It was a peaceful morning in the Savannah, animals grazing in the golden Sun. Mother Lion was admiring her cubs, laughing lovingly at their restless play. Father Lion left to check the territory, to see if it was safe for the Lioness to go hunting later.

Unexpectedly, like thunder in the sky, Lioness sensed something in the far distance. It was a feeling and a sound not familiar to their world and it signalled danger. She left the babies in the care of her sister and ran. Ran with the fear that was rising in her heart, although she did not know what was happening yet.

It was the King’s hunters. When she came close enough she saw her dear Lion being surrounded by hunters with guns, with no way to escape. His roaring screams of despair tore at her heart but she could not help. She only watched how they caged him and took him away.

She ran back to her pride, telling her sister what happened and asked if she could take care of the babies. She nodded, of course, and the Lioness took off. She could smell Father Lion’s fear mixed with the gas from the trucks, as she followed the tracks of the car. And she ran endlessly…until she reached the high white walls of the great palace.

It was the palace of the fearsome King. All gold, shining stronger than the sun, blinding those who came close to it. All around it was a dry yellow desert. Nothing grew any more. He had chopped down all the trees with his cold roaring screams.

She sensed the lion on the other side of the wall and tried like crazy to find the way in. Looking for entrances, sniffing for holes, digging, trying to jump. With no luck. The wall was impenetrable.

She was looking around with increasing despair. There were only men with guns, cold as statues, guarding the wall. Other people walking in the service of the King, who looked half alive in their service and devotion to the King. No one to help her. Until one day she noticed…

A young girl with big brown eyes. She looked untamed. In her shabby clothes and with nails brown from the soil she seemed like a wild child. There was something warm about her and she could hear her heart beat. She was surprised to see her taking her owly piece of bread from her dirty pocket and feeding the birds.

“Hurry, hurry. Eat fast.” The girl told the birds.

“Otherwise they will catch you and put you in the cage.”

Lioness heard emptiness in the girls voice, she knew right away she was different from all the others working in Kings service. So, she dared to come closer. With her body low to the ground and her ears flattened she approached from behind, giving the girl a kind look, saying:

“Hey, please don’t be scared, I mean no harm. I am looking for a friend.”

The girl was surprised beyond measure and she was quick in looking for a shelter for Lioness.

“Come on, are you crazy, they cannot see you, they will cage you!” she kept saying, leading the Lioness to her secret cave near to the castle walls. There they stayed and the Lioness told her about her Lion and how he was taken away. And the Girl told her about the King; about how brutal he is and how everyone is afraid of him. How he lives alone in a kingdom of richness and cold power and how no one dares to approach him and look him in the eye.

“A lot of them are in the awe of the gold he owns and they follow his rule in their desire to share it. They are not kind to other people then…” she said with sadness in her eyes.

They became friends, Lioness and the Girl. Lioness shared her desire to set her lion free and the Girl shared her dreams about the gardens.

“You know if only I could grow roses. Their beauty would open the hearts of the people and maybe they would remember to smile and be kind to each other.”

“Well start then!” said the Lioness, encouraging the Girl who was becoming more courageous from being with the Lioness. She did not feel like hiding anymore and felt her will to plant the few rose seeds her mother had given her.

So she did. She planted them and tended them with such care and devotion. Some people gave her a surprised look, some were saying that the King might be angry. But she did not care, the Girl. She was determined and feeling stronger.

So it went on and days passed. Girl and Lioness became stronger in their friendship, while Lion, on the other side of the wall was getting weaker. His mane lost its shine and soon the lion refused the food. The King became worried. He did not want his lion get sick, he needed all his glory to shine.

So he called upon all the best doctors and magicians to help. He was sitting in his massive golden chair, roaring in anger, calling:

“Next!”

Trembling with fear they approached him, one by one, no one even daring to raise their eyes to him.

“Sorry king, I have tried all I can, he does not eat still.”

He roared more and beat some in anger, with no luck.

Then one day the Girl came to pass the lions cage, catching his sad eyes, feeling his pain and suffering. She looked at him with compassion and for the first time he felt understood. He crawled from his corner, closer to her.

“Help me…Please,” he begged her, turning his great head closer to her as if he would whisper in her ears.

“I will,” she said. “Don’t worry.”

It was the first time in a long time that the lion left his corner and one of his tenders saw that. Running to the king he explained what he had seen.

“Bring me the Girl!” he yelled.

And they searched for her. She listened with calm and then took one red rose blossom, put it in her pocket, shook mud and dust from her hands and followed. At the grand, gold door the servant left her, showing her the red carpet running like the snake towards the great seat of the king. She walked with her head up high and her eyes catching the king’s gaze. She walked with the bravery and pride of the Lioness.

The king was shocked as she was the first to look him in the eye, but her warm brown innocent stare left him speechless. So shocked was he that he could not even get mad. And she did something more. Putting her hand in the pocket she brought out the red rose and handed it to the king.

A crack in the golden wall, a crack in his heart.

“Let’s go and see the Lion,” he said to her, placing the rose in his pocket.

They walked, passing the silent doorways until they reached the outer gardens where the cage was. At the first notice of the king approaching, Lion hid himself in the corner of his cage. The King saw that.

But when the Lion noticed his friend, he came out willingly, making a soft roar in greeting to her.

King saw this too and his blood started to boil.

“Dear king, the Lion must be free. He will not eat here and he will die if he stays,” she said with a will that matched the king.

Blood boiled and his anger came out in roaring screams making such wind that all the servants fell to the ground. When finished, he looked around, seeing the damage he had caused. Yet with the biggest surprise, he saw the girl standing next to him, looking him in the eyes. She took his hand gently and waited.

Another crack in the golden wall, another crack in his heart.

The touch of her hand placed the king into Lions skin. He saw how he had been captured and felt his agony when he was taken away from home. He saw the Lioness running after him and felt his heart tearing into pieces in his chest. Such power and such powerlessness in the same moment. The king felt it all and started to roar in pain. But that was just the beginning. He felt how the vastness of Savannah changed into a small cage where his body could not move. He felt the pain in his muscles, despair in his heart and anger choking him so bad he thought he was going to die. And then…then he felt his spirit being broken down in despair.

“Let me out, let me out!” he screamed and cried in despair.

The gardener’s daughter let go of his hand. It was as if the king had woken from an enchantment. He broke down crying, while all the servants still on the floor, looked on in amazement. Now he knew from his own flesh and blood how it feels to be captured and caged. He cried, begging for forgiveness.

She caught his tears and held his hand again.

“You can still make it better. Set the Lion free and become the king protector of all Life instead of the king taker of Life.”

Without words the king went to the cage, still holding her hand. He unlocked the door and invited the Lion to come out.

The king fell down on his knees in front of lion.

“Forgive me,” he said gesturing for him to run free.

Lion was shy at first, moving slowly and insecurely. But when he saw his Lioness on the other side of the wall he roared his happiness and they ran. His mane shone from afar when they were running back to the wild, back to their home where they belonged.

From that moment on King vowed to become a protector. He protected all the wildlife and prohibited any kind of interference into their lives. He broke down the golden walls around the palace and asked the Girl to plant a garden that would invite birds. She did and the birds came. And she planted more roses and the people’s hearts opened. They laughed and they become kinder to one another.

And the kingdom flourished in compassion and cooperation.