

# The Lion, the Eagle and the Mountain

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Once upon a time there was a rich land ruled over by a rather selfish King. His palace was gold-lined and had gold outhouses and things, but the further away from the King's palace you went, the poorer and barer everything became and, in fact, the distant part was just a barren wasteland.

There were all kinds of creatures in this land, but the King had appointed two of them to run the place for him - being a bit lazy - and these were the Lion and the Eagle. The King said to the Lion: You're in charge of the ground and everything that's on the ground. And to the Eagle he said: You're in charge of everything above the ground, up in the sky. They thought this was a reasonable demarcation - although there can always be demarcation disputes, of course.

The Lion loved to roam majestically over the countryside sniffing here and there. He could tell exactly what was going on by the feeling in his whiskers. He could sniff out trouble a long way off and nip it in the bud with his loud voice and he could sense festivity too, so he often invited himself to other people's parties and always enjoyed himself very much.

The Eagle took a much broader view, either sitting in his eyrie up on the mountain or soaring on the wind and looking way down to the ground with his piercing eyes. Taking in so much at once had developed his mind and his wits were as sharp as his beak and his claws. Some called him harsh and cold, but he was knowledgeable and he never overlooked a detail. He kept to himself much more than the Lion.

The mountain on which the Eagle lived was not far from the King's palace, but its tall peak could be seen from every point in the land. It affected everyone, the mountain, but no one took more interest in it than the King himself.

At the base of the mountain there were tunnels leading inside and the entrance was closely guarded, in each case, by an elderly, rather mean-looking dwarf. Out of these tunnels there came a continuous stream of dwarves, and some other creatures, carrying sacks of gold which they took straight to the palace before returning through another tunnel to the inside of the mountain.

The Lion had always felt some uneasiness about this business of the mountain, especially because it was kept secret, even from him, and he was getting more concerned about it. It didn't smell right. He had this feeling that there could be something sinister, maybe cruel, going on under the mountain. There was a rumour that animals were kept there. He tried to find out from the dwarves, but dwarves aren't like elves, they aren't very communicative at the best of times - they just mutter and look down at the ground.

So the Lion decided he'd talk with the Eagle about this. They didn't normally meet much, with this demarcation business, but he managed to get the Eagle to hover round for a bit and said what he felt and the Eagle said: No, nothing to worry about, from what I can see. I think we need those sacks of gold. I rather like the golden gleam of those outhouses. And he flew away.

The Lion was still worried, however, and so were a good many other creatures - even some who worked in the mountain - and, eventually, the Eagle was called upon to do some research - to

look into the matter from above, as it were. So, in due course, he sent down a report which said, essentially, that he couldn't see anything except the top of a mountain. And there was nothing to worry about.

Now, as with any demarcation, there was a group which supported the Eagle's point of view and another group which supported the Lion's and, in time, a serious rift developed throughout the land.

So the King said: we can't have this. I'll appoint a Royal Commission - that'll calm everybody down - and we'll have expert witnesses from over the sea. This they did. The wise Dolphin was brought all the way from the sea, and she said what they had to do was for the Lion and the Eagle to hold meetings until the matter was resolved. However, this was very difficult to arrange, because the Eagle didn't like spending long on the ground and the Lion certainly wasn't about to fly.

So they had another Royal Commission and another Dolphin came and she explained that nothing at all would happen until the Lion and the Eagle were both prepared to leave their accustomed territory altogether and hold long meetings in the dreaded wasteland, which was barren, neutral ground. Then, the Dolphin said, they would be amazed by what would happen - and how right she was, as you will soon find out.

The Eagle and the Lion were very reluctant, but the King said: off you go. It'll keep them occupied, he thought. The Lion had to trek for days, and leave behind all his familiar smells and comforts, to reach the harshness of the wasteland. The Eagle had to come right down from his cool, clear, air to the hot, flat desert where his view was unbearably restricted and the sameness of everything appalled him.

From the very start of their first meeting, however, an incredible thing began to happen to the great mountain. Cracks began to appear in its peak and the weathering of the mountain was so speeded up that its top part was noticeably changing shape - getting rounder and beginning to break up. This only happened while they were actually meeting. When they stopped for smoko or had a flexi-day, nothing happened, but as soon as they met again, the peak of the mountain would suddenly age some more.

In between the desert meetings, the Eagle could do more research and he could see a little further into the mountain. Most people were pleased about this, but the King was now having second thoughts about the whole affair. He hadn't expected this breaking down of the mountain and he didn't really want everyone to know what went on inside. The fact was that he kept a flock of magic lambs with golden fleeces in the mountain and he was the one who supervised the harvesting of this Golden Fleece - which was, in fact, the reason that the land was as rich as it was.

Now, the controversy hadn't died down with all these meetings - it seemed to be getting worse. The King put a ban on the meetings, but that only drew attention to them, so that many others joined in to support either the Lion or the Eagle. Eventually, it was only some of the dwarves and the King himself who took no part in the meetings. The wasteland rang with the noise of the debate which had now become truly searching and fearless.

When the last meeting had gone deep into unknown territory, and just as the clamour reached a frightening crescendo, there was a tremendous clap, like thunder, heard right across the land.

The great mountain erupted in sheets of fire, and rivers of volcanic lava spewed out, and burning ash and stones were thrown across the palace and the nearby land, bringing a fairly cruel death to many of the dwarves and, indeed, also, to the King, himself.

It was a long time before the Lion and the Eagle could return to the mountain. Both were humbled by what had happened. They decided then to combine forever their respective powers of feeling and thinking to heal the land and, as time passed, there came a new King who built a smaller palace, with no gold outhouses. But it was not this which made everyone so happy. It was something else.

It was the discovery that the magic lambs had survived the volcano and were still alive and well. They explained that they were enormously resistant to physical damage, so there had been no need to worry about them. However, they certainly preferred to live in the more natural state which was now so incredibly provided for them.

For the lambs were now living in the huge crater on top of the flattened mountain where there was lush, green, pasture as far as the eye could see, and every imaginable kind of living thing, streams of clear water, gurgling down the mountainside, trees and birds, and so on; and they still produced their Golden Fleece. In fact, the Eagle was now able to organise the harvesting of the Golden Fleece more efficiently than ever, so the land could remain wealthy for a very long time.

The Eagle built a new eyrie in the mountain and flew back and forth revelling in the teeming life across the land. There were no outhouses, but the golden gleam seemed to be spreading gradually outwards - even reaching into the wasteland.

The Lion could now roam to his heart's content amidst all his favourite smells, but what he enjoyed most was to stroll across the grassy mountain to lie down for a while with the lambs.

Lloyd Fell c. 1987

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