Delilah wore a yellow dress the day the storm came, because the news promised sunshine and her mother said she looked so lovely in it. But maybe that day the news was wrong. Before they had time to leave the house, rain was dripping from the cracks in the roof and salty air was blowing up beneath the floorboards. In an hour, the wind had grown louder and rocked their tiny hut from side to side, ripping off some of the roof panels and exposing Delilah to the cloudy sky. Her Momma tuned the old radio to any station that still worked while Delilah peered through the rips in her home at the river that flowed through the middle of her street, a river that had never been there before. It was a wonderful thing to see, until a man came flowing with it, screaming for help, and her Momma ran out into the storm to save him.

“Momma!” Delilah had yelled from the door of their house.

“Stay there!” Her Momma had time to reply, before the current caught her off balance and pulled her down the flooded street. Delilah had stood there, frozen with shock, until the wind blew apart her house and she was forced to run, her little sundress flying out behind her, away from the water and wind.

When the clouds moved on and her beach-side city lay on the ground, silent and broken, her Momma still had not come home. People were lying in the street, beside the skeletons of homes and automobiles. They had cried for water and medications. They had cried so loudly that their cacophony stole Delilah’s chance at being heard.

Now Delilah wandered the ruins where her street had been, hoping that maybe her mother would think to go back to where her home once stood. A few of their neighbors searched through the debris left over from the river. A woman picked up silver coins and broken television apparatuses, not because they were hers, but because she was hoping to earn something from the disaster. Delilah crept behind her and pulled tentatively on the woman’s sleeve. The woman spun around and glared at her, pulling her trophies away from the little girl.

“What?”

Delilah pointed down the street, the way the river had flowed. “My Momma went down there.”

The woman pushed her away.

“Have you seen her? I don’t know where my Momma-”

“She’s dead, child! Who could survive that? Now move! I can’t help you!”

Delilah dropped her gaze and felt tears well up in her eyes. If she wasn’t so scared she would be completely numb inside. Somewhere from behind her a deep voice reprimanded the woman for being so heartless. But it didn’t help Delilah. Slowly she sank to the dirty ground, hugging her legs and breathing into her knees.

She was startled by a rough hand rest on her shoulder, The same deep voice said, “What did she look like?” A man with bulging muscles and terrible scars looked straight at her. He had a mane of hair like a lion, and eyes as dark and arms as strong as one, too. Delilah wiped her runny nose and mumbled her mother’s description, so quiet that the lion-like man could barely understand her. But somehow, he must have, because his eyes lit up, “I met a woman with a broken leg, who had a daughter with a yellow dress. I can take you there.” Many people would be frightened of the man who had the face of a lion, but not the girl in the yellow dress. She took his hand and they began walking.

People stared when a man as tall as The Lion Man led a girl through the broken city. The sun bounced waves of heat from the road to the sky and back again. The streets were mostly empty and stretched on forever. When Delilah could hardly take a step further, The Lion Man told her a story, about a boy who wanted to catch the sunset, so he walked towards the horizon until he became so tired he slept for thousands of years.

“But your mother is not a sunset.” he pointed out. “We’ll catch her soon.” Delilah nodded slowly, vaguely aware of police sirens screaming in the distance. The Lion Man looked up suddenly. His eyes darted towards the noise and clutched Delilah's hand by his side. Then the sirens faded and he relaxed his grip. Delilah looked at him curiously, but said nothing, and neither did The Lion, so they continued to walk.

By early evening they reached the encampment where her Momma should have been. But every tent they checked was filled to maximum capacity, but none of those people were her. At the end of a long row of canvas homes, Delilah sat and looked on as The Lion Man continued to search. Delilah could never believe that The Lion Man had tricked her, she was too innocent, but even she had painful doubts that her Momma had never been there at all. An old, wrinkled woman laying beside Delilah in the tent next door suddenly sat up and took Delilah’s dress in her hands.

“Your Mother is looking for you.” The old woman smiled and then lay down again to rest. The Lion Man, hearing the woman, lumbered over and shook her awake.

“Where is she, old woman?”

The woman scratched her lip and looked towards the sky.

“In a tavern. The one that the water didn’t touch.” She lay down again. Before they could leave, she sat up one more time and put a hand on The Lion Man’s shoulder.

