

FALL OF THE HERO

An original radio drama by
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FALL OF THE HERO

CAST

NARRATOR	Wise voice from beyond
GRACE	Proud stately knight
SQUIRE	Humble stable boy
ROLAND	Powerful magi, keeper of the balance
VOICE(S)	Chorus of voices, male and female
MAN	Male voice
WOMAN	Female voice
IMP	A hectoring fiend
MAIDEN	Fair maiden

FALL OF THE HERO

SCENE ONE: VILLAGE - DAY

(Narrator, Grace, Boy)

NARRATOR: Long ago, in a different age, there was a hero. A stately knight known through the lands as his king's hand of justice and slayer of all breeds of monsters. A proud warrior known as Sir Grace.

SOUND: AMBIENCE - A MEDIEVAL VILLAGE, VOICES, CHICKENS, MUSIC

GRACE: Boy!

SOUND: FEET PATTEN UP.

SQUIRE: Yes, m'lord!

GRACE: Where is my steed? I commanded you to retrieve her ten minutes ago.

SQUIRE: Sorry, m'lord, but you also commanded me to retrieve your blade, and shield, which I have for you now.

GRACE: And what did you do? Stand before the pond to see how you look while wielding them? Hand the blade to me!

SQUIRE: Of course!

SOUND: SHIELD, SWORD PASSED

GRACE: Bring my steed, and tarry no longer! I have a date with a wizard and I shall not be late.

SQUIRE: Yes, m'lord.

NARRATOR: The morning sun struck the shield and armor of Sir Grace as he stood impatiently. His coat of arms, a lion swallowing a snake, emblazoned the shield of three generations of the king's mightiest champion. His blade, redeemer, felled ogres and wyverns. His mithril armor withstood the claws of harpies and breath of dragons. Friend and foe alike bowed to Grace's imperturbable strength, courage, and honor.

MUSIC: MUSIC SHIFTS DANGEROUSLY

NARRATOR: Yet today was different. In all the realms there was only one thing that Grace feared, and that was magic users. Their power derived from a source that Grace knew must be evil, and today, he came at the beckoning of the most infamous of all: Roland Fierro D'Arcanus.

SOUND: NEIGHING, HOOVES CLATTER

SQUIRE: Here she is, m'lord!

GRACE: Ah, Nightshade, you look strong and well
this morning.

SOUND: HORSE NEIGHS, MOUNTING HORSE WITH ARMOR

GRACE: She's fed, rested, shod?

SQUIRE: Yes m'lord.

GRACE: A penny for your troubles then!

SOUND: COIN THROWN

GRACE: Hyup!

SOUND: HORSE NEIGH, HOOVES CLATTER OFF

SCENE TWO: ARCANUS TOWER - DAY

(Narrator, Arcanus)

NARRATOR: Roland Fierro D'Arcanus was not evil.
However, his skill with the arcane and role
dictated by the fates made his name one that
caused the peasants to shudder. This
saddened him, but he stood by his role with
unwavering resolution.

NARRATOR

Good, evil... They were just opposite sides of a coin, phrases that balanced out the other in the unseen order of the universe. Roland accepted his role as mediator in the balance, forsaking human life and emotions, gaining the intangible gifts of the cosmos instead. Today he needed to test another figure that tipped the scales.

While nature needs heroes as well as villains, Roland fretted that one may too easily turn into the other. Great heroes may become tyrants, and if that happened the whole world might spiral into chaos. No one was immune from the temptation birthed from their virtue, and as Roland peered down at the road-weary hero from his looming tower, he wondered.

ROLAND:

Perhaps this will be the one... We are in great need of a messiah.

SCENE THREE: EXT TOWER - DAY

MUSIC: OMINOUS BRIDGE, FADES TO WIND-LIKE WHISPER.

SOUND: HORSE TROTTING UP A PATH, WHINNIES.

GRACE:

What vile creature must live here...

NARRATOR: The thick stench of rot hung in the air, radiating from a vast swamp that surrounded the narrow path Sir Grace had trod. In all directions were twisted trees, knotted like men stretching out in their dying poses. The monolithic tower rose at the end of the path, a single mass of slate gray stone that disappeared into a mass of low-lying clouds. It had no doors, no windows, no distinguishing features at all -- it was so unimpressive that it may as well be remarkable.

SOUND: HORSE DRAWS TO A HALT - RIDER DISMOUNTS.

