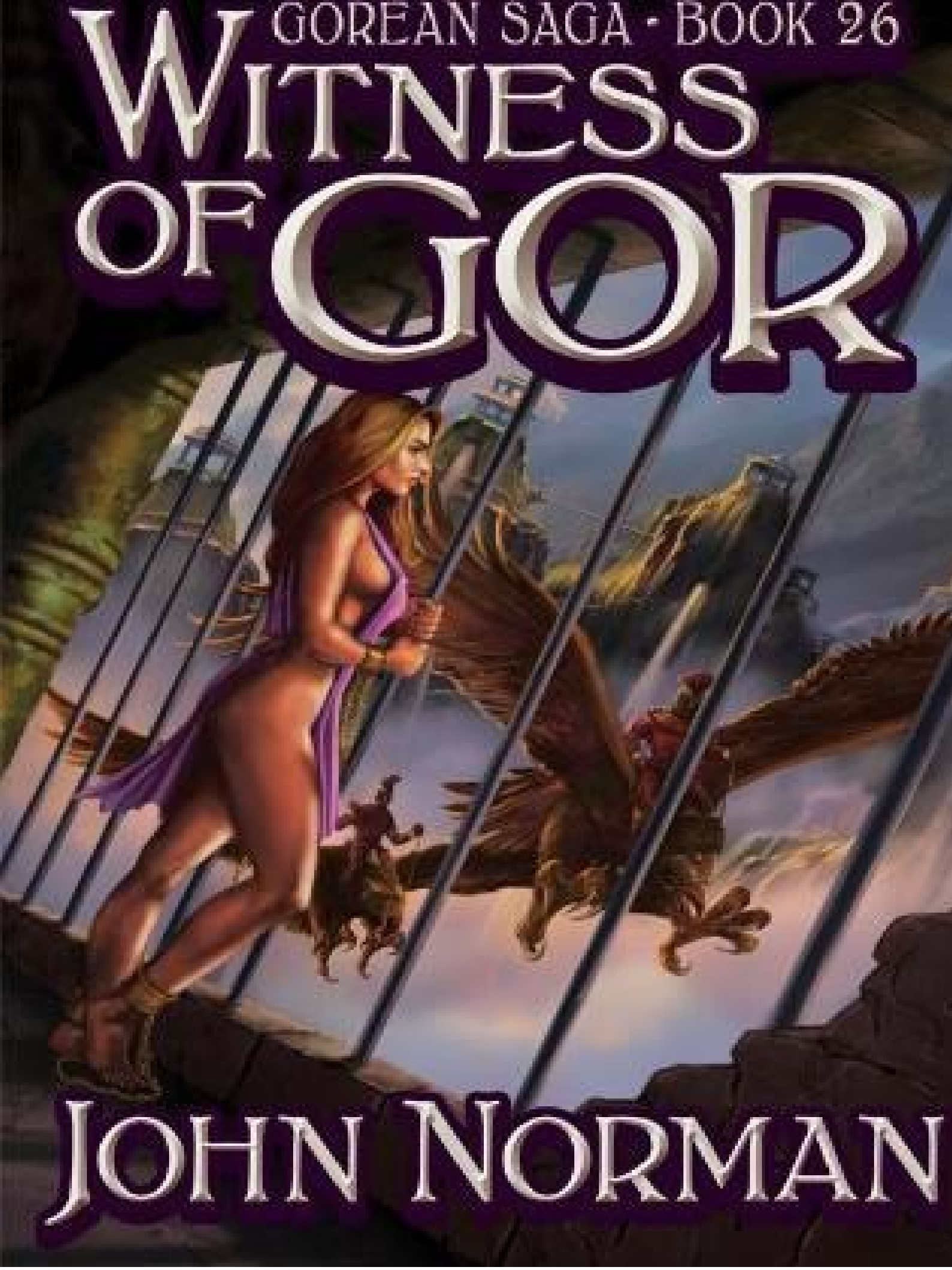
GOREAN SAGA · BOOK 26

WITNESS OF GOR



JOHN NORMAN

Witness of Gor

Gor 26

John Norman

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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 on 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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see was surmounted by incurved blades. I shuddered. Presumably some similar arrangement, perhaps outcurved blades, characterized its exterior side.

