



The Knight with the Lion

Overview



The story of brave Sir Iwain, his friendship with Sir Gawain, and his adventures with his faithful lion, was one which early English people never tired of hearing. The story of Sir Iwain was told by hundreds of minstrels, both English and French.

The Tale of The Knight with the Lion

Of all the knights of King Arthur's Round Table there were no two better friends than Sir Iwain and Sir Gawain. They were dearer to each other than brothers. Now it happened that the King sent Sir Gawain, who was his nephew, on a long and perilous quest. As time passed and Sir Gawain did not return, Sir Iwain received the King's permission to set out on a journey to see if he might meet with any adventures or find any trace of his friend.

He left court alone, armed in the strongest of armor and ready for anything that might happen. Soon he found himself in a thicket of briars and brambles that pressed so close that he could hardly make his way through. This thicket soon gave way to a great forest where there were many wild leopards and bears and lions that growled and roared. He rode away fast and soon came to a man sitting on the ground, the ugliest man he had ever seen. He was larger than any giant.

His head was as big as a barrel and his hair hung down to his belt. He had a broad, flat face with brows like little bushes and ears like elephant's ears. His chin was fastened to his breast, and there was a great bulge upon his back. His clothes were all woven of some strange fabric, neither wool nor linen, and he was leaning on a thick, ugly mace. As soon as he saw Sir Iwain, he stood upright. Sir Iwain asked him if he wished to fight, for the knight felt in the mood for a battle. The strange man stood as dumb as a beast. Sir Iwain thought that he did not know how to speak. "What are you?" cried Sir Iwain boldly. "I am a man," said he at last.

"Such a man as you I never saw before. What are you doing here?" asked the knight. "I keep all the wild animals here," said he. "That is strange," said Iwain. "I never heard of a man who could keep wild beasts unless they were bound fast."

"There is no beast so bold that he dares pass out of my sight day or night," said the stranger. "All the animals stand still and do what I bid. When I call, they all gather around me. There is no man living who can go among them without being torn to pieces unless I command them not to harm him. I am master of them all. Now what manner of man are you?"

"I am a knight seeking an adventure," said Sir Iwain. "I pray you tell me where I can find one." "No knight can pass through my forest without meeting with some adventure among my wild beasts," said the strange man. "You'll find more adventures than you wish before long."

So Sir Iwain went on his journey through the forest. Soon he heard a hideous growling and howling and roaring and snorting right ahead of him. He hastened along his way and soon came upon a lion and a dragon engaged in a terrible

battle. The dragon had attacked the lion. He wished to drag him off to his cave and eat him.

The poor lion, strong as he was, made no match for the dragon. Already the dragon was pulling him along by the tail and breathing fire on him. As soon as Sir Iwain saw how the fight was going, he made up his mind to kill the dragon.

Holding his shield before his face to protect himself from the dragon's fiery breath, he went into the midst of the fight and struck the dragon's back. Next he cut off the dragon's head, but the dragon's teeth had been clamped so firmly into the lion's tail that the head still hung there. No amount of pulling would take it off. So Sir Iwain had to cut the lion's tail in two to free him from the dragon's head.

Then Sir Iwain said to himself, "I must be on my guard, for the lion will probably turn and attack me. I have had to hurt him sorely. He is only a dumb animal and can not know that I was really trying to help him."

But the lion had no wish to fight. He held up his big paws. Then he lay flat on his stomach and came crawling up to lick the knight's feet. He was trying to thank Sir Iwain for rescuing him from the dragon.

When Sir Iwain started on his journey again, the lion ran along by his side and could not be driven from him. They went together all day until near dusk. Then the lion became very hungry and soon smelled a deer. He started away into the woods, then came back to Sir Iwain, then started off, and came back again. Sir Iwain understood what the lion wanted and made a sign that he could go. The lion bounded off through the brush. Sir Iwain never expected to see him again. The lion had gone only an arrow-shot's distance away when he came upon a deer. He bit its throat and drank the warm blood. Then he tossed the carcass over his back and carried it to Sir Iwain.

It was now night, and Sir Iwain could ride no farther. He had made a lodge of boughs for the night and was striking up a fire of fir boughs and dry moss when the lion appeared, carrying the deer. Sir Iwain was delighted when he saw the load of raw venison, for he was hungry and had no provisions. He took the deer from the lion's back and roasted some of it for the evening meal.

Although he had no bread, salt, or wine, he supped with good cheer. The lion was ravenous with hunger, but he would not touch a morsel until his master had had enough. Then he gobbled up everything that was left, even to the raw flesh and bones. That night Sir Iwain laid his head on his shield and slept while the lion prowled about guarding his master and the horse.

