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To Éloïse,

SAINT MICHAEL AND THE DRAGON



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THERE WAS A WORLD...



Once upon a time, love prevailed in the world. No one was happy if others were not. And as a constant reminder, a statue had been set on top of a church built high on a hill called "Mont-Saint-Michel". It was the statue of an angel fighting a dragon. The angel, with a sword raised high, had a foot on the neck of the beast lying on the ground. According to legend, it was not really a statue: the fight had indeed taken place, and angel and dragon had been frozen in time at the very moment when Good had prevailed over Evil. No one knew who could have done such a thing, but under this spell, the people of that land loved and respected each other.

It was there that lived a little girl whose lovely name was Éloïse. Her father had built his house at the foot of the hill, and from her bedroom window, Éloïse could see the angel and the dragon.

Beautiful, full of life, she had a happy childhood, although not totally carefree. Her father had told her so often that happiness can only exist if it's shared that she never stopped worrying about the people around her. She gave freely whatever money she had in her little purse to the poor she met in the streets, and each Friday, she helped her father prepare and serve a meal to those in need around them.

One day, she felt so tired that she went to bed earlier than usual. And so, as our tale begins, Éloïse is asleep and dreams...







First dream

Éloïse dreams that she is a princess living in a castle surrounded by a forest, and that her father has given her an animal as a companion. But it's no ordinary pet, since that animal is a... lion!


Together, they run through the woods, drink in brooks and chase after deer and boars for fun, never to hurt them. Their laughs and roars echo in the woods where, as falling stars, they leave a trail of joy and wonder.

However, in Éloïse's dream, such a happy way of life does not last. People grow tired of being kind to each other. In their hearts, selfishness and jealousy replace love.

The rich become so rich that they build huge palaces where they can ignore human misery. And the poor become so destitute that they have no other choice than to fight to survive. Thousands of them rebel, only to be crushed by the armies sent against them by the people in power. Soon, in a world full of fear and misery, people lose any hope in a brighter future.

Éloïse, seeing so much suffering around her, cannot resign herself to stay idle. Every day, instead of frolicking in the woods, she and her lion start to run desperately from one end of the land to the other to try and give some assistance to the poor. She consoles, helps and encourages them, but they are so many that she cannot give them all the help they need.

The kindness of her heart is all she has.



One evening, as she and her lion are coming back from a long run, she sees some will-o'-the-wisps dancing among the trees. Ahead of her, they leap, prance and snake through the forest. Surprised at first, she urges her lion on to get closer and gallop at their side, but at a distance, to be able to see without being seen. She then discovers that the lights she has fancied were will-o'-the-wisps are, in fact, simply torches. Under their flickering light, she sees the hooded heads of a group of men galloping at breakneck pace, forcefully and resolutely towards what she soon realizes is her father's castle.

Are they planning to attack him, to burn down what is their home?

She has to stop them. But how?

She switches direction and takes a shortcut leading to a bend, a half-mile away, on the path the men are following, to cut them off. She gets there first, and slipping on the ground from the back of her trusted steed, she tells the lion:

- I am too weak to face these armed men. You are the only one who can stop them. You have to, we need you!

They hide behind some bushes.

When the horsemen get close, the lion tries to jump. Alas! Paralyzed by his fright of the torches' flames, he freezes, and one after the other, the men keep passing by...

As the last one is about to pass, Éloïse puts her hand on the lion's neck.

Shaking away his fright, he jumps out of the shadows on the back of the horseman who falls on the ground and lies there, knocked unconscious, while his horse flies away, neighing with terror. The other men, alerted by the noise, stop in their tracks and turn back. When they get close, the lion stands up on his rear legs. At this fearsome sight, the horses rear up too and throw off their riders. Only one of them, who seems to be their leader, manages to stay in his saddle. He draws his sword and gallops towards the lion, but he dodges, jumps on the horse's back, bites the man's shoulder and throws him on the ground.

There he lies, in the shadow of his torch slowly burning away on the ground, in incredible pain and unable to fight back, just waiting for the lion to finish him off, as his companions watch from a distance.

The lion, however, does not attack again to kill. He chases the horse away and turns back to the bushes where Éloïse is waiting. Immediately, she jumps on her friend's back and they run off as fast as they can to tell her father what's happened.

When she woke up the next morning, Éloïse went quickly to her window to see if the world had indeed changed. But in the streets, people were talking and greeting each other, and women were selling fruits and vegetables, as usual. Looking up to the statue crowning the church and the village, Éloïse saw the dragon's head still under the angel's foot.

