



Lara and the mountain lion

Lara is my mother's best friend. She's a vet, that's a doctor who looks after sick pets and wild animals, too. I want to be a vet, as well. One day I asked her, 'Why did you decide to be a vet, Lara?'

'It's a strange story, George,' she answered. 'When I was your age, I was often alone and I had no-one – no

brothers or sisters to play with. So, for a few weeks each winter, I stayed with my three cousins. They lived high up in the mountains. They were tall and strong and could ski very fast. They were very good at snowboarding and climbing, too. But I couldn't ski, snowboard or climb. My legs weren't strong enough. I was often ill as well, so I had to carry different medicines with me all the time.

'One day, my cousins wanted to climb the mountain that was behind their house. They said, "You must come with us, Lara." They were unkind. They knew I wasn't well enough or brave enough.

'I tried to follow them up the path, but I soon got tired, so I had to stop and sit down. My cousins laughed at my red face. "See you later, then," they called and went on up the mountain without me.

'I started to feel better after a few minutes, but then I heard an animal behind me. I felt a big, warm, furry, soft face on my shoulder. It was a mountain lion.'

'Wow!' I said.

'I was very afraid, but I couldn't run away because my legs and knees still felt weak, so I just sat there. The lion opened its mouth ...





... and said, "I've got a terrible toothache." Well, I knew all about sore teeth because I often had a toothache, so I gave it some medicine that I kept in my jacket pocket.'

I laughed and said, 'I don't believe you, Lara!'

'Why not?' she asked. 'Strange things happen in the world all the time.'



'The lion and I sat and talked about X-rays and Saturdays and other things and after a few minutes, it said, "My tooth's feeling much better now, but I've got a very bad stomach-ache. I ate too much food after I woke up this morning."

'I often had a stomach-ache, so I had a bottle of stomach-ache medicine in my backpack. I put some on a little plastic spoon and gave it to the lion and then we sat and chatted about bandages and jam sandwiches and other things.

'After a few minutes, the lion said, "My stomach's feeling much better now, but I've got a horrible headache. I lay in the sun for hours yesterday."

'I knew about headaches, so I took a clean spotted handkerchief from another pocket and put it in the snow before I put it on the lion's furry head. "That's very cold but it feels fantastic!" the lion said. "Thank you so much."

'After that we sat and spoke about temperatures and school teachers and other things. But suddenly, the lion jumped up and said, "I'm feeling grrrrreat! How can I help you, now?"

'I pointed at the mountain. My cousins were already high up above us. "Can you take me up to the top?" I asked.

"Sure!" it said. "No problem." So I jumped on its back and put both arms around its neck.

'The lion ran faster than the wind. It's really wonderful to ride on a lion's back. You must try it one day!'

I laughed.

'When we got to the top, we stood quietly together for a minute or two, then the mountain lion disappeared into a dark cave. Soon after that, my cousins arrived.

"The view's amazing, isn't it?" I said.

'My cousins were so surprised, they couldn't speak!'

'What happened next?' I asked.





'Well,' said Lara, 'they never laughed at me again. And every year, I went back to the same special place where I met the lion and it came to speak to me again. We always had wonderful conversations, the lion and I. Sometimes I took it more medicine and I often rode on its back in the snow. I always felt safe when we were together and we helped each other a lot. I knew then that I wanted to be a vet one day. So that's the answer to your question.'



Lara waited for a minute and then laughed.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'It's just a story.'

But then she turned round and looked at a photo on her desk. It was of a young girl and a mountain lion. They were sitting on a rock in the snow and the lion had its big, soft, furry face on her shoulder.

Lara turned back and smiled at me. 'Now I must work,' she said, 'but would you like some strawberries or a honey cookie before you go?'