I moved the armlet on my left arm a bit higher on my arm. It was warm to the touch. Many of the others were resting. I looked about. I did not want anyone to see me near the wall. We were not to approach the wall. The sun was reflecting against the wall. The glare hurt my eyes. We were forbidde to cross the perimeter of the sharpened stones.

I wore a brief wisp of yellow silk, fastened at the left shoulder, my only garment. Two bracelets were on my right wrist. I did not mind the silk. Indeed, I was grateful for it. It had only been permitted to me a few days ago. Too, of course, as I have indicated, the weather was warm. I brushed back my hai I have brown hair, and brown eyes. My hair was now long. It was now below the small of my back. This is not untypical. Many of the others had hair even longer.

I looked again, at the wall, so smooth and sheer. It had a lovely pattern in its marbling, but this pattern, though the glare of the sun, could not be seen to its advantage. I looked up, again, at the lofty formidable height of the wall. The wall seemed very smooth. Surely no purchase could be gained there. And the wall was very high. And there were the knives at its summit.

Behind me, in the interior of the garden, I could hear the soft splashing of the fountain. It was set among the trees, and its spill fed into the pool.

I looked again at the wall.

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

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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 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 sens of other, for I found myself, and in a certain fashion, in this place, but this is not the same sort of thir as being important. I was no longer important. That is a strange feeling. It is not, of course, and I war 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, the not 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 my full consciousness, or had immediately forced it from my consciousness. Perhaps I had simply pu 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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attached to this ring, running, as I discovered, to another ring, fastened to a plate, apparently bolted into the wall.

My wrists were also confined. I wore metal cuffs, joined by some inches of chain. My ankles, by metal anklets, linked by a bit of chain, were similarly secured.

I crouched in the darkness, terrified.

I felt the collar again. It was closed by means of a heavy lock, part of the collar itself. It would thus, presumably, respond to a key. The cuffs and anklets, on the other hand, were quite different. They ha apparently been simply closed about my limbs, closed by some considerable force, perhaps that of a machine, or even, perhaps unthinkably primitive though it might seem, by the blows of a hammer on an anvil. They were of flat heavy strap like metal. They had no hinges. Perhaps they had begun as partly opened circles into which my limbs had been thrust, circles which had then been, by some means, closed about my limbs, confining them. They did not have hinges. There was no sign of a pla for the insertion of a key. They clasped me well. It would be impossible to remove them without tool I could thus be freed from the collar, and the wall, quite simply by means of the key. I could not be ri so simply, of course, of my other bonds. This suggested to me that I might be, in the near future, removed from this place, but that no similar indulgence might be expected with respect to my other bonds. I wondered who held the key to my collar. I suspected that it might be merely one of many keys, or, perhaps, a key to many similar locks. It would doubtless be held by a subordinate, or agent. The key to a collar such as mine, I suspected, would not be likely to be held personally by anyone of importance. The will by the rule of which, by the decision of which, I, and perhaps others, might be confined would doubtless be remote from the instrumentalities by means of which the dictates of tha will be enacted. As far as I knew I did not have any enemies, and I did not believe that I had ever, really, truly offended anyone. I suspected, accordingly, that what had happened to me was in its natu not personal, at all, but was, rather, objective and, in its way, perhaps quite impersonal. Accordingly, although I did not doubt that I was here because of something about me, perhaps because of some properties of other, and thusly, doubtlessly, for some reason, I did not think that the matter really had anything to do with me in a truly personal sense. I suspected it had to do rather with a kind, or a sort, of which kind, or sort, I was presumably an example.

What had become of me?

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What was I now?

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. 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 finger 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 thing the light, the nature of the door, seemed to fit in well with the primitive confinements in which I fou 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 eve breathe. I remained absolutely still. I was frightened, even, that the metal on my body, in which I wa so helpless, might make some tiny sound. I did not want, even by so small a sound, to attract attentio to myself. It was not that I doubted that whoever, or whatever, was out there was well aware of where was and how I was. It was merely that

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I did not want to draw attention to myself. I would later be taught ways in which it is suitable to draw attention to oneself, and ways in which it is not suitable to draw attention to oneself. On this occasion I am confident that my instincts were quite correct. Indeed, they have seldom, if ever, betrayed me.

