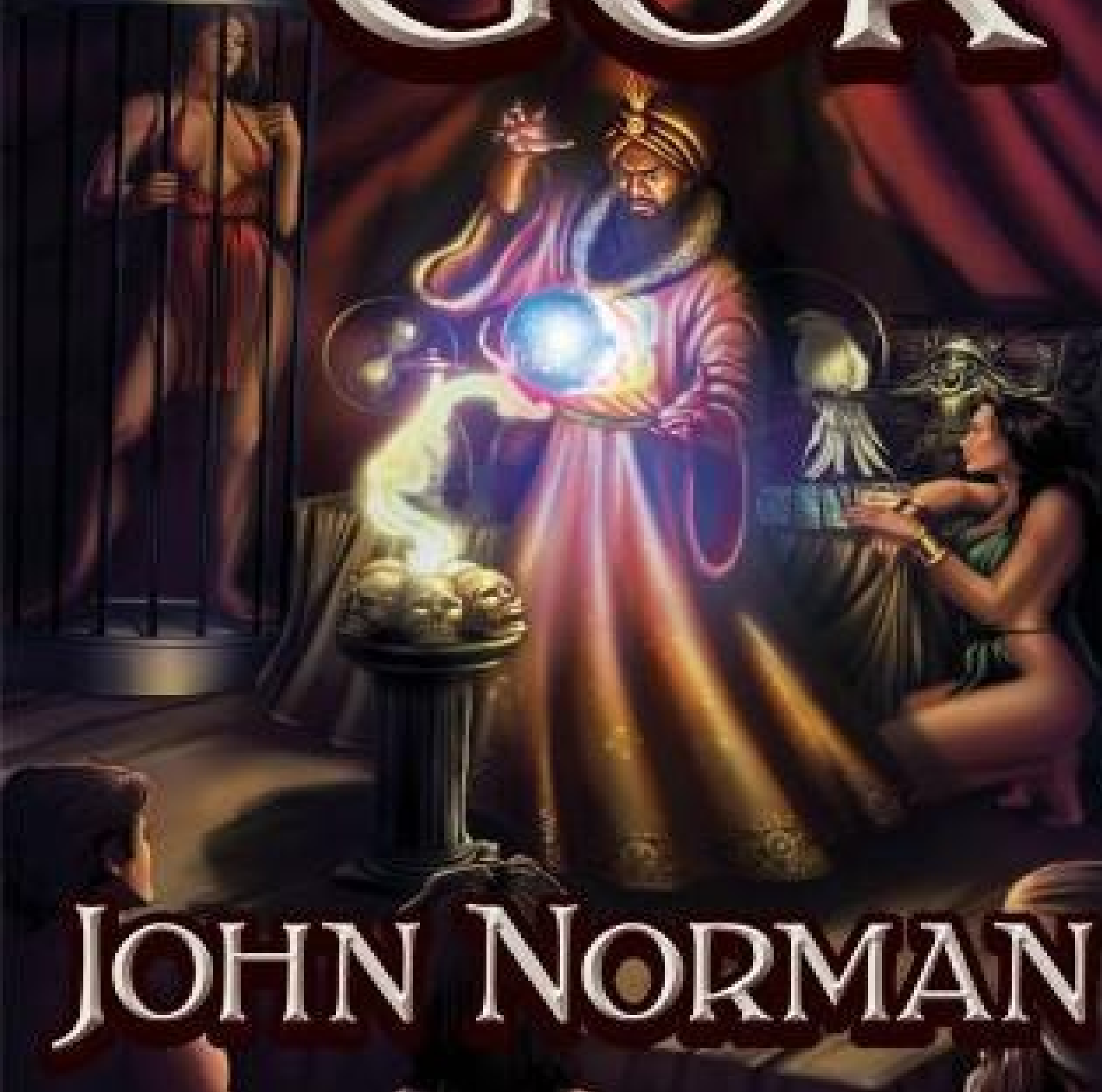


GOREAN SAGA - BOOK 25

MAGICIANS OF GOR



JOHN NORMAN

1 The Street

(pg. 7) “Surely you understand the law, my dear,” he said.

She struggled in the net, dropped from the ceiling, then held about her by guardsmen sprung from concealment at the sides of the room.

“No!” she cried. “No!”

She was then turned about, twice in the net, on the couch so that she was thoroughly entangled, doubly, in its toils.

“No!” she wept.

The guardsmen, four of them, held the net.

Her eyes were wild. Her fingers were in the knotted mesh. She was like a frightened animal.

“Please,” she wept. “What do you want?”

The fellow did not then answer her, but regarded her. She was naked in the toils of the net, and now lay on her side, her legs drawn up in it, now seemingly, small and very vulnerable, so bared and caught, on the deep furs of the huge couch.

“Milo!” she cried to a tall, handsome fellow to one side, “Help me!”

“But I am a slave,” pointed out Milo, donning his purple tunic.

She looked at him, wildly.

“I am sure you are familiar with the law,” said the first fellow, flanked by two magistrates.

“No!” she cried.

The magistrates were ex officio witnesses, who could certify the circumstances of the capture. The net was a stout one, and weighted.

“Any free women who couches with another’s slave, or readies herself to couch with another’s slave, becomes herself a slave, and the slave of the slave’s master. It is a clear law.”

“No! No!” she wept.

“Think of it in this fashion, if you wish,” he said. “You have given yourself to Milo, but Milo is mine and can own nothing, and thus you have given yourself to me. An analogy is the coin given by a free person to a street girl, which coin, of course, does not then belong to the girl but to her master. What

given to the slave is given to the master.

She regarded him with horror.

(pg. 8) “I loathe you!” she cried. “Bring me my clothing!” she wept to the guardsmen.

“When the certifications are approved, and filed, and in this case there will be no ambiguity or difficulty about the matter, you will be mine.

“No!” she wept.

“Put her on her knees, on the couch, in the net,” he said.

This was done.

She looked wildly at Milo. There were tears in her eyes. “Will I then, as a slave, be your woman?” she asked.

“I do not think so,” said Milo, smiling.

“The handsome, charming, suave, witty Milo,” said the fellow, “is a seduction slave.”

“A seduction slave?” she wept.

“Yes,” he said. “He has much increased my stock of slaves.”

She tore at the net, in tears, but helpless.

