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The Adventure Of The Lion

Lady Charlotte Guest

As Owain one day sat at meat, in the city of Caerleon upon Usk, a damsel entered the hall upon a bay horse, with a curling mane, and covered with foam; and the bridle, and as much as was seen of the saddle, were of gold. The damsel was arrayed in a dress of yellow satin. And she came up to Owain, and took the ring from off his hand. "Thus," said she, "shall be treated the deceiver, the traitor, the faithless, the disgraced, and the beardless." And she turned her horse's head and departed.

Then his adventure came to Owain's remembrance, and he was sorrowful. Having finished eating, he went to his own abode, and made preparations that night. The next day he arose, but did not go to the court, nor did he return to the Countess of the Fountain, but wandered to the distant parts of the earth and to uncultivated mountains. And he remained there until all his apparel was worn out, and his body was wasted away, and his hair was grown long. And he went about with the wild beasts, and fed with them, until they became familiar with him. But at length he became so weak that he could no longer bear them company. Then he descended from the mountains to the valley, and came to a park, that was the fairest in the world, and belonged to a charitable lady.

One day the lady and her attendants went forth to walk by a lake that was in the middle of the park. They saw the form of a man, lying as if dead, and were terrified. Nevertheless they went near him, and touched him, and saw that there was life in him. And the lady returned to the castle, and took a flask full of precious ointment and gave it to one of her maidens. "Go with this," said she, "and take with thee yonder horse, and clothing, and place them near the man we saw just now; and anoint him with this balsam near his heart; and if there is life in him, he will revive, through the efficiency of this balsam. Then watch what he will do."

The maiden departed from her, and went and poured of the balsam upon Owain, and left the horse and garments hard by, and went a little way off and hid herself to watch him. In a short time she saw him begin to move. He rose up, looked at his person, and became ashamed of the unseemliness of his appearance. Then he perceived the horse and the garments that were near him. He clothed himself, and with difficulty mounted the horse.

Then the damsel discovered herself to him, and saluted him. And he and the

maiden proceeded to the castle, and the maiden conducted him to a pleasant chamber, and kindled a fire, and left him.

He stayed at the castle three months, till he was restored to his former guise, and became even more comely than he had ever been before. And Owain rendered signal service to the lady, in a controversy with a powerful neighbor, so that he made ample requital to her for her hospitality; and he took his departure.

As he journeyed he heard a loud yelling in a wood. It was repeated a second and a third time. And Owain went towards the spot, and beheld a huge craggy mound, in the middle of the wood, on the side of which was a gray rock. There was a cleft in the rock, and a serpent was within the cleft.

Near the rock stood a black lion, and every time the lion sought to go thence the serpent darted towards him to attack him. And Owain unsheathed his sword, and drew near to the rock; and as the serpent sprung out he struck him with his sword and cut him in two; and he dried his sword, and went on his way as before. Behold the lion followed him, and played about him, as though it had been a greyhound that he had reared.

They proceeded thus throughout the day, until the evening. When it was time for Owain to take his rest he dismounted, and turned his horse loose in a flat and wooded meadow. He struck fire, and when the fire was kindled, the lion brought him fuel enough to last for three nights. And the lion disappeared. Presently the lion returned, bearing a fine large roebuck, and threw it down before Owain, who went towards the fire with it.



Owain took the roebuck, skinned it, and placed slices of its flesh upon skewers round the fire. The rest of the buck he gave to the lion to devour. While he was so employed, he heard a deep groan near him, and a second, and a third. The place whence the groans proceeded was a cave in the rock; and Owain went near, and called out to know who it was that groaned so piteously. And a voice answered, "I am Luned, the hand-maiden of the Countess of the Fountain." "And what dost thou here?" said he. "I am imprisoned," said she, "on account of the knight who came from Arthur's court, and married the countess. And he staid a short time with her, but he afterwards departed for the court of Arthur, and has not returned since. And two of the countess's pages traduced him, and called him a deceiver. And because I said I would vouch for it he would come before long and maintain his cause against both of them, they imprisoned me in this cave, and said that I should be put to death, unless he came to deliver me, by a

certain day; and that is no further off than to-morrow, and I have no one to send to seek him for me. His name is Owain, the son of Urien." "And art thou certain that if that knight knew all this, he would come to thy rescue?" "I am most certain of it," said she.

When the slices of meat were cooked, Owain divided them into two parts, between himself and the maiden, and then Owain laid himself down to sleep; and never did sentinel keep stricter watch over his lord than the lion that night over Owain.

The next day there came two pages with a great troop of attendants to take Luned from her cell, and put her to death. Owain asked them what charge they had against her. They told him of the compact that was between them; as the maiden had done the night before. "And," said they, "Owain has failed her, therefore we are taking her to be burnt." "Truly," said Owain, "he is a good knight, and if he knew that the maiden was in such peril, I marvel that he came not to her rescue. But if you will accept me in his stead, I will do battle with you." "We will," said the youths.

And they attacked Owain, and he was hard beset by them. And with that, the lion came to Owain's assistance, and they two got the better of the young men. And they said to him, "Chieftain, it was not agreed that we should fight save with thyself alone, and it is harder for us to contend with yonder animal than with thee." And Owain put the lion in the place where Luned had been imprisoned, and blocked up the door with stones. And he went to fight with the young men as before.

But Owain had not his usual strength, and the two youths pressed hard upon him. And the lion roared incessantly at seeing Owain in trouble. And he burst through the wall, until he found a way out, and rushed upon the young men and instantly slew them. So Luned was saved from being burnt.

Then Owain returned with Luned to the castle of the Lady of the Fountain. And when he went thence, he took the countess with him to Arthur's court, and she was his wife as long as she lived.

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