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The Lions In The Way

Maud Lindsay

Once upon a time three friends set out to go to the palace of the king, which was known as the House Beautiful.

The king himself had invited them there, and that they might have no trouble in finding the way he sent to them a scroll upon which the path was marked so plainly that it would have been a hard matter to have missed it. And to make assurance doubly sure he wrote upon the scroll with his own hand, bidding them to keep to the path.

"Turn neither to the right nor to the left," his message said; "but follow the path and it will lead you safely to the House Beautiful, where I have prepared a place for you."

All their lives the three friends had heard of the wonders of the king's house. Some people said that it was built of gold bright as the sun itself, and others that it was made of gleaming pearl. Its windows were said to overlook the whole world, and its towers to reach higher than the sky. And every one agreed that there was naught within its gates but peace and joy.

So eager were the friends to see it that they could not journey fast enough to satisfy themselves, and from morning until night they urged each other on.

The path by which they were to go was a narrow path, with a rough place now and then, and now and then a briar or sharp stone upon it, but for the most part it was a pleasant way. The travelers hastened joyfully along it and all went well with them until, one day, they met a man whose face was turned toward the land from which they had just come.

"Good neighbors," he cried, "why travel you so fast? Is a house afire or a friend ill; or does a feast wait till you come? Tell me, I pray you, that I may sorrow with you, or rejoice, as your need may be."

"Rejoice, rejoice!" cried the three; "for we journey to the king's House Beautiful, where a place is prepared for us."

But when the man heard this he shook his head sorrowfully as if what they told him was grievous news indeed.

"I, too, had thought of going there," he said; "but that was before I knew of the

lions in the way."

"Lions in the way!" cried the travelers, looking at each other with startled eyes.

"Aye, lions," repeated the man solemnly, "the fiercest and largest that ever man saw. Their very roaring shakes the ground, and many a traveler has been devoured by them, so people say. As for myself, I have not seen them. To hear of them is enough for me."

"And for me," said one of the travelers; and in spite of all his companions might do or say to persuade him, he would go no farther.

"The king's house may be beautiful as the morning and as full of wonders as the sky is full of stars, but what good will it be to me if I am eaten by the lions?" said he.

And his friends were forced to journey on without him.

As they went they talked of the lions in the way and the one said to the other:

"Think you it is true, or but an idle tale?"

"True or not we shall pass in safety. Have we not the king's own word for it?" said the other; and he led the way with such great strides that his friend could scarcely keep pace with him.

On and on they traveled without stop or hindrance, till all at once the air was filled with a great noise that shook the earth beneath their feet and set their knees to trembling.

There was no mistaking what it was. Even though they had never heard the sound before, they knew it was the roaring of the lions.

And the second traveler began to grow afraid.

"Let us go around by another way," he said. "Surely there are more paths than one to the king's house."

And though the other spread out before him the scroll on which the path was marked and read once more the message of the king: "Turn neither to the right nor to the left but follow the path and it will lead you safely to the House Beautiful, where a place is prepared for you," he would pay no heed to it but turned away into a by-path and followed it out of sight.

The other traveler was forced to journey on the path alone, with the roaring of the lions in his ears and the shaking of the earth beneath his feet. Nor had he gone a furlong more when just ahead he spied the lions themselves. One on each side of the path they stood with flaming eyes and yawning mouths; and at the very sight of them the traveler's heart beat quick and sharp and his feet faltered upon the way.



But his faith in the king's word was greater than his fear. "Falter not, oh, feet! Fear not, oh, heart! There is safety in the path. The king himself has said it," he cried as he pressed on.

And lo! and behold, when he had come to the lions he found that they were chained. Roar as they might and strive as they would, they could not touch those who walked in the path that the king had marked; and the traveler passed in safety.

Beyond the lions stood the House Beautiful, with walls of gold bright as the sun itself and gates of gleaming pearl. Its windows overlooked the world, its towers reached above the sky, and of its wonders not the half had ever been told him.

The traveler's place was prepared for him, and the king was waiting to welcome him to his house; and he lived there in peace and joy forever after.

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