The knight and the lion lived together in this way for more than a week. Every day they traveled together as far as they could through the forest. At dusk Sir Iwain would build a snug lodge for the night while the lion went out to hunt some meat for supper. Then all night the lion would keep guard outside the lodge. One day as Sir Iwain was riding through the forest with the lion, he came to a lonely little stone chapel beside a tree so thick with green leaves that no ray of sunlight could reach the ground. Beneath the tree a spring of water bubbled clear. Sir Iwain was thirsty and alighted to drink. As he bent over, he stumbled and fell to the ground, and as he fell, his sword shook out of the scabbard. The hilt stuck in the soft ground and the point struck the knight's neck, cutting through the armor and drawing the blood. When the lion saw his master's blood, he sent up such a roar that it would have terrified anyone who heard it. He thought that his master was dead. It was very pitiful and awful to hear him roaring out his sorrow. At last he took the sword between his paws, set it up against a stone, and wished to fall on it and kill himself. Just at that moment, Sir Iwain arose again. As soon as the lion saw that his master was not badly hurt, he was beside himself with joy. Whining and growling, he ran up to the knight and licked his hands and feet.

Just as Sir Iwain had comforted the lion, he was startled by the strange sound of a maiden in the chapel, sobbing and crying as if her heart would break. At first Sir Iwain thought that she had been frightened by the noise of his lion. He went close to the chapel and called through a crack in the wall, "Do not fear, maiden. My lion means no harm. He is my most faithful friend and would have killed himself for love of me."

"Alas, alas!" cried the maiden, "I do not weep from fear of any lion, but from sorrow over my sad case. There is no trouble in the world equal to mine. Once I was a maiden of high degree and was in service with a rich lady who lives in a castle near here. She loved me especially well and trusted me in everything. Now her two

wicked guardians and her steward say that I advised her falsely in time of danger and accuse me of treason. They have imprisoned me here in this chapel and will burn me to death tomorrow morning, for I have no knight to defend me."

"Maiden, pray tell me more of your trouble. Are you sure you can find no knight to defend you?"

"Indeed I can find no help," she said, "although I swear that I am innocent. When they first accused me, I answered like a fool that I should soon find a knight to fight for me against all three of them. So they granted me forty days in which to find one. I sent to King Arthur's court, but I found no help there. Sir Iwain and Sir Gawain are the only knights bold enough to enter a battle against three. They are both always courteous and never fail a maiden in distress, but Sir Gawain has gone on a quest for the King, and Sir Iwain has followed after, and no one knows where they are."

"Sorrow no more, maiden," said Sir Iwain. "I will never let you be burned to death. Upon my honor, I'll be ready to fight against all three of your accusers tomorrow morning without fail."

Then he rode away again with his lion. He had gone only a little way when he came to a castle. At the castle gate were four porters. They let down the drawbridge, but they all fled in great fear as soon as they saw the lion.

"Sir," they called from within the castle, you must leave that beast outside."

"I will never part from my lion, sirs," answered Sir Iwain. "He is my very dear friend and I love him as well as I do myself. Either we come in together or else we go away together."

Just then the lord of the castle came out with many knights and fair ladies. He welcomed Sir Iwain with much courtesy and took both the knight and the lion into the castle. The lord and his servants led Sir Iwain to a chamber, unarmed him, and clad him in gay and costly garments.

Then Sir Iwain noticed a strange thing. Even while they all jested and laughed and tried to bid him welcome, their eyes were full of tears. When they thought that he was not watching them, they would turn aside and weep as though their hearts were breaking and look sadder than any people he had ever seen. Then when they saw him

looking, they would try to smile and laugh through their tears. Sir Iwain wondered much at these quick changes from sorrow to joy.

"Sir," he said to the lord at last, "pray tell me why you seem first joyful and then sad." "The joy we show," said the lord, "is all because of your visit to us, and our sadness is because of dread deeds which will be done tomorrow.

A giant named Hairpins of the Mountain lives near here and has brought great sorrow upon us.

He has stolen my land from me until only this castle is left of all my possessions. I had six sons who were knights. I myself saw him kill two, and the other four he will kill tomorrow, for he holds them in his prison. And he is going to carry off my daughter, the fairest maiden alive, unless I can find a knight who dares to fight him. I have searched afar, but I can find none. It is small wonder that I am sad."

"Why didn't you send to King Arthur?" asked Sir Iwain. "He is the bravest man in the world and he has many knights, any one of whom would be glad to try his strength against the giant."

