

## Memoir of a Broken Leg

He comes not just for my world, but yours as well.

Pain and regret manifest flesh with scaly skin, breath of fire, and a heart of malice. He speaks, but only the lost understand him as he traverses the broken landscape of what once was my home. Everyone else is gone. Only the mindless and myself remain, unable to die, unable to drive back the demon inadvertently brought forth.

I kneel on the broken rocks as he marches toward me. His towering form is visible for miles and the spread of his ashen wings blanket the landscape with shadow. The pieces of my shattered staff litter the dirt, and the pains of battle my muscles declare are second only to the ache in my heart.

I might have beaten him before, had fortune gone another way, but there is little chance now. The poor turn of luck was not my doing, but the outcome of circumstances beyond even my control. My part is to live and defend, enduring unbroken and bound to the Earth until its core is destroyed. Only then will I pass and rest. My longevity does not give me the wisdom to see the path forward, only the strength to walk that path. The excuse is little solace.

Failure is failure, and shame shackles me. It would shackle you, too.

Imagine you are climbing a tree. You are the only one nimble enough to save the kitten stranded at the top. Everyone in the town gathers and looks on with hopeful anticipation as you make the perilous climb.

Halfway up, a branch snaps.

Your leg breaks when you hit the ground. It hurts and you see a bone protrude through the skin. Your climbing days are done. The kitten will never be rescued.

The onlooking townsfolk don't jeer at you, but you can guess at their silent condemnation, even if they outwardly give you piteous platitudes. Inside, you squirm, because you know you were the only one for this task. Yet, you fell short.

Does the knowledge that you could not prevent your bone from breaking heal your leg?  
Does the wisdom that it wasn't your fault the branch broke give you another chance?  
Does the confidence that you gave it your best rescue the kitten?

No.

You are still a failure, the leg is still broken, and the kitten is still dead.

I never broke my leg, but rather watched my failure unfold over the course of a millennia. As our men of knowledge delved deeper into the depths of their forbidden sciences, the unseen demon drew closer to our world until finally, he passed through the weakened doorway. Had I but known, I might have stopped them, but I did not, so I could not.

I stood against him, but I was not enough. Now the world about me is ash and the few survivors lost in their despair.

Yet, I am still here.

There is a lesson to note in this. One even my un-wizened mind can comprehend: One failure does not excuse withdrawal.

He is close enough for his shadow to cool my skin now. I look up into the towering heights and meet his piercing red gaze. He is smiling. I see his monstrous teeth, the flesh of my kin still stuck between them. He believes he has won.

He doesn't understand.

My part is to live and defend. His part is to destroy and subjugate. My failure does not equate to his success. Not when I may call down a crippling misfortune of my own.

My muscles protest as I rise. He chuckles at my impudence. I speak the words of power and feel warmth, pure and white, in my chest. He raises a hand, bearing the claws that broke the armies of the men of knowledge.

I send this omen to you in the moment I leap into our final battle.

Be warned, the demon is here, crippled but untamed, and the doorway is open.