I gasped with relief, as the steps passed.

To be sure, but a moment later, I again castigated myself, as having neglected this opportunity of inquiry or protest. Indeed, shortly after the steps had passed, I scrambled to my knees! I must be angry! I must pound upon the door! I must call out! I must insist upon attention! I must demand to see someone! I must demand release! I must bluster and threaten! I must attempt to confuse my jailers, and terrify them into compliance with my will! If necessary, I must appeal to undoubted legalities!

But I could not pound upon the door, of course. I could not even reach the door. I had not been chained in such a way as to make that possible. And I did not doubt but what that was no accident.

I struggled to my feet, bent over. I could not stand fully upright, because of the chain on my neck. I put my hand up. It touched the ceiling. I had not realized the ceiling was that low. I then lay down, again. I was alarmed, and dismayed. The area in which I was confined was not so much a cell, as something else. It was more in the nature of a kennel.

My mood, or fit, of indignation, or resolve, of protest, of momentary righteousness, of transitory belligerence, such a futile bellicosity, soon passed. Save for the sounds of a bit of chain it had been silent. I supposed I had thought I owed it to my background, or my conditioning program. To be sure I suspected that neither of these was likely to be particularly germane, or helpful, with respect to my current plight, or, more likely, condition. It was not merely that it seems somehow inappropriate, or silly, and likely to be ineffective, to adopt a posture of belligerence when has a chain on one’s neck, and cannot even stand upright. It was rather that, given my current situation, chained and confined as I was, it seemed to me that any such pleas, or demands, or such, would be absurd. Doubtless decisions had already been made, pertinent to me. Matters, in effect, like those of nature, had doubtless already been set in motion. If there had been a time when such threats, or protests, might have been effective it was doubtless long past. Too, I did not doubt, somehow, but what I was not the only one, such as myself, in this place. The chains, the ring, the depressions

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in the floor, the apparently small, close, nature of the area of my confinement, the incomprehensibili of my being here, except perhaps as one of a group, perhaps similar to myself, all suggested this. Let others, if they wish, I thought, adopt such postures. For myself, not only did I not find them congenia given my nature, but, too, I was afraid, distinctly, that they might not be found acceptable, unless perhaps, very briefly, at the beginning, as a source for amusement. Too, I considered the nature of legalities. One tends, if naïve, to think of those legalities with which one is most familiar as being somehow the only ones possible. This view, of course, is quite mistaken. This is not to deny that all civilizations, and cultures, have their customs and legalities. It is only to remark that they need not b the same. Indeed, the legalities with which I was most familiar, as they stood in contradiction to nature, constituted, I supposed, in their way, an aberration of legalities. They are, at the least, uncharacteristic of most cultures, and historically untypical. To be sure, if the intent is to contradict nature rather than fulfill her, there was doubtless much point to them. Thusly, that they produced human pain and social chaos, with all the miseries attendant thereupon, would not be seen as an objection to them but rather as the predictable result of their excellence in the light of their objective But not all legalities, of course, need have such objectives. As I lay there in the darkness, in my chains, and considered the factuality and simplicity of my predicament, and the apparently practical and routine aspects of my helplessness and incarceration, I suspected that my current situation was n at all likely to be in violation of legalities. Rather I suspected it was in full and conscious accord wit them. I suspected that I was now, or soon would be, enmeshed in legalities. To be sure, these would b different legalities from those with which I was most familiar. These would be, I suspected, legalitie founded not on politics, but biology.

I was now very hungry. But I would not, of course, drink from a depression in the floor, nor soil my lips with whatever edible grime might be found in an adjacent depression.

I was cold, and helpless.

If it would be stupid, or absurd, as I suspected, if not dangerous, to pretend to a belligerent stance, to protest, or threaten, or to appeal to legalities, the purport of which might well be aligned precisely against one, then perhaps, I thought, one might appeal to the pity, the mercies, of one’s captors. Coul one not plead with them, armed in all the vulnerable panoply of one’s tears, of one’s

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utter helplessness and need? Could one not beg them for mercy? Might one not even consider, in such a ~~desperate predicament, the almost unthinkable option of kneeling before them, and lifting one~~'s hands to them? Might one not, in such desperate straits, dare even to assume that posture, one so natural, so apt, to supplication? And might not one even cry, or pretend to? Surely they could not resist so piteous a spectacle. Surely, considering one's weakness, and presumed power of one's captors, this would be an endeavor more likely of success than the utterance of empty threats, of meaningless protests, the enunciation of futile demands.

