

The Warrior's Twilight

The black flesh-like pad of the gryphon's massive toe enveloped the face of the defeated warrior. Warm and soft, but no softness could ever alleviate the pressure being felt by the little human under that comparatively massive foot. He could also feel pulsing—whether from their own quickening heartbeat or the twitching of the powerful foot muscles, he could no longer tell. All he could hear was the grinding of that foot against the dirt... and him. Humiliated and beaten to the core, the warrior could do nothing but wait for the end.

The fine specimen of a warrior, in all his well-toned and dashing glory, had been sought out by a Count for a "special task." Many times, the warrior taken to bounty hunting. What better way to make it rich than to do what one loves and get paid for it, especially when all who hired him caved so easily to his demands? Money, drink, a night with the one who hired him, he always got what he wanted, and rarely was there resistance. This time, however, the job was different.

When the Count asked if he had heard of the one they call "Dannik," the warrior's eyes widened in surprise, then narrowed.

"I have. The rider of the Burning Chariots. A god among some, a demon among others, beloved, despised, respected and feared."

"And do you believe he's a god," the Count asked, to which the warrior sneered. "No," he replied, "if he's flesh and blood, he can't be a deity." He paused.

The Count looked directly in his eyes and said, "Because I want this gryphon, this blight that dares to call himself a god, eliminated. For far too long he has lorded his superiority over my people, my land... but worse still, when he deemed me 'not important enough to be graced by his presence.' Stand me up at my own negotiation, will you? The gryphon may drive the Chariots, but money and the sword still rule in my land. If he appears before us, he is flesh and blood, and therefore he must be reminded of that."

After discussing the matter further, learning of where Dannik was last seen and where he might visit, the warrior took the job. With some hesitation. He had faced many fierce opponents on the battlefield and on the hunt, but for some reason, this job awoke within the warrior something he hadn't felt in years. Fear. He had a bad feeling about this, something no other target had given him. Still, the money was quite good, and he enjoyed the idea of being feared as a slayer of a supposed god, and after his usual bout of negotiation for higher pay than what was offered, the warrior set off.

Many days later, after searching many areas in vain, following leads, sleeping with some of the leads, and a great deal of lost patience later, the warrior finally found the spot where he would confront Dannik. The spot that would ultimately determine his fate.

Outside a small, quiet village, mountains sprawled all across the horizon, their bases all covered with trees. A few clearings dotted the spaces between woods, and the only sounds that could be heard from these spots was the muffled activity from the village and the occasional wandering animal. The sun was getting low in the sky, turning the white clouds into wondrous, vibrant colors. In one of the clearings, the warrior stood, looking down towards the village. Here was where he would meet his target, as it was, according to the last lead, the anniversary of the day Dannik brought this village the food and water they so desperately needed. One of a few similar tales the warrior had heard about him. Worthless peasants, he thought. Hoping someone else will fix their problem because they're too weak and stupid to fix it themselves. As he was musing and sneering, he heard a smooth, deep voice behind him.

"Breathtaking view, isn't it?" The warrior spun around, sword drawn, shocked that anyone could have snuck up on him like this. Then his eyes widened. There he was, the tan-legged, white-coated gryphon himself. Wearing nothing more than a toga tied with a red sash, wings closed in behind his back, he was simply resting upon a boulder with one leg up. Despite the warrior's stance, the gryphon never even flinched. His eyes were set upon the village. A calm, strangely peaceful smile upon his orange beak.

A god? Why, this beast is no larger than myself, thought the warrior. He readied his stance, prepared to attack. And yet... he couldn't break his hesitation. There was something that compelled him to listen.

"One might get lost in the beauty of this place, if they weren't already getting lost in my good looks." He chuckled and continued, "It wasn't always like this, you know. A drought wracked this very place, and others, many ages ago, turning a paradise into a near wasteland. Many dead, dying, begging for someone to save them... I heard them. I rode my Chariot to another town before this one, but to do that here might have turned it all to ash, so I used my wings instead. A sweet woman from here told me I might be the only reason they didn't all die out. That I had turned it into their paradise."

Dannik finally turned his head to look upon the warrior and continued, "When they looked upon me, seeing what I had brought them, they bowed. They thanked me for freeing them from such a tragedy. The look in their eyes, the joy in their hearts, the sheer overwhelming need to fall to your knees? To be worshiped as a god in return for a good deed means more than the world to me..." His smile turned into a slight sneer. "...and is certainly worth more than any scoundrel's coin."

In his mind, the warrior was puzzled. This imposter, this one who dared to be above all men, to be a deity... he wasn't what the warrior expected. There was something about him, a certain aura that, unlike all the previous kills, compelled the warrior to listen. Dannik was indeed splendid in form, as he had been told, and his voice was most soothing to hear, even from another male, but allure and charms had never worked on the warrior before. Why now, he asked himself. What is it that makes me hesitate?

"I know why you're here. You would come here to slay me. And yet... you hesitate. Perhaps... there is a reason for this."