SLUDGY STEPS, HORSE WHINNIES

GRACE: Pardon, Nightshade, but you'll need to remain here until I return. Trod not far in this evil place.

SOUND: SLUDGY STEPS

GRACE: Wizard! (ECHOES) Sir Whilhem Grace comes at your calling! Slayer of the dragon Zheirgreid and Yulous the Giant! Defender of King Harrot, who has named me arm of his justice and fire of his vengeance!

SOUND: IMPASSIVE SILENCE, WIND.

GRACE: Damn you! I will not be taken for a fool!

SOUND: SOLID THUD AGAINST THE STONE WALL. WALL
DISSOLVES -- SOUNDS LIKE CRINKLING
CELLOPHANE

NARRATOR: A door-sized chunk of wall dissolved,
revealing only darkness within.

GRACE: God... Accursed magic... (CASTS VOICE) I
shall see you at the top, then?

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS MOVE FROM SLUDGE ONTO STONE, COOL
INTERIOR AMBIENCE, LOW BASSY HUM.

VOICES: (WHISPERS) Go... go now...

GRACE: Who was that! (ECHOES)

SOUND: DOOR DISSOLVES BACK.

GRACE: Blast...

SOUND: COMPLEX MEDLEY OF VOICES, MOAN LIKE GHOSTS

VOICES: Go... go now... Run... while you can... It's
not safe here... they'll come for you...

SOUND: TREES BRUSH AGAINST THE STONE WALL

GRACE: What trickery is this?

NARRATOR: He pulled a torch from his rucksack...

SOUND: WHOOSH! FIRE COMES ALIVE

NARRATOR: ...Which lit of its own accord. The fire spat and danced and cast dismal shapes against the dark blue walls. The shadows grew into contorted, agonized bodies...

VOICES: No... No... Not another step! You'll be cursed!

NARRATOR: ...As Grace strode to the upward staircase

VOICES: (WHISPERS GROW TO SHRIEKS) NO! NO! NO!

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS ASCEND THE STAIRCASE, VOICES
DIMINISH.

MUSIC: RISE TO CHEERY, MEDIEVAL FESTIVAL MUSIC.

VOICES: (MERRY LAUGHTER)

NARRATOR: Glowing stacks of gold blinded Grace as he finished his ascent. Diamonds, emeralds, and rubies spilled over enormous stacks of riches that reached to the ceiling, burying gem-encrusted scepters, necklaces, and rings.

VOICE 1: (CHEERING BREAKS FOR A MOMENT) Aye, and it's all for the taking! Anything you want, it's yours!

VOICES 2: Rich as a king! An emperor! You could buy your own army!

GRACE: Fah... (SPITS)

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS CLOMP ACROSS THE FLOOR

VOICE 1: A kingdom! Your own kingdom!

VOICE 2: An empire all your own

VOICE 1: With any maiden you could imagine...

GRACE: Enough!

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS CLOMP UP STAIRS

MUSIC: MERRY MUSIC FADES... PRIMAL DRUMMING RISES

SOUND: WOMEN MOAN IN THE BACKGROUND, MAN LAUGHS

EERILY

NARRATOR: The next chamber glowed red and caused Grace's blood to boil. Against the walls were naked shapes sprawled in every form of lovemaking. The air clawed him like excited hands as he staggered across the chamber.

WOMAN: Let me fulfill all your dreams...

MAN: Even the one's you won't admit.

WOMAN: (GIGGLES)

MAN: (SINISTER LAUGH)

GRACE: (BITTER) Burn... all of you...

SOUND: BOOTS CLOBBER AGAINST THE FLOOR, UNSTEADILY, THEN REACH THE STAIRS. CLOMP, CLOMP, CLOMP

MUSIC: DRUMMING HUSHES. A LOW MONOTONE HUM, ALMOST
LIKE BEING IN A VACUUM.

NARRATOR: And then, it was dark.

SOUND: FLAME SIZZLES OUT.

NARRATOR: The flame on his torch ate itself and Grace cast it aside in disgust.

GRACE: Accursed magic! (ECHOES STRANGELY)

NARRATOR: Grace was suddenly disoriented in this strangest of the chambers. He stood still, yet could not help feel that he was moving, though in what direction he could not tell. He staggered forward and realized his feet were not even on the ground.

GRACE: Let go of me! Let go!

IMP: (CACKLES) Stupid! Stupid little knight! I have you now!

GRACE: You fiendish devil! Step out so I might smite thee!

IMP: You couldn't smite a roach without stabbing it in the behind could you? (CACKLES) You couldn't squash a bug unless you gave it the drop!

