

GOREAN SAGA · BOOK 15

ROGUE OF GOR



JOHN NORMAN



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The Gorean Saga: Book 15

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I Seek the Whereabouts of a Slave; I Spend an Evening in the Belled Collar

I slipped behind the girl and suddenly seized her, holding my hand tightly over her mouth. The trash she carried spilled. I dragged her backwards. She struggled. She made muffled noises. I threw her down, behind the row of trash containers behind the house of Oneander in Ar. My hand was at her throat, thrusting the light steel collar she wore up under her chin. "Make no sound," I warned her. She was blond. She wore the brief, sleeveless white tunic of a house slave. She was barefoot. I recognized her. She was the woman, once free, who had been last on the coffle of Oneander long ago in Ar, the same coffle in which Miss Henderson had been secured. "Rape me swiftly," she said. "I must soon be back."

"Where is Oneander?" I asked, my eyes hard. I had had little fortune with the guards at the gate to his holding. I knew little more than that he was not now in the city.

"Gone," she said. "To the north, business!"

"Where?" I asked. "Where?" My hand tightened on her throat.

"I do not know, Master," she whispered. "I do not know! I am only a slave!"

"Is the slave, Veminia, in the house?" I asked. "The barbarian, the small, dark-haired one, she brought from Vonda, she sold out of the house of Andronicus?"

"It is you!" she said, suddenly, recognizing me. "The slave in the street!"

"I am now free," I said. "Where is she?" My grip tightened. "Speak!"

"She was taken north, she with ten others, by Oneander," she whispered.

"Where!" I demanded.

"I do not know," she whispered. "I am only a lowly slave."

"Who would know?" I asked, fiercely.

"Those with him," she said. "Oneander keeps a close counsel."

"Who else?" I demanded. "There must be others."

"Alison," she said, "the dancing slave at the Belled Collar, she might know. Oneander uses her when it pleases him!"

I released her throat. She touched it, frightened, looking up at me. I looked down at her. "I am not now in danger, am I?" she asked.

"No more than any other slave," I said.

She lay back on the cement. Her left hand touched the garbage cans to her left. "You are handsome," she said.

I shrugged.

"You have me at your mercy," she said. "Are you going to press your advantage?"

"Do you beg it?" I asked.

"Yes, Master," she said.

"You are not unattractive," I told her. Then I thrust up the brief house tunic and she put her arms about my neck, lifting her lips to mine.

* * * *

I considered the belly and hips of the dancing girl as she thrust them toward me, undulatingly, as the

music pounded in the tavern.

"Have you heard the news?" the man next to me was asking.

"No," I said.

The girl was naked, save that she wore many strings of jewels and armlets. Too she wore bracelets and anklets of gold, which had been locked upon her, and were belled. Her collar, too, was of gold, and belled. She was blond, and it was said she was from Earth. A single pearl, fastened in a setting like a droplet, on a tiny golden chain, was suspended at the center of her forehead.

"There has been a major engagement, one long awaited," said the man next to me, "south of Vonda. More than four thousand men were involved. Fighting was fierce. The mobility of our squares was crucial in the early phases, separating to permit the entrance of charging tharlarion into our lines, the isolating the beasts." Massed men, I knew, could not stand against the charge of tharlarion, not without a defense of ditches or pointed stakes. "But then," said the man, "their phalanx swept down upon us. Then did the day seem lost and retreat was sounded, but the withdrawal was prearranged to creviced ground, to rocky slopes and cragged, outjutting formations. Our generals had chosen their ground well." I knew, too, that no fixed military formation could meet the phalanx on its own terms and survive. Different length spears are held by different ranks, the longer spears by the more rearward ranks. It charges on the run. It is like an avalanche, thundering, screaming, bristling with steel. Its momentum is incredible. It can shatter walls. When two such formations meet in a field the clash can be heard for pasangs. One does not meet the phalanx unless it be with another phalanx. One avoids it, one outmaneuvers it. "Our auxiliaries then drove the tharlarion, maddened and hissing, back into the phalanx. In the skies our tarsmen turned aside the mercenaries of Artemidorus. They then rained arrows upon the shattered phalanx. While the spearmen lifted their shields to protect themselves from the sky our squares swept down the slopes upon them."

I nodded. I continued to regard the female before me. It was said she was from Earth. I lifted my paga to my lips, from the low table behind which I sat, cross-legged.

She regarded me, as she danced her beauty before me.

"The field was ours!" said the man. "Vonda herself now lies open to our troops!"

I nodded. I did not take my eyes from the dancer. Her eyes, on me, were sensuous and hot, those of a true slave. It was hard for me to believe that she was really from Earth.

"The women of Vonda will soon be emptied into our slave markets," said the man.

"It will lower prices," said another, gloomily.

"I have heard," said another, "that forces from Port Olni are marching to the relief of Vonda."

"Our men will turn northeast to meet them," said another.

"Please, Master," whispered the girl to me. She extended her small hand, still dancing, as though to touch me. On her wrist was a golden bracelet, belled. I saw the small lock, with its key socket, on the bracelet. She could not remove it.

"She likes you," said the man next to me, now paying some attention to the dancer.

Suddenly there was the fierce crack of a slave whip and the girl, terrified, scurried from me. Busebius, proprietor of the tavern, stood at the edge of the sand. "Do you think I have but one customer?" he called to her. "No, Master!" she cried. There was laughter. Then she was dancing, too, before others, and among the tables. I watched her. She was a sensuous dream. It was hard to imagine that she was from Earth.

"There was another dancer here previously," said the man next to me, "one called Helen. She, too, was an Earth blonde. Alison was purchased to replace her."

"What happened to the other girl?" I asked.

"Helen?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"She was seen once by Marlenus of Ar, who purchased her. She was chained and sent as a gift somewhere."

"I see," I said.

"Paga, Master?" asked a dark-haired, belled paga slave, in a scrap of diaphanous yellow silk.