Relieved, she laughed at herself and at...her nightmare!







Nightmare

The following night, Éloïse dreams that, to protect her against the horsemen she met the night before, her father has hidden her and her lion in the castle's cellars. She is bored. She misses her runs in the countryside, her friends and most of all, the opportunity to help the poor people abused by soldiers and thugs.

But while on land, people are fighting each other, inside a pyramid burrowed deep inside the hill, right under the church dominated by the angel and the dragon, three shadows, as if gossiping on a market place, are whispering at each other's ear.

They are going in circles around a light beam shooting up from the ground to the top of the pyramid.

The fate of the world is in their hands:

- *Gone are the days when love prevailed!* sneers Selfishness, the first shadow.
- *The earth will soon be ours!* jeers Jealousy.
- *Our days of glory have come,* says Vanity arrogantly and puffing itself up. *Let's rule the universe once and for all!*

They start going around and around, faster and faster.

So fast that they swirl into the beam of light as one fiery flame while proclaiming:

- *We are one, the One who knows how to play on people's weaknesses to unleash the forces of Evil against the Heavens, the fallen angel, **Lucifer!***







The walls of the pyramid fall and the fiery flame rises and swishes around corridors before stopping in a library where it devours every book and wipes out their memory!

It then goes up the stairs leading to the church, snakes through the pillars and stops before the altar, at the foot of the rope used to ring the bells. There, as if gathering strength, the fiery flame stays for a few seconds before surging and leaping up along the rope.

As fire engulfs the rope faster and faster, getting closer and closer to the bells, they ring louder and louder until they finally fall after a last mournful toll.

At the tip of the church spire, the angel has not moved. Ignored by the people of the land, it's as if he has fallen into a slumber.

Then, under his foot, the fiery flame spurts from the dragon's mouth. Suddenly coming to life again, the magnificent angel raises his sword higher. Too late, though, as the dragon has risen too and the furious fight between the two arch-enemies starts all over again.

Under red and black skies, they fight all day long.

As the sun sets, the dragon huffs and puffs so forcefully that the angel is thrown up in the air like a stone out of a volcano. He lands at the foot of the hill, bounces up, then goes rolling for a long time before stopping in a place called Carnac.

The stones he dragged with him as he was rolling away cover him, like a grave.

Alone on the church steeple, the dragon spews forth a giant flame which goes up to the skies and falls back over the world, engulfing and destroying everything with devastating force.

Towns, palaces, everything vanishes, including the castle where Éloïse and his father live.

Powerless under that frightful fire, people turn to stone. The earth, covered with ashes, stops turning. One by one, the stars die out.

Darkness reigns.

Its monstrous deed accomplished, the victorious dragon, pleased with itself, falls asleep.

Waking up from her nightmare, Éloïse jumped from her bed and run to her window. She looked towards the church spire to make sure the angel still had his foot on the dying dragon and to see whether the streets were indeed covered with ashes or if saleswomen were there as usual, offering their fruits and vegetables to passers-by.

But she did not see anything. The night was deep and dark.

Trembling, she quickly went back to bed and hid under the covers.

But sleep eluded her for a long time, until... she started dreaming again.



Third dream

The sky is empty and dark.
There's no life on earth anymore. Only Éloïse and her lion, protected by heavy walls in the depths of the castle, have survived. The lion is standing, head down, with Éloïse on his back, looking like she has fainted.

At last, she stirs. When she opens her eyes, she can see nothing, only darkness, and the smell of ashes is overpowering.

She wraps her arms around her friend's neck, but the lion does not move.

She then slides from his back and sits in front of him, waiting...

But the lion, eyes downcast, still does not stir. So, with all the courage she can muster to shake off his lethargy, she burrows her hands in his mane and whispers:
- If you feel defeated, then I am really in danger. But if you believe that there is still hope for us, we'll be saved. Don't give up! Look at me!

The lion shakes himself up and lifts his head. The glimmer he sees in Éloïse's eyes is enough to restore hope in his heart. And as that glimmer becomes brighter and brighter, his mane changes into a crown of flames, lighting up the darkness like an ardent sun.

Éloïse then jumps on his back, urges him on and off they go!

The lion gallops on and on, to the point of losing his breath.

But Éloïse does not give him a chance to rest a little, she keeps spurring him on. Head down, the lion gallops and gallops on.



- *Faster, we have to go faster!* Éloïse suddenly shouts.