“Had you, and your predecessors, not been so secretive, so much concerned to conceal your affairs with a slave, Milo’s utility as a seduction slave would have doubtless been much diminished by now. On the other hand, the concern for your reputation and such, so natural in you free women, almost guarantees the repeatability, and continued success, of these small pleasant projects.”

“Release me!” she begged.

“Some of Milo’s conquests are used in my fields, and others in my house,” he said. “But most, and I am sure you will be one of these, are exported, sold out of the city to begin your new life.”

“My new life?” she whispered.

“That of a female slave,” he smiled.

She struggled, futilely.

“Raise the net to her waist, and lower it to her neck,” he said, “and tie it about her. Then put her in a gag and hood.”

“No!” she wept.

“By tonight,” he said, “you will be branded and collared.”

“No, please!” she wept.

The net was then adjusted on the female, in accordance with the fellow’s instructions, in such a way that her legs and head were free, but her arms were confined. It was then bound tightly in place.

The fellow then glanced at the handsome slave. “You will leave by another exit,” he said.

“Yes, Master,” said the slave.

The free woman watched the slave withdraw. “Milo!” she whispered.

(pg. 9) “You are now kneeling on a couch,” said the fellow, “which, for a female slave, is a great honor. You may be months into your bondage before you are again permitted such an honor.”

“Milo!” she wept, after the slave.

The leather bit of the gag, a fixture of the hood, was then forced back between her teeth, and tied in place.

She made a tiny noise, of protest.

The hood itself was then drawn over her head, covering it completely. It was then fixed on her, buckled shut, beneath her chin.

“What have you seen?” said Marcus.

I stepped back from the crack in the shutters, through which I had observed the preceding scene.

“Nothing,” I said.

We were in a street of Ar, a narrow, crowded street, in which we were much jostled. It was in the Metellan district, south and east of the district of the Central Cylinder. It is a shabby, but not squalid district. There are various tenements, or insulae, there. It is the sort of place, far enough from broad avenues of central Ar, where assassinations, or triflings, might take place.

“Is Ar this crowded always?” asked Marcus, irritably.

“This street, at this time of day,” I said.

My companion was Marcus Marcellus, of the Marcelliani, formerly of Ar’s Station, on the Vosk. We had come to Ar from the vicinity of Brundisium. He, like myself, was of the caste of warriors. With him, clinging closely, about him, as though she might fear losing him in the crowd, and attempting also, it seemed, not unoften, to make herself small and conceal herself behind him, was his slave, Phoebe, this name having been put on her, a slender exquisite, very lightly complexioned, very dark-haired girl. She had come into his keeping in the vicinity of Brundisium, some months ago.

“As we do have the yellow ostraka and our permits do not permit us to remain in the city after dark,” said Marcus, “I think we should venture now to the sun gate.”

Marcus was the sort of fellow who was concerned about such things, being arrested, impaled, and such.

“There is plenty of time,” I assured him. Most cities have a sun gate, sometimes several. They are called such because they are commonly opened at dawn and closed at dusk, thus the hours of their ingress and regress being determined by the diurnal cycle. Ar is the largest city of known Gor, larger even, I am sure, than Turia, in the far south. She has some forty public gates, and, I suppose, some number of restricted smaller gates, secret gates, posterns, and such. Long ago, I had once entered (pg 10) the city through such a passage, its exterior access point reached by means of a putative Dar-Kos pit, which passage, I had recently determined, descending into the pit on ropes, was now closed. I supposed that this might be the case with various such entrances, if they existed, given Ar’s alarm at the announced approach of Cos. In a sense I regretted this loss, for it had constituted a secret way in and out of the city. Perhaps other such passages existed. I did not know.

“Let us go,” suggested Marcus.

I saw a slave girl pass, in a brief, brown tunic, her back straight, her beauty protestingly full within her tiny, tight garment, balancing a jar on her head with one hand. The bottom of the jar rested in a sort of improvised shallow stand or mount, formed of a dampened, wrapped towel. In Schendi the white slave girls of black masters are sometimes taught to carry such vessels on their heads without the use of their hands or such devices as the towel. And woe to the girl who drops it. Such exercises are good for a girl’s posture. To be sure, the lower caste black women of Schendi and the interior do such things commonly. I looked at the girl. Yes, I thought, she could be similarly trained, without doubt. If I owned her, I thought, I might so train her. If she proved clumsy or slow to learn she could be whipped. I did not think she would prove slow to learn. Our eyes met, briefly, and she lowered her eyes swiftly still keeping her burden steady. She trembled for a moment. I think she had seen, in that glance, that could be her master, but then, so, too, of course, could be many men. A slave girl is often very careful about meeting the eyes of a free man directly, particularly a stranger. They can be cuffed or beaten for such insolence. The collar looked well on her, gleaming, close-fitting, locked. She was barefoot. Her brief garment was all she wore. It would have no nether closure. Thusly on Gor are female slaves commonly garbed. She hurried on.

“Let us be on our way,” said Marcus. Phoebe clung close to him, her tiny fingers on his sleeve.

“In a moment,” I said.

“I do not like such crowds,” said Marcus.

We were buffeted about a bit.

“There is a date on the permits,” Marcus reminded me, “and they will be checking at the gate to see who has left the city and who has not.”

“I think they will be coming out in a moment or two,” I said, “there at that door.”

“Who?” he asked.

“There,” I said.

(pg. 11) I saw the fellow who had been in the room emerge through the door. He was followed by the two magistrates, who had probably now made the entries in their records. They were followed by four guardsmen, in single file. "Make way, make way!" said the fellow from the room, and the crowds parted a little, to let them pass. The third of the three guardsmen carried a burden on his right shoulder. It was a naked woman whose upper body was thoroughly and tightly wrapped in several turns of a heavy net, tied closely about her. Her head was covered with a buckled hood. She squirmed a little, helplessly. She was being carried with her head to the rear, as a slave is carried.

"So that is what you were watching," said Marcus, "a caught slave."

"In a sense," I said.

About at the same time, coming toward us, down the street, following the other party by several yards was a large, graceful fellow, blond and curly-haired, who was astonishingly handsome, almost unbelievably so. On his left wrist, locked, there was a silver slave bracelet. His tunic was of a silken purple. He had golden sandals.

