

"You are a fool," Loki said, and he rattled a shrill, evil cackle which shook the skies.

Calmly Cal said, "You don't frighten me, Loki. I have the god power now. I have a woman who loves me. I control the universe. Why would I fear you?"

A wide smile split Loki's red and fiery face.

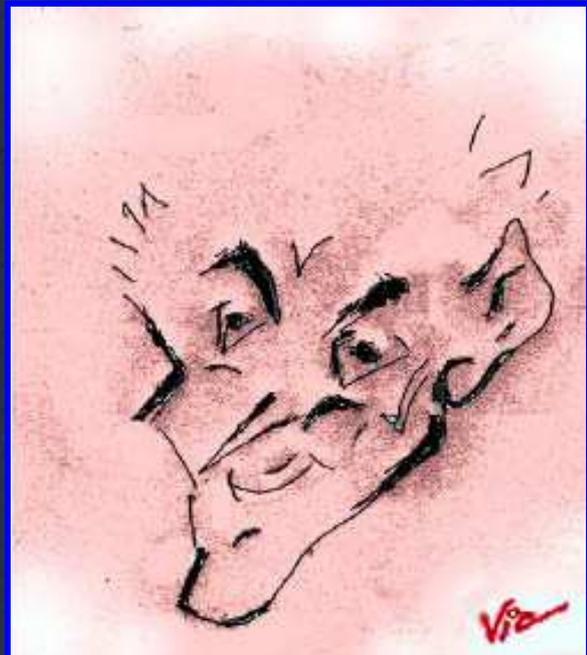
"You don't know, do you?" he asked, and the cackle vibrated again. He threw his head back, and more laughter roared out

"You really don't know!" He shook with his wicked humor, and his high-pitched cackle must have shaken the world.

And Cal woke up, sat up straight in bed.

Eve Absolym opened her sleepy blue eyes and looked up at him. "What's wrong?"

Before Cal could answer, he noted that the imp which served as a nitelight was flickering. Then it made a small whimper. "I thought it was a dream," he whispered. With a shake of his head he added, in a normal voice, "But it was more; I can tell, because of the imp. He sensed something wrong, and –"



Spontaneously the wall screen lit up, showing the night sky and a flock of high-flying lights headed Earthward, growing into brightly lit alien ships as they neared. A ray blast burned a tree.

"Don't worry," a voice said. The voice not only came from the screen, but was also all about them. "I will take care of this invasion."

A figure at least one hundred feet tall strode into view, carrying a large fly-swatter. With one swing, it smashed several of the invading ships. Another swing took care of more, but then the figure dropped the fly-swatter and snapped his fingers. In a flash, all the ships exploded. Looking directly out of the screen, the man said, "All taken care of. Now," he added, "I wish to meet with all world leaders noon tomorrow at noon at the World Center. Thank you."

The screen went blank.

"Rafe!" Cal exclaimed. "That was Rafe!" He shook his head violently. "But how? He didn't believe in gods! Yet now he is one."

Eve got out of bed and slipped on a light robe. "I think I should make coffee," she said. "I can tell we're in for a long night."

Cal seated himself at the kitchen counter and watched Eve pour him a cup of coffee. She smiled and said, "Okay, what's going on? You've told me quite a bit in the last months, but I don't recall anything about a god named Rafe."



Planting his elbows on the counter, Cal placed his head in his hands and muttered, "It shouldn't have happened." Lifting his head he looked at Eve. "Something is very wrong."

"You're a god, husband," Eve said reassuringly. "Whatever might be wrong, you can fix it."

"I am not a god," Cal said. "I've only discovered how to use the god power."

"But your father," Eve began.

Cal nodded. "Odin was my father, but my mother is mortal as am I." He smiled. "As prolific as Odin was, there are probably several hundred mortals today who have Odin blood in them. Perhaps his blood helped me, I don't know."

Wiping his brow with his sleeve, Cal said, "It's too much of a coincidence that Loki popped up in a dream just before Rafe put on his show."

Eve gave him a questioning look. "Show?"

Cal nodded. "He's up to something, using the god power." He shook his head. "Time was, Rafe didn't believe in gods! I ran into him early in my studies. We were in the library and he saw the book I was reading and snorted. After that, I used him as my devil's advocate. He was good at pointing out fallacies in my reasoning."

Again, Cal raked his fingers through his hair. "It never occurred to me he would gain faith and understanding."

Meeting Eve's eyes, he continued, "It must have been my visit to Olympus which swung him around. I caused the crew of the spaceship which took me there to think the planet was destroyed, and that's the way it was reported. Still, something about it must have convinced Rafe. He remembered what I had expostulated, and he reached out and found it."