I would not drink here, nor eat here.

I did not think, really, given the fact that I was here, the presumed methodically of my arrival in this place, the presumably routine manner of my incarceration, the nature of my cell, or kennel, suggesting that it was not unique, that my presence here would not be its first occupancy not its last, the unlikelihood that there was anything special about me, the probability that I was only one of several such as myself, that my pleas would move my captors.

I changed my position several times.

It is hard to comprehend such realities, the darkness, the dampness, the stones, the walls, the wet straw, its smell, the collar, the chains, the not being clothed.

There was some sense of security, oddly, just being on the chain.

I did not speculate that I might have gone insane. The chain was too real.

In time I went to my belly and put my mouth down, and lapped the water in the shallow depression beside me. Then, a little later, I reached into the other shallow depression and withdrew the damp crust there, and fed on it. Too, in a moment, I addressed myself to the small bit of meal in the same container. Later, with my finger, I carefully, methodically, wiped out the inside of the depression, that I might not miss whatever last, tiny, wet particles of meal might adhere there. They had suddenly become very precious. As I liked these gratefully from my finger, these few particles, such tiny, damp things, I realized that what I was fed, and when I was fed, and in what amounts, and, indeed, literally, even if I was fed, was now up to another. This is a very frightening thing to understand.

I lapped again a bit of water, and then wiped my mouth with the back of my hand.

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I rolled to my back.

I looked up, into the darkness.

I bent my knees. I put my chained wrists over my head. I could feel the chain there, behind me, leading up to the ring on the wall from my collar.

I was not strong, or powerful. I was not strong enough, even, let alone powerful, for the sort of creature I was. What, I wondered, then, could be the meaning of the chains I wore. Perhaps in them, I speculated, was a lesson. Oh, to be sure, they confined me. They kept me in a place. I could not rush a the door, if it were opened. I could not run. I could not use my hands freely. They might keep me fro being something of a nuisance, I supposed, particularly at the beginning, if I were so inclined, or became difficult or hysterical. But their primary reason I suspected had less to do with security than something else. That they were on me, that I was in them and helplessly so, I suspected might be intended, particularly at this time, to be instructive. Let me begin to be familiarized with chains, let me being to become accustomed to them. Let me learn, too, in this graphic, profound fashion, what I had become, what I now was. I supposed that later, too, such as I might find ourselves chained. But then, I supposed, apart from practical matters, such as security, and mnemonic considerations, and such, that that might be regarded as much a matter of appropriateness as anything else. I, and perhaps others, were such as to be appropriately chained. That was the sort we were. To be sure, beyond such things, there is no doubt as to the effectiveness of chains. They hold us, perfectly.

I rolled to my side.

I considered the simple, meager fare. What was I, I wondered, that such stuff had been deemed suitable for me. Too, I again considered the chains. What was I, I wondered, that I wore such?

I dared not conjecture, but knew.

I drew up my legs, and put my hands on my shoulders, huddling, making myself small in the damp straw.

I was cold.

The corridor was quiet outside.

I lay very quiet.

One feels some comfort, and security, perhaps oddly enough, in such a situation, being on one’s chai

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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?

I was in light silk. It was extremely brief, and was, for most practical purposes, diaphanous. Certainly it left little doubt as to my lineaments.

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I do not know how long I lay in the darkness. Sometimes I slept I did not know what time it was, wha day.

Indeed, I suspected that I would not be familiar even with the calendar.

Once or twice some meal, and another crust, was placed in the shallow depression beside me. This wa done while I slept. No longer did I permit it to linger there. I devoured it, gratefully, eagerly.

But for a long time now there had been nothing more in the depression. The depression for the water, like a sunken bowl, was replenished from a slender, flat trickle of water. I could feel it with my finge It was more than a dampness. That trickle, I assumed, had its origin elsewhere in the darkness. It derived, doubtless, from the water which, as I could hear, slowly, drop by drop, fell into the chamber perhaps from the ceiling, perhaps from some pipe or ledge. The water bowl did have a tiny run-off which might carry excess fluid away, presumably toward some drain, but the amount of water was so small in the bowl, and took such time to accumulate, that the run-off was not used. I learned to conserve the water, my tongue even licking the rough bottom of the depression.

