

A detailed image of a medieval helmet, likely a basinet or similar, featuring a pointed top and a faceplate with a grid of small circular holes. The helmet is attached to a chainmail aventail. The background is a solid dark brown color.

# I Should Have Been a Barbarian

Robert Norton

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by

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## ***At the feet of a mongrel puppy***

This rascal is going to kill me. This is so embarrassing.

He is grotesquely skinny and swaddled in rags, and he's being careful to stay out of my reach so I won't snap his twiggy legs with my merciless grip. I've slayed scores of magical creatures and legions of brave warriors, and yet this dirty rodent, this mangy varmint is the one that will best me? The indignity of it all makes my blood boil. I could pop his head like a ripe huckleberry with a mere pinch of my fingers if I could only reach him, but alas, I've fallen off my mount and am stuck in the mud. So how did I end up helpless as a suckling babe at the feet of this mongrel puppy?

This morning, the Fair Lady Gionivana, youngest daughter of the Good King had begged me, "Dashing knight, would you please compose a verse elucidating every aspect of my beauty while lounging by the Waterfall of Libidinous Lust."

Lady Gionivana is a ridiculous twit, an unscrupulous tease, and a spoiled brat with none of the grace of her older sisters, but the good King garnishes my wages when I don't indulge her preposterous inclinations, so I immediately set off for the waterfall as requested. My noble flying steed, Gangles the Devourer of Souls, was acting a bit peevish so we were trotting along the ground instead of soaring through the sky.

And yes, I've heard all of the jokes about Gangles. Indeed, he is a pygmy giraffesus with tiny silver wings that dust everything with sparkles, and he has

a long pink tongue that tends to hang out of his mouth, but how many knights have a steed that can fly? Only one, and that's me. Well, Proud Duke Fauntleroy's flying snail that he rides around using a swing tied to its wee shell doesn't count because it's a snail, not a steed. And I don't want to hear any praise for Lord Bastion's Demonic Rhinoceros of Awesomeness because I have a steed that can fly and he doesn't.

So Gangles the Devourer of Souls was trotting to the waterfall through the Tranquil Pines, and my boots were dragging along the ground because he is so short. And as we traveled, I dreamed of being free of the petty obligations of a gallant knight. That is when I was taken by surprise. The skinny little man and his accomplice had hoisted a massive log into the trees and when I happened along, they cut it free. Gangles noticed the log speeding towards us and even slowed down to ensure that I would be smashed. As I already mentioned, he was being a bit peevish. I was thrown off and incapacitated, and Gangles flew away - noble steed indeed.

"He's pretty, like an elf, and he smells like flowers," a fat man observes as he cautiously ambles into view, looking down at me with dumb blank eyes. He is a colossal slab of meat, though he is as meek as a little girl, and he's fingering a hole in his tattered pants, exposing his flabby, naked bum.

I can't believe this is how my saga will end. When I fell off Gangles, the warhammer that was slung over my shoulder plunged deep into the soft mud. I slew Rada, Vile Tyrant of the Giants, to get that immense weapon of destruction, and now I can't even stand up because of its weight.

“He looks important. We should ransom him back to the King,” the skinny one says. He is holding my sword, Ivandal, formerly owned by Bjorn the Ruiner, King of Old Ingshalla. I had to climb to the top of Dread Tower, a sheer black cliff of obsidian, tear open the belly of Maelstrom, the evil dragon that had eaten Bjorn, and paw through its guts to procure that fearsome sword. And now this heathen was clumsily waving it about at the flies attracted to his stench.

Someone important!

“I am...” I try to scream but it comes out as a burp. The breastplate of my glimmering armor, forged in the depths of Mount Scarpomalo and covered with pictographs representing each of my glorious victories, was caved in by the log, so I am barely able to breathe, let alone speak.

I am Avardante! I have traveled every kingdom and land, smiting the oppressors of the weak, bringing freedom and justice to all, and I have annihilated every foe that has ever stood in my righteous path. I am feared by my enemies, and loved by everyone that is good, and yet these two buffoons, these ignorant dolts, are the ones that have bested me. This is completely indecorous.