"Who is that?" I asked a fellow in white and gold, the colors of the merchants, when the handsome fellow had passed. Such a one, I assumed, might be generally known. He was no ordinary fellow.

"He is the actor, Milo," said the man.

"He is a slave," I said.

"Owned by Appanius, the agriculturalist, impresario and slaver," said the fellow, "who rents him to the managements of various theaters.

"A handsome fellow," I said.

"The handsomest man in all Ar," said the merchant. "Free women swoon at his feet."

"And what of slaves?" asked Marcus, irritably, scowling at Phoebe.

"I swoon at your feet, Master," she smiled, putting down her head.

"You may kneel and clean them with your tongue," said Marcus, angrily.

"Yes, Master," she said, and fell to her knees, putting down her head.

"The appearance of Milo in a drama assures its success," said the merchant.

"He is popular," I said.

"Particularly with the women," he said.

"I can understand that," I said.

(pg. 12) "Some men do not even care for him," said the merchant, and I gathered he might be one of them.

“I can understand that,” I said. I was not certain that I was enthusiastic about Milo either. Perhaps it was merely that I suspected that Milo might be even more handsome than I.

“I wish you well,” said the merchant.

“Perhaps Milo serves, too, in capacities other than that of an actor,” I said.

“What did you have in mind?” asked the merchant.

“Nothing,” I said.

“It is Milo,” whispered one free woman to another. They were together, veiled.

“Let us hurry after him, to catch a glimpse of him,” said one of them.

“Do not be shameless!” chided the first.

“We are veiled,” the second reminded her.

“Let us hurry,” urged the first then, and the two pressed forward, through the crowd, after the purple-clad figure.

“Fellows as handsome as he,” complained the merchant, “should be forced to go veiled in public.”

“Perhaps,” I granted him. Free women in most of the high cities of Gor, particularly those of higher caste, go veiled in public. Also they commonly wear the robes of concealment which cover them, in effect, from head to toe. Even gloves are often worn. There are many reasons for this, having to do with modesty, security, and such. Slave girls, on the other hand, are commonly scandalously clad, if clad at all. Typically their garments, if they are permitted them, are designed to leave little of their beauty to the imagination. Rather they are designed to call attention to it, and so reveal and display it, sometimes even brazenly, in all its marvelousness. Goreans are not ashamed of the luscious richness, the excitingness, the sensuousness, the femininity, the beauty of their slaves. Rather they prize it, treasure it and celebrate it. To be sure, it must be admitted that the slave girl is only an animal, and is under total male domination. To understand this more clearly, two further items might be noted. First, she must go about in public, denied face veiling. Men, as they please, may look freely upon her face, witnessing its delicacy, its beauty, its emotions, and such. She is not permitted to hide it from them. She must bare it, in all its revelatory intimacy, and with all the consequences of this, to their gaze. Second, her degradation is completed by the fact that she is given no choice but to be what she is, profoundly and in depth, a human female, and must thus, willing or not, (pg. 13) sexually and emotionally, physically and psychologically, accept her fulfillments in the order of nature.

“I wish you well,” I said to the merchant.

He turned away.

“Make way,” I heard. “Make way!”

A house marshal was approaching, carrying a baton, with which he touched folks and made a passage among them. He was preceding the palanquin of a free woman, apparently a rich one, borne by some

eight male slaves. I stepped to one side to let the marshal, the palanquin and its bearers move past. The sides of the palanquin were veiled.

“Odd that a palanquin of such a nature should be in the Metallan district,” I said.

“Perhaps we should consider saving our lives now,” said Marcus.

“Phoebe is not finished with your feet,” I said.

Phoebe, looked up, happily.

“Up,” said Marcus irritably, snapping his fingers. Immediately she sprang to her feet. She stood beside him, her head down, docile. She, I noted, attracted her share of attention. I was not too pleased with this, as I did not wish to be conspicuous in Ar. On the other hand, it is seldom wise to interfere in the relationship between a master and a slave.

I looked back down the street. I could no longer see any sign of the fellow who had been in the room, the magistrate, or the guardsmen, with their shapely prisoner. She had been on a guardsman’s shoulder, being carried, her head to the rear, as a slave. Later I did not think she would be often accorded the luxury of such transportation. Soon, perhaps in a day or two, she would be learning how to heel a man and to walk gracefully on his leash.

“Oh!” said Phoebe.

Someone in the crowd, in passing, had undoubtedly touched her. Marcus looked about, angrily. I did not know, really, what he expected.

I looked back down the street. I could see the head of Milo, with its blond curls, over the heads of the crowd, about fifty yards away. He was standing near a wall. The free woman’s palanquin had stopped briefly by him, and then, after a time, continued on its way.

“Oh!” said Phoebe.

Marcus turned about again, swiftly, angrily. There was only the crowd.

“If you do not care for such things,” I said, “perhaps you should give her a garment.”

(pg. 14) “Let her go naked,” he said. “She is only a slave.”

“Perhaps some article of clothing would not be amiss,” I said.

“She has her collar,” he said.

“You many never have noticed,” I said, “but she is an exquisitely beautiful female.”

“She is the lowest and most despicable of female slaves,” he said.

“Of course,” I said.

“Too,” said he, “do not forget that I hate her.”

“It would be difficult to do that,” I said, “as you have told me so many times.

Phoebe lowered her head, smiling.

“Too,” said he, “she is my enemy.”

“If ever she was your enemy,” I said, “she is not your enemy now. She is now a slave. Look at her. She is simply an animal you own. Do you think she does not know that? She now exists for you, to please and serve you.”

“She is Cosian,” he said.

“Turn your flank to him, slave,” I said. “Touch your collar.”

Phoebe complied.

“You can see the brand,” I said. “You can see the collar. Furthermore, it is yours.”

He regarded the slave, docile, obedient, turned, her fingers, too, lightly on her collar, so closely locked on her lovely neck.

“And it is a pretty flank,” I said, “and a lovely throat.”

He moaned softly.

“I see that you think so,” I said.