I motioned her away. She had short, lovely legs and a sweet, full bosom. The yellow silk was belted tightly about her waist by several turns of yellow binding fiber, more than enough to tie her for your pleasure in an alcove.

I continued to watch the dancer, now some yards away, under the low ceiling.

The girl who had offered me paga had not been truly interested in giving me paga. My cup, clearly was still almost full. She had been offering me something else, other wares of the tavern.

The dancer now, as the music was mounting in crescendo, was again approaching me. I considered her ankles and thighs, the sweet belly of her, her breasts, and shoulders and throat, the loveliness of her, her face and eyes, the latitudes of her swirling blond hair, the shimmering, restless jewelry on her body, the metal locked on her wrists and ankles, her collar, the pearl at her forehead.

"Master," she said, dancing before me.

I regarded her, through narrowly lidded eyes.

Then she sank to her knees and, on her knees, leaning backwards, danced before me as a kneeling slave.

The music swirled to its climax and, as it ended, she straightened her body and then, from her knees lowered herself to her right hip and, extending her right arm to me, lay before me, submitted, her head to the floor.

There was Gorean applause in the room, the striking of the right palm on the left shoulder.

I rose to my feet and placed two copper tarsks on the table.

I went to the girl and, with the side of my foot, kicked her.

She looked up, frightened.

I saw in her eyes that she well knew what it was to feel the foot of a master.

Then there was a sudden, different look in her eyes. She put her head down, swiftly, and, holding my foot, pressed her lips to it, fervently.

Then she looked up at me, her eyes shining, her lips softly parted.

"To an alcove," I told her. "Now."

"Yes, Master," she said, and scrambled up, hurrying with a rustle of jewelry and bells to a leather-curtained alcove.

There was more Gorean applause as I followed her and, turning, from the inside, drew shut the curtains of the alcove. When I had them buckled shut from the inside I turned to face the girl.

She knelt in the position of the pleasure slave, back in the alcove, on the scarlet furs, in the light of the small lamp. I looked about. There were some chains in the alcove, and a coil of rope, and a whip.

"If Master desires special equipment," she said, "it will be provided by Busebius."

"There is more than enough here to tame you," I said.

"Yes, Master," she said.

"You are Alison?" I asked.

"In his use of me Master may name me as he pleases," she said.

"You are Alison?" I asked.

"Yes, Master," she said.

"It is an Earth-girl name," I said.

"Please do not be cruel to me on account of it," she said.

"Are you from Earth?" I asked.

"Yes," she said.

"Was Alison your original name?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "only now Gorean masters have put it on me, by their will, as a mere slave name."

"How did you come to Gor?" I asked.

"I do not know," she said. "I retired one night and awakened later, how much later I do not know, naked, in a dungeon, chained with other girls."

"All slaves?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "though we did not know it at the time, we were all slaves."

"True slaves?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "true slaves."

"It is a pretty name," I said.

"Thank you, Master," she said.

"Too," I said, "it is a superb name for a female slave."

"Yes, Master," she said. "Thank you, Master."

I regarded her. "You appear to be a slave," I said.

"I am a slave, Master," she said.

"The men of Gor," I said, "say that the women of Earth are natural slaves. Is it true?"

"Yes, Master," she said. "I, and the other girls on my chain, swiftly learned that we were natural slaves."

"How was this information received by them?" I asked.

"Generally at first with chagrin and shame," she said, "then with helpless resignation, objective recognition and sober acceptance, and then with a liberating and unspeakable joy."

"Are you a natural slave?" I asked her.

"Yes, Master," she said.

I regarded her.

"Try me," she said. "Judge for yourself."

"But you are of Earth," I said.

"Does it dismay you," she asked, "that I, a woman of Earth, should be a natural slave?"

"Get on your back," I said.

"Yes, Master," she said. She unlooped the strings of jewelry from her body, putting them to one side.

"No," I said, "leave the armlets, the pearl drop at your forehead."

"Yes, Master," she said, and lay down.

"What do you want to do?" I asked her.

"Please my master," she smiled.

"It is a slave's answer," I said.

"It is my answer," she said, "and I mean it, and am proud of it."

"On your stomach," I told her.

Uneasily she turned to her stomach. She then lay tense in the furs. "Master has removed the whip from the wall," she said. "Am I to be whipped?" I caressed the side of her body, gently, with the coils of the whip. She shuddered. "You have a slave's fear," I said. Then I replaced the whip on the wall. I then touched her body and she squirmed in the fur, clutching at it with her small fingers. "Yes," I said.

"you have a slave's reflexes."

"On your back," I then ordered her, sharply.

Swiftly she turned to her back, and looked up at me, frightened.

I took the rope from the side of the alcove and, folding it so as to make four strands, looped it several times about her throat and knotted it. I thus made a heavy rope collar for her, knotted under her chin, with heavy guide strands. I then jerked her to her knees before me, her chin pulled up by the knot so that she must look at me.

"I am prepared to believe that you are, as you claim, a natural slave," I said. "Do you know the penalty for a slave who lies?"

"Whatever the Master wishes," she whispered, terrified, looking up at me.

"Do you know one called Oneander of Ar?" I asked.

"He is a merchant," she whispered.

"Do you know him?" I asked.

"He comes upon occasion to the Belled Collar," she whispered. "Please be kind to me, Master!"

I jerked the heavy rope and she cried out in misery.

"Do you know him?" I asked.

"I have served him," she wept.

"Do you know him!" I said.

"Yes, yes!" she wept, half pulled from her knees. "He uses me as it pleases him, as an abject and total slave."

I looked down at her, fiercely.

"Busebius has me on retainer to him," she said, "that he may use me when he wishes. Sometimes I am sent to his house!"

"Where is he!" I said. "Where!"

"Lara!" she cried. "Lara!" This was a town in the Salerian Confederation, at the confluence of the Vosk and Olni. It was no wonder Oneander made no public fact of his most recent itinerary.