The gryphon rose, approaching slowly. Each step a graceful glide as if he were slowly dancing across the ground, flowing toward the warrior. As he neared, the warrior snapped out of it, and made a move to attack. SWISH!

To no avail. Dannik had dodged with a speed the warrior had never encountered before, and now stood to his side.

"What... hmph. Lucky dodge, but your luck will run out. Your reign ends here, abomination! My name is—"

"Your name doesn't matter anymore."

Again, the warrior attacked. SWISH. A miss. SWISH, another swing of the sword. And another. SWISH, SWISH, SWISH. Each time the gryphon dodged. The smile never left his face.

THUNK. The sword landed on a rock. The blade was sharp enough to slice through most of it. As the warrior pulled it out, WHAM! Dannik had slammed into the warrior, knocking him back several feet. The warrior grunted loudly but kept his balance as he slid. The gryphon gave a sneering smile as he spoke.

"What's wrong? Have I overestimated your ability?"

"YOU COWARD!!! FIGHT ME IF YOU'RE MAN ENOUGH!!!"

"But I'm not a man, am I?" Another swing, another dodge. "We both know what I am, even if you try to deny it. Even now, as you fruitlessly try to slay me, I sense your admiration. Your awe. Your... longing."

Dannik's words, his silky voice, his agility, his form... even as the warrior failed to strike him over and over, he simply felt more drawn in. Anger clouding his mind, but in his heart, he struggled to deny that he was in awe of him. Struggled to ignore the peaceful aura that emanated from this creature. This... NO, he thought. HE IS NOT A GOD!

"Hrgh... You bastard... You are my enemy, SO YOU WILL DIE!!!"

Once more he lunged. This time, the gryphon did not dodge. He stretched out his hand, and the blade made contact with the palm... but unlike with the rock, this time, it did not cut through! Grunting and growling, the warrior tried to force the blade down. Then, CRACK. Dannik had closed his fist entirely. The blade was shattered. The tip and all the shards fell to the ground as Dannik opened his hand. In a single instant, all of the warrior's confidence had been shaken. So much so that he couldn't even dodge the kick that THUNKED on his chest.

“ACK!!!” The warrior winced as he fell to the ground and slid back a few feet, slamming his head right into the rock that Dannik had first sat upon. What would’ve otherwise been something he could shake off, this had left him completely dazed. As he tried to recover, WHAM! His head was pushed on the rock and he couldn’t move. Though winded, he could tell Dannik was pinning his head with his foot. He could only see a bit of the gryphon as his head was turned, but he could also tell that gryphon was doing so with no effort, arms folded in his fluffy chest. The foot itself was warm and surprisingly soft, but Dannik’s strength and power could be felt through its weight.

“I win,” he said in a singsong voice.

With a laugh, the gryphon began grinding his foot on the human’s head, rubbing side to side as if his face were a doormat. Embarrassment burned through the human’s cheeks as he turned very red. The gryphon’s humiliation seemed to last an eternity. At last, the foot lifted off, but as the warrior started to turn—WHAM, the other foot came up and pinned him, once again wiping and rubbing on the warrior’s face. The smile never left the gryphon.

“Can it be that I have broken more than just your weapon? How amusing—for all of your supposed might, you’re no match for even a sliver of my power.” The warrior’s face turned somehow even more red. WHAT!? Was this only...

Before he could even finish the thought, the foot left his face, and the gryphon grabbed him by his chest plate, holding him up close and forcing him to look into his eyes. He tried to shut them and look away, blushing in humiliation, but then he felt the other hand grabbing his face and turning his head back.

“No,” said the gryphon calmly. “You will look into my eyes, you will know I have beaten you, and you will accept your defeat.” Struggling did no good. Dannik’s grip was too strong. Tired from fighting and struggling, the warrior slowly opened his eyes.

Dannik had him now. Physically, and now in spirit. The gryphon’s eyes pierced into the warrior’s soul, and now the warrior couldn’t close his eyes even if he wanted to. Dannik’s gaze was... strangely intoxicating. His body exuded might, but a strange feeling of peace radiated from his eyes. The sneer was gone from his smile.

“That’s it,” he whispered, “gaze upon me, get lost in my eyes, and accept that I am the victor. There’s no shame in losing to me, after all.”

The gryphon opened up the chest plate, began stripping the armor off piece by piece and tossing them away, then finally let go of the undressed warrior. Nothing but the undergarments were left upon him. The first instinct would’ve been to attack, but the warrior was so tired, so broken, that he simply fell to his knees. The anger was still within him, the pride, the stubbornness... but what could he do but look down in defeat?

He couldn't move. He couldn't speak. He couldn't do anything but hang his head in shame. As he looked down, he stared upon the gryphon's feet. A silver ring upon the inner middle toes of each. The gryphon chuckled and flexed his toes as the warrior stared.

"Eager to look upon them now, are we? Enjoying the sight of the feet that put you in your place?"

The warrior could only turn red in response. And yet... yes, he did want to look upon them.

"What... is happening," the warrior asked, breathless.

