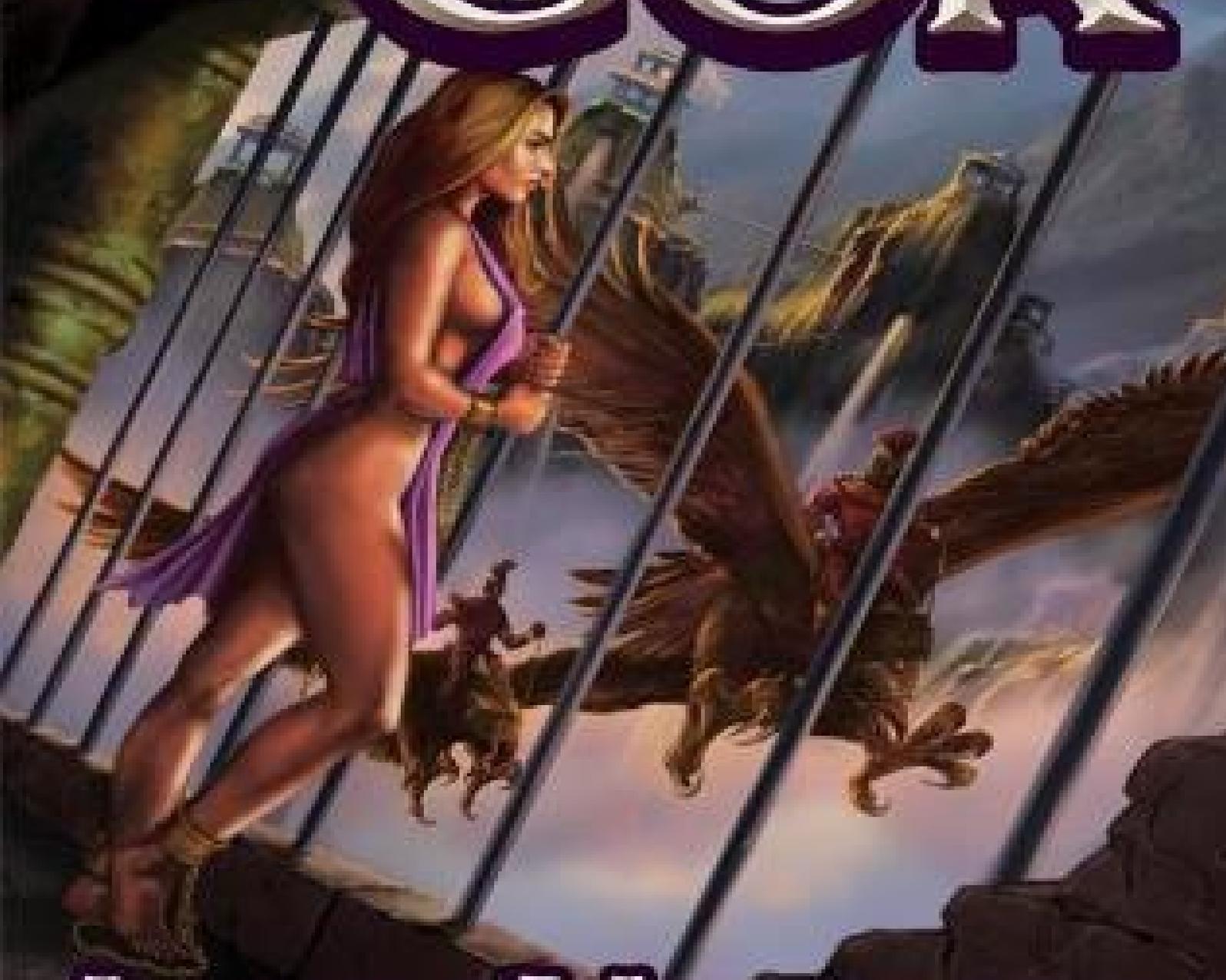


WILSON GOREAN SAGA - BOOK 26

# WITNESS OF GOR



JOHN NORMAN

Gor 26

John Norman

I looked about. No one was looking.

I crossed the perimeter of small, sharpened stones, a foot or so deep, about ten feet wide, which lined the interior wall, of the garden. This hurt my feet, which were small, and soft, and bare. Even the sole of our feet must be soft, and this is seen to, by creams and lotions, and the nature of the surfaces upon which we are permitted to walk, such things.

It was during the heat of the day.

The bangles on my left ankle made a tiny sound, and I stopped, looking about. I was frightened. But no one saw. How pleased I was that I had not been belled! Normally it is a new girl, or even a free woman, who is belled. To be sure, we may be belled at any time, and, naturally, if it is wished, kept that way. But usually one is belled, if at all, in serving, or in the dance. To be sure, it is sometimes required of us in the furs. Bells have many purposes, as might be supposed. Only one of these is security, making it easy, for example, to detect the presence, the movements, of a girl. This is particularly useful at night. One of the reasons, too, why new girls, and sometimes free women, may be belled is that they may begin to understand what they are, or are likely to become. This is not hard to understand when one has bells locked on one's limbs. What sort of girl or woman would be belled? Later, of course, bells are unnecessary for such a purpose. Later, obviously, there will be no doubt as to what one is, either in the minds of others or in one's own mind.

