

Estienne and the Everlasting Lily

Once in a time so long ago that few now remember it today, in a part of the forests outside of what is now Morlaix, there grew a single, beautiful lily. Its ribbon petals were much larger than any other lily. They shimmered so brightly in the sunlight that they seemed almost as if they were encrusted with diamonds. The lily never faltered in its brilliance, and continued to shimmer even in the darkness. It remained strong throughout all seasons, even when snow blanketed the forest floor. The people in the surrounding towns began to call it “the Everlasting Lily.”

People traveled from all ends of the Earth to see this lily that never died. It became renowned as one of the greatest wonders in the entire world. Those whose hearts were kind, who came to gaze upon the Everlasting Lily were blessed with joy just as strong as the flower’s beauty. The reverence and keeping of the Lily allowed the land to flourish and the people to prosper.

One day, a man who had greed in his heart came to gaze upon the Lily. He cared not for the beauty of the flower or the happiness that it granted the people who visited its forest home. The man was more interested in the opportunity that the Lily presented to him. That same day, the man went to the courthouse and purchased the large plot of land on which the Lily sat. He tore down the surrounding forest, bringing large machines to rip up the earth. He put up fences, constructed buildings, and began to charge those who came to visit the magnificent flower. Those who were the poorest and could not pay to see the Everlasting Lily were turned away, denied the joy that the Lily would have brought to them.

In time, the man earned a considerable amount of money from his venture. He used the money to buy out the surrounding towns, pushing people from their homes, turning the small communities into sprawling cities, with buildings that scraped the sky. The largest of these cities became known as Morlaix. Those who could not afford to live in Morlaix were cast out and made to live in slums and hovels. The land began to grow sick and the disease of the earth also infected the people. The large buildings blocked out the sunlight. The once friendly inhabitants became sullen, and their hearts turned away from kindness. Soon, there was no one left to appreciate the Lily’s beauty, so no one paid to visit its enclosure. When the man realized that the Lily was no longer a source of income, he closed down the area to visitors and moved on from the town to go and make money elsewhere.

The wild reclaimed the Lily. Thorns grew where once green grass and flowers were abundant. The trees became twisted and choked out the sun. The

dazzling beauty of the Lily was cast into darkness. Years passed, then decades, until the memory of the Everlasting Lily all but faded from existence, save for in the memories of very few people who still held on to the joy that they had received when the Earth still prospered.

In one of the slums of Morlaix, a young boy named Estienne lived with his elderly grandmother in a one-room apartment. His grandmother had fallen ill, and they had no money to pay for a doctor or medicine. Estienne knelt by his grandmother's bedside, holding her hand and weeping softly.

"Estienne, why are you crying?" asked the grandmother, her voice faint.

"I am crying, because soon you will leave me. I will have nowhere to go, and we have no money. I will be taken by the city and put into an orphanage or made to work in a factory," he said, sobbing into his arms.

"Don't despair, little one," she said, stroking his hair with her thin hands, "You are strong. You will find a way to be happy and to live a good life," said the grandmother, drifting slowly off to sleep.

"How can I be happy when there is no joy left in this place? When you are gone, I will be miserable. There must be a way to save you, Grandmother. I will find a way," he whispered to her sleeping form.

At these words, there was a soft knock on the door. Estienne stood and wiped away the tears that dripped from his cheeks. He grabbed the handle to the door and pulled it open. He was met by a small, decrepit old woman. Her hunched appearance startled Estienne, but he didn't back away.

"Can I help you, ma'am?" he asked.

"Do you have any food to spare for a poor old woman?" said the frail and hunched stranger.

"We do not have much, but our door is always open to those in need. We can give you what we can afford," said Estienne, stepping away from the door to allow the woman into the small room.

The strange woman shuffled into the apartment and sat down on a stool with a heavy sigh. Estienne brought her some bread, cheese, and water. She dipped the bread into the water and ate ravenously, devouring every last crumb. When she was finished with her meal, she glanced over to the bed where the grandmother was lying.