But there had been no more meal, or crusts, of late, in the food depression.

I was ravening.

I wondered if my captors had forgotten about me. I wondered if I had been left here to die.

I mustered the courage to call out, piteously. “I am hungry,” I called. “Please feed me. Please! I am hungry!”

But I doubted that anyone heard. There seemed to be no one about.

I pulled on the chains. They held me well.

How helpless I was!

I was ravening. I was ready to do anything, just to eat.

Then, again, perhaps a day later, when I awakened, I found a bit of meal, and a crust, in the depressio It might have been the

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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 ha learned, and more keenly, and profoundly, than before, that I did not have control over my own food. 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 almos 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 tha 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 matte of volume, or of accent, as of something else. Perhaps it was the lack of diffidence, the lack of apology, in their speech,

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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.

“You already know what posture to assume in the presence of a male,” he said. “Excellent.”

I squirmed a little, being so before a man. I fought the sensations within me.

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He laughed.

I blushed.

“Put your head to the floor,” he said.

I obeyed, immediately. There were tears in my eyes, from the light, you understand.

He entered the chamber.

The lantern, now in the care of another fellow, remained mercifully by the door. It was easy to tell its position, as its light was clear, even though my closed eyelids.

The fellow crouched down beside me. “Remain still,” he said. “Do not look at me.”

With the pain of the light I would not have wished to look at anything.

He threw my hair forward. I felt a key thrust into the lock on my collar, and then, in a moment, for th first time in how long I knew not, that confining metal band, close-fitting, sturdy and inflexible, with its chain, attached to the ring on the wall, was no longer on my neck. I was no longer chained to the wall!

I kept my head down, of course. I did not move. I did not look at him. I did not make a sound.

I then felt his hand in my hair. I winced as he drew me up, forcibly, to all fours. He also, almost at th same time, keeping me on all fours, pushed my head down. I was then on all fours, with my head facing the floor. He did not do these things gently. I was handled, and positioned, as though I might b no more than an animal.

“You will keep this position,” he said, “until you receive permission to change it. Now, go to the corridor, where you will be appropriately placed, aligned and instructed.”

I shuddered.

“Keep your head down,” he said. “Do not look at us.”

I fell, so frightened I was, trying to comply, caught up in the chains. I lay there for an instant, in terro unable to move, feeling so exposed to him. My whole back felt terribly vulnerable. I was afraid, even then, even knowing as little as I did at the time, that he might not be pleased, and that I might be struck, or kicked. But he saw fit, at that time, at least, to show me patience. I regained the position and, slowly, carefully, my limbs trembling, crawled from the chamber. One may hasten on all fours, so chained, but it is much easier, of course, to move in a measured manner, bit by bit. It is not difficult, incidentally, to crawl on all fours in chains, even those such as I wore. It is just a matter of moving within their limitations.

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I was to be appropriately placed, aligned, and instructed.

Outside the chamber I could see little but the stone flagging of the corridor hall. I was aware of the proximity of two or three men. I did not look up. They wore heavy bootlike sandals. One of them reached down and took me by the upper left arm, and guided me to a position in the center of the corridor. My body was then aligned with the long axis of the corridor. With respect to the interior of my chamber, I was facing left.

I heard other doors opening behind me, one by one, and heard the voices, in various languages.

I remained as I was, not daring to change my position in the least degree.

I was yet, it seemed, to be instructed.

I realized then, only fully comprehending it for the first time, one takes such things so for granted, that the voice which had addressed me had done so in my own language.

Other doors opened, father down the hall, behind me.

Patterns of light moved about on the stones, the consequence, I suppose, of the movements of lantern

He had had an accent, of course. Whereas it is surely possible to speak a language which one has not

learned in one's childhood without an accent, it is, as one might suppose, unusual. One's speech ~~generally tends to retain a foreign flavor. Sometimes that the tongue one speaks is not native to~~ one i revealed by so little as an occasional slip in pronunciation, say, the shifting treatment of a consonant, perhaps under conditions of stress, such as anger, or fear. He had made no attempt, as far as I could tell, to disguise an accent. That his speech might be intelligible to me was, perhaps, quite sufficient for him. I could not place the language these men spoke among themselves. It was no language I knew, nor even one I could recognize. Yet, oddly, it seemed sometimes reminiscent of other languages, which, to one degree or another, if only by sound, I was familiar with. At times I even thought I detected a word I knew. To be sure, similar sounds need not mean similar words. A given sound might have many meanings, and quite different meanings.

