



“The Lion Who Died Standing” A Folk Tale for Those Whose Worth Is Ignored

Dr. A. Arun Daves

In the hidden world of Aetherpine, where the trees touched the stars and rivers spoke forgotten names, there once lived a lion named Kaelor. His mane was once fire, his mind brighter. He was a Flamemane, descended from the ancient lions who taught the beasts how to think, how to lead, how to live not with claws but with counsel.

Kaelor had given thirteen long years to the Grand Forum of Hollowroot. There, beneath the roots of the mountain itself, creatures of every kind came for guidance. It was Kaelor who settled feuds without a drop of blood. It was Kaelor who remembered every law, every star-cycle, every lesson the elders once carved in stone.

But time is cruel to the wise.

As the seasons turned, new voices rose—louder, prouder, emptier. Young beasts who hadn't tasted hardship began to call Kaelor “*slow*,” “*old*,” “*dusty*.” They laughed when he spoke of patience. They rolled their eyes when he warned of forgetting the old ways.

One day, in the council den, a squirrel stood up, flippant and proud, and said:

“I don't know nothing, and I don't need to. This lion just talks in circles.”

The Forum laughed.

Kaelor did not.

He bowed his head. He did not protest. He left the Forum and wandered into exile. Not one voice stopped him. Not even the owls.

“I have killed something inside me,” Kaelor whispered as he reached the high cliffs of Solmarrow. *“But they did not see me die.”*

He built no home. He spoke no word. His mane faded. His fire dimmed. The forest forgot him, as they forget all who do not scream for attention.

But far away, the land grew worse. The beasts that took his place made laws of pride and ruin. They mocked the old, rewarded the loud, and taught the young that truth was weakness.

And Kaelor watched.

Until one night, in the bitter hush of frostfall, a tiny voice came sobbing through the trees. A young doe, trembling, broken, collapsed before Kaelor's cave.

“Please,” she wept. *“They're tearing down the Tree of Memory. The one your kind planted. The only place that still remembers our names.”*

Kaelor stared at her, silent. His bones ached. His heart had no songs left.

“They said it's useless,” she whispered, *“just like you.”*

That word—useless—cut deeper than any wound he'd borne in battle.

Kaelor turned to the cold stream beside him. For years, it reflected only silence. But tonight, he saw something different: a lion still standing.

Not proud.

But still there.

He rose.

The journey back to the Tree took three days. No beast recognized him. His mane was silver. His body bent. But in his chest, the ashes stirred.

When he reached the Tree of Memory, he found it surrounded by laughter and axes.

“Break it down!” shouted a young wolf. *“Build a stage! Who needs stories when we've got shows?”*

Kaelor stepped forward.

None noticed.



Until he placed his paw against the bark and whispered, *"This tree remembers your names—even when you forget them."*

The forest quieted.

The workers turned, startled by the voice that was more wind than roar.

"Who are you?" a badger sneered.

Kaelor looked at them all—not in anger, but in sorrow.

"I was once your guide. But I spoke too gently. So you crowned fools instead."

One monkey laughed. *"You? You're the lion who ran away when we didn't clap for you."*

Kaelor closed his eyes. *"No. I'm the lion who died quietly... and you never noticed."*

He lay down at the foot of the Tree—not in protest, but in remembrance. His ribs heaved like old bellows. His eyes dimmed. He did not move.

"Let's tear it down anyway," said the wolf.

But none moved.

Something held them still—the sight of a lion too tired to roar, but too proud to crawl.

That night, the forest wept.

The winds carried a scent of mourning.

Alu, the doe, stayed beside him. She sang the songs he once taught her mother. Slowly, other beasts came too—those who had once sat at his feet, learned from his patience, been healed by his quiet strength.

By morning, the axes were gone.

By moonrise, so was Kaelor.

He died at the foot of the Tree he protected.

No monument was raised. No grand farewell was sung.

Only silence.

But not the silence of forgetting.

The silence of truth.

The Tree of Memory still stands. No law protects it, only memory.

And every time the wind passes through its branches, the forest remembers—not the lion's name, not his titles—but the way he stood, silent and dying, still shielding something sacred.

If you are that lion—know this:

Some will never see your worth,

until the day you fall.

But even then,

your truth will live in the quiet

where real things do not die.

Bio–Note:

Dr. A. Arun Daves is working as an Assistant Professor of English at Jawahar Science College, Neyveli, Tamil Nadu. A native of Thenkuthu, a village near Neyveli, he holds a B.A. and M.A. in English Literature from St. Joseph's College, Cuddalore, a M.A. in Linguistics from Annamalai University, and an M.Phil. in English from PRIST University. He earned his Ph.D. in English from Annamalai University in 2021 for his thesis titled "Society and the Individual: A Critical Study of John Galsworthy's Plays." In addition to his doctoral research, Dr. Daves has published scholarly articles, poems, book reviews, and short fiction in various refereed, UGC-approved international journals and Anthologies. He serves on the editorial and review boards of reputed academic journals and regularly reviews research papers. His academic interests include modern British drama, literary theory, and interdisciplinary approaches to literature and language.