The Song of Baucis and Philemon

Where strangers roam and travellers tread,

Far from home, fire and bed,

They could rely on kindness of those on the way,

To open their homes with a place to stay.

For as long as man can recall,

This was the law for one and all,

That one who wondered the long, dusty road

Could come to the door of a stranger’s abode.

Yet times changed and folk became hard,

And doors were closed to the travelling bard,

In the Valley of Phrygia, hospitality was rare,

The villagers showed no kindness or care.

High on Olympus Zeus called out in wrath,

“Is it true that in this valley, there is a long, winding path,

Where the scared laws of hospitality no longer apply,

And travellers are left outside to die?”

Zeus called to Hermes, protector of travellers, merchants and orators,

“Let us see if it is true that there is no place for wanderers

And take revenge on the villagers for breaking our law

That shelter be given to travellers, both rich and poor”.

They arrived in Phrygia during a howling storm,

And looked for homes where they could keep warm,

Disguised as mortals wrapped in their cloaks,

And come to the doors of the village folks.

To a hundred doors they came that night,

Asking for shelter from the storm which raged with all its might,

But none let them in, all turned them away,

With curses and kicks they were sent on their way.

Then Zeus and Hermes came to the last door,

Expecting to be turned away, just as before,

But an elderly couple with smiles so sweet,

Said “come in from the rain and dry your feet”.

“We are poor and have little but we really do care,

And the little we have we want to share,

Sit close by the fire so you can be warm,

And be safe from the terrible, raging storm”

“I am Baucis” the old woman said,

“And Philemon will fetch you wine and bread,

and we have meat and eggs and cheese for you to eat

And warm water to wash your tired feet”.

Baucis cooked a delicious stew,

And set the table for four not two,

She also had wine but just one jug,

So poured it carefully into each mug.

They sat round the table as the storm blew outside,

And told stories to entertain their guests inside

Yet Baucis felt shame as she watched her guests dine

“I am sorry I have no more wine”

She looked at the jug and gasped in awe,

It was now full, just as before.

“Husband” she whispered, “look at the wine,

These were not mortals, they are divine.”

“This is not a meal for Gods” she said to her man,

“we must kill our prized goose to cook in the pan”,

Philemon did just as he was told,

But could not catch the goose as he was too old.

“Stop” said Zeus, “we are gods indeed,

“Kill not the goose, we have all that we need,

You have given us more than we could have asked,

You showed kindness to strangers on a dark, lonely path.

A hundred doors were closed on us in the rain and wind,

We punished them all for they had sinned,

Follow us to see what became of those,

who ignored our laws and wickedness chose

They followed them up a cliff with feet sore,

Reached the cliff and gasped in awe,

Where the village had once been was now a dark lake,

The two Gods had left nothing in their wake.

For your hospitality we grant wishes twice,

You were kind, warm, generous and nice,

Say what you want Baucis and Philemon,

We will grant two wishes; they will be done.

Philemon spoke and said “for your glory,

Make our home a temple so we can tell this story.”

Zeus turned the home to a temple of gold,

So the gods may be worshiped by young and old.

“We are old said Baucis and our love is deep,

Do not let one of us go alone to sleep,

Let us die at the same moment together,

So we go to our graves together forever”.

Their wishes were granted and it came to be,

That when Philemon died, he became an oak tree,

At the very same moment, Baucis drew her last breath

And became a linden at the time of her death.

The trees stand together their branches entwined,

A reminder to people to always be kind,

A blessing from the gods on Olympus divine,

To be always together until the end of time.