

Pride Goes Before a Fall

by Neha

Darius was a fierce warrior, the bravest the world had ever seen. Everywhere he would go he was greeted with admiration, for his legend walked before him. Once a sweet boy, he grew into a prideful man and thought everyone beneath him.

Meanwhile, legend of his bravery and skill in combat reached the heavens, and the gods were much impressed. Azreal, the angel of god, volunteered to descend unto the Earth and see this great human in action herself and report whether he was worthy of his praise.

When she reached the village, she learnt from his neighbors that he had left a while ago to go practice his archery in the redwood grove 20 miles from the village. "Watching his practices will be a good judge of his character", she thought to herself and set out in search of him.

Darius, however, was too vain to think he needed practice. He had made it a habit to tell anyone who would listen that he was going to the grove to improve upon his skill and that should anyone follow him, they would find themselves speared through the heart. For when he was in the zone, he saw nothing but targets. In reality, however, he simply sat by the stream and drank wine. When Azreal approached upon this sight, she was scandalized. Her plan had been to watch from afar, but she could not help but speak up, "O ye who sits by the brook so, pray tell me thy name," for she thought she might have been mistaken.

Darius leaped up in indignation. "You know not who I am?" he thundered, "I am Darius," he cried, "strongest of all creation. And now," he said with an evil grin curling around his lips, "you shall perish for you have incurred the displeasure of the mighty Darius."

Azreal was furious. As the big form of Darius threateningly approached her small frame, she snapped her fingers, and his power was stripped away.

He stopped mid-stride as his legs, now scrawny and deformed, could not hold him up any longer. His tunic hung off of his protruding bones. His shoulders once broad and strong were now weak and bony, and his arms hung limply at his sides. His handsome face was now sunken and sickly, and his luscious locks, frayed and greying.

He fell at her feet and wept, "I am sorry, my lady, for I knew not what you were or what I did. I would do anything to be restored to my former self."

"You shall never be restored to your former self," she said in a thunderous voice, but then hearing his pitiful gasp, she added, softer, "

That self was much too prideful. Learn compassion and you may restore your physical body," and with that, she disappeared in a cascade of golden rose petals.

As Darius crawled back to his home, he met many who had previously admired him, praised him, worshipped him even, and every one of them mocked him. His fame had been his downfall. Where once he could not travel without praise and admiration, now he couldn't even step out of his front door without laughter and mockery ringing in his ears. He lost everything, his health, his friends and eventually, all his money too.

He now spent his days laying by the roadside hoping to appeal to the humanity of his fellow men. After weeks, when he finally had enough to buy a piece of bread, he hobbled into the store. Even after all these years, heads still turned, fingers pointed and occasional laughter heard, but he had long been immune to such disrespect. At the time, all the famished man cared for was a morsel of food.

He left the shop with a warm sliver of bread and more happiness in his heart than he had felt in years. But by the side of the store, sat an old woman in rags with her back to the wall. She was hunched over and shivering, barely strong enough to even look up at him as he walked by her. He looked at the bread in his hand and paused for a moment. A cold breeze blew through the alley, almost taking the woman's life with it, and Darius made up his mind. She needed the strength more than he did.

He softly knelt by her and offered her the bread. Her tired, glazed eyes lit up in joy, and Darius realized that he felt it too. As he handed her the piece of bread, a strong, warm breeze blew past them, strong enough to lift him to his toes. But when he regained his balance, he realized that he was now able to stand straight again, a feeling he had almost forgotten.

He glanced up at the heavens with tears of gratitude in his eyes and could have sworn he saw the smiling figure of the angel from what

felt like a lifetime ago. Blessed, he realized that true strength was but of the heart, not of the body. He had never really lost his true strength, he had just forgotten it, and all he needed to do was to find it.