

Lily and the Lion

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The Lady and the Lion

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The two stories have been used as the basis of this tale.

The Lady and the Lion

Once upon a time there was a girl called Lily. Also: two greedy sisters, a loving father, some lions, a sorcerer, a nasty princess, and both a griffin and a dragon!

Lily lived with her merchant father and her two sisters. Lily's sisters were nice enough young women but they knew what they liked, and what they liked was jewellery. One day, their father asked them what he should bring them from the journey he was about to undertake. It was no surprise that his oldest daughter asked for diamonds and his middle daughter asked for pearls.

"And what about you, Lily? What would you like?"

Lily looked up from her book.

"You, safe home," said Lily. "And if you could find a singing, soaring lark, that would be wonderful."



"And there was me thinking you'd ask for a book," said her father.

"Books are heavy. A lark would be lovely," Lily replied.

And so it was that the merchant bought on his travels a necklace made of sparkling diamonds and a string of milky luminous pearls. However, although he asked everywhere he went, he could not find a singing, soaring lark.

“What am I to do?” he asked his servant. “I so wanted to find this present for Lily but we are nearly home.”

Just then they heard the exuberant trill of a lark.

“There! There’s one,” said the merchant excitedly. “It’s in the tree over that wall. We can get that one.”



The merchant found a juicy caterpillar and put it in the cage he had bought. The two men scrambled over the wall. The servant lifted the cage on to a branch, while the merchant whistled to the lark. The bird spotted the caterpillar and hopped into the cage. Quickly the servant shut the door.

“We’ve done it!” the men exclaimed.

“You have indeed done it now,” agreed a deep growly voice behind them. Slowly the two men turned around. There in front of them stood a large tawny lion. A large tawny lion with big teeth, they noted. A large tawny lion with big teeth and a lot of friends. The men cowered against the tree trunk.



“What makes you think you may take a lark from my royal garden?” enquired the Lion Prince.

“I’m very sorry, Sir,” said the merchant. “I had no idea it was your garden.”

“But you knew it was not **your** garden,” said the Lion.

"True," said the merchant. "But my daughter asked me to bring her a singing, soaring lark from my travels and I am nearly home. I am afraid I forgot myself in fulfilling my promise."

"Hmm," said the Lion. "A forfeit must be paid. Your servant perhaps?"



"No, no," whispered the servant. "I don't want to be eaten by lions."

"No, indeed," said the merchant. "I cannot give you my servant. He has been a faithful friend throughout our travels."

"The first creature you meet when you get home then."

"But it might be my daughter, Lily!" exclaimed the merchant.

"It **might** be a dog though," said the servant in a trembling voice. "Or even a ... a mouse."

The merchant looked from the Lion to the servant.

"Quickly," said the Lion, growling deep in his throat. "Make your choice: your servant or whatever you meet at home. You may keep the lark as part of the bargain."

The merchant was sure the lion would eat the servant if he left him there. There was at least a chance it wouldn't be him or Lily who got eaten if he went home. Full of foreboding, he agreed to send whatever he first met at his house.

Never had there been such a sad homecoming, for Lily was watching for her father and rushed out to meet him. Her father gave her the lark with tears rolling down his face.

"Thank you, Father. But what is the matter?" asked Lily.



"I looked everywhere for the bird and the only one I could find was in the palace garden of a great lion. He caught me taking it and I had to promise to send the first creature I met at home or he would have eaten my servant on the spot. And that creature is you, my dear Lily."

"Oh! Well, never fear, Father. Promises must be kept. You were in a very awkward situation, just like Beauty's father in '*Beauty and the Beast*'. Maybe the Lion is lonely like the Beast and I will be able to save him. Or maybe I can take a thorn out of his paw as happened in '*Androcles and the Lion*' and he'll be grateful and not eat me. There are lots of possibilities." And Lily went and packed her bag, hugged her father and sisters and walked away to meet her fate.

By the time she arrived at the palace, the sun had set. Lily felt scared as she knocked on the great doors. *There are lots of possibilities*, she reminded herself and she stood up straight. The door creaked open. By the light of the full moon, Lily saw that it was not a lion but a young man standing there.

"H-h-hello," said Lily.

"Come in, come in," said the Prince, for that is who it was. "The lark man will have sent you? I am delighted to see you. I did rather hope it wasn't going to be the dog."

"Yes, my father sent me," said Lily. "But where is the lion?"

"Time enough for lions," said the Prince. "Don't hurry it upon us! Knights by night and lions by day - that was what the sorcerer said."