I threw the girl from me to the furs.

Sometimes a man speaks freely to a slave. Oneander had, perhaps in his drink and pleasures, confided his intentions to the slave in his arms.

"I was not to tell," she wept.

Perhaps she, a foolish Earth girl, had asked him, and he had not been in the mood to beat her. Perhaps he was proud of his plan to undertake such a bold venture in troubled times. I did not know. Ar, of course, was not at war technically with the Salerian Confederation. Similarly at that time hostilities with confederation cities had been limited to skirmishes with Vonda. His act, thus, though perhaps one of dubious propriety, and accordingly not one he would care to publicize in the streets of Ar, was neither treasonous nor illegal. It did, however, Lara being a member of the Salerian Confederation, suggest some economic desperation. Being denied the markets of Vonda, and perhaps of Port Olni and Ti, it was natural, I supposed, for Oneander to turn to Lara.

"I was not to tell," wept the girl.

I pulled her up to her knees and turned her and threw her against the wall. I took the heavy guide strands of the rope on her neck and passed them through a slave ring on the wall and pulled them tight pulling her against the wall. Then, with the guide strands, which had been passed through the ring, I tied her wrists closely together under her chin. She was thus tied on her knees, her belly against the wall, fastened extremely closely by her neck and wrists, and some two inches of rope, to the ring.

"I was not to tell!" she wept.

"Did Busebius, your true Master, order you not to tell?" I asked.

"No," she said.

"Why then do you weep and tremble so at the ring?" I asked.

"Oneander did not wish me to tell," she said.

"But I wished you to tell, didn't I?" I asked.

"Yes, Master," she said.

"And you told, didn't you?" I asked.

"Yes, Master," she said.

"Do you think it was wise for a man to have confided secrets to a female slave such as you?" I asked.

"No, Master," she said.

"You do not regret having told me, do you?" I asked.

"No, Master!" she wept.

"Do you think it was wise to have obeyed me?" I asked.

"Yes, Master!" she said. "Yes, Master!"

"You are a mere slave, aren't you?" I asked.

"Yes, Master!" she said. "Have mercy on me, Master!"

"Accordingly it was right for you to have told me, wasn't it?" I asked.

"Yes, Master," she wept. "Yes, Master."

"Do you think a girl such as you should be told secrets?" I asked.

"No, Master," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because we may be made to tell," she said.

"You were made to tell, weren't you?" I asked.

"Yes, Master," she said.

I then turned about and went to the leather curtains of the alcove. I reached up to unbuckle the strap which held them closed.

"Are you going to leave me?" she asked, behind me, bound.

"Certainly," I said.

"All you wanted from me was information," she said.

I shrugged. "I now have that information," I said.

"Dally but a bit, Master," she whispered.

I turned to regard her. "I do not understand," I said.

She was looking at me over her shoulder. "Please," she said.

"I do not understand," I said, irritably.

"I danced before you," she said, "and in the fullness of the slave I am."

"It is true," I said. "You danced as a slave."

"I am a slave," she said.

"But you are of Earth," I said. For some reason I was angry with her.

"The women of Earth," she said, "are natural slaves."

"No!" I cried.

"Do not disparage and condemn us," she said. "Understand us!"

"No!" I said, angrily.

"Fulfill us!" she begged.

"No!" I said. "No!"

"Is a natural slave not to be granted her fulfillment?" she asked.

"No," I said. "No!"

"Why not?" she asked.

"I do not know," I said. "I do not know!"

"Perhaps because we are slaves," she said. "It is a cruelty you practice upon us."

"Perhaps," I said, angrily.

"What greater cruelty can a man inflict upon a slave than to deny her the collar?" she asked.

I said nothing.

"Did you not see how I danced before you?" she asked.

"Yes," I said.

"You excite me, Master," she said. "Does that horrify you? Does that scandalize you? Does it startle and discomfort you, does it so dismay you, does it seem so hard to comprehend, that a woman from Earth could be sexually excited, that she could have sexual desires, that she could feel helpless and frustrating passion, that she could beg even to be sexually satisfied?"

"It is not typical," I said. "And it is not permitted."

"It is typical!" she said. "How little you know of women! And on Gor it is permitted—to slaves!"

I did not speak.

"On Gor," she said, "I have experienced feelings and sensations I never knew could exist. Inhibitions have been shattered, some of them commanded from me by strong men and the blows of the whip. I have learned to live and to feel. My emotions have been freed. My deepest sexuality and nature have on this world at last been fully liberated. I have found myself. I love and I serve. I now know at last what and who I am, a love slave for uncompromising masters."

"No," I said. "No!"

I turned away from her, again to open the curtains.

"Did my dance interest Master?" she asked.

I turned again to look upon her. She knelt close to the wall, fastened by the neck and wrists tightly to the ring. I heard the small movement of the bells upon her. I saw the barbaric armlets, and the tiny chain that held the small pearl drop at her forehead.

"Yes," I said. My fists were clenched.

"I beg to be fulfilled," she said, "and as the slave I am. I know I have no right to beg this, for a slave is without rights. I do, however, beg it, placing myself vulnerably and fully at your mercy. You may, of course, deny me this fulfillment, for I am a slave. I hope, however, that you will not do so. I hope, rather, that you will see fit to show kindness to a miserable girl in bondage."

I thought I would let her speak.

When one wished, she might be lashed to silence.

She was only a slave.

"It is not just any woman on my world," she said, "who is brought here to serve masters, her better. Surely we are selected for interest, and beauty. Is it not the fairest and the most fascinating who are harvested for the slave pits of this world, who are found worthy of the collar!"