I kept my head down.

My eyes were now becoming adjusted to the light.

The only source of light in the corridor, as far as I could tell, was that carried by various men, which source I supposed was lanterns. Without that light the corridor, as far as I could tell,

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would have been totally dark. The corridor itself, I supposed, would be sealed off by some door or gate. Even if I had been able to get loose from my collar, that by means of which I had been fastened to the wall of my chamber, even if I had been able, somehow to get though the heavy door which kep me in my chamber, I would, I supposed, have soon encountered another barrier, that which, presumably, closed the corridor. Too, as the corridor was in utter darkness, as soon as a lantern was lifted in it, I would have been rendered temporarily blind, and totally at the mercy of whoever had entered.

From the point of view of most, I suppose, the corridor would have counted as being, at best, only dimly lighted, but, as such things tend to be relative, it seemed, by contrast, well illuminated to me.

I was aware of a fellow standing near me. He had the heavy bootlike sandals, as did the others. Other than the sandals, his legs were bare. He wore a tunic, or something like that. I did not understand his mode of dress. It was totally unlike things with which I was familiar. I did not think I knew this place This place, I thought, is very different from what I am used to. His legs were sturdy. I found them frightening, and disturbing. What place is this, I asked myself. It is so different from places with which I am familiar. I am not in my own culture, I thought. This is not my culture. I thought. This is

different culture. This may be a quite different culture. Things may be quite different here.

And my speculations, as I would soon learn, would prove correct, profoundly correct.

Then the man moved away.

But another, in short time, paused near me.

I was much aware of him, but, of course, I kept my head down. He was, it seemed, like the other, larg and strong. I found his presence disturbing, as I had found that of the other.

The culture here, though quite different from my own, I thought, seems all of a piece. Things seem to fit, the nature of my incarceration, the simplicity of things, the architecture, the mode of dress, the iron on my wrists and angles.

I kept my head down.

What place was this? How had I come here? Surely I did not belong here! But then I trembled. Perhaps, I thought, the thought terrifying me, this is where I belong. Perhaps I was not where I

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belonged before. Perhaps this is exactly where I belong.

The fellow beside me moved away.

The last door had now apparently been opened. I heard no more of them being opened.

I lifted my head the tiniest bit. I saw small ankles before me, joined by chain, as mine were. I was on one in a line. I was then, I conjectured, as I had suspected. I was here as a result of selections, based upon some criterion or other. The matter was objective, not personal. It was not that I had offended someone and that my plight had been accordingly engineered for someone’s amusement, or that it constituted perhaps, in its way, some sweet tidbit of revenge, one perhaps of many such, the subjects of which, left here, might later be dismissed from mind, and, in time, forgotten. No, the matter was impersonal. My position here was not a consequence of who I was, but, rather, of something else, perhaps of what I was. The primary reason I was here was, I supposed, because I was of a certain sort or kind. But what sort, or kind, could that be? I did not know. I looked at the ankles before me, and th

anklets, so close about them. Some of the links of chain between the anklets rested on the stones. I supposed that the metal on my own anklets, though I had not seen it in the light, was the same, or similar. Certainly there would be no reason for it to be different. No, there was nothing unique or special than characterized the others in the line. It extended before me and, doubtless, behind me. Ho many were in it I did not know. There had been several doors opening and closing. Perhaps, I conjectured, there might be fifty of us in this line. There were several in front of me, and doubtless several, given the doors opening and closing, behind me. I thought I might be about two thirds of the way back in the line. Those before me and behind me, as nearly as I could tell, from the languages which had been addressed to them, did not speak my language, or, indeed, one another's language. O placement in line, I suspected, might not be a matter of chance. I did not think that we had a languag in common, as yet.

I heard the tread of those heavy sandals approaching. I put down my head, even lower. Then they passed.