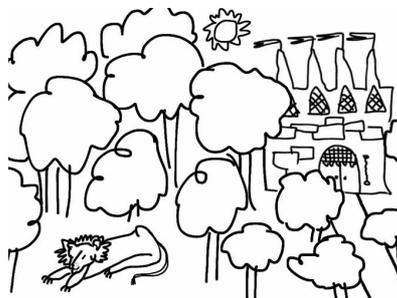
"Ah," said Lily. "I told Father it might be like '*Beauty and the Beast*'. Not that you're really a beast," she added, blushing.

"Well, I expect I used to be, a bit," said the Prince. "But I'm much nicer now."

"Trials to improve your character," said Lily, nodding her head. "Just like in '*Blondie, Doe and Looker*'. Though it wasn't very nice of you to threaten my father, even if he did take your lark."

"I'm sorry," replied the Prince. "I so wanted to see someone new! Come and meet everyone. There's roast chicken for dinner." Lily followed him into the palace, relieved that the chicken would be roasted, not raw. Life could be very much worse.

As the days went by, Lily got quite used to sitting up late with the Prince and his friends and sleeping through the morning, while the others rose at dawn and dozed in the shade under the trees outside. In the afternoons, she began to set the gardens in order; lions are not good at gardening and it is not easy to do by moonlight.



As the light faded each day, the great beasts gave a last stretch and transformed into people. Shaking off their doziness, they went inside to cook and clean before sitting down to enjoy the evening together. (The servants had all run away when they'd seen the lions.) The Prince made sure that Lily sat beside him. It was not many weeks before he asked her to marry him and she was happy to agree.

One day some news arrived: one of Lily's sisters was to be married too!

It was decided that Lily would go to the wedding with some of the lions for company. Sadly, her husband could not risk going. The sorcerer had said that if the light of a torch landed on him while he was being a lion, he would turn into a dove for seven years.

"You go," he said. "You can tell me about it later."

So she did and her family was very happy to see for themselves that she was alive and not eaten.

The next year brought Lily and the Prince great delight with the birth of their baby boy. Then another invitation came.

"My other sister is to be married. Oh, I do wish you could come and meet them all," said Lily. She and the Prince decided that, if they were very careful, it might be managed. Lily sent a message that a special hut must be built where the Lion Prince could wait for nightfall. It must have no windows and thick walls.

The little family set out joyfully and reached her father's home. The Lion Prince went into the hut, while Lily took their son to the wedding. On the way back from the church, the grand procession was lit by torches although the sun had not quite set.

As they passed the hut, a flicker of light no wider than a hair shone through a crack in the door. It had been made from green wood and had split a tiny bit. Lily heard a great roar turn into a gentle coo.

"Oh no!" she exclaimed, rushing in to see. No lion was to be found, nor prince either, but only a white dove, fluttering.

"I have to fly," said the Dove Prince. "I will let fall a feather and a drop of blood every seven paces – perhaps you can follow me and we will still be together."

"It will be like '*Hansel and Gretel*'," Lily assured him. "And that turned out all right in the end.

As long as he doesn't get caught by a witch before I get there, she added to herself.

Quickly, Lily entrusted her son to her family. Then she took to her heels, following the red and white trail along the road.

The Dove Prince flew onward every day for all the seven years of the spell and Lily travelled behind. Each evening the dove would roost in a tree beside Lily but there was no turning back into his human form now.



On the very last day of the seven years, Lily awoke to find the Prince had already flown away. She jumped up and set out after him. After a little way though, the trail stopped. She looked and looked but there was neither feather nor blood to be seen any more.

*When Prince Ivan was searching in 'The Frog Princess', he got help from an old man, a good witch and **several** animals, Lily said to herself. I could do with some help like that about now.*

She looked around to see if there were any old men, witches or animals coming but there was nary a one.

I suppose each person must live their own life and make their own story, she thought, a little wearily.

She called out to the sun, since no one else was offering to help. "You are up high, Sun. Have you seen a white dove fly this way?"

"I fear not," said the sun. "But I will give you this casket to open at a time of great need."



"Thank you," called Lily.

Later, when the moon was showing her white face, Lily called out to her too. "You travel all around the world, Moon. Have you seen a white dove fly this way?"

"I fear not," said the moon. "But I will help you with this egg. Break it at a time of great need."



"Thank you," called Lily.

Just then Lily felt the night wind stirring.

"Night Wind," she said. "I have lost my husband, the white dove. Have you seen him?" A tear slipped down Lily's cheek.

"I fear not," said the night wind. "Take courage though - perhaps my brothers have."

So Lily wrapped herself in her cloak and slept until the other winds came along in the morning.

Neither the east nor west winds had seen the dove but towards evening the south wind had some news.