There was much in what she said, but the professional criteria used in such matters were more complex, more subtle, than she seemed to realize. One of the major criteria utilized by slavers, for example, was the native intelligence of the potential acquisition. Gorean men, as men of Earth seem seldom to do, prize high intelligence in women. Perhaps that is because their own intelligence, on the whole, is high and they might be bored with their properties were the intelligence of the properties not similarly high. Who wants to be served by a stupid slave? Many a girl in a Gorean market, accustomed

to, and resigned to, the values of Earth, a world seemingly so enamored of simpler women, is surprised to find herself sooner brought helplessly to the chains of a master, sooner put to her knees, sooner subjected to degradation, sooner given a whip to lick and kiss, than others she esteems far more beautiful, or glamorous. The reason is simple though she may not suspect it for some time. She is thought to be more interesting, and more worth owning, for the Gorean master intends to, and will, own the *whole* slave, *and as a whole slave*. The intelligent woman, of course, now put to her knees, quickly grasps what she now is, and what is expected of her; she now realizes that she is now, presumably for the first time in her life, in the presence of masters, authentic masters of women; she is well aware of the collar on her neck, and its meaning; she wishes to live, but, too, she is strangely stirred and thrilled; intelligent, she trains quickly, and well; emotionally, she is more in touch with her own feelings, and nature, and the secrets of her self, and less the victim of a culture founded on hate and neuterism; female, she relishes her domination, for which she has hungered on Earth; at last she finds herself at the feet of a true man, a strong, virile man, who will master her; at last, accordingly, she can fulfill her womanhood. Too, of course, such women are more sensitive to the master, more attuned to his moods, more alert to his least desires, and they are inventive and appetitious in the furthestmost, in time, thankful for the profound, liberating joy of their collars, become hot, devoted and dutiful; most, in time, may be expected to become love slaves. Too, bondage liberates the beauty in a woman, for even a plain girl blossoms in the collar. This has to do, doubtless, with a removal of inhibitions, a fulfillment of her nature, and such. It is hard for a woman to be happy and not beautiful. Another criterion used by slavers which may not be immediately evident to everyone is an initial assessment of the candidate's potential for unusual sexual responsiveness. Thus some women are brought to Gor not because they are unusually beautiful, or intelligent, but because it is recognized, in having come under the judicious, practiced eye of the slaver, that they, doubtless unknown to themselves, will find themselves helpless in the arms of a master, no more than a yielding, dominate spasmodic love animal. Such are surely worth their coins. To be sure, sooner or later, this doom, or fate, or joy, is the lot of almost every slave girl, for slave fires, as it is said, are lit by cruel men in their bellies, fires which will rage frequently and may be quenched, if at all, by the kindness, and attentions, of the master. Lastly, it might be mentioned that the Gorean's idea of female beauty tends to be far more diversified than that of Earth. Statistically, the Gorean tends to prefer the natural woman, so to speak, who tends to be short, and sweetly bodied. This is not to deny that the "model types," so to speak, are not available in her markets. Surely they are nice, too. Some men prefer one sort; some another; but they are all slave girls, all in their collars. None of this is to deny, of course, that there is anything wrong with a slave candidate who is at one and the same time beautiful, highly intelligent, and sexually needful. Indeed, I think that description fits most of the women who are found in the Gorean markets, whatever may be their world of origin. One thing might be mentioned, passing, pertaining to Earth-girl slaves. That they have come from a negativistic, antinatural world, that they have been raised, so to speak, in a sexual desert, gives them an interesting piquancy in the markets. Too, of course, one may then easily recognize why it is that such women, now finding themselves in a natural world, with powerful men, often kiss their fingertips and press them gratefully to their collars. Lastly one might note, though one supposes this is of no interest to the slaver, who will have his eye on the market value of the girl, they seem to have a need for, and a capacity for, love.

I said nothing.

"I will strive to be worthy of my fulfillment," she said.

I crouched down behind her, and put my hands on her waist. She shuddered, pressing herself against the wall.

"In what way?" I asked.

~~"By serving you completely and intimately, and as an abject and total slave," she said.~~

I did not speak.

"You will not regret it, Master," she said.

I freed her wrists and neck of the rope, leaving it fallen by the ring. I then had her in my arms, she on her knees, by the ring. "Alison will strive to please Master well," she whispered. She then kissed me, softly. Then, softly, she whispered in my ear, "The women of Earth are natural slaves."

"No!" I said.

"Judge by me," she said.

I lowered her to the furs. I began to kiss at her body. "No," I said. Soon she began to gasp and sob in my arms. Then she began to writhe. Then she screamed in the alcove and then, shuddering, shaking, was held in my arms. "Am I not a natural slave?" she asked. "Yes," I said, "you are." There had been no mistaking the nature of her movements, her reflexes. They were clearly those of a natural slave. These things troubled me. She lay back. "And I am a woman of Earth," she said. "You are not typical." I told her. "I am typical," she said. I looked down at her. "What are you thinking?" she asked. "I was thinking," I said, regarding the girl, "that the men of Earth, if they could but see an Earth woman as you are now, would scream with pleasure."

"We are waiting for our masters," she smiled.

I listened to the musicians outside of the alcove, the sounds of the tavern. When one brings a girl to an alcove one may keep her there for most practical purposes as long as one wishes. She is yours, for most practical purposes, until one chooses to re-open the curtains. After the tavern is closed an attendant will let you out and, taking charge of the girl, see that she is properly chained at her ring by the girl-wall or kenneled.

"Do you now think it is so terrible a thing to fulfill the needs of a slave?" she asked.

"No," I said.

"And if one is a natural slave," she said, "surely it is acceptable for her to seek, even desperately, the fulfillment of her deepest needs."

"Yes," I said.

"And surely," she said, "it is permissible for the master, though he is under no obligation to do so, for she is only a slave, to deign, in his kindness, if it be his whim or pleasure, to fulfill the needs of the slave."

"It is totally up to him," I said.

"Yes, Master," she said. "She is only a slave."

"That you are a natural slave, Alison," I said, "does not prove that the women of Earth are natural slaves."