"I did send to the King's court to seek Sir Gawain," answered the lord. "He would have helped me without fail, for my wife is his sister and he loves her better than his life, but he was not there. He has gone on a long and dangerous quest for the King and has not yet returned."

Then Sir Iwain said, "Sir Gawain is a dear friend of mine, and for his sake I will fight the giant if he comes early enough to fight before nine o'clock tomorrow morning. I must surely leave by that time, for there is another deed that I have promised to do before noon.

Everyone in the room knelt down before Sir Iwain in thanksgiving. Soon the lord's wife and fair daughter entered, weeping bitterly "Be of good cheer," said the lord. "This knight has said that he will fight for us." Then they, too, fell on their knees at his feet and thanked him with all their hearts.

"No sister of Sir Gawain or any of his kin shall kneel to me," said Sir Iwain, lifting them up.

"Pray heaven that the giant will come early enough so that I can save you, for I must go my way and do another deed before noon. Then the

people of the castle lost some of their fear. They thought Sir Iwain must be a mighty knight because the lion lived with him. That night no one dared to come near his room for fear of the lion, but the next morning at daybreak the lady and the maiden were brave enough to come to his door and awake him. Sir Iwain went down to the hall and waited and waited, but no giant appeared.

"Sir, soon I must be going," he said to the lord at last. "I do not dare to stay longer, for I must be in another place this morning."

"Sir, for Gawain's sake, stay a little while longer," pleaded the lord. "I'll give you half my land if you will help me in this hour of need."

"I want no reward," said Sir Iwain. "It would be reward enough to save you from sorrow. Now Sir Iwain pitied them with all his heart, but still he could not break his promise to the poor maiden imprisoned in the chapel. If she should be burned because he had failed to keep his promise, he would be shamed forever in the eyes of all knights.

Just at that moment a groom came and called out to the lord, "Sir, the giant is coming. He brings your four sons bound fast and clad in rags."

They all went to the window and looked out. There was the giant. He carried a huge bar of iron with which he beat the four sons beside him. On the other side of them rode a dwarf with a scourge of ten cords. With this scourge he struck the four young knights so furiously that the blood burst from their backs at every stroke. It was most pitiful to hear them cry out under the blows.

When the giant reached the castle wall, he cried out loudly, "If you wish ever to have your four sons back alive, give me that fair damsel, your daughter."

At these words, the lord of the castle went almost mad with fear, but Sir Iwain said, "Although this giant is fierce and cruel, I will conquer him or die within an hour."

The ladies of the castle were in a bustle of excitement. They ran hither and thither to fetch his armor. One brought his shield, another his sword, while still another laced on his coat of mail. Soon he was armed and rode forth to the

field with his lion by his side. Then all the people in the castle knelt and prayed that he would conquer the giant.

The giant strode toward him, swinging his great iron bar and calling, "How came you to be so bold? Whoever let you come out here could not have loved you much."

Sir Iwain rode on at top speed. The giant's armor was only of bull-skin. Sir Iwain struck him in the breast. The spear was stiff and sharp. It cut through the leather breastplate and drew blood. As soon as Iwain saw that the giant's armor was weak, he struck hard and fast. The giant stumbled from the force of the blows and swung out blindly with his iron bar. The giant was so strong that never before had he needed any other weapon. At last he gave Sir Iwain such a blow that the iron bar bent with the force of it.

It was a wonder that the knight still lived. He had lost his spear and was now trying to defend himself with his sword. The giant struck another blow that laid him low over his saddlebow.

When the lion saw Sir Iwain's head hanging down, he knew that his master was hurt. He rushed upon the giant and ripped off skin and flesh with his mighty claws. The giant struck at him with the iron bar, but the lion was quick enough to dodge every blow. By this time, Sir Iwain had recovered his strength and attacked the giant again. He cut off the giant's right shoulder so that both his hand and the iron bar fell to the ground. Then the giant could do nothing against the knight and the lion. Soon he received a blow in the heart that sent him crashing to the ground like a heavy tree.

Then great was the joy in the castle. The gates were cast open wide. The lord and lady ran out to meet their four sons whom Sir Iwain had freed from the giant. They were all as happy as happy could be and would have thanked Sir Iwain a thousand times if he could have stayed long enough to hear them. But he and his lion hurried away to rescue the maiden.

As soon as Sir Iwain came in sight of the chapel, he saw a great roaring fire and a crowd of people standing by. The people were all weeping bitterly, for they loved the gentle maiden. He spurred his horse forward, praying that he might not be too late. Then he saw her standing with

her arms bound behind her. Two stout knaves were coming to throw her into the flames.

"Stop, false men, cried Sir Iwain. "You are mad to think of killing this innocent maiden, and you shall not do it if I can help it.

