher Dromeus," they whispered.

Diossos did relatively best out of all his family: his rags did not shame him, his peers did not avoid him, and he always had someone to play and fight with.

Besides, he had two great friends.

One of them was his flute.

Diossos had found it a few years ago in a grove outside the city. Someone lost it there, perhaps during bacchanalia⁴– when the procession circled the city in drunken merrymaking. However it happened, Diossos found the flute, and from that day on, it became his dearest toy and his most beloved friend.

Without quite knowing when and how, the boy learned to play it. In the beginning, an old sailor helped him, showing him some fingering. His mother taught him some songs, and the rest he learned by trial and error. He went to all the ceremonies and processions, everywhere there was singing or *choreia*⁵ dancing with the accompaniment of music. He collected melodies and repeated them later as best he could, ineptly at first, then better and faster and more beautifully.

And thus, the flute was his best friend.

³ The province surrounding the city of Athens

⁴ Bacchanalia is a word we use today to describe The Rural Dionysia, a holiday in honor of god Dionysus and new wine, celebrated with drinking and dancing in the wilderness

⁵ *Choreia*: a circle dance accompanied by singing

His other friend was his dog.

The dog was named Argos, after Odysseus's famous dog, but it did not belong to Diossos at all – it belonged to Terpnos, a wealthy miller, owner of a large estate with a walled-in garden not far from their house. Terpnos was one of the most wicked and unhelpful people in all of Corinth. He exploited his workers ruthlessly. Diossos's mother, who had worked for him for a while, had to quit that job, not wanting to endure his humiliating treatment. Terpnos hated her from then on, calling her "that blasted foreigner," and rejoiced at her increasing poverty.

The bad owner had a bad dog, and the dog was the terror of the whole neighborhood. It was a great, black, shaggy beast, evil, trained from a puppy in hate and aggression to keep watch over Terpnos's beautiful garden. He had mauled several passers-by, and since then, his reputation as the meanest dog in Corinth was established.

And this dog became Diossos's second great friend.

It happened this way.

One day, while passing by Terpnos's garden, Diossos saw an extraordinary spectacle: a huge dog stuck on the fence.

The dog must have miscalculated distance when jumping the fence and now hung, jammed in between the stakes. His front paws did not touch the ground, and his hind legs milled in vain in search of support. He twitched and jerked, and the more he struggled, the more tightly wedged he became, causing himself unbearable pain. He had been hanging like that for a long time, whining and howling, head hanging down, his bloodshot eyes glowing with fear and despair. He was panting, and foam dripped from his mouth.

Several boys walked past, saw him and laughed. A few picked up sticks and beat him. Children are often cruel, and both Terpnos and his dog were universally hated.

Seeing the dog, Diossos stopped. He knew at once that this was the great Argos of the miller, but he felt sorry for the animal. He didn't stop to reflect; he just reached to help him.

But this turned out difficult. Diossos was weak, and Argos was as heavy as a calf, and besides, crazed with pain at the slightest movement, he snapped his jaws at his rescuer. So, Diossos clambered over the fence and pushed the dog's hind legs upwards, slowly easing him over to the other side. After a little heaving, the dog fell down – *splatt!* – right on its snout, free at last. He jumped up, dazed, turning right and left, as if checking to see what had just happened. Then he barked, ran forward a hundred paces, and threw himself on the ground, rolling back and forth before shaking himself and sitting up. He jumped up, did a kind of dance, stood again, and burst out in joyful barking, declaring to the whole world that he was alive and free and unscathed.

The crowd of children dispersed in the blink of an eye; only Diossos remained, proud of

his good deed. He climbed back over the fence, and now, he saw Argos and... froze. The dog ran straight at him. Diossos went numb as he saw the huge black beast coming, but the dog, reaching him, jumped up with his paws on his shoulders, knocked him over, and then ran his enormous tongue twice over his face. He then jumped up, danced beautifully again, and disappeared around the bend in the road.

Thus, Diossos became acquainted with the most terrible dog in Corinth.

But it wasn't friendship – yet.

The real friendship did not begin until a great misfortune struck a few days later.

Diossos returned home one day in the evening, happy to have earned a few *obols* for showing a rich foreigner his way, when his sister, crying, told him the terrible news.

In his absence, his stepfather had come home again, old Dromeus, along with Terpnos. Dromeus owed the miller a sum of money, and now he came with the creditor to his wife's house to find something to sell to pay back his debt.

They rummaged around for a long time because poverty had long since swept clean all corners of the Carians' house, but in the end, they found two winter coats – and the flute.

And they took them.