Although not understanding why, the lion wants to please Éloïse so much that he does as she says. Taking no notice of his heart ready to jump out of his chest, nor of his lungs about to burst, he makes a tremendous leap, then another and yet another!

Soon, he isn't galloping any more, just leaping, again and again.

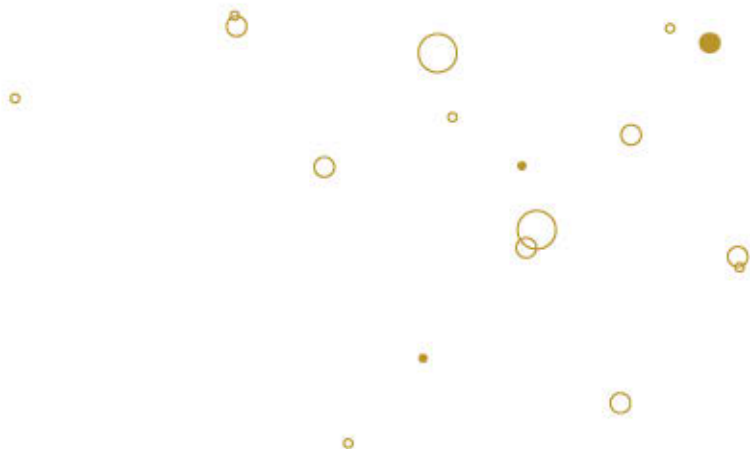
Then, under the forceful pressure of his paws, the earth starts to turn, and as his leaps become longer and longer, the earth starts turning faster and faster, so fast that it is no longer Éloïse and her steed that move, but the dark ground they tread.

When the earth reaches the speed needed for rotating in twenty-four hours, Éloïse urges her lion towards a high mountain.

As they reach the top, she gently spurs him to make him jump.

Leaping high up in the dark sky, the lion lands on a nearby planet and, with the flames still crowning his mane, sets it afire and turns it again into a shining star.

They jump from planet to planet, and Éloïse laughs joyfully as they leave behind a whole trail of stars set ablaze by the lion's mane. When they reach the North Star, Éloïse stops while the lion goes on lighting up each constellation with his dazzling mane.



When the whole sky is once again illuminated by the celestial lampposts, Éloïse, waiting for the sun to rise, starts crying tears of joy. Her tears rain on earth, on the burnt out stones and on those trapping the angel, as a corpse in a grave. As a new day dawns, her tears form a small stream which seeps under the stones and brings the magnificent angel back to life.

Like a butterfly emerging out of its cocoon, the angel rises from his grave of stones.

He slowly opens his wings wrapped around his frozen body under his coat of mail, and lifts his sword towards the North Pole, as a tribute to Éloïse. Then, flapping his wings, he flies away over the rainbow arising from Éloïse's rain of tears.

On top of the church spire, the dragon wakes up. On the horizon, a light starts to illuminate the dark sky: the sun is lifting the shroud of ashes the beast has spread upon the earth.

Turning its ugly head towards the light of the new day, it sees the angel quickly approaching. Enraged, it rises on its claws and in a sharp snap, flies towards the angel to fight him in mid-air.

At noon, the rain of Éloïse's tears stops. While up in the air, the two giants keep on fighting, the stones scattered on the ground, under the now wet ashes, start vibrating, pulsating as a beating heart.





Very soon, the stones crack open, as does the egg under the repeated pecking of the chick.

A child finally emerges and sets foot on the dark earth. Soon, many others follow, and from the burnt stones, the artisans of a new humanity arise.

The children get together and, smiling joyfully at one another, join hands and start to dance on the hills, by the rivers and on the seashore, till dusk.

At the end of the day, as the angel has once again subdued the dragon, the children make huge bonfires. The girls dance and sing to charm the boys and they, to win the girls' hearts, show off their prowess by jumping over the flames.

They choose the girl and boy they admire most to be queen and king of their land...

... until the following summer, to be fair to them all.

At dawn, they all leave, going in every direction and scattering across every corner of the earth. Their songs and their laughter break the silence that had fallen on the land, and everywhere they go, all nature grows green again.

A new light shines on the world.

Éloïse woke up, feeling exhausted, but happy. Rays from the sun coming through her window warmed her bed.

She got up to look at the church spire and she let her gaze linger long on the magnificent angel before going back to bed, to wait for her father to come and wake her up with a kiss.



But under the angel's foot, on the dragon's ugly head, there lingered a fleeting sneer, as if it were patiently waiting for the time when children, once they had become grown-ups, would forget that only love can make the world go round...

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