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opening extract from

The Lion, The Unicorn and Me

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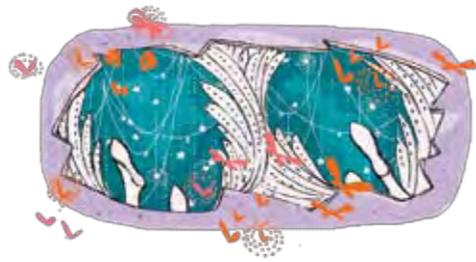
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please print off and read at your leisure.

For Eleanor and Cara Shearer

, with love from the donkey ~

JW



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The Lion, the Unicorn and Me



The Donkey's Christmas Story

Jeanette Winterson

Illustrated by Rosalind MacCurrach

SCHOLASTIC

Before it happened, an angel lined up all the animals – every one, of every kind, because this angel had the full list left over from the Ark.



Most were eliminated at once – spiders, monkeys, bears, whales, walruses, snakes. Soon it was clear that four legs on the ground at the same time would be necessary to reach the qualifying round. That left some serious competition – horses, tigers, a stag with antlers that branched into an unknown forest, a zebra painted black and white like an argument.

The elephant could carry the world on its back. Dogs and cats were too small, the hippopotamus too wayward. There was a giraffe in jigsaw graffiti. The camel was wanted elsewhere, as were the cattle. After a long time, it was just the three of us: the lion, the unicorn and me.



The lion spoke first. Present position: King of the Jungle. Previous history: worked with Hercules and Samson, also Daniel in the lions' den. Special strengths: special strength. Weaknesses: none reported. The angel wrote it down.

Then the unicorn spoke. Present position: mythical beast. Previous history: in Hebrew I am Re'em, the creature that cannot be tamed. Special strengths: known to be good with virgins. Weaknesses: tendency to vanish. The angel wrote it down.

Then it was my turn.



“He’ll make an ass of himself,” whispered the lion. I did. I am. A proper ass. Present position: under-donkey. Previous history: small under-donkey. Special strength: can carry anything anywhere. Weaknesses: not beautiful, not well-bred, not important, not clever, not noticed, not won any prizes...

The angel wrote it down, and down, and down. Then the angel gave us a tie-breaker: could we say, in one sentence, why we were right for the job?

The lion spoke first. “If He is to be King of the World, He should be carried by the King of the Beasts.” The unicorn said, “If He is to be the Mystery of the World, He should be carried by the most mysterious of us all.”



I said, “Well, if He is to bear the burdens of the world, He had better be carried by me.”