Then he rode up to her and said, "Maiden, where are your enemies?"

"There they are yonder," she replied, "waiting to see me die."

The steward and the lady's two guardians heard them speak and rushed over. "False woman, we are not your enemies, but your judges," cried the steward, and then he said to Sir Iwain, "She betrayed her lady, and like all traitors, must be burned in the fire. You are foolish if you risk your life for such as she."

"I believe that she is innocent, and I will not fail her," said Sir Iwain. "With the right on our side, my lion and I can easily conquer all three of you." He drew his sword and made ready for battle while the lion lapped his chops as he looked forward to a good fight.

"Oh! oh! oh! oh!" cried the steward and the two guardians in fear. "You must not let the lion into the battle. You must not let him hurt us. You alone must fight against us three." "I need no help from my lion," laughed Sir Iwain scornfully.

He spoke to the lion sharply and ordered him to lie down. The poor lion whined with disappointment, but he went aside and crouched down with his tail between his legs.

All three knights rode against Sir Iwain at once, but one stroke of his was as good as three of theirs. He gave the steward such a blow on the shield that he fell flat to the ground, but soon he arose again. Then he and his two companions attacked Sir Iwain with hard, fast strokes. Sir Iwain began to be tired.

The lion became so worried that he would lie still no longer. He ran out to help his master. First he met the steward. He struck him with his mighty paws and scratched off armor, skin, and flesh down to the bare bone. After that Sir Iwain had to fight against only two knights. Then Sir Iwain shouted at the lion to make him lie down again, but it was of no use. The lion thought that

his master was praising him and fought harder than ever. The two guardians struck the lion and gave him many wide wounds.

When Sir Iwain saw his lion bleeding, he was beside himself with anger. He doubled his blows and bore down horse and man until his enemies were no more.

Then he cut the young maiden's bonds with one stroke of his sword and led her up to her lady. The lady kissed the maiden tenderly and rejoiced that she had been saved from the unjust judgment. She had always thought the maiden innocent, and believed that the wicked guardians and the steward had made up the charges against her because they hated her. She had not been able to do anything to protect her favorite maiden, for she was much afraid of the steward and the guardians. So she thanked Sir Iwain for his bravery and begged him to stay with her until his wounds were well, for her castle was only a mile away.

Now although Sir Iwain did not care a straw about his own wounds, he was much worried about his lion, for the poor animal was growing weaker and weaker from loss of blood. So he accepted her kind offer and started out with her toward the castle. Before they had gone a quarter of the way, the lion became so weak and faint that he could walk no farther. Sir Iwain alighted and pulled grass from the field and made a soft bed on his shield. Then he laid the lion on the shield and carried him. When he reached the castle, kindly people met him, took his shield with the lion, and softly laid it down. The lady of the castle treated him with the greatest kindness.

She led him to a chamber with a bed spread with purple and gold. When he had stretched out his sore and tired body upon the soft cushions, his lion was placed beside him. Then the lady sent one of her maidens who had been taught how to cure wounds to care for the knight and the lion until they should be well enough to go away.

While Sir Iwain was staying at that castle, a strange case came up in the land. A rich lord of that country died, leaving two daughters as heirs. Now the elder sister said that all the land belonged to her because she was the older and that the younger sister would have to be her servant.

The younger sister said that the land ought to be equally divided between the two. As the elder sister was very stubborn and obstinate, the younger sister soon saw that she could not get a penny without fighting for it. The elder sister soon came smiling cruelly and said that she had got one of the bravest knights of Arthur's court to fight for her, but she would not tell his name.

The younger sister doubted whether she could get another of Arthur's knights to fight for her because two of Arthur's knights would scarcely want to fight against each other. Nevertheless, she went to court to seek Sir Gawain, for he was always kind to maidens in distress, but she could find nothing of him.

Now when the younger sister could not get Sir Gawain, she wept in despair, but soon there came to court the story of a bold knight with a lion who had slain a terrible giant. This tale was brought by the knight who had wedded Gawain's sister. The four sons and the giant's dwarf were there to prove the story. As soon as the younger maiden heard of the bold knight with the lion, she asked King Arthur to let her take forty days in which to seek the knight to fight for her. The King gladly allowed her the time, and she set out on her search. She hurried day and night through city and town and asked every one she met if he had heard of a knight with a lion.

"He is brave and good and helps all who have need of him," she said, but she could find no one who had heard of him.