The feelings of the young warrior toward his slave were profoundly ambivalent. She was not only the sort of female that he found irresistibly, excruciatingly attractive, as I had known before I had shown her to him the first time, but, to my surprise and delight, there seemed to be a special mystery or magic, or chemistry, between them. Each was a dream come true for the other. She had been, it seemed in some profound genetic sense, born for his chains. They fitted together, like a lock and its key. She loved him profoundly, helplessly, and from the first time she had seen him. He, too, had been smitten. Then he had discovered that she was from Cos, that ubarate which was his hated foe, at the hands of whose mercenary and regular forces he had seen his city destroyed. It was no wonder that in rage he had vowed to make the lovely slave stand proxy for Cos, that he might then vent upon her his fury, and his hatred, for Cos, and all things Cosian. And so it was that he had determined to reduce and humiliate her, and make (pg. 15) her suffer, but with each cuffing, with each command, with each kick, with each blow of the whip, she became only the more his, and the more loving. I had known for long time, even as long ago as the inn of the Crooked Tarn, on the Vosk Road, before the fall of Ar's Station, that she had profound slave needs, but I had never suspected their depth until I had seen her in a camp outside Brundisium, kneeling before Marcus, looking up at him, unbelievably. She had known then that she was his, and in perfection. I had no doubt they fitted together, in the order of nature, in the most intimate, beautiful and fulfilling relationship possible between a man and a woman, that of love master and love slave. To be sure, she was Cosian.

Phoebe put down her head, shyly smiling.

“Cosian slut!” snarled Marcus.

He seized her by the arms and lifted her from her feet, thrusting her back against the wall of the building.

He held her there, off her feet, her back pressed back, hard, against the rough wall.

“Yes,” she cried. “Yes!”

“Be thusly used, and as befits you,” said he, “slave, and slut of Cos!”

“Yes, my Master!” she wept. She clung about him, her eyes closed, her head back, gasping.

Then he cried out, and lowered her to the stones of the street.

She knelt there, gratefully, sobbing. Her back was bloody. Marcus had not been gentle with the slave. She was holding to his leg.

“Disgusting,” said a free woman, drawing her veil more closely about her face.

Did she not know that she, too, if she were a slave, would be similarly subject to a master’s pleasure?

“This is a very public place,” I said to Marcus.

A small crowd, like an eddy in the flowing stream of folks in the street, had gathered about.

“She is a slut of Cos,” said Marcus to a fellow nearby.

“Beat her for me,” said the man.

“She is only a slave,” I said.

“A Cosian slut,” said one man to another.

“She is only a slave,” I said again.

The crowd closed in a bit more, menacingly. Phoebe looked up, frightened.

In the press there was not even room to draw the sword, let alone wield it.

“Let us kill her,” said a fellow.

(pg. 16) “Move back,” said Marcus, angrily.

“A slut of Cos,” said another man.

“Let us kill her!” said another fellow.

Phoebe was very small and helpless, kneeling on the stones, near the wall.

“Continue on your way,” I said to the men gathered about. “Be about your business.”

“Cos is our business,” said a man.

The ugliness of the crowd, its hostility, and such, was, I think, a function of recent events, which had precipitated confusion, uncertainty and terror in Ar, in particular the military catastrophe in the delta in which action, absurdly, the major land forces at Torcadino, one of the largest assemblages of armed men ever seen of Gor, under their polemarkos, Myron, cousin to Lurius of Jad, Ubar of Cos, had now set their standards towards Ar. Torcadino had been a supply depot for the forces of Cos on the continent. It had been seized by the mercenary, Dietrich of Tarnburg, to forestall the march on Ar. Ar, however, had failed to act. She had not relieved the siege at Torcadino nor that in the north, at Ar’s Station. Dietrich, finally understanding the treason in Ar, in high places, had managed to effect a withdrawal from Torcadino. His location was now unknown and Cos had put a price on his head. Now there lay little or nothing between the major forces of Cos on the continent, now on the march, and the gates of Ar. Further, though there was much talk in the city of resistance, of the traditions of Ar, of her Home Stone, and such, I did not think that the people of Ar, stunned and confused by the apparently inexplicable succession of recent disasters, had the will to resist the Cosians. Perhaps if there had been a Marlenus of Ar in the city, a Ubar, one to raise the people and lead them, there might have been hope. But the city was now under the governance of the regent, Gnieus Lelius, who, I had little doubt might have efficiently managed a well-ordered polity under normal conditions, but was an unlikely leader in a time of darkness, crisis and terror. He was, I thought, a good man and an estimable civil servant, but he was not a Marlenus of Ar. Marlenus of Ar had vanished months ago on a punitive raid in the Voltai, directed against the tarnsmen of Treve. He was presumed dead.

“Kill her!” said a man.

“Kill her!” said another.

“No!” said Marcus.

“No!” I said.

“There are only two of them,” said a fellow.

(pg. 17) “Listen!” I said, lifting my hand.

In that instant the crowd was silent. More than one man lifted his head. We turned down the street. Phoebe, very small and vulnerable, naked, in her collar, crawled more behind the legs of Marcus.

We could hear the bells, the chanting. In a moment we could see the lifted golden circle, on its staff, approaching. The people in the streets hurried to press against the walls.

“Initiates,” I said to Marcus.

I could now see the procession clearly.

“Kneel,” said the fellow near me.

“Kneel,” I said to Marcus.

We knelt, on one knee. It surprised me that the people were kneeling, for, commonly, free Goreans do not kneel, even in the temples of the Initiates. Goreans commonly pray standing. The hands are sometimes lifted, and this is often the case with praying Initiates.

“I do not kneel to such,” said Marcus.

“Stay down,” I said. He had caused enough trouble already.”

We could now smell the incense. In the lead of the procession were two lads in white robes, with shaved heads, who rang the bells. Following them were two more, who shook censers, these emitting clouds of incense. These lads, I assumed, were novices, who had perhaps taken their first vows.

“Praise the Priest-Kings!” said a man, fervently.

“Praise the Priest-Kings!” said another.

I thought that Misk, the Priest-King, my friend, might have been fascinated, if puzzled, by this behavior.

An adult Initiate, in his flowing white robe, carried the staff surmounted with the golden circle, a figure with neither beginning nor end, the symbol of Priest-Kings. He was followed by some ten or so Initiates, in double file. It was these who were chanting.

A free woman drew back her robes, hastily, frightened, lest they touch an Initiate. It is forbidden for Initiates to touch women, and, of course, for women to touch them. Initiates also avoid meat and beans. A good deal of time, I gather, is devoted to sacrifices, services, chants, prayers, and the perusal of mystic lore. By means of the study of mathematics they attempt to purify themselves.

