

Do Not Go Gently Into That Good Night  
by Mari Evans

The crackling sound of fire filled the air, engulfing thatch homes greedily. The sounds of clashing swords rang out as men fought to protect their families.

Already the slavers were rounding up all the young and strong in the town square. The dying screams of the elderly and the young filled the air. Slavers were ruthless: you were either useful or you were dead.

His father shoved the baby into Eloise's arms and looked him in the eye, "Athos, take good care of your sister and your baby brother. Follow the escape route we practiced. I'll hold them off." Athos wanted to cry out, tell him no. No. NO. Father, you have to come with us but the look on his father's face told him that his father would brook no disobedience in this matter. Athos bowed his head. His father ruffled his hair fondly for a second, then he pushed Athos away. Tears filled his eyes but he shook them away.

Athos gripped Eloise's wrist, turned, and ran. The escape route was a good one. It was circuitous and long, but it kept to the darkest of alleys the whole way. They ran down one alley and slipped through the darkness to the next alleyway. They did this, again and again, always running just ahead of the slavers.

A hideous howl filled the air and Athos shuddered. They had brought hellhounds. He had been gripped with nightmares for years after hearing stories of hellhounds. They were huge, terrifying beasts that designed to hunt down humans. Escaping a hellhound was impossible.

They increased their pace, Athos and Eloise's footsteps slapped against the rough cobblestone of the alleyways as they ran. He cursed as they came to another transfer point between alleys. There were two dark, grim alleys and he could not remember which one belonged to their escape route.

Another long howl filled the air and he chose, pulling Eloise after him as they ran down the long alley. Athos cursed again as he realized that the alley he chose was a dead end. They turned around and ran back. They almost reached it—Then it was too late. A tall scarred man stood in the mouth of the alley. By the man's side stood a hellhound. Five feet tall at the shoulders and with glowing red eyes, the hellhound slavered and whined to get at them.

His body stiffened and he shoved his sister behind him. The baby wailed in terror and

Eloise shushed him quietly, her eyes never leaving the slaver. Athos's eyes were fixed upon the hellhound. It was huge and muscled. It could rip out his throat as easily as he could step on an ant. Death was imminent.

The slaver looked them up and down and shrugged. "You two are good enough I suppose, but the baby dies." Athos stifled the sudden sob that welled up from his chest and threatened to spill over. His sister clutched the baby closer, her fingers white against the baby's smooth skin.

The slaver walked towards them. Shivers ran all over his body. Fear filled him like a poison. He couldn't move. NO. Athos rejected that thought. He had to move. For his baby brother's sake.

Athos took a deep breath. "I won't let you," he said, quietly. The slaver cocked his head in surprise. The boy's words were quiet but they were heavy with menace.

The slaver lifted a finger. The dog became even more alert, his fur rippled and he growled threateningly. Athos closed his eyes. This was it then. He would die and his sister and his baby brother alongside him. A poem came to mind that his grandfather had shared with him many years before. Do not go gently into that good night.

The slaver smiled. Athos took a deep breath. His muscles danced motionlessly beneath his skin. They were ready and they were eager to be used. His heart pumped harder and harder. His face was still and his eyes were closed. Do not go gently.

Deep within the tangled veins of his being, he heard silent whispers. He listened harder than he had ever listened before. His breathing stopped. In that silence lay the answer. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

His mind filled with the chaos of berserker rage. Athos accepted it. He would do anything to protect his family. Anything. His muscles leaped and his blood sang with joy.

The slaver paused, startled by the change. The boy's eyes were still closed but he seemed to shimmer with light and an unnatural smile spread across his face slowly.

Athos eyes snapped open, revealing orbs of pure red. The slaver gaped in horror. Rage, rage. Athos silently chanted. The verses of the poem seemed to murmur and bubble within his lifeblood.

Athos lunged forward grabbing the slaver's dagger, flipped it around and slipped it into

the barbarian. The dagger went in quietly, only a small wet squelch betrayed the action. The slaver's face twisted in pain and he howled as his lifeblood spilled out onto the ground. Do not go gentle. Athos felt no pity for the slaver, he had devoted his life to killing and enslaving others. The man deserved death.

Athos turned and saw the hellhound rushing him. He felt no fear. He laughed, his white teeth flashing as he grinned. He easily stepped aside from the hellhound's mad rush. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion. The hellhound ran past Athos and turned back. Athos gripped the hellhound's head and wrestled it to the floor, where he cut its throat.

This done, Athos wiped the dagger on his pants and turned around. His sister's eyes were wide but she met his red eyes unflinchingly. Eloise reached up and wiped away a blood droplet clinging to his cheek. The red drained slowly from his eyes.

Eloise gazed hard at him for a moment, then she nodded once. "Thank you, brother."