GRACE: Watch your words, little villain! I have snapped an ogre's neck with my bare hands!

SOUND: BLADE DRAWN

IMP: Where are your bare hands now? (CACKLES)

NARRATOR: Grace stepped back a moment, having hardly noticed his shining blade Redeemer was in his hands. The holy blue light illuminated a path to another stairwell, but he ignored it in a furious search for the imp.

GRACE: I'll skewer you and roast your hide before feeding it to rats!

IMP: Rats! (CACKLES) I'll bet you know a few of them!

NARRATOR: Grace spun and the blue glow dodged off a shape darting around the circular chamber. His split-second judgment was enough to detect the speed at which the creature was trotting and aim his blade to reckon.

IMP: You must use the rats to do the dirty things
no woman wants to do with you! (CACKLES)

GRACE: (ROARS A BATTLE CRY)

SOUND: BLADE GLANCES AGAINST STONE, CREATURE HOWLS

IMP: Ahh! Ahh! You got me! Enough! Enough!

GRACE: You'll pay for your trickery, demon!

IMP: No, please, please! Let me be! Go on!

GRACE: Not before you burn in hell!

SOUND: MEATY PLUNGE OF A BLADE

IMP: (SCREAMS)

NARRATOR: The wiry creature stared at Grace with
features all too human as its life poured
out on the black tiles. Grace threw it off
his blade in a dismissive gesture.

GRACE: You're next, wizard!

MUSIC: A RECKONING IS ABOUT TO COME. THE DRUMS OF
WAR BEAT FOR AN INEVITABLE BATTLE.

NARRATOR: Grace ascended a staircase that wound longer
and narrower than all the others. The more
he walked, the more he felt that he was not
moving at all, as though he were treading
through quicksand. But still he walked.

NARRATOR: He fought a feeling of vertigo as he crossed the threshold into a vast observatory with commanding views of the kingdom. Across the stone floor stood a figure shrouded in gray robes, almost a statue himself, save for golden eyes that glowed from within a heavy cowl. Its stringy figures wore no rings, carried no staves. He could imagine a skeleton supported its weight. But the voice of Roland Fierro D'Arcanus was no skeleton's.

ROLAND: I bid you greetings, Sir Grace. I have heard great things of you.

GRACE: Indeed? The slaying of the chimera Mah'ul'doon? Or the defeat of the trolls at Silverdale? Maybe the death of the ogre Kuhragh? I have come at your call, o wizard, but I fear you no more than the beasts I have slain in my days prior.

ROLAND: Brave you may be, but without manners. Remember that you are a guest in my home.

GRACE: And what a way to treat your guests! How do you account for the trickery you have showered upon me?

ROLAND: How do you account for the pitiless slaying
of my familiar?

GRACE: A worthy fate that shall soon be yours if
you do not stop weaving your silvery web!

ROLAND: As I have my answer, Sir Knight, so you
shall have yours. I invited you here to
test your virtue, and you have answered
abundantly clear.

GRACE: Then let us dance the dance and I shall cut
you down like I did your pathetic man thing!

SOUND: WIND ERUPTS AND BEGINS TO HOWL FURIOUSLY

MUSIC: CRESCENDOS

ROLAND: So be it, warrior, for time tells us your
kind shall never be at harmony with magic!

GRACE: (BATTLE CRY, ABSORBED BY THE WIND)

SOUND: METAL BOOTS BUCKLE, SWORD CLATTERS ON GROUND

GRACE: I shall have you... by the neck!

ROLAND: (MIGHTILY REVERBERANT) Dul amos di keras
meath ke abross de brebok

GRACE: No! Silence... fiend!

ROLAND: Duluth ex KIMUR TOV!

SOUND: DEAFENING ROAR OVERWHELMS ALL. SILENCE.

SOUND: RISE UP BIRDS TWITTERING, PASTORAL COUNTRY

NARRATOR: The knight awoke in a dim barn without dignity. He lay sprawled in a mound of hay, his ragged wounds patched but naked save for a burlap sack that covered his loins. He leapt up and pain roared in his side. His mind drowned with disorientation, his knees quaked. He grabbed at the burlap sack as it dropped, struggling to keep the last tatters of his pride. The door at the far end of the humble barn opened, letting in light and a fair haired maiden, her arms heavy with a tray of fruits and oatmeal.

MAIDEN: Ah! Kind sir! You have awoken, at last! I had begun to worry.