Looking at Eve intently, he said, "We've got company." Then he shifted his attention to one corner of the kitchen. "Is Olympus what cued you in, Rafe?" he asked.

Even with Cal's warning, Eve's eyes widened as a grinning Rafe appeared.

"Knew I couldn't get away with eavesdropping," he said and chuckled, ignoring Eve's surprise. "You're far more advanced than I. But yes, that was what turned me on. I remembered you saying the gods lived on Olympus, and I knew you couldn't destroy the gods. You aren't the destroying type, Cal. Started looking at all those things we had discussed about gods and belief and faith – and, since I was looking at it with a different slant, it all fell into place."

Cal smiled. "I imagine you left some chunks of alien ships to verify what you had done," he said.

Rafe nodded. "They'll find elements which don't gibe with what they would expect, so they'll accept it as alien."

Eve's mind had cleared. "You're giving all the governments a motive to work together, aren't you?"

Still grinning, Rafe said, "You bet! Watch tomorrow." He disappeared.

In the split second before Rafe disappeared, Cal noted a sudden change in the man's eyes, and he felt a surge of power.

Eve knew her husband. "What's wrong?" she asked.

Cal shook his head. "I'm not sure. He seemed to change, and I felt a real surge of power when he disappeared."

"Wouldn't it take a lot of power for him to vanish?"

"Not so much," Cal said grimly. "Something just happened to Rafe. I'm afraid it was something bad."

The next day verified his fears.

The entire world watched the meeting of the World Council. Rafe stood at the head of the table, normal in size but radiating power.

"You have seen what I did," he announced without introduction. "You have wisely verified the remains of the alien ships and know they are authentic. Now that you are under my protection, the world has nothing to fear." He cast his gaze around the room and added, "All I ask in return is for you to worship me, as is my due."

"No way!" Cal snapped.

As if aware of Cal – which, of course, he was – the Rafe on the screen gazed in his direction and flicked a finger. "Begone!" he exclaimed.

Cal flew across their living room and slammed into the wall, where he collapsed. Eve ran to him. "Cal!" she said, worry wrinkles in her face. "What – what happened? You're a god! At least," she added, "you use the god power. How did he do this to you?"

Cal took a deep breath. "I turned off my Spell of Protection when I returned from Olympus," he muttered. "Didn't think ... it was needed." Inhaling deeply, he struggled back to his feet. "It's on now," he added grimly, "but I'm not sure it will do any good."

"But your power," Eve began, worry evident in her tone.

Licking his lips, Cal told her, "I tap the god power. If I'm not wrong, whatever has taken Rafe over *is* the god power."

From the screen came a rumbling laugh, and Rafe's voice said, "Very true, little insignificant one. I predate your puny ancient gods. I was part of the birth of this weak universe. There is nothing you can do."

Cal's eyes narrowed and a glint of determination could be seen. "You're the devil," he said. Eve, despite her worry, put a reassuring hand on Cal's arm as he said, "Satan, Lucifer – all those names have been used for you. You have taken over my friend Rafe." He blinked, then added, "I'm broadcasting this so all will know, evil one."

Laughter erupted again. "I should care!"

"You feed on greed, devil," Cal said. "When someone lets greed, lust and lies control them, you gloat! You ask to be worshipped because worship strengthens you. When someone lets evil control them, you grow in power." Eve was watching closely, her concern obvious.

"Proving that you know me and know resistance is futile," the being said with pride and confidence. "Greed and lust and lying are basic to humanity. I will always have plenty to feed on."

"People can change," Cal said softly.

The devil's next laugh was a bark of derision. "Never! As I said, I have been around billions of years before humanity and I have seen it spread; spread, but never improve! That is the way people are, and they cannot change it!"

Cal stood, smiling. "You may find you are wrong," he said, with growing confidence. "People might have those traits you praise, but they also really hate being used. Check your support now! When I said I was broadcasting this, I meant to all intelligences that exist. Now they know they are being used, and resent it."

Cal's smile broadened. "I have even released the ancient gods, and their power is being used against you, devil. Look and see!"

The roar shook the world, but it was weaker than before. "You cannot do this, puny mortal!" the entity screamed. "No one is stronger than I am! I will pinch you to nothingness!" The devil brought his thumb and forefinger together and squeezed.

Cal forced a smile to stay on his face, then laughed in relief. "Nothing!" he said, exultantly. "You have been weakened significantly."

"But I am strong!"

"I'm not arguing," Cal said. "My point is that people don't want to be used as your fodder, so you won't be sucking nourishment from them. Otherwise, do as you wish."