"What is your name, young man?" she asked.

"Estienne, ma'am," he replied.

"Your grandmother is very ill, Estienne. She will die very soon unless something is done."

"I know she is ill, but we cannot afford a doctor or medicine. All I can do is plead to St. Ronan to heal her."

“Your grandmother is dying because the joy that once resided in her heart is fading. If the happiness is not restored, she will pass within the month. She would have been gone long ago, if not for you, who kept her kindness alive,” said the elderly stranger.

“If there is a way to save my grandmother, please, you must tell me. How can I restore her happiness to her?” cried Estienne, falling to his knees in front of the old woman.

“Since you were kind to me and shared your food, I will share what I know. There used to be a beautiful flower known as the Everlasting Lily growing wild in the forests surrounding the city. This Lily was said to have magical properties. Anyone who was pure of heart that gazed upon the Lily’s miraculous beauty would be filled with an eternal joy,” said the woman, the light shining in her pale blue eyes.

“Please tell me where I can find this Lily.”

“Oh, my dear boy. I only saw the lily once, when I was still a small child. I cannot remember where the Lily is located. All I can tell you is that you must go towards the rising sun. Take this ring as well,” she said, holding out a small gold ring in the palm of her hand. “Wear it on your finger. The brighter the ring begins to shine, the closer you are becoming to your destination. Somewhere in that dark forest, you will find the Lily. I will stay and care for your grandmother, but you must leave at once, for her time is growing short.”

Estienne quickly rose and slipped the gold ring onto his finger. He began to pack as many provisions as he could afford to take. Two loaves of bread, a small block of cheese, and a canteen full of water. He kissed his sleeping grandmother on the forehead and set out to find the Lily.

Estienne stepped outside onto the cement. The smell of exhaust and the haze of fog obscured the last traces of sunlight. Since the sun was setting, he knew that he had to walk away from the last slivers of light. He wandered the sidewalks of the sprawling, twisting city. He had never liked being out and about so close to dark, but he would do anything to save his grandmother. The neon lights made every shadow seem darker and more menacing. All the sounds of city life, the laughter and shouting coming from the bars, the honking of horns and the echo of distant sirens all seemed to close for comfort. Estienne’s steps became faster, and he felt his heart beating in his throat. He was so busy looking behind him that he failed to notice the danger in front as he walked straight into a circle of robbers.

“Look who has come into our midst, boys! A young kid, who is now in for a terrible night!” said the biggest man, who was obviously the leader.

Estienne was scared, but he knew he couldn’t let his grandmother down, so he held up his fists, ready to defend himself.

“Oh, we have a tough guy here. Watch out boys. He may try to kick us in our shins!” laughed another big, burly man.

“Say, boy, that’s a nice ring you have on that finger. Give it to me now, and we won’t hurt you,” said the leader.

At this, Estienne felt the bottom of his stomach drop. He could not let them have the ring, because it was his only hope at ever finding the Lily.

“Please, sirs, let me pass,” he begged. “I’m trying to find a cure for my grandmother. I need this ring to pay for her medicine.” Estienne lied to the men, not wanting them to know what the ring could do.

“If it’s for a sick old lady, I’ll let you pass us without incident, but on one condition. You need to get me a ring just like the one you have on your finger. If you don’t, I’m going to take your ring and you’ll wish you had stayed inside tonight. You have until dawn.”

Estienne slumped away, the laughter of the men echoing in his ears. He let his head hang, unsure of how he would ever find a ring to give to the robber. He contemplated giving up and going home to avoid the men, and waiting until tomorrow to start his journey on a different road, but he knew his grandmother didn’t have much time left and every minute counted.

