



THE DOG AND THE LION

Once upon a time there was a dog named Hercules who lived in a house that was only a stone's throw away from a jungle. One day he realised that even though he lived so close, he had never actually been to the jungle. Of course, he'd heard a thing or two about it – curious, intriguing things - but he'd never dared to go there himself. So one fateful day, he decided it was finally time to go and see for himself what a jungle really was and what was hiding inside.

Hercules had no clue what kinds of animals lived in the jungle, and it didn't even cross his mind that some of them could be dangerous and that he should be careful. Where he'd grown up, he was considered an excellent hunter. He was fast and strong and he could deal with all sorts of things. There was no doubt in his mind that he'd not only be safe from any possible threats, but that he'd be respected and feared in the jungle.

It was early in the morning when Hercules set off to explore the jungle. He ran towards it fearlessly, and soon he was at its gates. Once he was inside, he boldly strutted around, looking curiously at everything around him and admiring the beauty of this new wilderness. Everything was lush and green and the grass was so tall it could hide the biggest of bears. Every now and then, he would hear a rustle, and suddenly he would remember he wasn't alone, but still he wasn't scared.

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Before long, a lion with a great bushy mane appeared just a few steps away from him. The big cat strutted slowly through the tall grass, paying attention to no one. Hercules had never seen such an animal, nor heard about it.

Even though the lion was huge, Hercules didn't fear him one bit.

"I could hunt him and eat him for dinner!" he thought. He'd caught so many animals at home, and not even the larger ones could scare him. He was sure he could make short work of this animal too, too.

Hercules followed the lion quietly for a while, then broke into a run. As soon as the huge cat was within his reach, he prepared to jump. In that moment, though, the majestic lion turned his head towards him and looked directly at the attacking dog with piercing, merciless eyes. Hercules stopped in his tracks.

"Maybe this animal won't be as easy a prey as I thought," Hercules said to himself. Now that they were looking at each other, the lion seemed much stronger and more terrifying. It was clear that fighting him would be brutal.

It felt like time itself had stopped. The dog and the lion watched each other, each sizing up their opponent. The silence only lasted for a few seconds, but to Hercules it felt like minutes. Suddenly, the lion opened his large mouth and let out a deafening roar. Hercules was so scared he forgot to breathe – he had never heard such a terrifying noise in his whole life. The sound echoed through the jungle. The birds that had been watching them from the safety of the trees took off and flew away. Even a giant snake that just happened to be passing by hissed and disappeared into the thick bushes.

Hercules stood as still as a stone. He was so scared, he couldn't make his paws work. He wanted to run away as fast and as far as he could, but he couldn't seem to move a single muscle in his body. He could see giant teeth in the lion's open mouth, but they weren't even the scariest part. The lion's head was so big! His chest so wide! His paws so terribly huge! With every second he looked fiercer and fiercer. His snout and forehead wrinkled with anger and his fur bristled like a porcupine.

Monkeys started screeching in the trees, so loud and sharp that Hercules finally managed to move one of his paws, then another, and then he was running for

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his life – just in time! He didn't want to be the lion's lunch, so he ran through the trees and the bushes and the grass and his heart raced faster than ever before. He wanted to get out of the jungle as soon as possible, far away from the animal whose roar was so deafeningly loud.

The only animal who hadn't run away was an old fox, who was used to the lion's roaring and, as a result, witnessed this peculiar encounter. She found the whole thing to be absolutely hilarious, as she had seen Hercules strutting around before he had met the lion, and whenever she told the story it would take her a whole minute to stop laughing long enough to tell how Hercules had run away with his tail between his legs, no longer convinced that he was the fiercest animal in all the land.