"My entire chain, in training," she said, "learned that we were."

"It proves nothing," I said.

"Do you think we were all so rare and different?" she asked.

I shrugged. "I do not know," I said.

"We were not," she said.

"Perhaps, perhaps not," I said.

She smiled.

"How long have you known you were a slave?" I asked.

"Since I was a young girl," she said. "I first discovered it in my thoughts and dreams, and feelings, and fantasies. But I thought I could never be more than a secret slave at the mercy of a secret master."

Then I was brought to Gor. Here I wear my collar openly and kneel before my masters, my true masters, for all the world to see."

"It is true," I said.

"Do you object that I have slave needs, Master?" she asked.

"I do not object that you, personally, have slave needs," I said. "Indeed, I rejoice that you have slave needs for they make you a perfection and a dream of pleasure."

"But you would not want all women to be like me?" she asked.

"No," I said.

"But what if they were?" she asked.

I looked at her, angrily.

"Or is it only one woman you would not want to be like me?" she asked.

"No!" I said.

"But what if she is?" asked the girl.

I closed my eyes. The thought of Miss Beverly Henderson as a female slave was almost overpoweringly erotic. With difficulty I controlled myself. I thrust the thought from my mind. I must not even permit myself to think such things.

I opened my eyes.

"Do not deny her nature to her," said the girl.

"Kneel to the whip!" I cried. Terrified the girl scrambled to her knees and knelt down, making herself small, her head to the furs. Her wrists were crossed under her, as though bound. She trembled. I now stood over her, the slave whip in my hand. I drew it back, then I threw it aside, angrily. I crouched down. Then I jerked her head up, by the hair. "Permission to placate," she begged, reaching for me with her lips and mouth. But I held her, by the hair, from me. She whimpered, denied. Then I released her hair and permitted her to touch me.

"Thank you, Master," she whispered.

She was a slave. I would permit her to attempt to placate me, in one of the ancient fashions of the female slave.

* * * *

"I must soon be on my way," I said.

"Master searches for a slave, does he not?" she asked.

"Perhaps," I said.

"Do not ever let her forget that she is a slave," said the girl.

"I must be on my way," I said.

"Have me, but once again," she begged.

I did so, and then, later, I rose to my feet. I unbuckled the leather curtains and threw them back. The tavern was now empty and closed. I turned about and again regarded the girl. She had replaced the loops of her jewelry and knelt before me, in the position of the pleasure slave.

"It is hard for me to think of you as a girl from Earth," I said.

"I am now only a Gorean slave girl," she said.

"You danced well," I said.

An attendant approached from a side door. "I will put her in her kennel," he said. He snapped his fingers at her. "Come, Girl," he said.

"Yes, Master," she said. She rose quickly to her feet and ran softly to him. He took her by the arm.

"She whom you seek is a slave, is she not?" she asked me.

"She is a legal slave," I said. "She is not a true slave."

She was then conducted to the small side door, through which the attendant had emerged. Beyond it I gathered, would lie such things as the kitchens, the offices, the cellars and pantries, the storage rooms, the dressing rooms, the discipline chamber and the kennels. At the door the attendant let her pause and she turned to me. "Good hunting, Master!" she called to me. "Show her no mercy," she said. Then she brushed a kiss to me with the tips of her fingers in the Gorean fashion. I returned this gesture. She was then conducted through the door. In a short time I heard the sliding downward and locking in place of a kennel gate. Shortly afterward the attendant returned to the floor and let me out, through the main entrance. I heard it being bolted shut behind me. I stood then in the streets of Ar. I looked up at the moons and stars, beyond the cylinders and bridges. I then turned my steps toward the Street of Tarns, that somewhere among its many shops and cots I might arrange transportation northward, toward the Salerian city of Lara.

The Victory Camp

"Greetings, Lady Tima," I said.

"Jason!" she said, struggling in the straps. "Do not hurt me!"

The night sky was red with the glare of the burning city.

"It will be a tarsk bit," said the fellow walking down the long line of pleasure racks.

I placed a tarsk bit in the small leather sack nailed to the frame of the rack.

She pulled back in the straps.

"I will take you no closer to Lara than this," had said the fellow who had flown the tarn which had brought me to this place. "Tarnsmen of Ar," had said he, "patrol the corridor between Vonda and Ar, but are insufficient in numbers to guard the sky beyond the corridor. Too, tomorrow, as the cavalries mass for attack, the guard on the corridor itself will be abandoned." I had nodded and paid him, crawling from the heavy basket. On his return trip he would doubtless take refugees, or perhaps bound girls from Vonda, back to Ar.

"What news of the war is there?" I asked the fellow who was guarding the long line of pleasure racks. "I have just come from Ar."

"We have been successful here," he said, "defeating in battle both the forces of Vonda and those of the tarnsmen of Artemidorus of Cos. Vonda is being sacked. The city burns. This is a victory camp, one for loot and pleasure."

"Surely the Salerian Confederation is now committed to war," I said.

He shrugged. "Forces from Lara march north," said he. "Forces from Port Olni are within a hundred pasangs, marching south. They are delaying now only to match their strike with that of the men of Lara."

I nodded. It would be a pincers move, to take the men of Ar, far from their supply lines, on two fronts.

"We must now retreat," I said.

He laughed. "No," said he. "While those of Port Olni dally in camp we are marching upon them. We will take them separately. Defeating them we will return south to meet the forces of Lara, perhaps even here, in the sight of the ashes of Vonda."

"I see," I said.

"We fear only that the forces of Ti will be committed," he said.

Ti was the largest and most populous city of the Salerian Confederation. It had, to date, refused to involve itself in the machinations of Vonda and Cos.

"Surely it will be only a matter of time," I said.

"I suspect so," said the man. "Even now Ebullius Gaius Cassius, of the Warriors, Administrator of Ti, meets with the high council of Ti."

"Their delay seems inexplicable," I said.

