

Herodas 6: *First half of the third century BCE. Metro visits her friend Coritto, who is attended by enslaved women. The two discuss a leather dildo that has been passed around among their friends, and the shoemaker Cerdon who manufactures these prized objects. The Greek noun used here for dildo, baubôn, (= pacifier) suggests something that lulls a person to sleep.*

Coritto: Sit down, Metro. Hey, you, get a chair for the lady!

Must I tell you everything? Wretched girl!

Won't you do one thing on your own? A lump,

Not a slave, lives here. But when you are fed,

You count every crumb. And if one bit is lost,

All the livelong day you mumble and fume,

Fit to bring the house down. And you choose now

To wipe and shine the chair, when we need it?

Thief! Be grateful she is here, for otherwise,

You'd soon have a taste of the back of my hand.

Metro: Dear Coritto, we chafe under the same yoke.

Night and day I too gnash my teeth, and bark

Like a hound at these unspeakable slave girls.

But the reason I came...

Coritto: Leave us now, and be off with you, schemers,

Made of nothing but ears, tongues and laziness!

Metro: I beg you, dear Coritto, tell me the truth now;

Who was it that stitched you the scarlet dildo?

Coritto: But Metro, where have you seen it?

Metro: Erinna's daughter Nossis had it a few days ago.

My goodness, what a lovely present that was!

Coritto: Nossis? From whom did she get it?

Metro: Will you get me in trouble if I tell?

Coritto: By these sweet eyes, dear Metro, nobody will hear

One word you say from the mouth of Coritto.

Metro: Eubule the wife of Bitas gave it to her, and said

That no one must know.

Coritto: Women! This one will be the death of me someday.

She begged me incessantly, so taking pity on her,

I gave it before I had a chance to use it myself.

Then she snatches up the treat, and passes it on

To the wrong people. My dear, it's goodbye to her,

Such as she is, and let her find another friend.

Not if I had a thousand would I give up even one

To Nossis, Medoces' daughter – no, not even

An old rotten one!

Metro: Now, Coritto, don't let it get up your nose

The minute you hear a piece of bad news:

'An honest woman's duty is to endure all.'

But I am to blame for speaking of this; in fact,

I ought to have cut out my own tongue first!

Yet on that particular point I mentioned,

If you love me at all, tell me who stitched it.

Why do you give me that smile, and look as if

You don't know me? Why so coy about this?

I pray you Coritto, tell me no more lies, but

Give me his name.

Coritto: My, what's all this fuss? Cerdon stitched it.

Metro: But which Cerdon? For there are two of them.

One's that grey-eyed neighbour of Myrtiline,

Cylaethis' wife. But he couldn't stitch a plectrum!

The other lives near Hermodorus' lodgings,

On Broad Street. He was really something,

Till he got old. Dear departed Pylaethis

Had an affair with him, bless her memory.

Coritto: As you say, Metro, it is neither of them. He

Hails from Chios or Erythrae, I don't know which.

He's bald and short – you'd say he was Prexinus,

For they look as much alike as two figs. And yet

You'll know it's not Prexinus when he speaks.

He works at home and sells his wares in secret,

For today every door shudders at the taxman.

But as for his work! You'd think Athena's hands

Had done it, not Cerdon's. He brought two, Metro,

And the minute I saw them my eyes popped.

Just between us two, no man's part is that firm,

And not only that, but silky smooth as a dream,

And the straps are more like wool than leather.

Search though you might, you'd never find

A more considerate shoemaker for a woman.

Metro: But why then did you leave the other one?

Coritto: I did all I could to persuade him, Metro –

I kissed him, patted his bald head, poured him

Sweet drinks, and called him by pet names.

The only thing I didn't give was my body.

Metro: Even if he asked that, you should have agreed.

Coritto: Yes, I should have, but it wouldn't do to be rude.

Bitas' wife Eubule was here grinding grain,

For day and night she wears out our millstone

To save a few obols on buying her own.

Metro: And how did this fellow find his way here,

Dear Coritto? Tell me no lies.

Coritto: Artemis, the wife of Candas the tanner

Pointed out our house and sent him here.

Metro: Oh, Artemis is always up to something.

She puts the procuress Thallo to shame.

But since you couldn't purchase the pair,

I hope you asked who ordered the other one?

Coritto: I begged him, but he swore he wouldn't tell.

It seems he had quite a crush on her, Metro.

Metro: Then I must be off. Soon I shall visit Artemis,

And learn all about this Cerdon. Farewell,

Coritto, it's time I go feed my hungry husband.

Coritto: Shut the door, you there, girl! Count the hens,

To see if they're safe, and toss them some food.

A bird-thief may rob a chick right from your lap.