

Signed, Sealed and Delivered

(Darius, Astyages)

It is night time. Darius is discovered sitting on the edge of a couch, stage centre. Behind him a window. During the course of the sketch the light gradually appears. By his side is a noble, Astyages

Astyages: Why don't you sleep, my Lord King. There is absolutely nothing you can do now. You really have tried your best.

Darius: Have I? Have I really tried?

Astyages: Of course you have. You have nothing to reproach yourself with. You have made every possible effort to save him.

Darius: Yes to save him. If it wasn't for me he wouldn't need saving. Me and my royal decree. Just who do I think I am?

Astyages: You are the King and as such you can do what you like, after all.

Darius: What I like? Well that's a joke to start off with. If I could do what I liked, I'd be a lot happier. The fact is, I'm shackled, totally enmeshed in this irrevocable law. The law of the Medes and the Persians. The unchangeable law- and I have only myself to blame.

Astyages: Surely not, your highness.

Darius: I issued the edict. It was me. Nobody else. I'm the one who sealed Daniel's fate. It's all there in my own writing. How can I have been so stupid?

Astyages: You were under enormous pressure.

Darius; Self induced

Astyages: No I have to disagree with you there. It was my fellow nobles of the court and...I am ashamed to have to say it myself included. They...we put you under intolerable pressure to sign the decree.

Darius: A decree. Why did I do it? Once you put it in writing there's so little chance of going back. It's so final

Astyages: But to be fair you could not have expected Daniel to be so stubborn. He's not human, if you ask me. Most men faced with an ultimatum like that would take the easier path. I mean it's just a matter of his religion. It's not life and death.

Darius: It is now. Anyway, it's not like any religion I've ever seen. It's almost as if he's under orders. Orders that come from some higher authority than me or *(with a sneer) the unchangeable law of the Medes and the Persians. No something greater drives Daniel.*

Astyages: Why couldn't he have at least paid lip-service to the edict? Why act in such a brazen fashion. I mean it was so in your face. You issue a written decree that no-one is to worship any god or man for the next 30 days and he just carries on as usual. Down on his knees 3 times a day praying and giving thanks to his God. As if that would help.

Darius: You missed out something.

Astyages: What?

Darius: Oh just the fact that the edict...my edict allows worship of me only.

Astyages: And nothing wrtong with that.

Darius: Isn't there? I am beginning to have my doubts.

Astyages: King Darius, I have to say, you are far too hard on yourself. You are a victim of circumstances. You have been stitched up like a kipper by enemies of Daniel. They're the ones to blame, not you.

Darius: I issued the edict.

Astyages: They told you Daniel was ignoring it.

Darius: I issued the edict.

Astyages: You made every effort to find a way out. Ye gods you were hunting around for an exit route until the sun set. No-one could have done more.

Darius: I issued the edict.

Astyages: Well, what's done is done. You know there's no way out now. The law is the law. Why torment yourself. You have not eaten, you haven't slept. You have not relaxed at all. You have seen no-one

Darius: *(In disgust) Huh. That's not true. I have seen that rabble who came baying for his blood and to remind me (mimicking) that "according to the law of the Medes and the Persians no decree that the King issues can be changed". What a fool I was. Why didn't I see through their hostility earlier? (Agonizingly) What have I done?*

Astyages: It's not all your fault. You cannot single yourself out like this.

Darius: I was rash.

Astyages: You haven't been that rash.

Darius: I gave the order. They brought Daniel to me here and I gave the order. My own words are still ringing in my ears. "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you."

Astyages: Well maybe that was a bit rash. We are talking about a pride of lions after all. It'd have to be a powerful kind of god to rescue him from those cats. They aren't noted for their gentler arts. I don't think there's any getting out of this one in one piece, if I'm honest

Darius: *(Despairing)* I made pretty sure of that, didn't I? I had the stone brought and put over the mouth of the den. I sealed the stone. I used my own signet ring. We all did. What have we done?

Astyages: *(Without conviction)* Well, we can only hope that the God of Daniel is the kind that's able to break seals, roll away stones and save his people from death.

Darius: *(Longingly)* We can hope. We can hope. We can hope he is just that kind of God.

Astyages: Meanwhile your highness, look at the sky. We have been here right through the night. The sun is up and your ordeal is over.

Darius: My ordeal? My ordeal! *(Looks out of the window and shouts)* What about his?

Daniel, servant of the living God has your God, whom you

serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?

Freeze

A.Lund