“Save Ar!” wept a man, as they passed.

“Save us, oh intercessors with Priest-Kings!” cried a man.

“I will bring ten pieces of gold to the temple!” promised another.

(pg. 18) “I will bring ten verr, full-grown verr, with gilded horns,” promised another.

But the Initiates took no note of these not inconsiderable pledges. Of what concern could be such things to them?

“Keep your head down,” I muttered to Marcus.

“Very well,” he growled. Phoebe was behind us, on her stomach, shuddering, covering her head with her hands. I did not envy her, a naked slave, caught inadvertently in such a place.

In a few moments the procession had passed and we rose to our feet. The crowd had dissipated about us.

“You are safe now,” I said to Phoebe, “or at least as safe as is ever a female slave.”

She knelt timidly at the feet of Marcus, holding to his leg.

“We cannot resist Cos,” said a man, a few feet from us.

“We must place our trust in the Priest-Kings,” said another.

Across from us, about seven feet away, on the other side of the narrow street, was the free woman who had secured her robes, that they might not touch an Initiate. She rose to her feet, looking after the procession. We could still hear the bells. The smell of incense hung in the air. Near the free woman was a female slave, in a short gray tunic. She, too, had been caught, like Phoebe, in the path of the procession. She had knelt with her head down to the street, the palms of her hands on the stones, making herself small, in a common position of obeisance. The free woman looked down at her. As the girl saw she was under the scrutiny of a free person she remained on her knees. “You sluts have nothing to fear,” said the free woman to her, bitterly, “It is such as I who must fear.” The girl did not answer. There was something in what the free woman had said, though in the frenzy of a sacking, the blood of the victors racing, flames about, and such, few occupations of a fallen city. I supposed, either free or slave, were altogether safe. “It will only be a different collar for you,” said the free woman. The girl looked up at her. She was a lovely slave I thought, a red-haired one. She kept her knees tight together before the free woman. Had she knelt before a man she would probably have had to keep them open, even if they were brutally kicked apart, a lesson to her, to be more sensitive as to before whom she knelt. “Only a different collar for you!” cried the free woman, angrily. The girl winced, but dared not respond. To be (pg. 19) sure, I suspected, all things considered, that the free woman was right. Slave girls, as they are domestic animals, are, like other domestic animals, of obvious value to victors. It is unlikely that they would be killed, any more than tharlarion or kaiila. They would be simply chained together, for later distribution or sale. Then the free woman, in fury, with her small gloved hand, lashed the face of the slave girl, back and forth, some three or four times. She, the free woman, free person, might be trampled by tharlarion, or be run through, or have her throat cut, by victors. Such things were certainly possible. On the other hand, the free women of a conquered city, or at least the fairest among them, are often reckoned by besiegers as counting within the yield of prospective loot. Many is the free female in such a city who has torn away her robes before enemies, confessed her natural slavery, disavowed her previous masquerade as a free woman, and begged for the rightfulness of the brand and collar. This is a scene which many free women have enacted in their imagination. Such things figure, too, in the dreams of women, those doors to the secret truths of their being. The free woman stood there, the breeze in the street, as evening approached, ruffling the hems of her robes. The free woman put her fingers to her throat, over the robes and veil. She looked at the slave, who did not dare to meet her eyes.

“What is it like to be a slave?” she asked.

“Mistress?” asked the girl, frightened.

“What is it like, to be a slave?” asked the free woman, again.

“Much depends on the master, beautiful Mistress,” said the girl. The slave could not see the face of the free woman, if course, but such locutions, “beautiful Mistress,” and such, on the part of slave girls addressing free women, are common. They are rather analogous to such things as “noble Master,” and so on. They have little meaning beyond being familiar epithets of respect.

“The master” said the free woman, shuddering.

“Yes, Mistress,” said the girl.

“You must do what he says, and obey him in all things?” asked the free woman.

“Of course, Mistress!” said the girl, and leaped to her feet, scurrying away.

“You may go,” said the free woman.

“Thank you, Mistress!” said the girl, and leaped to her feet, scurrying away.

The free woman looked after the slave. Then she looked across at us, and at Phoebe, who lowered her eyes, quickly. Then, shuddering, she turned about and went down the street, to our left, in the direction from whence the Initiates had come.

(pg. 21) “The people of Ar are frightened,” said Marcus.

“Yes,” I said.

We saw a fellow walk by, mumbling prayers. He was keeping track of these prayers by means of a prayer ring. This ring, which had several tiny knobs on it, was worn on the first finger of his right hand. He moved the ring on the finger by means of the knobs, keeping track of the prayers that way, comes to the circular knob, rather like a golden circle at the termination of the Initiate’s staff, one knows one had completed one cycle of prayers. One may then stop, or begin again.

“Where do you suppose the Initiates were bound?” I asked Marcus.

“To their temple, I suppose,” he said.

“What for?” I asked.

“For their evening services, I presume,” he said, somewhat irritably.

“I, too, would conjecture that,” I said.

“The sun gate!” he cried. “We must be there before dark!”

“Yes,” I agreed.

“Is there time?” he asked.

“I think so,” I said.

“Come!” he said. “Come quickly!”

He then, leading the way, hurried up the street. I followed him, and Phoebe raced behind us.

“You may turn about,” said Marcus, standing up.

Phoebe, kneeling, gasping, unclasped her hands from behind her neck, and lifted her head from the dirt, in our small tent, outside the walls of Ar, one of hundreds such tents, mainly for vagabonds, itinerants and refugees.

“Thank you, Master,” said Phoebe. “I am yours. I love you. I love you.”

“Stand and face me,” he said. “Keep you arms at your sides.

Marcus took a long cord, some five feet or so in length, from his pouch, and tossed it over his shoulder.

“Am I to be bound now?” she asked.

“The air seems cleaner and fresher outside the walls,” I said.

We could hear the sounds of the camp about us.

(Pg. 21) “It is only that we do not have the stink of incense here,” smiled Marcus.

“Do you know what this is?” he asked, Phoebe. He held in his hand, drawn forth from his pouch, a bit of cloth.

“I am not certain,” she said, timidly, hopefully, “Master.” Her eyes lit up.

I smiled.

