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Opening extract from

The Lion Classic Aesop's Fables

Written by

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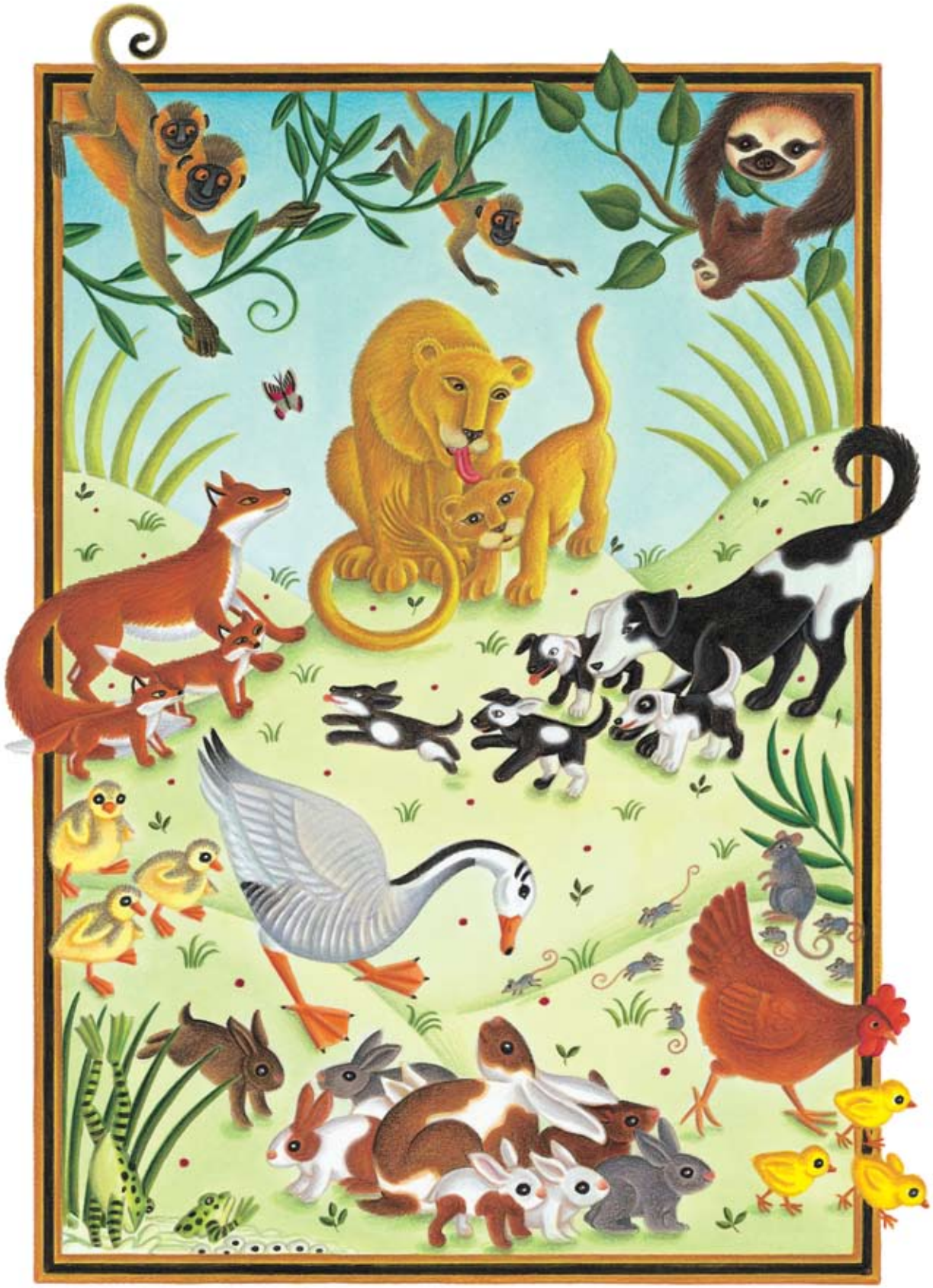
The Lioness

On a summer's day, when the forest was just hot enough and shady enough for a pleasant afternoon out, the forest mothers took their children to play. Little monkeys swung through the branches, chattering at each other, puppies chased each other's tails, and a baby sloth hung asleep in a tree and fell off without waking up. Mother Fox arrived with her young, and Mother Hen gathered all her chickens together and hurried them away. The rabbit stayed near to her babies as Mother Goose marched over for a chat, with three gawky little goslings waddling along behind her.

"Aren't my babies doing well!" said Mother Goose. "All three of them, all thriving! How many young ones do you have now?"

"Eight," said the rabbit proudly, watching her little ones. "Eight, and all adorable. Aren't I lucky!"

Mother Dog felt a little jealous. "I had four in my last litter," she said. "I expect it will be more next time."



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"Nine!" squeaked a mouse. "I may be small, but I had nine babies in my last litter!"

There was a sound of croaking behind them. Frogs were hopping in and out of a pool.

"Don't ask the frogs," said Mother Rabbit. "All that frogspawn and all those tadpoles. They lose count of their young."

"Tadpoles don't count," said Mother Goose firmly.

All this time, Lioness had been sitting up proudly, occasionally licking the fur of her handsome young lion cub, watching him as he stalked a butterfly. When she thought he might chase the puppies or run away into the forest, she would growl softly and place a firm paw on his tail. She heard all that the other animals were saying about the sizes of their families. Mother Fox approached her.

"Your Majesty," she said, "how many young ones do you have?"

Lioness called her cub to her. Young as he was, he moved with grace and strength, carrying his head high and happy.

"I have only one," said Lioness. "But that one is a lion!"





BELLING THE CAT

"BE VERY, VERY quiet."

The youngest mouse *was* trying very hard to be quiet. It was the middle of the night and long after her bedtime, but she was holding her mother's paw as they scurried along under the floorboards of the big house. This evening, there was to be an Important Meeting of the Mouse Safety Committee and the youngest mouse wasn't supposed to be there at all, but her mother and father were both members of the Mouse Safety Committee and couldn't find a babysitter, so the youngest mouse had to go with them.

"Be very, very quiet!" Mother had told her, so that was what the youngest mouse was doing, though she had to bite her tongue in the effort to stay silent. There was a swish as her tail whisked round a corner.

"Shh!" said Mother, frowning down at her. The youngest

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