I, and doubtless the others, had been forbidden to look upon our captors. This was very unsettling to me. I wondered why this was. Yet I was, also, afraid to look upon them. I did not know what I would see. Why do they not wish us to look upon them, I wondered. Can their aspects be so terrible, or hideous, I wondered.

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Perhaps they are disfigured. I thought. Perhaps they are not truly human, I feared. Perhaps they are animals! I did not want to be eaten! But I did not think they were animals. And I doubted that I woul have been brought here to be eaten. Certainly I had not been fattened. Rather, given the meager diet t which I had been subjected, my figure had been excellently trimmed. This suggested an entirely different theory as to what might be one of my major values in such a place. To be sure, terribly frightened, I thrust this very thought immediately from my head. It was too terrible to even consider.

I then heard, the sound frightening to me, from back, near what must be the end of the line, the sound of several coils of chain thrown to the flooring.

"Steady," said a voice near me.

I heard other utterances, too, before me, and behind me, soft, soothing utterances, in other languages. Their import was perhaps similar.

“Steady, little vulo,” said the voice.

I was very still. I did not know what a “vulo” was, of course.

I could hear the chain approaching, slowly, pausing briefly by each item in the line, its links moving against one another. Too, shortly after each pause, there was a clear click, as of the meshing and fastening of metal. After a time, it was quite close, only a few feet behind me.

I considered leaping up, running.

But I would only have fallen, miserably.

I was shackled.

Too, where would one run?

Most importantly, I knew that I would not have dared to leap up and run, even if I were not where and as I was. Only a fool, I thought, and understood, even at the time, would be so stupid as to disobey men such as these, in the even the smallest way.

I looked to my right, and before me. I could see the shadow there, on the floor, of the man who had spoken to me, it flung before him by some source of illumination, presumably a lantern such as I had seen earlier. He was clearly in a tunic, of some sort. Even in the shadow he seemed large, formidable. He, personally, was behind me, and to my left. He was carrying something in his right hand, which I could see in the shadow coils of something, the coils stretched out, distorted somewhat, like the silhouette itself. I did not know what the coils might be. I suppose it was obvious but I did not even consider it at the time. Too, if I had

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known more of where I was, I would have found his mere location, behind me and to my left, a source of considerable apprehension. “Steady, little tasta,” he said, soothingly. I did not know what a “tasta” might be. I had heard the expression ‘tasta’, and ‘vulo’, and others, used elsewhere by these men along the side of the line, ingredient among locutions in various languages. Such words, ‘vulo’ and ‘tasta’, I gathered, were words in their own language. We, of course, would not know their meaning.

Suddenly I heard, beside me, the rattle of a chain, and before I could think of reacting, had I even dared, a metal collar had been placed about my neck and snapped shut. It, like the collar in the chamber, fitted closely. This was one collar, apparently, of a large number of such collars, for I could

see the lower loops of a long chain, one interspersed with such collars, before me. In a moment what was ~~before me was also in a collar. Then the chain and collars were being taken forward, again.~~ The fellow who had been behind me now passed me, on my left. I suddenly then saw the lower loops of what he had been carrying. There was no mistaking it now, no way to misinterpret its appearance. I gasped, and almost fainted.

It was a whip!

After a time two new chains were brought forward, each attached, in turn, down the line, so that, in th end, one long chain was formed.

We waited, those of us already attended to, heads down, on all fours.

Then the last of us, the first in the line, was on the chain.

We were all on the chain.

They then began to speak to us, in various languages. In mine I heard, “Kneel in the following fashio keeping your head down. Kneel back on your heels, with your knees widely spread. Keep your back straight. Hold your shoulders back. Keep your hands back, and to the sides. The chain on your manacles is to be tight against your waist.”

I gathered that our “instruction,” now that we had been “placed and aligned,” had begun.

Men passed down the line, adjusting positions here and there. When one approached me I drew my hands back as far as I could, to the sides, at my waist, given the length of chain that joined my metal wristlets. I could feel the links of the chain deeply in my flesh. I forced my knees as far apart as I could manage.

“Good,” said the man, and continued on, down the line.

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In time it seemed that we were all in the position desired.

Again the voices spoke, in diverse languages. In my own language, I heard, “Your heads are bowed in submission. Your bellies are under the chain.”

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