“It is a tunic!” she cried, delightedly.

“A slave tunic,” he said, sternly.

“Of course, Master,” she said, delightedly, “for I am a slave!”

It was a sleeveless, pullover tunic of brown rep cloth. It was generously notched on both sides at the hem, which touch guarantees an additional baring of its occupant’s flanks.

I saw that Phoebe wanted to reach out and seize the small garment but that she, under discipline, kept her hands, as she had been directed, at her sides.

The cord over Marcus’ shoulder, of course, was the slave girdle, which is used to adjust the garment on the slave. Such girdles may be tied in various ways, usually in such ways as to enhance the occupant’s figure. Such girdles, too, like the binding fiber with which a camisk is usually secured on a girl, may be used to bind her.

“It is to be mine, is it not?” asked Phoebe, eagerly, expectantly, hopefully. She would not be fully certain of this, of course. Once before, in the neighborhood of Brundisium, far to the north and west, when she had thought she was to receive a similar garment, one which had previously been worn by another slave, Marcus refused to permit it to her. He had burned it. She was from Cos.

“I own it,” said Marcus, “as I own you, but it is true that it was with you in mind that I purchased it, that you might wear it when permitted, or directed.”

“May I touch it, Master?” she asked, delightedly.

“Yes,” he said.

I watched her take the tiny garment in her hands, gratefully, joyfully.

It is interesting, I thought, how much such a small thing can mean to a girl. It was a mere slave tunic, a cheap, tiny thing, little more than a ta-teera or camisk, and yet it delighted her, boundlessly. It was the sort of garment which free women profess to despise, to find unspeakably shocking, unutterably scandalous, the sort of garment which they profess to regard with horror, the sort of garment which they seem almost ready to faint at the sight of, and yet to Phoebe, and to others like (pg. 22) her, in bondage, it was precious, meaning more her doubtless than the richest garments in the wardrobes of the free women. To be sure, I suspect that free women are not always completely candid in what they tell us about their feelings toward such garments. The same free woman, captured, who is cast such a garment, and regarding it cries out with rage and frustration, and dismay, and hastens to don it only when she sees the hand of her captor tighten on his whip, is likely, in a matter of moments, to be wearing it quite well, and with talent, moving gracefully, excitingly and provocatively within it. Such garments, and their meaning, tend to excite women, inordinately. Too, they are often not such strangers to such garments as they might have you believe. Such garments, and such things, are often found among the belongings of women in captured cities. It is presumed that many women wear them privately, and pose in them, before mirrors, and such. Sometimes it is in the course of such activities that they first feel the slaver’s noose upon them, they surprised, and taken, in the privacy of their own compartments. On Gor it is said that free women are slaves who have not been collared. In Phoebe’s case, of course, the garment represented not only such things, confirmation of her bondage, her subjection to a master, and such, but more importantly, at the moment, the considerable difference between being clothed and unclothed. She, a slave, and not entitled to clothing, any more than other animals, was, by the generosity of her master, to be permitted a garment.

“Thank you, Master! Thank you, Master!” wept Phoebe, clutching the garment.

Marcus had, of his own thinking in the matter, purchased the garment. It was, in my opinion, high time he had done so. Not only would Phoebe be incredibly fetching in a slave garment, garments permitting a female in many ways to call attention to, accentuate, display and enhance her beauty, but it would make her, and us, less conspicuous on the streets of Ar. Also, of course, she would then be no more susceptible than other similarly clad slaves to the pinches, and other attentions, of passers-by in the streets.

“May I put it on?” she asked, holding the garment out.

“Yes,” said Marcus. He was beaming. I think he had forgotten that he hated the wench, and such.

“Why have you come to Ar?” I asked Marcus.

“Surely you know,” he said.

“But that is madness,” I said.

During the siege of Ar’s Station its Home Stone had been smuggled out of the city and secretly transported to Ar for (pg. 23) safekeeping. This was done in a wagon owned by a fellow named Septimus Entrates. We had learned, however, after the fall of Ar’s Station, that the official rumor circulated in the south was to the effect that Ar’s Station had opened its gates to the Cosian expeditionary force, this in consideration of substantial gifts of gold. Accordingly, those of Ar’s Station were now accounted renegades in the south. This supposed treachery of Ar’s Station was then used, naturally, to explain the failure of Ar’s might in the north to raise the siege, it was supposed that Ar’s dilemma in the north was then either to attack their former colony or deal with the retreating expeditionary force. On the supposition that the latter action took priority the might of Ar in the north entered the delta in pursuit of the Cosians, in which shifting, trackless morass column after column was lost or decimated. The devastation of Ar’s might in the delta was perhaps the greatest military disaster in the planet’s history. Of over fifty thousand men who had entered the delta it was doubted that there were more than four or five thousand survivors. Some of these, of course, had managed to find their way back to Ar. As far as these men knew, of course, at least on the whole, the circulating rumors were correct, namely, that Ar’s Station had betrayed Ar, that it was still intact and that it was now a Cosian outpost. Such things they had been told in their winter camp, near Holmesk, south of the Vosk.

Phoebe slipped the garment over her head.

Marcus observed, intently.

Understandably enough, given these official accounts of doings in the north, Ar’s Station and those of Ar’s Station were much despised and hated in Ar. Happily Marcus’ accent, like most of Ar’s Station, was close enough to that of Ar herself that he seldom attracted much attention. Too, of course, these days in the vicinity of Ar, given the movements of Cos on the continent, and the consequent displacements and flights of people, there were medleys of accents in and about Ar. Not even my own accent, which was unusual on Gor, attracted much attention.

Phoebe drew down the tunic about her thighs, and turned before Marcus, happily.

“Aii!” said Marcus.

“Does the slave please you?” inquired Phoebe, delighted. The question was clearly rhetorical.

“It is too brief,” said Marcus.

“Nonsense,” I said.

“It is altogether too brief,” said Marcus.

“The better that my master may look upon my flanks,” said (pg. 24) Phoebe. They were well exposed particularly with the notching on the sides.

“And so, too, many other men,” he said, angrily.

“Of course, Master,” she said, “for I am a slave!”

~~“She is extraordinarily beautiful,” I said. “Let her be so displayed and exposed. Let other see the with envy upon consideration of your property.”~~

“She is just a slut of Cos!” said Marcus, angrily.