At that, Dannik lifted his foot and pushed it into the naked warrior's face, but this time he did so gently. He lightly but firmly forced the warrior on his back, resting that powerful foot upon his face. The heat of the human's breath against the soft sole made it even warmer. Now the warrior was looking up into the black paw pads of... wait, he thought, is it... no... yes, he's... growing! All hope of escape was now gone from his mind.

Dannik was indeed growing. He looked down and, with his increasingly booming but still somehow soft voice, said, "I know the truth. You hide what you really are inside. You seek selfish and shallow things to bury that side of you and pretend you're something you're not. You harm people and force your will upon others because you're scared of feeling... small. But you ARE small. Wretched. Pathetic. But... this is not all there is to you. Perhaps I can make you into what you were always meant to be, undo the damage you have wrought upon yourself. I will do away with you, 'warrior,' and you shall begin a new, better life."

As Dannik spoke, he continued to grow. Now, the foot that had covered the warrior's face was bigger than his chest. His torso. Finally, the growth stopped, and a single toe enveloped the warrior's face as the rest of the sole covered the warrior's body. The warrior could not move, all the pressure that was surely little to the gryphon god was immeasurably heavy by the human's standards. He could feel pulsing—whether from their own quickening heartbeat or the twitching of the powerful foot muscles, he could no longer tell. All he could hear now was the grinding of the foot against the dirt... and him.

"This," the gryphon said, "is how the warrior's life ends."

Ultimately beaten now, knowing there was nothing he could do, the warrior closed his eyes and waited for the end under that soft, warm sole. Under the sole of... the gryphon god, Dannik... so ends my life as a warrior, he thought as he anticipated the snuff.

But it never came.

Suddenly, all the pressure was gone. The foot had lifted off his little body. He gasped for breath and sat up. Dannik's foot was before him. He looked around, then at his body, and gasped as if taking his first breath.

He was completely naked before the god. But rather than embarrassment, he simply felt curious. The feelings of anger, defeat and despair were gone, his mannerisms were entirely different from before. He looked up at the magnificent gryphon god and asked, "What's happened?"

The smiling gryphon knelt down, a massive finger coming for the human. He flinched and braced, expecting to be crushed, but the human only felt the softest brush upon his chest. Dannik held his large finger up to the human, lifting his chin with the gentlest touch. His silky-smooth voice once again rang in his ears, the most heartwarming of smiles on his face.

"You've let go of everything you were not, and in accepting what I am to you, allowed my power to replace it. Little one, you were never meant to be my enemy. Now, it's time for you to take your place as my servant. But don't you fret—as my servant, you will be well cared for. You will have everything you need, and you will be far greater than any so-called 'warrior.' And you will be safe. Nobody will harm you as long as I'm around. All you must do is serve me well. A small, and even enjoyable price to pay, is it not?"

The human watched as the gryphon sat down, leaned back, and presented the padded sole before him. Now he could see the entirety of the mighty sole laid bare; sharp claws upon the toes, pads upon them, as well as the ball and heel, separated by the tan fur of the arch. A wondrous sight indeed.

Without needing to be told, instinctually, the human walked to the sole and touched it. He let out a sigh of wonder as his hand caressed the foot, the sheer power resonating from it left him in absolute awe. The gryphon chuckled and said, "You're already showing promise, little one. Now, kiss my divine heel!"

Without hesitation, the human kneeled down and kissed it. Warm feelings washed all throughout his body. It felt... right. He kissed it again. Then he stood and hugged the large, wide sole as much as he could, nuzzling the soft, warm ball pad and panting happily. Thoughts of his old life were fading, the anger and pain from the loss being replaced with a feeling of calm.

"See? I knew you'd enjoy this. I think you will be a wonderful servant, little one. Now, repeat after me. 'I cast off my old life...'"

The human repeated, "I cast off my old life..."

"...to serve his greatness, Lord Dannik..."

“...to serve his greatness, Lord Dannik...”

“...in every way he desires...”

“...in every way he desires...”

“...and in doing so I shall know peace and happiness under him.”

“...and in doing so I shall know peace and happiness under him.”

Upon finishing the recital, the human felt something form upon his neck. A collar. And then the chain materialized before the human, leading to the massive toe ring. Firmly on him but not uncomfortably so, a soft material cushioned his neck. The human was not bothered by this. What would've caused distress before, now made him quite happy. His blushing was one of joy, not despair.

“Welcome to your new life, my servant.”

Upon hearing this, the human let out a sigh of content. It all really did feel so much better than his life before.

My life before, he thought, hanging his head slightly.

“My Lord... I... I thank you for what you've given me... And... I'm... I'm sorry for... for everything that I—

Before he could finish, the gryphon pushed his foot down, gently touching a toe to the servant's face.

“Shhh. Do not trouble yourself with that, little one. You're here now, where you belong. That's all that matters.”

With that, the gryphon blew the little servant a kiss. The human smiled in relief, and hugged and kissed his toe in response, to which the god once again chuckled softly. Then the human looked around and realized the sun had just finished setting, and night was about to fall. One day had ended, but a new and better day was on its way, brought about by his gryphon deity, Lord Dannik.