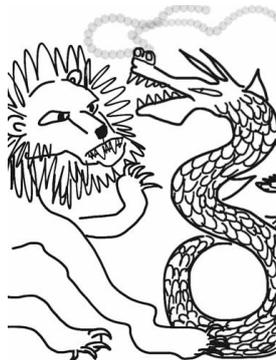
“He is a dove no more, My Lady. He is once again a lion and is engaged in a mighty battle with a dragon on the banks of the Red Sea.”

Just then the night wind blew by again.

“If you go to the Red Sea, you will find reeds growing upon its right bank. Choose the eleventh reed and use it to hit the dragon. That dragon is really an enchanted princess. The Lion Prince will then be able to win the battle. The spell will be broken and both will return to their human forms.

“Standing nearby you will see a griffin. You and your husband must jump on the griffin’s back and it will bear you home. But it’s too far for it to carry you all the way across the sea; so take this nut and, half way across, drop the nut and a tree will grow for the griffin to rest on.”

Lily thanked the winds and set off for the Red Sea. There she could see they had been right. She started to count the reeds. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and she broke off the very next one. Choosing her moment, she rushed in and whacked the dragon on its haunch. The lion and the dragon whirled round and round.



The next thing Lily saw clearly was her husband being hauled on to the griffin by the Princess! Away they flew towards the Princess’s home in the mountains.

Oh no! cried Lily. *That wasn’t supposed to happen! And just when the seven years were over too.* She felt rather hard done by. *Ah well, everyone must live their own life and make their own story. I will just have to carry on,* she thought. She plodded after the griffin that was landing on a castle wall in the far, far distance.

When she arrived much later, Lily learned from the chatter at the castle gates that the Princess had returned with a fiancé and was planning a wedding.

Lily sank to the ground. *This is too much*, she said to herself. *How can he marry her? He's already married to me! Oh, what am I to do?* A tear trickled down her face. She groped in her bag for a handkerchief. At the bottom, she could feel something hard. It was the casket from the sun!

Deciding this was indeed a time of great need, Lily opened it at once. Inside was a dazzling golden dress made from the sun's rays sewn together. It was very beautiful but Lily wondered how it was supposed to help. It looked like a dress to wear to a wedding.

Now, *there's an idea*, thought Lily and she carried the dress into the castle and asked to see the Princess.

"I must have that dress!" declared the Princess. "How much do you want for it?"

"Your Royal Highness is too good," said Lily. "I thank you but I have all the money I need. What I ask in exchange for my beautiful dress is some time with your husband-to-be."

A cunning expression came over the Princess's face. "Very well," she said. "You may visit him tonight and stay until the first glimpse of dawn's light."

When Lily was shown to the Prince's room, she was alarmed to find he was already asleep. She shook him but he did not stir. Lily knelt down beside the Prince's bed and whispered in his ear, pleading with him to wake up and remember her. At dawn, she crept sadly away. The Prince had not woken. He had not recognised her.

In the fields beside the castle, Lily sat down to think. What could she try next? She remembered she had another gift in her bag and she drew out the egg from the moon. This was indeed a time of great need, so she cracked the egg.

Out came a beautiful golden hen, surrounded by twelve golden chicks. Lily gathered them into her skirt and went up to the castle to see the Princess.

"I must have the hen and chicks," said the greedy Princess. "How much do you want for them?"

"Your Royal Highness is too good," said Lily. "I thank you but I have all the money I need. What I ask in exchange for my hen and her chicks is some time with your husband-to-be."

"Very well," said the Princess, scheming. "You may visit him tonight and stay until the first glimpse of dawn's light." Then she hurried away to see the castle page.

When the page brought his evening drink, the Prince asked him, "Was it windy last night? I seemed to hear a murmuring all night long."

"No, Sire, it was a still night. Perhaps it was the lady that visited you and whispered in your ear."

"Someone visited me? But why didn't I wake up?" asked the Prince.

The page looked down. "That will have been the sleeping draught," he muttered.

"You gave me a sleeping draught?"

"Yes, Sire," said the page. "I'm sorry but the Princess told me to add it to your daily potion – I mean, drink."

The Prince opened the window and poured his drink out. As the sun set, he could feel his mind getting clearer and clearer. When Lily arrived, the Prince woke up from the potion-dream he had been in. The Princess's spell was over.

"Lily! My darling wife!" he exclaimed. You can imagine how happy Lily was! They embraced and called to the griffin that was grazing below, and climbed on its back. They flew away across the sea and beyond the reach of the scary Princess. When the griffin started to tire, Lily remembered the gift from the night wind and dropped the nut into the water. The griffin was able to rest on the large tree that sprang up. Then it carried them home to their own country.



Lily and the Prince were re-united with their son and returned to their palace, where they lived their own life and made their own story to the end of their days. They chose to make it a life full of kindness and loyalty, humility and perseverance - and very happy it was too.