“If we try to ransom him, Ponticus will come after us,” the fat man whispers and looks uneasily about the forest as if Ponticus were a sorcerer that could appear at the mere mention of his name.

Ponticus indeed.

They tremble before him, yet they don't even recognize me. He is an eighteen year old moppet. Sure, dismembering Jingla the Obsidian Ogre was impressive, though I would have happily dispatched of the monster had I been around. But the Good King had sent me off to find the Helmet of Infinite Knowledge and Vision, which was a complete waste of time because it doesn't exist, and yet I was demoted to number two and he still holds that failure against me. It is I, Avardante, that have spent many uncomplaining years dutifully protecting the castle and heartily waging war against any and all of his enemies. And it is I, Avardante, that risked life and limb to get him the Ruby Ring of Judiciousness, and the Extraordinary Truth Rose, and what resplendent jewels and sublime gifts has Ponticus presented to the King – nothing. Ponticus indeed.

“He sure has a lot of fancy stuff. Maybe we should just kill him and sell it,” the skinny one says and starts tugging on my boots. I had to beat Zesto, an insane half-demon with cloven hooves, in a footrace across the Bone Desert to get those boots. If I could get to my feet, I could run faster than a stallion, but here I am, stuck in the mud.

Take the stupid boots. They are covered in ridiculous jewels and the high golden heels make me walk like a woman. I have spent my entire life collecting magical and magnificent items and yet here I am helpless at the feet of mere hoodlums. I have grown weary of these trinkets. I desire a simpler life. I want to be a barbarian in leather underwear that accentuates my tan, rippling muscles, and a claymore so long that I can cut down an entire field of

wheat with a single stroke. And no more grandiloquent ladies of the court with their proper talks in the garden, and impenetrable layers of finery and frockery. I want a heavybreasted warrior princess that overflows with passion and has lips that can heal any wound.

“Take it all...” I choke out, but they’re busy trying to pull off my armor. The fat one has actually picked up a large branch, almost a log, and is smashing it into one of the buckles. Just twist the clasp clockwise you fool and release me from this prison. This life of mine has been a waste. But just as I start to pity myself, a blazing arrow crackles through the forest like a bolt of lightning and splits the fat man in two.

## ***The hero arrives***

Ponticus.

His long black mane bounces on his broad shoulders as his formidable fighting ostrich, Tictic the Unmaker, gallops onto the scene. Ponticus already has another arrow drawn and the wretched little man looks at his cleaved partner, his rodent eyes bulging out of his gaunt face.

“Dear fellow, I won’t let you live, so you might as well fight,” Ponticus sings in his jolly voice. The little rat man flees into the trees and Ponticus casually sits in his saddle for several seconds, enjoying the crisp mountain breeze blowing across his boyishly smooth skin. And then, as if an afterthought, he raises his bow, points it at the sky, and lets an arrow fly. The flaming projectile thunders into the heavens, sails out of sight, and then comes down with an explosion that shakes my bones. The little man is no more. “I do wish we could have fought. At least there would have been some sport in it.”

Ponticus dismounts Tictic with a graceful kick of his foot and carefully lifts me out of the muck with his brawny arms.

“I will not say a word of this great Avardante. I am only grateful that I happened along and was able to be of service,” he says, helping me off with my armor. With my dented breastplate removed, I can breathe again.

“Thank you,” I say and give him a fatherly pat on the shoulder. Then I continue removing my clothes, tossing everything into the bushes. Ponticus blushes and innocently covers his gentle brown eyes as I take off my cape



fashioned from the glimmering tails of several unicorns, my bejeweled devil boots, and the necklace of wizard teeth that I stole from the haunted treasure room of Bruja the Sorceress, Queen of the Undead Army. “But tell everyone that Averdante is dead. I am now Kornuk, Kornuk the Barbarian.”

I grab my naked sword, leaving the gold scabbard behind, and run off into the woods wearing only my underwear, my pale skin ghostly white in the bright sunlight.

**THE END**