"You tricked me," the devil said.

Cal heard Loki's shrill cackle. This time the devil was the focus of the godlet's humor.

Rafe collapsed as the devil departed. "Set him up and give him water," Cal said, and his voice echoed in the room of the Council.

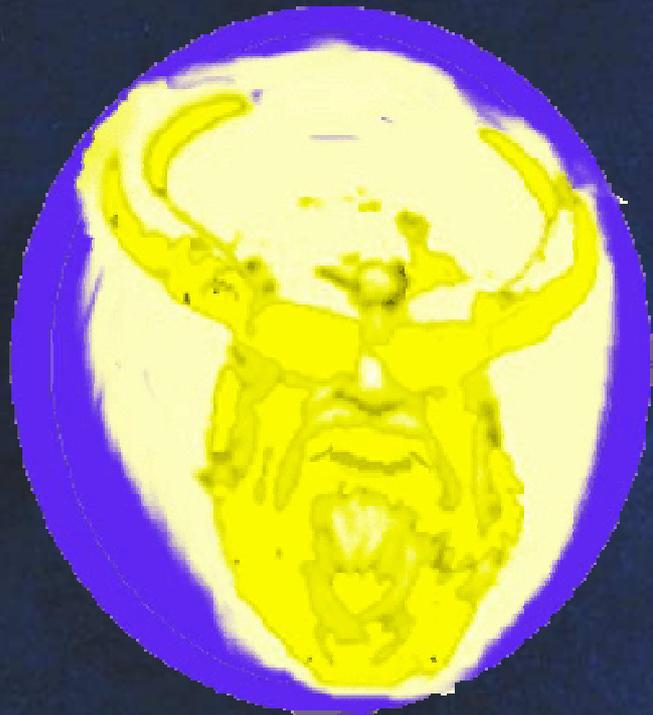
"After all, he is the one who saved your planet from an alien invasion."

Eve led Cal to the couch and urged him to sit, then joined him, his hand in hers. "You can relax, now," she told him.

"I have never been so frightened in my life," Cal murmured.

"Couldn't have proved it by me!" Eve said with pride.

"When I went against the ancient gods, I thought they had power. Their power is nothing compared to his!" Then he smiled. "But I have the strangest feeling God helped, and I am certain I have Odin to thank for increasing the strength of my Spell of Protection. Without it, the devil's pinch could have finished me."



A golden glow appeared in the center of the room.

"Couldn't have that old interloper kill my son," a voice throbbed into the room. The glow seemed to smile, and then it disappeared.

"Now I've met Odin," Eve said in awe. "Welcome to the family," Cal said with a grin.

A questioning look appeared on Eve's face. "What about God, the creator?" she asked. "Why didn't He appear?"

"Legend has it man opted for knowledge and self-control," Cal replied. "God granted it, then sat back to watch how we did."

"So we were left with the use of the god force, right?"
Cal nodded.

Eve paused in thought, then said, "You use it like a skier, it seems."

Cal gave her a questioning look, then understood. "Yes, something like that; the gravity could be akin to the god power, but the skiing person uses the gravity to perform tricks with no real control of gravity. Using the god power, as I found from pursuing your classes, is not *control* of the power but the *use* of it."

Eve moved her face close to his. "You were a very bright student, husband of mine. "

"I had an excellent professor, wife," Cal murmured, and kissed her.

A long kiss, which was abruptly interrupted by a cackle from Loki.

"Go away, Loki," Cal said. Then he straightened. "No, stay!"

Cal said in a quick contradiction. "What was it I don't know? Tell me."

Satisfaction evident in his voice, Loki said, "I had a hint of what was coming. I knew you would assume godhood because of the threat. Gods," he continued, "must obey certain rules, and one is that a relationship between a god and a human cannot last very long."

"But Odin, in the form of my father, stayed with my mother for

two years!"

"But even Odin couldn't go beyond that," Loki snickered. "It is part of the cost of godhood, you see." Loki vanished, leaving a giggle echoing in the room.

Unhappily, Eve clung to Cal. "We can't stay together?" she asked, tears in her eyes.

"Loki says it with authority," Cal murmured, his arms around his wife. "He is a trickster, but I'm afraid he knows the truth." Tears formed in his eyes as well.

Eve looked up at him. "What will we do?" she asked in desperation.

Cal took her shoulders and held her out, a crooked grin on his face.

"Wife," he said, "you're going to have a very amazing year!"

Epilogue -

There is the power of gods, and there is the power of woman. My husband forgets it was in my class of the mind that he found the way to godhood. He has no way to continue with Eve the woman.

He can live forever with Eve the goddess!



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