“Now only your slave,” I reminded him.

“You are a pretty slave, slut of Cos,” said Marcus to the girl, grudgingly.

“A girl is pleased, if she is found pleasing by her master,” said Phoebe.

“Surely, by now,” I said to Marcus, “you have thought the better of your mad project.”

“No,” said Marcus, absently, rather lost in the rapturous consideration of his lovely slave.

The Home Stone of Ar’s Station, as I have suggested, was in Ar. It was primarily in connection with this face that Marcus had come to Ar.

“She is marvelously beautiful,” said Marcus.

“Yes,” I said.

“For a Cosian,” he said.

“Of course,” I said.

Given the anger in Ar at Ar’s Station, and the fact that the Home Stone of Ar’s Station had been sent to Ar, supposedly, according to the rumors, not for safekeeping, given the imminent danger in the city but in a gesture of defiance and repudiation, attendant upon the supposed acceptance of a new Home Stone, one bestowed upon them by the Cosians, the stone was, during certain hours, publicly displayed. This was done in the vicinity of the Central Cylinder, on the Avenue of the Central Cylinder. The purpose of this display was to permit the people of Ar, and elsewhere, if they wished, to vent their displeasure upon the stone, insulting it, spitting upon it, and such.

“The stone,” I said, “is well guarded.”

We had ascertained that this morning. We had then gone to the Alley of the Slave Brothels of Ludmill on which street lies the insula of Achiates. I did not enter the insula itself, but made an inquiry or two in its vicinity. Those whom I had sought there were apparently no longer in residence. I did not make my inquiries of obvious loungers in its vicinity. I went back, with Marcus and Phoebe, later in the afternoon. The loungers were still in evidence. I had assumed then they had been posted. There was a street peddler nearby, too, sitting behind a (pg. 25) blanket on which trinkets were spread. I did not know if he had been posted there or not. It did not much matter. Normally in such arrangements there are at least two individuals. In this way one can report to superiors while the other keeps his vigil. As far as I knew, no one knew that I was in the vicinity of Ar. I did know I could be recognized by certain individuals. The last time I had come to Ar, before this time, I had come with dispatches to Gnieus Lelius, the regent, from Dietrich of Tarnburg, from Torcadino. I had later carried a spurious message which had nearly cost me my life to Ar’s Station, to be delivered to its commanding officer at the

time, Aemilianus, of the same city. I had little doubt that I had inadvertently become identified as a danger to, and an enemy of, the party of treason in Ar. I did not know if the regent, Gnieus Lelius, were of this party or not. I rather suspected not. I was certain, however, from information I had obtained at Holmesk, at the winter camp of Ar, that the high general in the city, Seremides, of Tyros, was involved. Also, secret documents earlier obtained in Brundisium, and deciphered, gave at least one other name, that of a female, one called Talena, formerly the daughter, until disowned, of Marlenus of Ar. Her fortunes were said to be on the rise in the city.

“I am well aware,” said Marcus, “that the stone is well guarded.”

“Then abandon your mad project,” I said to him.

“No,” said he.

“You can never obtain the stone,” I said.

“Have you come to Ar for a reason less likely of fruition?” he asked.

I was silent.

The girl did not understand our conversation as we had not spoken before her of these things. She was a mere slave and thus appropriately kept in ignorance. Let them please and serve. That is enough for them.

“Well?” smiled Marcus.

I did not respond to him. I thought of a woman, one now high in Ar, one for whom I had once mistakenly cared, a vain, proud woman who had once, thinking me helpless and crippled, mocked and scorned me. I thought of her, and chains. It would be impossible to obtain her, of course. Yet, if somehow, in spite of all, I should obtain her it was not even my intention to keep her but rather, as a gesture, merely dispose of her, giving her away or selling her off as the least of slaves.

“I see,” said Marcus.

“Master?” asked Phoebe, turning before Marcus.

“Yes,” he said, “you are very pretty.”

“Thank you, Master,” she said, “for giving me a garment.”

(pg. 26) “For permitting you to wear one,” Marcus corrected her.

“Yes, Master,” she said.

“For at least a moment or two,” he said.

“Yes, Master!” she laughed.

“You have an exquisitely beautiful slave, Marcus,” I said.

Phoebe looked at me, gratefully, flushed.

Marcus made an angry noise, and clenched his fists. I saw that he feared he might come to care for her.

He whipped the cord, some five feet in length, from his shoulder.

Phoebe approached him and held her wrists, crossed, before her. "Am I to be bound, Master?" she asked. In extending their limbs so readily, so delicately, for binding, slaves express and demonstrate their submission.

"Do you like the garment?" he asked.

"Whose use I may have, if only for a moment," she smiled. "Yes, Master. Oh yes, my Master!"

"Are you grateful?" he asked.

"Yes, Master," she said. "A slave is grateful, so very grateful."

"It is not much," he said.

"It is a treasure," she said. I smiled. To her, I supposed, a slave, such a tiny thing, little more than a brief rag, would indeed be a treasure.

"You understand, of course," he said, "that its use may be as easily taken from you as given to you."

"Yes, Master," she said.

"Do you wish to retain its use?" he asked.

"Of course, Master," she said.

"You now have an additional motivation for striving to please," he said.

"Yes, Master," she smiled. The control of a girl's clothing, and many other things, such as her diet, chaining, name, whether or not her head is to be shaved, and so on, are all within the purview of the master. His power over the slave is unqualified and absolute. Phoebe, of course, was muchly in love with Marcus, and he, in spite of himself, with her. On the other hand, even if she had been, as he sometimes seemed to want her, the hated slave of a hated master, she would still have had to strive with all her power to please him, and in all things, and with perfection. It is such to be a Gorean slave girl.

"Do you think me weak?" he asked.

"No, Master!" she said.

He regarded her, torn with his love for her, and his hatred of the island of Cos.

She lifted her crossed wrists to him, for binding.

But he did not move to pinion them. The cord, of course, (pg. 27) was not for such a purpose, though that was a purpose which it could surely serve.

She separated her wrists timidly, and looked him, puzzled, with love in her eyes.

“I am eager to be pleasing to you,” she said.

“That is fitting,” he said.

“Yes, Master,” she whispered.

“For you are a slave,” he said.

“And yours,” she said, suddenly, breathlessly, “yours, your slave!”