"Those of Cos, enemies to Ar, and merchants of Vonda," said the man, "have precipitated the war, hoping to engage the entire confederation."

"A minority party then," I said, "is maneuvering the situation."

"I think so," said the man. "I doubt frankly that either Ti or Ar wishes a full-scale conflict."

"How much is this one?" called a man, a few racks from us. It was a blonde, strapped on her rack.

"Excuse me," said the man, turning away from me. "A tarsk bit," he said to the fellow.

"Surely," I said.

It was evening. Fires, on high poles, illuminated the area. Many men were about, moving here and there. From where I stood I could see many tents, long tents, and holding areas, where there were temporary stockades or circular embankments. Within these enclosures there were, for the most part, goods and prisoners. Two drunken soldiers staggered past.

"How were you taken?" I asked the Lady Tima.

"By soldiers, in the city," she said, "with others." She looked at me. "Be kind to me, Jason," she begged. "I am absolutely helpless."

"How were you brought here?" I asked.

"On a rope," she said. "I was brought here, stripped, and fastened on the rack."

I looked down the long rows of pleasure racks, aligned under the high torches.

The blonde, a few racks away, in the same line, was crying out for mercy.

"Your market and goods?" I asked.

"The market was burned," she said, "and the goods and slaves taken."

"Did many of those of Vonda escape the city?" I asked.

"Many," she said.

"In flying over this area," I said, "I saw several stockades, mostly filled with women."

"We were hunted more relentlessly," she said, bitterly.

"Yet some women must have escaped the city," I said.

"Yes," she said, "particularly those who fled early. Many have gone as refugees to Lara."

The blonde a few racks away began to squirm and sob in her straps. "No, no," she begged. But she was not being shown the mercy for which she pleaded.

"What of the House of Andronicus?" I asked.

"Gone," she said, "burned, its slaves and personnel fled or taken."

"What of the Lady Gina?" I asked. I remembered her with some fondness.

"Shackled," she said, "in the food tent, where she waits upon men."

"Do you think she enjoys serving them?" I asked.

"They enjoy having her serve them," she said, angrily.

"Doubtless," I said. "Do you recall the slave, Lola, of the House of Andronicus?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "I do not know her fate." Lola and Tela had been the girls who had first taught me Gorean. They had been the first Gorean slave girls I had ever seen. I had never forgotten my first sight of them. That such women could exist and be slaves had been a stunning and welcome revelation to me of certain of the realities of Gor.

"You had an assistant," I said, "a superb actress, who, pretending to be a mere Earth-girl slave, even to the collar and Ta-Teera, well prepared me for my sale in your market."

"The Lady Tendite," she said. "Don't touch me!"

"Yes, she," I said. "She well made a fool of me."

"Please, don't, Jason!"

"I believed her," I said.

"Jason," she begged. "No!"

"I believed her," I said, "completely."

"I am completely helpless, Jason," she said. "Please have mercy on me!"

"The sale must have been amusing," I said.

"Your hands!" she wept.

"Did you plan it together?" I asked. "Your body seems smaller and more helpless than I remember"

it," I observed.

"Yes, yes," she sobbed, "but it was her original plan, her ideas. She thought it would be amusing to do it to you."

"I see," I said.

"Please stop touching me," she begged.

Suddenly, a few racks away, the blonde, throwing her head back, and rearing helplessly in her straps, screamed her submission.

The Lady Tima shuddered, and then, suddenly, lifted herself to me. But my hand did not quite touch her.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"She fled early from Vonda," she said. "She went to Lara. Please do not stop touching me."

"Are you prepared to beg to be touched?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "I beg it!"

"How do these things work?" I asked, looking at the rack.

"Jason, please!" she whispered.

"I note that you are not yet branded," I said, "nor, I suppose, are these others."

"Jason!" she pleaded.

"Speak," I said.

"We were put on the racks as free women," she said, "that we, the women of the enemy, be properly humiliated. Too, is it not a rich joke for the men of Ar that more than a thousand of the free women of Vonda adorn their pleasure racks, fastened down like slave girls, their use available for a tarsk bit to the passers-by?"

"Yes," I smiled, "it is a rich joke." The men of Gor are fond of such jokes.

"And only after this, our profound humiliation," she said, "will the men of Ar, if it should please them, see fit to permit us to be divided into lots, and be branded and collared, and sold into slavery throughout the towns and cities of Gor."

"Splendid," I said. "Splendid!"

She looked at me with horror. "Are you a man of Gor?" she asked.

I shrugged. I did not know.

Then again, suddenly, she lifted her body to me. "You have aroused me," she whispered. "You know you have aroused me, and cruelly."

"You lift your body like a female slave, Lady Tima," I said.

She groaned, and lay back. She moaned.

The blonde a few racks down was now sobbing with pleasure. She was alone. "Masters, Masters," she called. "I am only a tarsk bit! Please touch me!"

"What a slut she is," I said.

"Yes, Jason," whispered the Lady Tima.

"These straps seem to hold you quite well," I said.

"I am absolutely helpless," she said. "Touch me, I beg you!"

"The pleasure rack is an interesting device," I said. I examined the wooden wheels, the levers. In virtue of the axes of the device and the various gears and pinions, and the joints, braces, fitted, sliding boards, notches and lock points, it can be adjusted to a variety of positions. To be sure not all the pleasure racks were as sophisticated as that on which was bound my former Mistress, the former female slaver, the Lady Tima of Vonda. This device, like some of the others, had doubtless been brought from the city, perhaps dragged forth by shackled men of Vonda hauling on wagon ropes.

"Jason," begged the Lady Tima.

~~"I have never seen one this close before," I said.~~

"Jason!" she cried.

"You look well on your knees before me," I said.

"Jason," she wept.