Then the poor maiden became sick with worry lest she have to become servant to her cruel sister. Still she went on night and day. At last, when she could go no farther, she reached the castle of Gawain's sister, where Sir Iwain had killed the giant. But they could only tell her that the knight with the lion had gone away, they knew not where. Now the lady was very kind to the younger sister. As soon as she heard her story, she made the poor maiden stay at the castle until her sickness was gone and sent a messenger-maid ahead to seek the knight with the lion.

The messenger-maid went on and on. At last she came to the castle where Sir Iwain and the lion had been staying until their wounds were healed. She found a great company of knights and ladies at the castle gate. She greeted them courteously

and asked them if they could tell her where she might find a knight with a lion.

Then the lady of the castle said, "He left us only a few minutes ago. See, the footprints of his horse will lead to him."

The messenger-maid spurred on her palfrey and rode with might and main. Soon she caught sight of the knight with the lion running by his side. She shouted to him and he stopped to wait for her.

"Sir," she said when she had reached him, "I have looked for you everywhere, not for my own sake, but for the sake of a fair and noble maiden.

Her older sister wants to take her property and make a servant of her. She has no knight in the land to defend her. She went for Sir Gawain, but could not find him. She hopes that you will fight for her and win her right. She says that no knight living can help her so well as you. She herself looked for you until she became so sick with worry that she could go no farther. Then she sent me on to seek you. If you win her land for her, you will gain great glory for yourself: Pray give me your answer. Will you go with me or not?"

"Certainly I will not fail you, for a knight who lies idle wins little glory," said Sir Iwain. "I shall be glad to go wherever you lead me and to undertake any battle for the maiden."

Sir Iwain, the lion, and the messenger-maid went on their way together until they came to a stern and gloomy castle in the middle of a little town. This castle had a deep moat, thick, rough walls, and narrow, barred windows like little squinting eyes. Sir Iwain thought it best to seek shelter there for the night, as the sun was fast sinking on the horizon.

As they rode toward the castle, all the townsmen turned and stared and called out to Sir Iwain, "You wretched, unfortunate man, where will you take shelter for the night? If you go to that castle, you'll be sorry.

"You lack courtesy to speak ill of a man unless you know that you are speaking the truth," answered Sir Iwain at once. "The lord of that castle may be kind and hospitable. Can you show me that he is not?"

"You will know more about his hospitality tomorrow," they replied quickly.

"Just the same, I am going to that castle in spite of all your evil croaking," said Sir Iwain. He and the messenger-maid and the lion made their way to the castle gate. When the porter saw them, he said, "Come in now, all together, but bad luck to you that you ever came hither."

That was all the welcome they received. They went in without answering a word to the porter and soon came to a large and splendid hall with windows on both sides. Then Sir Iwain saw that the castle was built around an open courtyard or park. He looked out among the trees of this park and saw many maidens embroidering with gold and silver threads upon silks of all the colors of summer flowers--blue, green, yellow, crimson, purple, rose, and violet. At first it seemed a fair sight, but then Sir Iwain noticed that the maidens were all weeping bitterly. Their faces were thin and streaked with dirt, and they wore ragged black smocks. It was plain that they suffered from sorrow, hunger, thirst, and cold. Sir Iwain had never seen a more wretched looking band of maidens. When he saw all that misery, he did not want to stay at the castle any longer. He and the lion and the messenger-maid went out to the gate again, but it was locked.

The porter said to Sir Iwain, "Sir, I know you would like to go away again. But now that you have taken shelter here, you can on no account leave until tomorrow. And you will meet much trouble before you go, for you are among unfriendly people."

"I have been among enemies a good many times before this," said Sir Iwain, "and I have always been able to look out for myself, and so I shall this time. But pray tell me about the sad maidens who are embroidering the rich cloth."

"If you want to know, go and find out for yourself," said the porter rudely. "I'm not hindering you."

Sir Iwain searched through the castle until he found a little gate that led into the courtyard. He opened it and went through.

"Gentle maidens," he said, "pray tell me your trouble and I'll help you if I can."

"Alas!" said one, "there is no knight in the world strong enough to help us. I will tell you the story of our sorrow. We are from Maydenland. Long years ago our King was travelling through many countries in search of adventure. He took shelter here for the night, and that was the beginning of all our trouble. The lord of this castle keeps two terrible fighters, and whatever knight takes shelter here must fight with both at once before he can go. Men say that these are the sons of a demon and call them champions because they have never been beaten. No one can count the men they have killed. Our King was a skilful knight, but he was only fourteen years old and did not have the strength to defend himself against them. Rather than die, he gave himself up to them. They let him go after they had made him promise to send them every year thirty maidens, the fairest and noblest in the land.