I crept to the wall and put my fingers to the smooth, marbled surface. I looked upward. The wall was some forty feet high. There are trees in the garden, of course, but they are not placed in proximity to the wall. One could not use them, thus, even if they were tall enough, to obtain access to its height. The wall, I had been told, was some ten feet in thickness. I did not know, considering the fashion in which I had been brought here, but presumably only the interior side was marbled. I had been told that the foundation of the wall extended several feet below the surface of the ground. The height of the wall, now that I backed from it, I could

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It is difficult to comprehend such realities.

I had screamed, of course, but I had had no assurance that I would be heard.

Indeed, I suspected that I would not be heard, or, if heard, that I would be merely ignored. I suspected immediately, that my own will, my own feelings, and desires, were no longer of importance, at least to others. And even more profoundly, more frighteningly, I suddenly suspected that I myself, objectively, had now become unimportant. I realized that I might have value, of course, in some sense other than being important, for I found myself, and in a certain fashion, in this place, but this is not the same sort of thing as being important. I was no longer important. That is a strange feeling. It is not, of course, and I want you to understand this, that I had even been important in any of the usual senses of "important," such as being powerful, or rich, or well-known. That is not it at all. No, it was rather in another sense of "important" that I suspected or, I think, better, realized, that I was no longer important. I had now become unimportant, rather as a flower is unimportant, or a dog.

It is difficult to comprehend such realities, the darkness, the collar, the chains.

I had screamed, of course, but almost immediately, I stopped, more fearing that I might be heard, than that I would not be heard.

I crouched there, shuddering. I tried to collect my wits.

My neck hurt, for I had jerked, frightened, against the collar, turning it, abrasively, on my neck.

I do not think that I had realized fully, in the first instant, or so, though I must have been aware of it on some level, that it was on me. Perhaps I had, in that first instant, refused to admit the recognition of my full consciousness, or had immediately forced it from my consciousness. Perhaps I had simply pushed it from my mind, rejecting the very possibility, refusing to believe anything so improbably. And in consequence I had hurt myself, unnecessarily, foolishly.

I felt it, in the darkness. It fitted closely, and was heavy. I could not begin to slip it. A ring was attached to it, and a chain was

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What was I now?

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I dared not conjecture, but knew.

The place where I was damp, and cold. I did not wish to be there. I did not want to be in such a place. I heard water dripping from somewhere, probably from the ceiling. I felt about, in the darkness. Near me, as I brushed aside straw, I discovered two shallow, bowl-like depressions in the floor. My fingers touched water in one. In the other there was something like a bit of damp meal, surely no more than a handful, and a curl of something, like a damp crust.

I lay back down, in the damp straw, on my right side. I pulled up my knees, and put my head on the back of my left hand.

I would certainly not drink from such a source, nor eat from such a place.

I pulled a little at the chain, that attached to the collar on my neck. I could feel the force, small as it was, transmitted through the chain, to the collar, the collar then drawing against the back of my neck.

Once footsteps passed, in what I supposed must be a corridor outside. I lay there, very quietly, not daring to move. I saw, for a moment, as the footsteps passed, a crack of light beneath the door. Until that time I did not know the location of the door. The light was some form of natural light, that of a candle, a lamp, a lantern, I did not know. As it passed I saw some of the straw on my side of the door. The door, as one could tell from the light, it revealing the thickness of the beams, was a heavy one. Also, along its bottom, reinforcing that portion of the door, one could detect a heavy, bolted band. It seemed likely, too, of course, that the door might be reinforced similarly at other points. These things, the light, the nature of the door, seemed to fit in well with the primitive confinements in which I found myself.

I then, trembling, put my head down again.

Perhaps, I thought, I should have called out, as someone, or something, had passed.

Of course, that is what must be done!

But when the steps returned, I was again absolutely quiet, terrified. As the steps passed, I did not even breathe. I remained absolutely still. I was frightened, even, that the metal on my body, in which I was so helpless, might make some tiny sound. I did not want, even by so small a sound, to attract attention to myself. It was not that I doubted that whoever, or whatever, was out there was well aware of where I was and how I was. It was merely that

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I had looked again at the wall.

I had heard voices, coming from the house. As swiftly as I could, wincing, hurting myself on the stones, I had withdrawn from the wall. It was my intention to circle about, through the shrubbery, and the trees of the garden, to the vicinity of the fountain.

“Stop,” I heard, a man’s voice.

Instantly I stopped, my heart sinking. I turned, of course, immediately, and fell to my knees, putting my head down to the lavender grass, as was its color here, in this portion of the garden, the palms of my hands down, too, on the grass, beside my head.

It was a man’s voice that had spoken.

