

**DAUGHTER OF SPARTA:
CHAPTER THREE**

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CHAPTER THREE

On her way to the Temple where Phoebe lived, Gorgo passed by the agora, a marketplace right outside the walled acropolis. Though early, the village was awake and active. Shopkeepers were beginning to set up their stands and put out their wares. Household helots were starting to pick through the goods and haggle over prices.

Gorgo didn't have a hemiobol with her to purchase breakfast, and she ignored her growling stomach and tried not to think about the comforting aroma of freshly baked breads and sweet figs that drew her into the gathering crowd of shoppers.

As she entered the main gates, she spotted Elissa, a helot from her household, plucking purple grapes at a nearby stand. Elissa's mousey face darted forward as she chirped at the vendor about the lack of quality in today's selection. She was dressed like all women in the village in a simple, short chiton and sandals. Unlike Gorgo however, she wore a leather cap, signifying her slave status. She bounced along the line of merchants stopping to gossip with another helot at a stand selling fluffy batts of wool that could be spun and woven into cloth. Although she was many paces away, Gorgo heard Elissa's braying voice extolling on her favorite subject, Jason – another helot who farmed King Cleomenes' land.

If she saw Gorgo, she would wonder far too loudly why the king's daughter wasn't enduring morning lessons with her mother - prompting meddling prattle with the other women about Gorgo's recalcitrant escapades. She would likely make such a noisy fuss that Gorgo would feel obligated to return with her to the house, and she would miss the opportunity to tell Phoebe about her dream. To evade such an untimely demise to her

venture, Gorgo pulled her himation tightly around her shoulders, ducked her head down and moved quickly in the opposite direction.

After a few paces, she thought she heard her name being called, so she picked up her pace, rounded a corner and slipped into an empty structure used for storing grains, letting out a sigh of relief. *Safe.*

“Don’t make a sound.” A threatening whisper startled her from behind.

Gorgo turned abruptly to find a filthy, nearly naked boy squatting in the corner next to her. In one hand, he pointed a dagger. In his other, he cradled a small mound of eggs.

He had a scared but menacing look on his gaunt face.

“You little thief,” Gorgo spit out instinctively with more surprise than disgust. The boy immediately thrust his dagger forward with an uncontrolled jerk causing the egg on the top of his pile to fall and crack in a mess on the ground next to his bare feet.

Gorgo laughed out loud at the awkward boy and squatted to his level to look him in the eye. Her movement startled the boy and again his dagger darted forward but this time with a ferocity that convinced Gorgo to keep her distance.

“Don’t move,” he said.

“If you are caught, you will be flogged or worse,” said Gorgo.

“Quiet!”

“Quiet? Or what?” Although he wielded a weapon, she did not feel threatened, “You’re just a little thief.”

“I am a soldier.”

“Soldier? Ha! Soldiers don’t steal and hide in the shadows,” Gorgo continued to taunt.

“I’m hungry,” he protested. The boy’s thin arm shook and Gorgo could see the outline of his bones through his taunt skin. He looked much older than his likely twelve years, the age Spartan boys spent living on the outskirts of the community, learning to fend for themselves. As part of their training, Spartan boys were starved to make them resistant to hunger, and many did not survive the year. When they got hungry they were encouraged to steal as a way of improving stealth. If caught they were punished for both stealing and their failure for being caught. Gorgo smiled to herself and decided to have a little fun at his expense.

“I haven’t eaten in days,” he moaned.

“A real Spartan soldier wouldn’t care. He feasts on victory, not stolen eggs!” Gorgo needed.

He grimaced but remained silent.

“You have a duty to uphold the values of Sparta,” she continued loudly and with dramatic flair, as if orating to an imaginary crowd.

“Easy for you to say – girl,” the boy hissed at her. “What do you know of hardship and starvation? Of whippings and flogging?” Tears began to well up in his desperate eyes and Gorgo began to regret taunting him. The boy was clearly desperate and like a cornered animal he had a determined madness under his slight frame.

“Okay. Settle down. I was only teasing you—”

“Shut up. You think I’m weak? You think I don’t have the strength to endure? I do – but I MUST eat. I can’t stand another day.”

Gorgo had never seen such seething anger. The boy had a blank stare now as if his mind had gone to another place, somewhere dark and damaged.

“I didn’t say that.” Gorgo began to slowly rise back to the standing position.

“They say I’m not good enough!” his voice raised. “They say I will die like a starving dog in the gutter!” But they train me to kill! Well then...I’ll kill!”

Like a sprung trap, the boy leaped forward driving his dagger toward Gorgo’s throat. Muscle memory took over as Gorgo instinctively turned to one side, stepping inside the boy’s dagger thrust and driving her elbow up and into his nose. She knew she had hit her mark as she felt the soft cartilage crunch beneath her blow. She then grabbed the boy’s extended arm and with a well-trained movement borne from endless repetition, she rotated sharply but gracefully, and using the momentum of his wild thrust, she flung her attacker forward. The boy, disoriented and off balance, flailed forward crashing to the ground in a heap.