The King held up his hand and gave his sacred promise. Now he must pay this ransom as long as the champions live. Of course, if any knight could capture or kill the champions, we should probably be free, but no one can do it. "Here we stay day by day working with gold and silver and fine silks, but we never have enough to eat or wear. For all the work we do from morn till night, we never have half our fill of bread.

She who does the best work earns only four pennies a week. Any one of us might earn forty shillings a week somewhere else. Often they beat us cruelly. But what makes us saddest of all is that we must see many good men killed by the champions. You will have to fight with them tomorrow. May God help you to win.

"If I win, I promise to free you from your enemies," said Sir Iwain and went back into the hall.

No lord of the castle had yet appeared, but servants came and took his steed and the messenger-maid's palfrey to a stable. The servants gave the horses the best of care and fed them plenty of corn and hay, for they thought that the champions would kill Sir Iwain the next day, and then the horses would be theirs.

Sir Iwain, the messenger-maid, and the lion went on through the hall and along a narrow passage until they came to another little gate. This gate led into a different part of the courtyard where there was an orchard. There, under an apple tree, the lord of the castle was lying upon a cloth of

gold. By his side sat his wife and his daughter, a pretty maiden about fifteen years old. She was reading a romance to her father and mother. When they saw Sir Iwain, they rose to greet him.

"You are very welcome to us," said the lord with a strange smile.

The maiden helped Sir Iwain take off his armor and brought him a cloak of silk as white as milk. She did everything she could to make the knight and the messenger-maid comfortable. Soon they went to supper and were served with venison pasty and sweet spiced wine. Then Sir Iwain, the messenger-maid, and the lion were made comfortable for the night. Indeed, the lord and lady of the castle seemed so kindly and hospitable that

Sir Iwain began to think that the tale of the sad maidens about the champions must have been only a bad dream.

The next morning at daybreak he went to the lord and thanked him for his kindness. He started to leave, but the lord held him back saying, "No, young sir, you must not go yet. I have two mighty champions, and it is an old custom that whatever knight takes shelter here must fight with them before he goes. You, like the others, must follow this custom. Arm yourself quickly and go out in the field to fight with them. There is no way in the world that you can escape this fight." "Since I must fight, I'll do the best I can," said Sir Iwain and went out to the field with his lion.

The two champions were brought forth, and two such champions were never seen in this world. With their shaggy hair and beards and wild black eyes, they seemed like demons. Each carried a sharp, shining battle-ax and a heavy club. Their bodies were covered with the thickest of armor, but their heads were bare. Their heads were so hard that no blow could hurt them. When the lion saw the champions, he gave them an ugly look and lashed the ground with the stump of his tail. He knew that they were going to fight against his master. The two champions were very much afraid at the sight of the lion.

"Sir Knight," they said, "unless you take away this lion, you must yield to us as a coward, for no brave knight has a raging beast to fight his battles for him. You must either bind him or kill

him, for you must follow the custom and fight us alone without any help from man or' beast."

"Take the lion and bind him yourself if you are afraid to have him in the fight. Do whatever you want with him except kill him," said Sir Iwain.

"No, no!" cried the champions in fear, "if we tie him, he may break the bonds. Lock him up in a chamber with good, stiff locks."

Then Sir Iwain led the lion away to a room on the ground floor of the castle. This room had a hard, earthen floor and rough, stone walls. The only windows were high in the wall. They were narrow and so closely barred with iron that there was not room for a man to put his arm through.

The door was of oak a foot thick and was locked by a heavy iron bolt. Sir Iwain spoke to the lion kindly and led him along into the room. The lion followed gladly, for he loved to go with his master. When the lion was inside the room, Sir Iwain quickly jumped out and bolted the door.

When the poor lion found that he could not get out of the room, he sat down and howled. The two champions were very bold after they had seen the lion safely locked up. They rode against Sir Iwain both at once and struck his shield with their clubs so hard and fast that it fell to pieces. It was a wonder that any man could bear the force of their blows. Sir Iwain had never been in such danger in his life. He fought back manfully, but he could not harm them, for they protected themselves well. Their shields were of steel so hard that no weapon could strike even a splinter from them.

All this time the lion was shut up in the gloomy room whining his heart out. He could hear all the sounds of the battle, the clash of steel against steel, the sharp thud of the horses' hoofs, and the hoarse cries of the men as they struck their blows. Then the lion was afraid that his master needed his help. He ran and hurled himself against the oaken door, but it did not budge an inch. When he fell down again, his claws dug into the earth of the floor. He had an idea. He went to the threshold and began to scratch up the earthen floor with his forepaws. He dug up the earth as fast as four men with picks and spades could have done.

