

All I Ever Was

The story of the Ember Keeper

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In ancient days, there was a man, a cripple born to lose.
His back was hunched, he could not fight. He could not pay his dues.

His only job, to keep the fire and embers glowing strong.
And though adept, he felt that this somehow made him wrong.

His leader was an honorable chief, a warrior strong and brave.
And to his people did he make a vow to love and save.

So of this man, the cripple asked, to get his fighting chance.
“I want to serve. I want to fight. I want to be enough!”

The chief then said, his wise voice loud, “Your talents lie elsewhere.
Your crippled back, will make us weak. And death will find us there.”

“Your love of kin, a welcome gift, shows me your true desire.
You must give up, this errant wish. We need you by the fire.”

But anger flared, as he replied, “A hero I shall be.
“I’ll give the gift, of life to thee, my deeds I can foresee.”

“I am the man, you need the most. Our village I defend.
Without my deeds, the village dies. I am your greatest friend.”

The leader thought him good of heart, but feared the course of war.
This man could cause such problems as they’d never known before.

He must die to save the rest, and so devised a plan,
To kill him in the distant woods, a deed with his own hand.

He said with grief, "I will agree, but you must come with me.
Far in the woods, we have a shrine with embers you will see."

"A tomb for heroes who did fall. They gave so others may -
Live to love and rise again and see another day."

"I need a man with honor strong to guard it day and night.
To keep the embers glowing long, to guard with all your might."

"The altar here reminds us of the greatness of our cause."
"Come with me, and you will be, all that I ever was."

"I am your man!" the keeper said, his chest so proud displayed.
With true delight, and unaware his soul had been betrayed.

He started down, the narrow path, excitement in his stride.
Followed by his gallant lord whose sword was by his side.

They made their way, beyond the walls, and past the village fields,
Of corn and wheat, the folks lived on the goodness that it yields.

They walked until they saw a spot, an altar standing high.
And embers having lost their glow without a watchful eye.

So did the keeper find some wood and gave the embers breath.
Not knowing that the day would end in tragedy and death.

Behind him stood the chieftain tall, the sharpened sword he drew.
The cripple's hearing was his gift. He heard the blade and knew.

He turned to see, his master's sword, held high into the skies.
Intent upon the bloody task, so poised for his demise.

"My Lord, beware," the cripple's voice was clear and unafraid.
"T'is death I hear, a bowstring loose. An arrow comes our way."

He moved his leader's massive arm when it was by his head,
It missed the keeper by an inch, but smashed the arrow dead.

The broken arrow at his feet, was meant to kill the chief.
Who had but seconds to decide, a new plan of relief.

With godly strength, he threw his friend behind the altar wall,
Into safety, shielded from the arrows that would fall.

Though brave and strong, the leader fought, but what would be the cost?
For by himself, he could not last. The village would be lost.

He shouted out, "Go quickly now and warn the village men."
"No time to bring them here to fight as I'll be lost by then."

But they can ready castle gates and pull the women in.
They can see another day and live to love again.

The cripple tried, but could not run. His weakness was most dire.
But then he saw, the embers flare, and thought about the fire.

He knew so well, the task to do, to signal far and wide.
He quickly set about to light, a blaze no man could hide.

And when the village saw the sign, each man jumped on a horse.
In droves they came with weapons bared. They were quite a force.

They fought, they clashed, they saved their land, and gave the battle cry.
Too late it was, a mortal wound, the chief himself would die.

And with his last breath did he say, aloud for all to know,
"The keeper did his job so well so we could beat our foe."

"Because of that, your village lives. No more can one repay.
Your worth cannot be measured. Your debts are gone today."

Yes, one of us, will die this day. And one of us remains.
enshroud me by the altar, by the stones that my blood stains.

So keep the embers burning hot, guard me for heaven's sake.

And when you die, we meet again. And one request I make.

Bury you along with me, My right man to the end.
For you are all, I ever was. And are my greatest friend.