I then bent her backward, and then, lifting and turning her, examined the left side of her beauty, and then the right. I then put her through a variety of positions, more experimenting with the possibilities of the apparatus than anything else, though the experiments had their aesthetic value, for the Lady Tima was a lovely woman. "Fascinating," I said. "Jason," she protested. I then, as I had grown more proficient with the device, used it for one of its two major purposes, that of exhibiting and displaying its helpless prisoner. Its second major purpose, of course, is to hold the woman in any position one pleases. I rotated her to her back. I then turned away. "Jason!" she cried. "Jason!"

I turned back, again, to face her.

"You have humiliated and abused me," she said. "You have turned me about and examined me on the rack as though I might be a slave girl! You have cruelly aroused me! You cannot leave me now!"

"I can," I told her.

"Please come back," she wept. "Touch me! Touch me!"

"Do you beg it?" I asked.

"Yes," she said.

"As a slave?" I asked.

"Yes, yes," she said. "I beg it as a slave!"

"But that is lower than a mere slut," I said. "Surely you remember the blonde girl," I said, indicating the girl some racks from her.

"I beg it as both a slut and a slave," she said.

I then went slowly to the rack. She looked up at me, frightened. Then I fastened her in position, spreading her legs uncomfortably apart. Then, looking down upon her, I spread her legs by another four inches.

Then I had her.

The Food Tent

"Over here," I told the Lady Gina. "Kneel down." I indicated a place on the straw, at the wall of the food tent, a clear place, between other couples.

She knelt before me, looking up at me. "You are the first man who has ordered me to the straw," she said.

"Do you think you are unattractive?" I asked.

"I know I am unattractive," she said.

"To many men," I said, "you could be very attractive."

"I am a naked and shackled prisoner," she said, "soon perhaps, if it should please the men of Ar, to be branded a slave. I have waited upon your table, and brought you food and drink. Beyond these things, I beg you not to insult and torture me."

"You performed your duties as a naked waitress well," I said, "expertly and deferentially."

"I do not wish to be killed," she said.

"You were a fine trainer," I said. "You taught me much."

"And now," she smiled, "is it your intention to give your trainer a little training?"

"Perhaps," I said.

"I have never had the feelings of a normal woman," she said.

"Lie down," I told her.

"I obey," she said. She looked up at me. "You do not seem angry with me," she said.

I sat beside her. "I am not," I said. "Keeper!" I called. "Give me the key to the shackles of this one."

He came to me and gave me a key, with which I removed the shackle from her right ankle. I returned the key to him. I did not unlock the shackle on her left ankle. She continued to wear it, with its short chain and the opened right shackle.

"He did not seem surprised or startled," I said, "that I should open your shackle."

"No," she said, bewildered. "He did not."

"It is not thus so unthinkable," I said, "that a man might desire to free your legs."

She looked at me, frightened.

"Remember," I said, "you are not now carrying a whip and keys, clad in black leather, in a position of power, men at your mercy."

"No," she whispered.

"And even in that guise," I said, "it is not so improbable but what men might wish to take your whip from you and throw you down, and teach you what it is to be a woman."

"I wanted them to do so," she said. "I wanted them to make me a woman."

"You are a woman," I told her. "Dare to be it."

"No!" she said. "It means surrender to men!"

"Of course," I told her.

"I do not have the feelings of normal women!" she said.

"Perhaps it is only that you are afraid to have them," I said.

"No, no!" she said.

"Then have them," I said.

"No!" she said. "The Lady Gina will never be a submitted slave!"

"You are too proud to be a woman?" I asked.

"Yes," she said.

"Even though you are, in truth, a woman?"

"Yes," she said. "It is wrong to be a woman! It is wrong to be a woman!"

"You could always pretend that to be a woman is to be like a man," I said.

"I am not a fool," she said.

"Do you really think it is wrong for a woman to be a true woman?"

"Yes," she said, "for it is to be a woman, and not a man!"

"But you are not, in fact, a man," I said.

"I know," she said.

"Be a woman, then," I said.

"I dare not," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"I do not know," she said.

"Is it such a terrible thing to be a woman?" I asked.

"Yes, yes!" she said.

"No," I said, "it is not terrible. It is deeply and profoundly marvelous."

She trembled.

"Take your place in the order of nature," I said.

"At the feet of men!" she said.

"It is where you belong," I said.

She began to shudder at my side. "I begin to feel such emotions, such feelings," she said. "They frighten me. They threaten to overwhelm me."

"It is uncontrollable. It is like a storm," I said.

"Yes," she said.

"Yield to them," I said.

"I do not want to be a woman!" she wept. "I do not want to be a woman!"

"How fared the House of Andronicus?" I asked her.

She looked at me, startled. "The goods and the slaves fled or were taken," she said. "The House itself was destroyed."

"And Andronicus?" I asked.

"He fled," she said, "with others."

"How did Lola fare?" I asked.

"She fled," she said. "I do not know if she was taken by the looters or not."

"Do you think she managed to escape?" I asked.

"The looters, perhaps," she said. "But she wears a collar."

I nodded. Lola was attractive. By now she was doubtless on someone's chain. Lovely female slaves do not remain long at large.

"Did you know she sometimes cried your name aloud in her sleep?" asked the Lady Gina.

"No," I said.

"Yet you failed her as a master," she said.

"That is true," I said.

"It was long ago," she said.

"True," I said.

"You seem much different now," she said.

I shrugged. "Perhaps," I said.

"Jason," she whispered.

"Yes," I said.

"You freed my legs," she said.

"Yes," I said, "but it was a mistake."

"Why?" she asked.

"You do not have the feelings of a normal woman," I said. "It is doubtless nothing that you can help." I then bent to reshackle her. Quickly she drew her legs back. "What is wrong?" I asked her.

"Please do not reshackle me, just yet," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"I want to be a woman," she whispered.

"Truly?" I asked.

"Yes, truly," she sobbed.

"Then," I said, "you must be prepared, holding nothing back, to yield to your deepest and most profound feelings."

"But then," she said, "I would be only a submitted slave, overwhelmed and mastered."

