

## The Lion

*Simone Field*

Tick-tick-tick went my indicator as I slowly turned the corner. I was patiently waiting in the kiss and ride queue outside my daughter's school, while keeping an eye on my three-year-old in the back, fast asleep in his car-seat. Kindy sure did knock him out. Since he had started, he always had a nap on the way home. My heart softened as I looked at him sleeping, his sweet lips puckered, his eyelashes resting on his soft cheeks.

My gaze moved to my little girl coming up the path, looking oddly grown up in her school pinafore, hefting her school bag, which was more than half her size, behind her. She walked towards the car and opened the door with the duty teacher's help.

'Hi Mum,' my school-weary six-year-old said, as she climbed into the car. She settled her bag at her feet and conscientiously buckled herself into her booster seat.

'Hi chicken, how was your day?' I ask, reaching back to pass her a cut-up apple for the ride home.

'It was okay,' she said half-heartedly, toying with the apple.

'Just okay?'

'Yeah, Lila had to go home, so it was a bit boring.'

Lila was her best friend. The two were always giggling and playing together, so I could see how she would find a day without her not as interesting as usual.

'Ah, I see. I hope she's okay.' I spoke absently while indicating right to pull out into the traffic.

In my head I was running through my usual evening dance. Get the kids home, wake up three-year-old, do home reading with the six-year-old, cook dinner (what will we have tonight?), fold the laundry and then put kids to bed...

'I dunno, she fell on the floor and started moving all funny. The teacher ran to her real quick, but then, I dunno, she just went home, I guess.' She started munching the apple, so I let the conversation dwindle.

Fell on the floor, moving funny. That didn't sound good. I made a mental note to call her mum at some point in the evening routine. At home I sent a quick text, 'All good? C told me L wasn't feeling well?' At the sound of the text whooshing its way across the suburbs, I quickly got side-tracked with the bustle of household machinations.

It wasn't until a few hours later, when dinner had been eaten, baths had been given, stories read and blankets tucked in that I thought to check my phone. The message was unread. Something started to coil in my belly. A bad feeling, a sense of foreboding almost. I decided to call. Straight to voicemail. That was not normal.

I left a voicemail, asking if she was okay and if she needed anything. I went to bed later that night, still unsettled, and fell into a restless sleep.

On waking, I checked my phone and saw that my friend had seen my message, but had not replied. I started to worry. What if something bad had happened to her little girl? The scenarios that ran through my head ranged from a seizure, to a fainting spell, to meningitis. What had happened?

I conducted the morning routine on autopilot, worry for my friend and her daughter etching a furrow in my brow. As I was leaning over his high chair, my three-year-old reached for my face and tried to smooth my forehead with his chubby little hands. It startled me out of my introspection and back into the present moment.

'Sorry, sweetheart, Mummy's mind was a million miles away!' I said, grabbing a facecloth to wipe the Weet-bix remnants off his hands and my forehead.

'What's the matter, Mum?' queried Miss six-year-old.

'I was just thinking about Lila. I hope she's okay' I said, aiming for a light tone.

'Well, Mum, did you pray to Jesus?' she said, looking up at me in her innocence, the question evident in her little face.

Huh. I didn't remember praying. I had been worrying it over though. Over and over, if I was honest with myself. My mind had raced from one bad scenario to another, all without asking for heavenly help. I smirked, bemused.

'You know what, how about we do that right now?' I suggested. A quick nod and my little girl bowed her head and started praying. 'Dear Jesus, my friend

Lila fell over yesterday. Please help her feel better and let her come to school so my friend is there to play with me. Amen.'

I let my shoulders relax. It was probably nothing now that I had worried about it all night; best not to jump to conclusions. I let my mind switch off as I moved through the rest of the morning, dropping my daughter off to school and then heading to toddler library time.

I was sitting up the back at the library, watching my son engage with the story being read by the librarian when I felt my phone vibrating 'bvvt, bvvt' inside my pocket. I quietly took my phone out and glanced down. It was Lila's mum, texting me back. I opened the text, reading quickly.

'Sorry. Couldn't text. Bad news. At the hospital, L had seizure at school, it's called an AVM, will text later.'

My stomach plummeted. It was bad news. So what to do now? Pick up that worry again? Or go to my knees in prayer? Prayer it was. I quietly sent my scattered thoughts in Jesus' direction, knowing that He would be gracious to understand what I was asking. I prayed like this off and on all day, every moment my heart turned towards them, praying.

Later that night I googled. What exactly was I praying for? AVM, I typed. I soon found out what it was and was glad I had prayed first. It was scary to read. It happens in the brain, I learnt, where the artery and veins get all tangled up and try to do the wrong job, essentially. It needed surgery to fix it. Brain surgery? I looked at my little girl, the same age, sitting happily on the couch and my heart broke.

So I went to my room and got down on my knees and prayed. 'Dear God, you know what is happening here, you know the structure of Lila's brain, you know every cell in her body. You knitted her together and you can repair a dropped stitch. Let Lila know your peace and your healing.'

As I prayed, deep stillness washed over me. A picture began to form in my mind. I was walking down a hospital corridor, the green floor ahead of me, the walls, white and sterile, the wooden hand rails on the sides. I turned right through an open door into a room and there was a hospital bed, off to the left-hand side as I entered, and Lila was sitting up on the bed.

Then I had to step back, because in the room was a large, golden lion. It was majestic. Regal, soft and scary at the same time. It was pacing slowly back

and forth, in between the door to the room and the bed where Lila sat peacefully. The lion stopped, blinked at me and sat down firmly in front of her. I had the strongest sense wash over me in that moment. I knew Lila would be okay. The Lion of the tribe of Judah was watching over her, protecting her, guarding her life.

I slept soundly that night.

The next morning my friend messaged, 'Can you come in to the hospital? L wants to see C before her surgery'.

'Of course.'

An hour later, we entered the hospital ward. As the double doors whooshed open, I saw a hospital corridor, the green floor, the sterile, white walls, the wooden hand rails on the sides. I looked for the room number, found it, turned right through an open door into a room and there was a hospital bed, off to the left-hand side as I entered, and Lila was sitting up on the bed. A wave of goosebumps danced across my flesh. I felt a presence in the room, an otherworldly presence, a holy presence, confirming what I had received in prayer. Lila would be okay.

I shared my vision with my friend and the four of us gathered in that hospital room and we prayed and we gave thanks and we prayed some more.

Through brain surgery, recovery and many years of schooling, Lila is still fine. She is a super smart teenager now, attending a program for gifted and talented people that she was selected for.

So many years later it still remains one of the best memories I have of my daughter's primary schooling. We prayed, we witnessed the Lion in action and we can tell of His goodness for the rest of our days.