PsyTales

Panos and the Climb

Panos had always believed that some people were just born good at things. His best friend, Bill, never studied maths but always got top marks. Catherine could run like the wind and win races without breaking a sweat. And Panos? He figured he just wasn't made for success. That was until the day of the Science Fair.

Every student at Valtadorion High School had to submit a project. It was mandatory. Panos wasn't excited. He never did well in science. It seemed like no matter how hard he tried, something always went wrong. So, he decided not to try too hard. He clumsily crafted a model of a volcano using an online tutorial, poured in vinegar and baking soda, and called it done.

On the day of the fair, Panos carried his project into the gym and set it on the table. Around him, other students bustled with excitement, setting up their displays. Catherine had created a miniature wind turbine that could power a light bulb. Bill had built a water filtration system using charcoal and sand. Panos felt his stomach sink. His volcano looked like a preschool craft.

When the judges came by, they asked him questions he didn't know how to answer. "What causes the chemical reaction?" one asked.
"Uh… baking soda and vinegar?" Panos mumbled. They smiled politely and moved on.

By the end of the day, the winners were announced. Bill won first place. Catherine got second. Panos didn't even get a mention.

That night, Panos sat on his chair at dinner, poking at his spaghetti.

"What's wrong, kiddo?" his dad asked.

"I'm just not good at science," Panos muttered.

His dad raised an eyebrow. "Did something happen?"

Panos told him about the fair, the judges, the other kids' amazing projects. His dad listened, then said, "You know, Panos, failing at something doesn't mean you're not good at it. It just means you haven't figured it out yet."

Panos frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Think of learning like climbing a mountain," his dad said. "Some people are already halfway up because they've had practice, or maybe they're using better equipment. But everyone climbs. If you stop at the bottom and say, 'I can't do it,' you'll never know what's up there. But if you say, 'I can't do it yet,' and keep going, you might surprise yourself." Panos thought about that for a while.

The next week at school, their science teacher, Ms. Angelou, handed back their fair evaluations. Panos had the lowest score in the class. But this time, instead of hiding the paper in frustration, he raised his hand.

"Ms. Angelou? Could I try again?"

The class turned to look at him. Ms. Angelou smiled.

"Of course you can," she said. "That's exactly what learning is about."

Panos decided he wanted to do something real this time—something he was curious about. He'd always been interested in how video games worked. So, he asked if he could create a basic computer game using coding. Ms. Angelou was surprised but supportive. She connected him with an older student named Evan who loved coding.

The first few weeks were hard. Panos had to learn an entirely new language—Python. His first few tries didn't even run. One version of his game had a character that ran backward off the screen and disappeared. Another had a bug that made the game crash if you pressed the spacebar.

"I'm just not cut out for this," Panos complained after one particularly frustrating session.

Evan shook his head. "You're learning. Every bug you fix means you understand more than you did yesterday. That's what matters."

Panos kept going. Over the next month, he stayed after school, watched online tutorials, and kept a journal of everything he learned. He even started helping other students who were struggling with basic coding problems. His confidence grew with every mistake he fixed. Finally, he finished a simple game where the player had to help a robot collect energy cells while avoiding obstacles. It was small, but it worked. And he had built it himself.

Ms. Angelou gave him a certificate for perseverance. But more importantly, Panos felt proud. Not because he had succeeded right away—but because he had failed, learned, and grown.

When the end-of-year presentation day arrived, Panos stood in front of parents, teachers, and students. He showed his game on the projector and talked about all the mistakes he had made along the way.

"I used to think I wasn't good at science," he told the audience. "But what I learned is that being good at something doesn't mean you never fail. It means you keep going even when you fail."

There was silence. Then applause. Afterward, Bill came up to him. "That was awesome," he said. "I could never do that."

Panos smiled. "Maybe not yet."

A few weeks later, Panos and his dad went hiking on a local trail. As they reached the top, Panos looked out over the valley.

"It's a long climb," he said.

"But worth it," his dad replied.

Panos nodded. He had learned that success wasn't a gift you were born with—it was a path you walked, one step at a time. And sometimes, the most important steps were the ones you took after falling.

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