“I recognize you.” Her eyes narrowed. “From a poster or a sign-” The Lion Man brushed off her hand and pulled Delilah out of the tent. Delilah looked back at the woman, who was now waking another woman, and pointing towards the giant man.

They ran. The Lion said that they ran because the tavern would soon close, and of course Delilah believed him. The tavern was lit and people looked like they were only just beginning to come, but The Lion Man pushed past them to the front desk. Frantically, he asked for the woman with the broken leg, but she had already left, said the man at the desk. She had gone to her sister’s home, where they had an automobile and could drive her home again.”

The Lion Man’s lion face fell and he placed his arm around Delilah.

“We’ll find her.” he said, and Delilah was sure of it, too. They stepped aside to let another man through, just as the doors to the tavern burst open. Men in uniforms entered, ordering everyone to stand still. The Lion Man yanked Delilah behind a cluster of overly merry people, and dropped to his hands and knees. A few paces away, he opened a trap door and dropped down below. Delilah leaned over the edge.

“What are you doing?” She whispered.

“Hiding.” He held out his arms. She jumped into them and The Lion pulled the two of them deeper into the basement. They sat behind barrels of beer and waited in silence. Chill air prickled Delilah’s skin and made her shiver so that The Lion Man pulled her close to his warmth. The basement was too dark for her, and the thumping of boots above to loud.

“Who are we hiding from?” Delilah whispered. The Lion squeezed her shoulders.

“The police.” He rumbled.

Delilah pulled away from her giant friend. What could they possibly want from a man like him? Spears of light from the room above fell over The Lion. His eyes were cast down to the floor and his lip quivered slightly. “I escaped from the prison when the storm came. The first time I’ve been outside-out *here*- in years.”

Delilah looked over at him in shock. “Why were you with them?”

Although she asked only a simple question and said nothing too sad, small silver teardrops slipped out from the eyes of The Lion.

“I did something, Delilah. Something very bad.”

They sat together in silence until the noise from above slowly quieted. “I need to help you.” He went on. “It may be the last thing I’ll ever do.”

But Delilah, lulled by the warmth from her Lion and dead tired down to the bone, drifted to sleep before she could understand what he said. She dreamt that she was the boy who chased the sunset, but something was chasing her as well. She woke before dawn with a cold feeling she understood what the dream meant. But then The Lion Man woke too and she forgot.

They stood and tip toed to trap door. The Lion Man pushed it open to a dark and empty tavern, and they snuck out with the rising sun.

Delilah’s aunt lived outside of the city, many miles away, so they walked from the early morning into the afternoon, on dirt roads with not a tree for shade. They walked until the sun dipped down to the horizon again, but by now Delilah sat on The Lion’s shoulders, watching for her aunt’s familiar farm, and secretly keeping an eye out for the flashing sirens. No matter what The Lion Man did, he couldn't go to a prison. Delilah decided that when they began walking that day.

By nightfall they had come to the town her Momma was in. Flickering streetlights illuminated the way down the street, and far away, some cars drove across the street. Cicadas chirped, making music for the stars you could see so well. Her aunts has was coming up. It was a few blocks away when the sirens started blaring. Delilah turned to her friend. His eyes were panicked. Holding her hand, he started to run. The sirens circled around them, growing louder and then tapering off only to come by again. But they ran straight. They ran so fast the stars above Delilah seemed to swirl, and the ground beneath her feet disappeared from underneath her. The streetlamp flicked off and behind her, Delilah could see the blue and red lights flashing closer and closer. The Lion Man could run faster and pulled her up the porch steps to her aunts ricketty farm house. As soon as he banged his fist against the door, his strangled expression seemed to relax. The terror in his eyes was not gone, but he was calmer, even though the cars were a block away.

“Hide!” Delilah hissed. “Why don’t you hide? Like you did in the tavern?” Suddenly her aunt opened the door. Her aunt had an obvious look of relief on her face, but glanced at The Lion Man and the police arriving behind him with concern.

“Delilah! Come in! Your mother is here-” The Lion Man breathed out with relief. The sirens stopped and the cars parked outside of her aunts house. The Lion Man smiled at Delilah as the men in the uniforms came up behind him. Finally, Delilah understood what was going on. Before the men could reach her friend, she reached for him but realised she never learned his name.

“Lion…”she could only think to say, before he turned around and walked to the men in uniform. But before he sat in the car, he turned around and smiled.

“Thank you.” He said.