GRACE: Where am I? How did I get here? Tell me these things, woman!

MAIDEN: M... M'lord.. Please be not so harsh, I have tended you for weeks!

GRACE: Then you would know what has happened to my sword, and my armor!

MAIDEN: No, m'lord, I would not.

GRACE: Don't play dumb with me, woman! One moment I was locked in combat with a terrible mage, moments from victory, holding the holy blade Redeemer high, and the next I wake up to some poor wench in a stable! This is an outrage!

MAIDEN: (FIRED UP) Outrage, m'lord! I found you a disheveled, wretched brute naked in a ditch, and took you to the shelter of my home. Here I have slaved over you, hiding you from my father, praying that you awake. When you do, all you have to offer me are insults and wild stories. Begone, accursed man!

GRACE: (RESOLUTION) Pardon me... my lady... Pray, forgive me, and let me be at your service. Let me do all that I may to reconcile my terrible words.

MAIDEN: (PAUSE, THEN SIGHS) Let me speak to my father.

MUSIC: PASTORAL, ROMANTIC INTERLUDE

NARRATOR:

The maiden's father, a wiry aging widower, was not pleased to see a ruggedly handsome man appear at his doorstep, nor to hear his daughter plead to let this man stay under their roof. Yet, the summer was coming, and he could hardly attend to the tasks around the house, let alone the farm. So Sir Grace's accommodations in the barn were extended till harvest time. Grace soon discovered that wielding a plow and shovel was no easier than his sword and shield. With the strength of an ox he plowed, dug, chopped, sawed and nailed. He pulled weeds, sanded edges, sharpened rusty tools. And as he toiled in the summer's sun, it was not only corn and beans that grew, but love. Though he slept on a threadbare bed and slaved in the dirt from dusk till dawn, Sir Grace was prouder than when he fought any knoll or giant. The maiden was as surprised as he with the dedication with which he fulfilled his promise, and soon they both knew that he had repaid his debt in full several times over.

NARRATOR: The father, being no fool to men and maidens, bought a fierce dog and tied it between the rooms of the two lovers. But no beast could come between hearts drunk by the September moon.

SOUND: SHOVELING.

MAIDEN: M'lord!

SOUND: SHOVEL STABBED IN DIRT.

GRACE: M'lady, what may I do for you?

MAIDEN: Keep shoveling! Don't let my father see that we have been scheming.

GRACE: Very well.

SOUND: SHOVELING CONTINUES.

GRACE: Have we been scheming?

MAIDEN: If we may, m'lord. I was hoping that perhaps tonight we could steal away. There is a beautiful grove not far from here, where we may love by the light of the moon.

GRACE: And you would welcome me so?

MAIDEN: By any means, m'lord... I am yours.

GRACE: Then shall I rouse you?

MAIDEN: Meet me by the edge of the woods, an hour after nightfall. I dare not bear a lantern, but I shall wait for you there.

GRACE: And I shan't be late.

MUSIC: ROMANTIC WITH AN EDGY OVERTONE

NARRATOR: Sir Grace found it difficult to shovel for the rest of the day and when the father looked to see what he had left unfinished, Grace could only account that the sun at last had taken a toll on him. Though Grace had yet to finish a day's work less than that of ten men, the father accepted the excuse solemnly and they spent the remainder of the afternoon rolling dice. Through dinner, a porridge stew with lamb, Grace fought to not stare too long at the maiden and instead to be good company with her father, who was uneasy about the coming harvest time, and if he should have the hands to take down the crops which were to be thrice or more what he had grown in the past.

NARRATOR: Grace muttered an evasive answer and the dinner ended quietly, Grace bidding an early retirement to his loft in the barn.

SOUND: NIGHT AMBIENCE.

NARRATOR: The minutes stretched on like hours as Grace impatiently paced the room, cursing himself for being so easily perturbed.

GRACE: He has been a good lord to me, knowing me not from a vagabond. To violate his trust would breach my honor, yet... Dammit! The woman is too sweet to resist!

NARRATOR: He agonized until the appointed time came, when he crept outside without hesitation.

MUSIC: EVENING TONES

NARRATOR: A half-moon lit the path to the edge of the forest, across the well-tended fields and through tendrils of thin mist. He walked boldly through the night, but she was not there.

GRACE: M'lady! Are you out here?

SOUND: SOMETHING MOVING THROUGH BRUSH

GRACE: Don't play me as the fool. I wait where you told me!