I took her in my arms. She was tense, and frightened. "You're trembling," I said.

"I am only a woman, and a prisoner," she said.

"Do not forget it," I told her.

"No, Jason," she said.

"You do not seem large and strong," I said.

"I am not large and strong," she said.

"Your body is soft," I said, "and feels good in my hands." I jerked her by the arms to a sitting position, and looked at her.

"Could a man find me desirable?" she asked.

"Yes," I said. "Escape me!"

She struggled, futilely. "I cannot escape you," she said. "You know that!"

I threw her then down to her back in the straw.

"Do not be rough with me, Jason," she said.

"You will now be treated as men please," I told her.

"Yes, Jason," she said.

"Accustom yourself to obedience and submission," I said.

"Yes, Jason," she said.

"Will it be necessary to whip you?" I asked.

"No, Jason," she said.

"Prepare now to yield to your deepest and most profound feelings," I said.

"I will try," she said. "Oh!" she cried, my hands in her hair.

"You will not merely try," I told her. "You will yield to them."

"Yes," she said.

"Yes, what?" I asked.

"Yes—*Master*," she said.

* * * *

"You yielded well, Lady Gina," I said.

"I would never have believed I could have such feelings," she said. "I did not know such feelings

could exist."

"Surely you have seen writhing, screaming slave girls?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "but not until moments ago did I have more than an inkling of what they might be feeling." She smiled. "It is no wonder the luscious little sluts are so fond of their collars."

"There can be progress in such matters," I said. "Perhaps no woman has yet truly sounded the depths of slave joy."

"Yes," she said, "the joy of being owned by a man, of being in his power, completely, of being fully his, and of totally loving and serving him."

"Perhaps," I said.

She kissed me. "You handle a woman well, Jason," she said. "You put me through my paces well."

"Any captor or master," I said, "can put you through your paces."

"It is true," she said, and kissed me. She put her head on my belly. "I have seen women such as myself on the block," she said. "We do not bring high prices."

"Perhaps," I said.

"If I were sent to the kitchens, or the mills or laundries," she said, "I would be under the will of my task master, would I not?"

"Yes," I said.

"Perhaps I might, under his whip, pulling his plow, please a peasant," she said, "or perhaps I might keep the hut of a dock worker, preparing his food and, when he wished, warming his mat."

"Perhaps," I said.

"Did I please you?" she asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Do you think I could please other men?" she asked.

"Yes," I said.

"I know that I am not as desirable as most women," she said.

"You are desirable," I said. "And to some men you will be unutterably desirable."

"How kind you are to a helpless female prisoner," she said, "one soon likely, should it please the men of Ar, to be made a slave."

"I speak the truth," I said.

"You are kind," she said.

I said nothing.

"I will try to please my masters well," she said.

"I would recommend it," I said. She shuddered, against me.

"The men of Ar," she said, "took my freedom from me, when they made me a prisoner. You have taken my freedom from me, when you forced me to yield—as—as a *female slave*."

"Your yielding," I said, "was not that of a female slave, for you are not yet, truly, a female slave. Yet it was, doubtless, the fullest yielding of which you were at this time capable."

"Can there be more?" she asked.

"You cannot, at this time," I said, "even begin to suspect the depths, the dimensions, the wonders and marvels of slave submission."

"What you have done to me," she said, "is irreversible. I can never go back, now, knowing what I do to being a proud free woman."

I shrugged. It was nothing to me.

"And yet," she said, sobbing, "I am too plain to be a slave."

"You are a woman," I told her.

"Yes," she said, "I am a woman. I did not know before, truly, what it was to be a woman."

"It is not being a kind of man," I told her.

"No," she said, "it is being a full female, in the order of nature."

"Yes," I said.

"A slave," she said.

"Yes," I said.

She sobbed.

"What is wrong?" I asked.

"I want a master," she said. "I want to be everything, and do everything, for him. I want to give him all of me, holding nothing back. I want to be nothing to him, only his owned slave, totally loving and serving him."

"And so?" I said.

"But I am plain," she said. "No man will want me."

"Are you not done with her yet?" asked a rough voice.

We were startled, and looked up. There, at the edge of the straw, standing, was a large, uncouth fellow, in the garments of the Tarn Keepers. "Yes," I said. I smiled. I sat up and took the Lady Gina's free shackle and jerked her ankles closely together. I prepared to close the open shackle about her right ankle. Her ankles would then be chained together, as before, with about eight inches of chain separating them. The shackles were large, and of heavy iron.

"Do not reshackle her," he said.

"Very well," I said, and got up.

"You look like a tasty pudding," he said to the Lady Gina. She looked up at him, from the straw.

"Are you branded yet, Female?" he asked her.

Her hand went inadvertently to her left thigh. "No," she said, "no."

"Is she any good?" he asked me.

"Yes," I said, "she is pretty good. And there is no telling how good she will be when she is properly enslaved and finds herself in the possession of the right master."

"Of course," he said. He again looked down at her. There was a startled, soft light in the eyes of the Lady Gina as she looked up at the fellow. Suddenly, to me, she seemed very soft, and very vulnerable in the straw. It was as though a transformation, somehow, had come over her.

"She is beautiful," he said.

"Yes," I said, for, somehow, suddenly, perhaps with the sudden understanding and acceptance of her nature and condition, it had become true.

She gasped, and looked up at him, spoken of as beautiful. She trembled.

He then kicked her, and she cried out with pain. "Split your legs, Vondan slut," he said.

The Lady Gina wasted no time in complying.

"Lie there now before me, thusly," said he, "in the straw."

He let her remain in that position, looking up at him. How far she was now from her whip and keys, her authority, from the House of Andronicus.

"Are you going to be had, Lady of Vonda?" he inquired.

"I do not know, Master," she said.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"It will be as Master wishes," she said.

"Beg," said he, "to be had."

"I so beg," she said.

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