Now Sir Iwain was in great trouble. No blows that he could give were strong enough even to

scratch the champions. He was deathly tired and dizzy from the blows they had given him. Soon they came up, one on each side of him, and pounded on him as carpenters pound upon an oaken beam. The messenger-maid wept, for she thought he would be slain, and then all her hope of help would be gone.

Just then the lion escaped through the hole he had dug in the floor. He ran out and jumped upon one of the champions, knocking him to the ground. The other champion went to help him, but as he stooped to lift up his fallen companion, Sir Iwain cut off his head. The lion was lying on the champion he had knocked down and was growling horribly. Sir Iwain quickly alighted and ran over to try to save the poor wretch from the lion. The lion saw his master coming and wished to do his part. Before Sir Iwain could reach him, he tore away the champion's right shoulder and arm.

"Have mercy on me!" howled the champion.

"You have killed my companion. Let that be enough! Call off your lion."

"I'll be merciful to you if you will say that you have been conquered at last," said Iwain.

"I swear that I have been conquered in this battle," said the champion.

Then Sir Iwain called off the lion. The lord and the lady and all the folk of the castle came out to meet him and hail him as conqueror. The lord wished Sir Iwain to stay with him and fight for him always.

"I can not stay, even if I wished, for there is another brave deed which I must do," answered Sir Iwain. "I have just one thing to ask of you as a reward for winning the battle. Pray free those poor maidens whom you hold imprisone to work for you. I wish to save them."

"I will grant them their freedom," said the lord when he saw that it was of no use to beg Sir Iwain to stay.

When the maidens heard that they were free, they were beside themselves with joy. They went out of the gate, two by two, still ragged and dirty, but as happy as if they were in Paradise. Sir Iwain stood at the gate and watched them pass. As they went out, they gave him thanks and

said, "May God bless you for saving us, and may He ever shield you from all ill."

"May He protect you and bring you safely to your homes," replied Sir Iwain.

Then the townspeople came forth blessing him and crying that there was no knight in the world like the knight with the lion. They led him from town in a fair procession and wished to hold a great celebration in his honor, but he went his way with the messenger-maid and the lion.

The messenger-maid led Sir Iwain back to the castle where the sick sister was lying. When the sister learned that her messenger-maid had returned with the knight and the lion, she was so happy that she became well again at once.

She quickly made ready and set out with Sir Iwain and the lion for the town where the King was to hold the fight between the sisters' two knights. There the elder sister was already waiting for the day set for the fight. As time went on and her sister did not come, she began to think that she would be able to get all the land without any fight. At any rate she did not think that her sister could find a knight good enough to win a fight against the great secret knight she had.

For all of a fortnight before the day, her knight lived in another town, and all that time he let no one see his face. He even wore borrowed armor and a shield with an emblem different from his own, for he wished to come into the King's town as an unknown knight on the day of the battle and surprise the King with his brave deeds.

Sir Iwain and the younger sister arrived in town the very day before that set for the encounter. Had they been a day later, the younger sister would have lost her rights forever. That night Sir Iwain stayed at the tavern and kept in his room so that no one would see him. The next morning he armed himself and stole away softly, leaving his lion asleep on the bed. He also wished to enter the battle as an unknown knight. He set out with the younger sister for the field of battle.

The King and Queen and many knights and townspeople were already on the field. The elder sister came very early with her knight. No one but she knew who that knight was.

She went up to the King and said, "Sir, I am here with my knight all ready to defend my rights. You gave my younger sister a certain time in which to find a knight. That time is here and she has not come. Certainly she has not found anyone who dares to fight for her. I have won all the property without one stroke of a sword. All the land is mine, and she must live as my servant forever. Therefore, Sir King, pray give your judgment and let us go."

Now the King really thought that the younger sister was right. So he replied, "Maiden, you must await judgment. Your sister may yet come, for it is only a little past nine o'clock."

Even as he spoke, they saw the younger sister and her knight come riding over the hill. The elder maiden made a sour face when she saw them coming, but the King was glad, for he wished to see the younger sister win her rights.

The younger sister came before the King saying, "Hail, King Arthur and all the knights of your merry company. I bring into your court an unknown knight who will fight this battle for my sake. He leaves many bold adventures to help me in my need. But I pray you to grant me my rights without battle, for I do not wish any man to be slain because of this quarrel."

"You have no rights, for all is mine," the elder sister spoke up, "and I'll have everything in spite of you. If you preach all day, you'll never get anything."

"Sister, you are not very courteous," said the younger. "But it seems a great pity that two such knights as these should hurt each other on our account. I beg you to be charitable and give me of your own free will enough so that I can live in freedom. Then there need be no fight."