Diossos's sister, Eucleia, a few years older than he, recounted the whole incident through tears. She related how she'd wanted to hide the cloaks because they were their only cover day and night, how she tried in vain to protect them, how she struggled with her stepfather and the wicked Terpnos, how she called them thieves and scoundrels, for which they had hit her so hard that she could now hardly move her hand. She was crying, and Diossos had to comfort her. Their mother came, then their little brother, and they all heard the story again, and wept.

But Diossos could not easily come to terms with his loss. The cloaks – bah! Summer was coming, and one hardly needed clothes anymore. But the flute! That was terrible. That could not be allowed!

During the day, Diossos hatched a plan. The boy didn't understand that, by law, a Corinthian husband could dispose of his wife's property however he liked. He only knew that the flute had been his best friend and his greatest joy and that it had been stolen from him. Stolen! And so, he decided to get it back. But because Terpnos was strong and evil, and no one would stand up for the poor boy, it followed that the only way to recover his friend was to steal him back.

So, when night fell, he left the house and crept silently into the miller's yard. It was sheer madness, and only utter despair could push anyone to take such a step, but Diossos was desperate. Terpnos's house was large, and Diossos, who had seen its inside only once, did not

remember it too well.

A house servant of the miller had told him where Terpnos had thrown his flute, and that was where Diossos was going to look, but with such information alone, it would have been difficult to find a small item even in daytime, let alone at night. Diossos was not a great burglar, and his foolish escapade ended just as it must have ended. Immediately after entering the house, he woke someone inadvertently, became frightened, cried out, and, blinded with fear, dashed away through the garden. Terpnos flew out after him, but he didn't intend to exhaust himself in chasing the boy whose tiny shadow he saw perfectly clearly in the moonlight. He set the dog after the fugitive. Let the dog deal with him, he thought with satisfaction.

Running pell-mell, Diossos heard the great animal's gallop and its terrifying hoarse growl behind him, and he froze with terror. He stopped helplessly just a few steps from the wall, and the dog caught up with him instantly. The dog ran up and... froze. He sniffed the boy's feet, his hands, his body, stopped growling, and... waved his tail indecisively. Clearly, his master had got this wrong. This was not a dangerous trespasser.

The dog was puzzled. He hesitated, then he sprang forward and began to bark at a nearby stone pillar. He meant to convey to the boy that all this chase had been completely unnecessary and, at any rate, was never directed at him. Just a stupid mistake, that's all. He barked again at the pillar, then at a tree, then at another tree, and... returned to his master.

Still trembling with fear, the boy had plenty of time to clamber over the wall. Huddled on the other side, he listened in horror as the evil dog was beaten by his evil master. Terpnos was furious with his dog, cursed him, kicked him, and beat him with a stick.

And Argos, kicked and beaten, whined and pleaded for mercy, pretending not to know what had happened, protesting his innocence and honest confusion. But Argos knew perfectly well what had happened. His great, shaggy, black head had formed an unshakable decision: "You want me to bite that boy! And I won't bite him. Even if you kill me, I won't bite him. If you like, I'll gladly bite five others – just point them out – but not him."

So the sly Argos thought to himself, patiently waiting for his master's anger to vent. As the blows continued to fall and the pain became unbearable, he got fed up and growled a brief, terrifying warning growl.

Hearing it, Terpnos stopped abruptly. It was better not to risk a confrontation with the dog: it was as big as a wolf and stronger than one, too. So, Terpnos gave him one more parting kick and went back home, cursing.

And Diossos returned home without his flute but with a heart overflowing with tenderness and devotion.

He had a rough homecoming because his mother awaited him on the threshold, and having first given him good boxing, started to cry again.

“That is just what’s been missing in our misfortune: to be taken for thieves!” she repeated amid her sobbing.

She made him swear that he would not go into Terpnos’s garden ever again to reclaim that stupid flute.

Diossos promised and kept his word.

But the following evening, as soon as darkness fell, he went back again – not to the garden but to the enclosing wall. He waited for the dog to be released from his chain, and he began to call to him softly and tenderly.

The dog appeared, sniffed, and wagged his tail. The boy threw him a handful of fish bones he had collected near one of the ships.

Argos quickly dealt with the treat, then stood on his hind legs, resting his front paws on the wall. Diossos lowered his hands towards him and dipped them confidently into the great black mane on his head and the ruff of his neck. They stayed this way for a long time without moving.



This is the first chapter of a novel entitled [Wind from the Hospitable Sea](#), by Witold Makowiecki and Tom Pinch, which is the second volume of the [Fleeing Carthage Series](#) now available on [Amazon](#) and all major online booksellers in both electronic and print format.