He looked at her, angrily.

“I exist for you,” she said, “and it is what I want, to please and serve you.” She was much in love. She wanted to give all of herself to Marcus, irreservedly, to hold nothing back, to live for him, if need be, to die for him. It is the way of the female in love, for whom no service is too small, no sacrifice too great, offering herself selflessly as an oblation to the master.

He regarded her, in fury.

She extended her arms a little, toward him, timidly, hoping to be permitted to embrace him. “Accept the devotion of your slave,” she begged.

I saw his fists clench.

“I love you. I love you, my Master!” she said.

“Sly, lying slut!” he said.

“No!” she wept.

“Mendacious slut of Cos!” he cried.

“I love you! I love you, my Master!” she cried.

He then struck her with the back of his hand, striking her to one side, and she fell, turning, to her knees. She looked up at him from all fours, blood at her lips.

“Were you given permission to speak?” he asked.

“Forgive me, Master,” she whispered. She then crawled to his feet and, putting her head down, kissed them. “A slave begs the forgiveness of her Master,” she said.

Marcus looked down at her, angrily. Then he turned to me. “Her use, of course,” he said, “is yours, whenever you might please.”

“Thank you,” I said, “but I think that I can find a rent wench outside in the camp, or, if I wish, buy a slut, for they are cheap in the vicinity of Ar these days.”

“As you wish,” said Marcus.

Although Marcus was harsh with his slave, pretending even to a casual and brutal disdain for her, he was also, it might be mentioned, extremely possessive where she was concerned. Indeed, he was almost insanely jealous of her. She was not the sort of girl, for example, whom he, as a hose, even at the cost of (pg. 28) a certain rudeness and inhospitality, would be likely to hand over for the nightly comfort of a guest. It would be at his slave ring alone what she would be likely to find herself chained

“Stand up,” said Marcus to the girl.

“I hear some music outside,” I said.

“Yes,” I said.

“At least someone in the neighborhood seems cheerful,” I said.

“Probably peasants,” said Marcus.

I thought this might be true. There were many about, having fled before the march of Cos. Driven from their lands, their stock muchly lost, or driven before them, they had come to the shelter of Ar’s walls. Still they were ready to sing, to drink and dance. I admired peasants. They were hardy, sturdy, irrepressible.

Phoebe now stood humbly before Marcus, as she had been commanded.

“Wipe your face,” said Marcus.

She wiped the blood away, or smeared it, with her right forearm.

“This cord,” said Marcus, “may function as a slave girdle. Such may be tied in several ways. You, as slave, doubtless know the tying of slave girdles.”

I smiled. Marcus would know, of course, that Phoebe would not be likely to know much, if anything, of such matters. Only recently she had been a free woman, though, to be sure, one who had been long kept, languishing, it seemed, and, of course, incompletely fulfilled, in the status of a mere captive. Only a few weeks again had she been branded and collared, and thusly liberated into total bondage.

“No, Master,” said Phoebe. “I am not trained, save in so far as you, and before you, Master Tarl, have deigned to impart some understandings to me.”

“I see,” said Marcus. I think he was just as pleased that Phoebe had not been muchly trained. From one point of view, this suggested that she had presumably been less handled before coming into his keeping that might have been otherwise the case. Also, of course, if she was to strive to please, and squirm, under strict training disciplines, he would prefer that she do so under his personal tutelage, and in the lights of his personal taste, she thus being kept more to himself, and also being trained to be a perfect personal slave, one honed to the whims, preferences and needs of a particular master. To be

sure, this sort of thing can be done with any woman. it is part of her “learning the new master.”

“Master is undoubted familiar with many slaves, and things having to do with slaves,” said Phoebe. “Perhaps then Master can teach his slave such things.”

(Pg. 29) Though Marcus was a young man and, as far as I knew, had never owned a personal slave before Phoebe, he, as a Gorean, would be familiar with slaves. Not only were they in his culture but he probably, as he was of the Marcelliani, which had been a prominent, wealthy family in Ar’s Station, would have had them in his house, in growing up, the use of some perhaps being accorded to him after puberty. Similarly he would be familiar with them from his military training, which would include matters such as the hunting and capture of women, who count as splendid trophies of the chase, so to speak, and his military life, as officers and men commonly have at their disposal barracks slaves, camp slaves, and such. Too, of course, he would be familiar with the lovely properties encountered in paga taverns, and such places. Indeed, together we had frequented such establishments, for example, in Port Cos, after our landing there, as refugees from Ar’s Station. The Gorean slave girl seldom needs to fear that her master will not be fully familiar with, and skilled in, the handling, treatment and discipline of slaves.

“I am not a professional slave trainer,” said Marcus, “or costumer or cosmetician, but I will show you two of the most common ties. Others you might inquire of, when the opportunity permits, of your sister slaves.”

“Yes, Master,” she said.

Phoebe, because of the nature of her acquisition and holding, and our movements, and such, had had very little chance to associate with, or meet, other slaves. On the other hand this deprivation might soon be remedied. I supposed, if Marcus should take up a settled domicile. Indeed, even if we remained in the camp for a few days, it was likely that Phoebe would soon find herself in one group or another of female slaves, conversing, working together. Perhaps laundering, or such. From her sisters in bondage a girl, particularly a new girl, can learn much. In such groups there are normally numerous subtle relationships, hierarchies of dominance, and such, but when a male appears they are all instantly reduced, before him, to the commonality of their beauty and bondage.

“Also,” said Marcus, sizing up the slim beauty before him, “we can always, if we wish, extend our repertoire of ties by experiment.”

“Yes, Master,” said Phoebe, eagerly. It seemed she had forgotten her cuffing. Yet I had little doubt that its admonitory sting lingered within her, not only as a useful memorandum of her bondage but recalling her to the prudence of caution.

Marcus looped the cord and put it over her, so that the loop hung behind her back and two loosed ends before her.

(pg. 30) Already, it seemed, Phoebe had returned to her normal mode of relating to him, as a mere, docile slave, not daring to confess her love openly. Yet I think there was not something subtly different in their relationship. Phoebe now, given his recent intensity, his denunciation of her mendacity, his fury, his excessive reaction to them, had more than ample evidence of the depth of his feelings toward her. She was more than satisfied with what had occurred. Such things, to the softness

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