"You will not get anything unless you win it in battle," said the elder. "If your knight is afraid to fight, let him flee."

Then the two knights came before the King. By this time there was a great crowd in the field, for every man who could walk came to see the fight. But no man in that crowd recognized either Sir Iwain or the elder sister's knight, for they kept the visors of their helmets lowered and did not speak in their natural voices. Sir Iwain spoke high and shrill and the other knight low and gruffly.

Not even the knights themselves, though they were both of Arthur's court, could recognize each other.

The two knights cast down their gloves in challenge and rode together in the field. They struck and struck with sword and spear. Their shields were splintered and their helmets cracked.

They were both sorely wounded. Their blood stained their bright armor and the jewels on their helmets. At last when their swords and spears were broken, they stopped and rested while squires brought them fresh weapons. Neither one was any nearer to victory than the other.

The King and the other lords there all said that they had never seen two such skilful knights fight together. When the knights heard these words of praise, they were more anxious than ever to go on with the battle. But the lords wished to stop the battle because they did not want to see two such brave knights kill each other just on account of a family quarrel. They tried to make peace between the sisters, but the elder sister was so cruel and unkind that they could find no mercy in her. The gentleness and courtesy of the younger sister made them all on her side. They even asked the King to take the matter into his own hands and divide the land between the two maidens, whether the elder sister consented or not.

"Certainly it would be a great shame," said they, "if one of these noble knights should kill the other,"

But the knights themselves wanted to fight the matter out. Never were two knights so evenly matched. They fought and fought and fought until the sun went to rest and it became very dark.

At last Sir Iwain said, "Since it is now dark and we can not see well, no one will blame us if we stop fighting. Indeed, I am ready to stop fighting, for of all the knights I have fought, none has given such mighty blows as you. Pray tell me your name.

"I am Gawain, the nephew of King Arthur, and certainly you can not be so weary as I. You owe me nothing in the way of blows, for I have never borne harder ones. I have just returned from my

quest and wanted to surprise my king by first appearing before him in a brave fight, but I fear that the bravery of this fight is more yours than mine.

Then Sir Iwain threw his sword far from him and alighted from his horse. "Alas!" he cried, "a sad thing has happened. If I had known you, there would never have been any battle. I have been seeking you everywhere. I am Iwain, who loves you better than any man alive, on account of the many kind deeds that you have done.

Therefore, I will do you the honor of yielding to you and will tell all that you have overcome me in battle. I will give a share of my own wealth to the younger sister."

"You shall do no such thing," said Sir Gawain. "The honor shall not be mine but yours. I'll say that I have been overcome by you."

Then they hugged and kissed each other in great joy. The King saw the two knights fighting bitterly one moment and embracing tenderly the next. He was astonished and came riding fast to find out what had happened. When he found that these were two of his favorite knights, he was astonished and very, very thankful that neither knight had been killed in the battle. At once he called for squires to unlace the armor of the two knights for they were stiff and sore from their wounds.

Just then the lion came bounding through the crowd. When he awaked, he had missed his master and had come to look for him. When the people saw the lion, they screamed with fright and ran hither and thither, but the lion paid no attention to them. He ran to his master and whined with joy and licked his hands and feet.

Then Sir Iwain called to the frightened crowd saying, "Come back, all ye townfolk. Certainly you need not fear this lion, for he is as tame and friendly as a big dog. He belongs to me, and I love him dearly. I would not part from him for any amount of treasure.

When the people heard these words, they spoke among themselves saying, "This must be the knight and the lion of whom we have heard so much. They say that this knight killed a giant and did many other brave deeds."

"Alas!" said Sir Gawain, "you helped my sister in her need, and poorly have I repaid you. Now you must surely let me repay you by saying that you conquered me in this battle."

"Yes, that is the best way," said the King quickly before Sir Iwain could object, "because I must give some judgment in this affair of the two sisters. I really think that the younger sister is right, but the elder sister is stubborn and will never give up her land peaceably unless she thinks her knight is beaten."

Then he called to the sisters, "Gentle maidens, listen to me now. Your quarrel is brought to an end and I will give my judgment. As the knight of the elder sister says that he was overcome in this battle, the younger sister shall have half the property.

"I suppose I must obey your commands," said the elder sister scowling, "but I think it a great shame to give her half my land."

"This is the first land that has ever been divided in England," said the King. "On account of this battle, sisters must always divide their property in the future."

Then all the lords and ladies crowded around to greet the two long-lost knights. They took them into the city in a royal procession, Iwain and Gawain leading arm-in-arm, with the faithful lion trotting at their heels. There the King held the finest feast ever seen, in honor of their homecoming.