I did not dare look, of course, upon he who had addressed me.

I had not received permission to do so.

But how could it have been a man’s voice?

How could it be, a man’s voice, here, in the garden, at this time of day?

Normally we vacate the garden when men enter it to work, as, for example, its gardeners. We are not for the eyes of such as those. And normally, if there are to be guests, if we are to entertain, information to that effect is issued to us hours in advance. We must, after all, have time to prepare ourselves. One must bathe. One must do one’s hair. There are silks, perfumes and jewelries to be considered. One must be made up, and so on. On the other hand, ironically, our appearance, achieved at such cost, with so much labor, and so much attention to detail, seems most often taken for granted by our guests. Often they scarcely seem to notice us, as we serve. To be certain, we are taught, in such situations, to be self-effacing, and to serve deferentially. Such things can be changed, of course, at so little as a word, or the snapping of fingers.

How could there be a man here, in the garden, at this time of day?

I kept my head down to the grass.

I had not been given permission to raise it.

Sometimes when men are to enter the garden, suddenly, or with little notice, such as guardsmen, say, in the line of duty, as in inspections or searches, a bar is rung, and we must find our body veils, and kneel, head down, and cover ourselves with them. Such veils are opaque. We are not, after all, for the eyes of just anyone.

But I was not now concealed in my body veil!

Who could this man be?





rarest of viands. I fell upon them, like a starving little animal. For a day or two then such slender provender made its appearance in the depression. I knew that I had lost weight. This would doubtless make some difference with respect to curves. But, more importantly, I think, I was learning to make do with what was given to me, and to be appreciative for it, whatever it might be. Too, of course, I had learned, and more keenly, and profoundly, than before, that I did not have control over my own food. I had learned that even for such a thing I was now dependent on another.

I awakened suddenly.

I thought that I heard a sound, outside.

I became instantly alert, frightened. There was a sound, outside! It came, I thought, from somewhere down the corridor, to the left.

I rose up, hurriedly, to my knees. I was wild, frightened. My chains made a noise.

I heard a door, heavy, grating, opening somewhere, away, to the left. I heard a voice. My heart almost stopped. I do not know what I expected. Perhaps I had feared that it would be merely an animal sound, not so much a voice, as a barking or growling. But it was a human voice.

I felt my body, quickly. I was frightened. I was unclothed. How much more slender seemed my body now!

I was frightened.

It was, you see, a man's voice.

I heard doors opened, on different sides of the corridor, it seemed, getting closer. I heard, now, more than one man's voice. Their tones seemed imperative, as though they would brook no question or delay. The voices themselves though clearly male, and human, seemed unlike those of men with whom I was familiar. I am not sure, precisely, in what the differences consisted. It may be merely that they spoke somewhat more loudly than the men I was accustomed to, for such things often vary culturally. But I think it was more than some possible difference in mere volume. Too, I do not think it had to do merely with an accent, though they surely had such, an accent which appeared distinctively, oddly, in words they uttered in various languages, languages some of which I could recognize, though I could not speak them, as the doors were opened, and which, on the other hand, seemed so natural, so apt, in their discourse among themselves. No, it was not really so much a matter of volume, or of accent, as of something else. Perhaps it was the lack of diffidence, the lack of apology, in their speech,

which struck me. Perhaps it was this sort of simple, natural assurance which most struck me. Too, in their tones, intelligent, clear, confident, forceful, it was not difficult to detect a simple unpretentious aspect of command. Indeed, in the tones of several, perhaps their leaders, there seemed something which might best be characterized as sort of natural, unassuming imperiousness. This made me terribly uncomfortable. How dare they speak like that? Who did they think they were? Men? Did they think they were men? This is, of course, "men" in a sense long since prohibited to, or abandoned by, the males with which I was familiar. And could they be really such men? And, if so, what consequences might that entail for one such as my self? How could one such as I, given what I was, possibly relate to such creatures? In what modalities, on what conditions, would it be possible to do so?

I put my hands about my body, again. I was much more slender now. I could tell, even in the darkness I had not been much fed.

The doors, opening, were coming closer now. They were heavy doors, doubtless like that on my chamber. That could be told from the sound of their opening.

Beneath my door now, visible in the crack between those heavy beams and the reinforcing iron band and the floor was a light. It was doubtless a dim light, but it seemed very bright to me, as I had been long in the darkness.

I heard a door across the way and a little to the left opened. I heard an imperious voice. Again I recognized the language, but could not speak it.

Then, a few moments later, I heard a key, large, and heavy, turned in the lock to my door.

I put up on my chained wrists, suddenly, frantically, wildly, and, as I could, on one side and then the other, fixed my hair.

As the door opened I covered myself as well as I could.

I winced against the light, and could not face it. It was only a lantern held high in the threshold, but I was temporarily blinded. I looked away, my hands over my body.

"Be absolutely silent," said a voice, a man's voice.

I would not have dared to make a sound.

"I see that you do not need to be instructed to kneel," he said.

I trembled.















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