

Acceptance is something everyone strives for. The desire for approval from our peers and loved ones is often times the driving force of our actions. To be respected by those around you is considered by many to be the greatest of accomplishments.

In the large city of Ghorud there lived an unassuming, humble youth who sought after these things just like everyone else. The difference was that he received none of it. He was a young lad who worked hard but who had never done anything notable or praise worthy in the eyes of the city. As a lower class citizen, he spent much of his time begging for money or food on the streets. For all he knew his parents were dead; at any rate, he had never met them. Street rat and tramp were among the kindest of nicknames he received regularly.

On a day that started just like any other, his life was forever changed. After being thrown in the mud for asking a Nobleman for food or money he received an act of kindness the likes of which he had not seen in his life. An angel—for at least, this was how she appeared to him—helped him out of the filth he was in and offered him shelter for the night. In his confusion he asked, “You mean to take me up into the sky?”

Softly she corrected him and took him to her lodgings—the palace.

Never had the boy dreamed of entering the palace, much less of doing so legally. After bathing and being outfitted in his first ever pair of palace robes he dined with the fair lady. Over dinner he learned of her identity: The Princess of a far away land! Her kindness was overwhelming, and for the first time in his life he was content.

For two months he had things that every person ought to have: Food, drink, and a friend. By this time he was head over heels in love with the fair princess—how could he not be? Many doubts crept into his mind. His primary concern was the custom in her land that only a prince or brave knight in shining armor who had rescued her would be permitted to ask for her hand in marriage. She’d simply have to stay in this village. She wouldn’t leave... She couldn’t! She did.

I suppose that when you've never had much of anything, whatever it is that you have is enough. But when you have had something worth having, even for only a little while, nothing else is good enough.

The truth is that the two months the young lad had spent in the castle with the princess had altered incredibly his position in society. He was now permitted a room in the palace and was provided food and drink.

But, of course, none of that was enough. For half a year the parting words of the princess tormented him. "Maybe I'll see you again, my knight in shining armor," she had said before kissing him on the cheek. He knew that he was in no position to travel to her lands and seek her hand in marriage, but those last words had planted the idea in his head. Many a night there was where his dreams were filled with the words "Knight in shining armor." Was it possible?

The answer, he knew in his heart, was "no." He couldn't hunt, and he most certainly couldn't fight. He had never so much as wielded a sword.

Despite all of that, during one of his restless slumbers he resolved to try. His conviction when he awoke in the morning rivaled that of any real or fiction character. He immediately prepared to set out on his quest. Unfortunately, all of the nights spent in one of the palace rooms turned out to have a cost. Likewise, the food taken from the palace kitchens proved to have a hidden price on them. The cost total would, at the rate that he made money, take well over a year to pay off. "Well over a year?" He thought to himself, "Like heck do I have that kind of time!"

He bluntly refusal to pay the debts, and instead promised to bring riches back from a foreign land that doubled that of the original cost. Not only did they not fall for his bluff, but the military forces were called in. Apparently (Who knew?) refusing the bill was stealing from the King himself. In a split second decision the course of his life changed forever. They say, "You win big, you lose big," and I guess he must have been thinking something similar. With his bread knife he killed one of the soldiers and took the knight's sword. From there he fought his way to the stables, stole a horse, and proceeded to fight his way out

of the city. Luckily for him he turned out to be a natural when it came to wielding a sword. The story of his escape from the city lived on in infamy inside of the palace, but among the street folk he was a legend. Songs were written about him and his story to this day is an inspiring tale to all struggling souls in that city.

For this humble youth who had never done anything worthy of recognition, this was the first time he had ever felt an ounce of self-confidence. He began to believe that his mission would be a success after all—he COULD do this!

Self confidence is far from a bad thing, but what it leads to often is. Indeed, even on the boy who knew not what pride even felt like, this poison began to take root. Slowly, as all changes happen, arrogance and pride took hold.

By the time he had at long last reached the land of the Princess, he was a completely new person. By all accounts he cannot be called “the boy” anymore, for indeed he had transitioned from boy to man in his travels. Walking through the palace doors as a conquering hero, the glorious end to his glorious journey was the proudest moment he’d ever had. Tall he stood, and the people of the hall were filled with awe. Tales had reached their ears of this man. A dragon and two giants he had slain on the outskirts of the city—both of which had terrorized the city for many a year, as well as taken the lives of many courageous soldiers attempting to slay them. This man had vanquished them without receiving so much as a scratch. Nearly every woman in the city was ready to throw themselves at him in their admiration. He relished this moment to take claim to the most beautiful of them all.

“I wish to take the Princess’s hand in marriage. I, who have delivered your city from the evils of the land. This is the reward I would take.” said he.

“But of course, brave knight!” The King himself proclaimed. “Long has she spoken of you... You hold a very special place in her heart. I am sure she would be honored!”

It appears to be quite the happily ever after, doesn't it? It is said that to marry the princess, the hardest mountain to climb is to get the King's favor... And already the favor of the King he has! Surely the story can end here with a good old "And the Princess, filled with admiration, married him that evening!" Indeed, this is how the knight had pictured it in his head many times. But alas, it was not to be!

The Princess invited the brave knight to walk with her. It is here that she rejected him. "...An arrogant peacock trumpeting around in his own honor! How could I ever marry a man like that?"

"But surely, Princess, you find me REMARKABLY attractive!" replied the knight.

"I loved the boy I met in the city all that time ago! You... are a stranger!" With this she left his side.

"But wait! Princess! Surely there must be something I can do to earn my way back into your good graces! Something even greater than delivering your city from danger. You name it. I assure you, I am up to the challenge!"

"The day that you believe there is nothing you can do to earn your way into my 'good graces' is the day that you will have succeeded," and with that she left him.

The knight, convinced that he simply had not done enough to win her, went out to prove his valor more so. For a year he returned every week to report of his latest heroics. After this his visits were more seldom—once every month or so, and then once every year...

Twenty-five years had followed since his last return. The Knight and the Princess were both well into their 60's. The knight, sad and alone, made one final visit to the Princess. After being granted her presence, he broke down and wept.

"There must be nothing I can do, fair Princess! I have done as much as I can and then more after that, and still have not found your favor. Truly it must be that you will never be mine! I have failed you, my love."

At last she cried out, "Never did I stop loving that boy from Ghorud! And now, for the first time since I kissed him all those years ago, he has found me!"

"Does this mean... That despite my faults... my weaknesses... You will take me at last?"

"I can't!" wept she, "For I am already married! A prince came some twelve years ago, long after I had given up hoping for you to come back, and I married him. I am the queen now! I cannot abandon my kingdom, my husband, and my children! I love you but we can never be!"

After leaving the Queen the old man moved into a small village far from the Queen's realm. He lived the remainder of his life alone. In the village he lived in there were many starving children on the streets. He had very little money—barely enough to feed himself. He wished to help the kids but could do nothing. One day a child who reminded him forcefully of himself—no friends or relatives—stole some coins for food while in the market. When it became clear that the man the young boy had stolen from had intent to kill the boy, the old knight made a split second decision—to add meaning to his life through death. He took the blame for the boy, and was knifed then and there.

The End