SOUND: MOVEMENT INCREASES

GRACE: Is this some game, then? Am I meant to chase you into the forest?

SOUND: SHUFFLING MOVEMENT CONTINUES

GRACE: Very well.

SOUND: MORE SHUFFLING MOVEMENT. FOREST NOISES.

MUSIC: UNEASY BARITONE

GRACE: Lady? Lady! Where did you go?

VOICES: (WHISPERED) Go... Go now...

GRACE: What... what trickery is this?

MAIDEN: (OFF) M'lord... Are you nearby?

GRACE: I...

VOICES: Run... while you can...

NARRATOR: Grace froze as his eyes adjusted to the interior of this parcel of woods. Just past the threshold the trees became twisted, barren abominations, their roots knotted in damp swampy ground. And beyond it, deeper in the forest, he could see a figure moving towards him.

GRACE: (UNDER) Curse me to the pits of the nether...

NARRATOR: The figure wore his armor and bared his naked blade, Redeemer, in a gauntleted hand. The mithril radiated glorious blue in the half-moon, yet it was hard to tell where the apparition ended and the mist began.

GRACE: Fiend! Those are my possessions! Given to me by friends to celebrate my glorious deeds! Return them to me or you shall pay!

MAIDEN: (OFF) M'lord! M'lord! Where are you? Who are you speaking with!

NARRATOR: He briefly glanced over his shoulder, and suddenly found he had no orientation in the dim mist, only a clear line of sight to the mysterious apparition, who now stopped and stood boldly.

VOICE: (MYSTERIOUS CHUCKLE)

GRACE: So be it, demon! I shall tear your throat from your neck and send you back to hell!

MAIDEN: No my knight!

NARRATOR: He turned his head to see the maiden in a thin slip, fighting her way through the branches that clawed at her like searching hands. The slip tore off her and she stretched her arms out to him, shivering and naked in the misty night.

MAIDEN: Forget these trinkets and come to me, let us lead a simple life. Don't kill yourself for blind pride!

GRACE: Foolish woman! You know nothing of battle! See now the greatness of my glory!

MUSIC: BATTLE

SOUND: BATTLE FX ACCOMPANY THE NARRATION

NARRATOR: Grace lunged towards the figure which fought back with inhuman strength, flinging him across a snarled branch and into the mud. It swung the blade down but Grace rolled out of the way and rose back to his feet wielding a heavy stump. The figure swung the blade again and Grace threw the stump solidly against its chest. The figure staggered back a moment, and Grace lunged again, this time throwing the apparition against the ground.

NARRATOR: They struggled, locked in combat like two furious rams, until Grace howled a battle cry into the air and ripped Redeemer loose from the hands of the creature. In a solid, unthinking motion, he swept the blade straight down through the figure's chest, watching as dark golden eyes flickered briefly before fading away.

GRACE: (ELATED) Ha ha! My love! I have recovered my honor, my armor! Surely now you shall take my hand in marriage? You have witnessed that I am a titan amongst men!

NARRATOR: He turned to her, but she did not share his revelry, but stood hugging her shivering naked body, her eyes cast to the dark earth.

MAIDEN: Then why have you fallen, Sir Grace? Dispel your toil-earned humility for avarice and pride? Do you not see who you have truly slain?

NARRATOR: Her words cut him deeper than hard steel. He looked down at his chest and groaned. Blood spat from the same spot where he sank his blade into the apparition.

GRACE: (COLLAPSING) No... my lady... This is...
trickery... I am... yours...

NARRATOR: His blurring vision could barely focus on her, as the woods shifted into another reality altogether. The mist receded into the dank waters of a swamp, the proud trees twisted into agonized shapes, and in the distance, looming over it all, was a dull gray tower. Another figure emerged from the shadows -- the maiden's father -- but, no, it was the wizard. He placed a hand on the shoulder of the shivering maiden, and met the eyes of the hero just once before glancing away. The last blood spilled from Sir Grace's body now, and as he moved to speak to the wizard he saw in horror his arms turn to wood, his feet root themselves in the swamp waters as the moss hungrily slurped his blood.

GRACE: But...

NARRATOR: His last words were lost to the cry of the awakening wind...

MUSIC: (DRAMATIC) WINDS BEGIN TO RISE

NARRATOR:

...a wind which rose from the belly of the earth and spilled up across mountains and plains, beaches and tundra. The wind echoed and danced across the land, praising the humble magician who had restored the balance once more.

MUSIC:

MYSTERIOUS

THE END