Gorgo immediately readied herself for a counter-attack. But instead the boy just lay there sobbing. He slowly sat up, holding his bloody nose with both hands, still crying slightly, covered in broken egg shells and sticky yoke. The blank stare evaporated, and instead he looked childlike again. A hurt little boy. As her adrenaline subsided, Gorgo felt no ill-will toward him. Instead she felt a mix of emotions.

It was inconceivable to Gorgo that the life of a Spartan boy could be anything other than the customary way, and she held firm faith in the Spartan warrior traditions with all the same nationalistic fervor as her father. But this was the first time she had ever had such a personal encounter with someone enduring the militant hardship. She felt like a fool for antagonizing him. This training was not like the parades she watched from afar

next to her father at his ceremonious station, or the columns of armor clad boys marching by in quick time formation throughout the village streets. This was something entirely more brutal, and she felt ashamed that she had made light of it.

“What is your name?” she asked.

“I have no name. Only disgrace now.”

“Why disgrace?”

“I was defeated by a girl!” he replied.

“You were defeated by a superior opponent.” Gorgo snapped. “With superior training, one in better physical and mental condition. Nothing else.”

“Where did you learn to fight like that?”

“My father is a great warrior who wanted a son and my mother lives in constant fear of an uprising. I have been training to fight and wrestling in the games since I was very young.”

“My name is Damon.”

“Salutations, Damon. Mine is Gorgo.”

“G-G-G-Gorgo? As in – the Spartan Princess?” Damon’s face drained of all color. “Forgive me, your highness, I – I had no idea. Now my shame is beyond redemption. I could never return to training - they will execute me!” he slumped over in despair.

“Nonsense! I am told hunger will drive a person mad. And judging by your clumsy attack, it destroys all discipline. Train yourself to overcome this weakness and remain in control. You have learned a valuable lesson here. I will not waste it by robbing Sparta of a developing warrior.”

Gorgo then softened her voice. “This will be our little secret,” she smiled. “Now go steal yourself some bread – and this time don’t get caught!”

At that, Damon nodded with a broad grin, jumped to his feet and ran out the door and down an alleyway.

Gorgo departed the vacant structure from the opposite side and began to work her way back through the market when she saw Phoebe walking with her older sister Hegaso.

The villagers gave the priestesses a wide berth as they moved through the crowd. They wore long, flowing chitons that extended to the ground, so they looked like they floated down the path effortlessly.

Gorgo ran up to her friend, “By the gods, what a coincidence! I was on my way to see you,” she exclaimed.

“Greetings, Daughter of King Cleomenes,” Hegaso said formally before Phoebe could reply. “Unfortunately, we don’t have time to converse.”

Unlike her sister, Hegaso did not look pleased to see Gorgo, but she never looked glad about anything. While Phoebe’s features were soft, Hegaso’s were hard and pointy. She had a sharp nose and chin, and always looked put out.

“Where are you going? Gorgo probed.

“No, why?”

“Unfortunately, that’s a private matter,” Hegaso said looking down her long nose at Gorgo.

“This is Gorgo. Surely, it’s okay to tell her – Erinna and Gaius eloped last night!” Phoebe blurted.

“Finally. I wondered if Gaius would ever work up the nerve to –”

“Honestly,” Hegaso interrupted Gorgo, her cheeks growing pink with impropriety. “It’s indecent to gossip about such matters in the middle of the village square.”

“Oh, that’s why King Demaratus is having a dinner party,” Gorgo said connecting this news to Macar’s early morning skytale. *Tonight’s dinner party is clearly a wedding reception. Why didn’t Demaratus just write that in his message?*

Demartus’ oldest daughter Erinna chopped her hair months ago in preparation for her marriage to Gaius, but he kept getting cold feet.

“Farewell, Gorgo, we need to be on our way.” Hegaso said grabbing Phoebe’s hand and pulling her sister along with her.

Gorgo felt disappointed she didn’t get to tell Phoebe about her dream. She desperately wanted someone to help her interpret its meaning. She pictured the young man – Perseus – with his silvery blue eyes.

As she turned toward home and started to exit the agora, caught up in her thoughts, Gorgo bumped directly into another woman knocking her to the ground.

“Excuse me,” Gorgo said flustered and reached a hand out to help the woman to her feet. “Elissa?”

“Gorgo? What are you doing here?” Elissa she asked taking Gorgo’s hand. “Shouldn’t you be doing your lessons?”

“I’m just returning from calisthenics,” Gorgo lied.

“At this hour? Never mind, you can help me with my baskets and I can tell you the latest about Jason. I saw him this morning. He didn’t say anything, but our eyes met, and he nodded.”

Gorgo groaned inwardly, picking up Elissa's basket containing several batts of wool.

"Isn't that lovely? I'm going to weave you a new cloak for the Heraean Festival."

"Will you have enough time? It's in a couple of days."

"Yes, yes," Elissa dismissed.

They walked together back to the house and Elissa described to Gorgo every detail of her early morning encounter with Jason.

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