He wandered around the streets, thinking that maybe one of the pawn shops may give him a ring that looked close enough if he traded something for it, but he had nothing of value. As he approached an intersection, Estienne saw a blind old beggar huddled against a building, holding out a cup to the empty street. Estienne was moved with pity for the old man. He reached in his pack and pulled out one of the loaves of bread.

“I don’t have any money to give you, mister, but I do have some food to spare,” said Estienne, placing the loaf of bread on the beggars lap.

The beggar lifted his head in the direction of Estienne’s voice; the milky eyes seemed to stare right through Estienne, the gaze burning into his skin.

“Because you have shared your food with me, I will reward you, young man,” said the beggar, reaching into his tattered coat, and pulling out a dagger.

Estienne was scared and began to back away until he heard the beggar say, “Don’t be afraid, son. This is a magic dagger. Whatever you touch with its point will turn to gold. If you remain kind of heart, the gold will remain, but if the gold is in the hands of a man with a wicked heart, it will turn to ashes.”

Estienne stepped forward carefully and took the dagger from the beggar’s outstretched hand.

“But sir, if it turns items to gold, why is it that you are out here begging for money? Shouldn’t you be rich?” asked Estienne.

“I used the dagger for the wrong reasons. I turned everything I could to gold and became a rich, ruthless business man. I destroyed many lives before I lost my

vision. Now the gold turns to soot in my hands almost instantly. Go,” said the beggar, pulling his hood up over his eyes and pointing his empty cup back towards the street.

“May St. Hervé bless you for your kindness sir,” said Estienne, and he turned back down the street.

Estienne could not believe what the old man had said. He placed the dagger into his pack and continued his walk. The old man had given him a dagger, but he still did not have a ring to give to the robber. He kept his eyes on the ground, scanning the sidewalks and gutters for anything that could be used as a ring. Finally, Estienne found a large, rusted lug nut. He picked it up, and was about to use the dagger, when he realized that the sky was beginning to grow lighter. Dawn was almost upon him, so he put the dagger and the nut into his pack and sprinted back the way he had come.

When Estienne was just about to the spot that the robbers were waiting, he stopped. Panting and heaving, Estienne reached in his pack and pulled out the dagger and a lug nut. He tapped the tip of the dagger on the rusted metal and instantly the nut turned to gold. Astounded and joyful, Estienne rounded the corner to face the waiting gang of men.

“Look who came back! I figured you would have run home to hide,” the leader said, his face contorted into mock surprise.

“I have your ring,” said Estienne, defiantly.

“Well, give it here then. I’m tired of waiting on you.”

Estienne handed the golden lug nut over to the robber. Upon seeing the nut, the man burst out laughing.

“Did you really think that painting an old nut would fool me? You’re as stupid as you are brave. You’re out of time, little man. Time to pay the consequences!”

The robbers advanced forward, cracking their knuckles. Estienne wanted to flee, but fear held him in place. He panicked, looking from man to man. He felt defeated, and was ready to embrace the beating, when he remembered the dagger. He drew it out of his pocket, ready to defend himself.

“Oh! The little man wants to use weapons. Well, little man, we have weapons too!” growled one of the men, pulling out a thick linked chain.

Estienne held his ground and watched as they slowly advanced, circling him. Finally, the leader lunged forward, and Estienne pointed the tip of the dagger at him. The tip grazed the man’s hand, causing a small scratch. The leader laughed, and was about to strike Estienne when his hand started to change. His skin began to turn to gold, first at the scratch, then his fingers, his hand, his arm, the gold surged over his body until he turned into a statue, frozen with a look of panic on

his face. The rest of the men gazed at their leader in shock, and then fled away into the alley.

Estienne shakily put the dagger back into his pack. When he had regained his composure, he set off back down the street towards the ever lightening eastern sky. He reached the edge of the city just as the first rays of sun peaked over the horizon. Across the dry open plain on the edge of the city, he saw in the distance a dark, tangled forest. Estienne started towards it, crossing the plain, the trees looking more ominous with every step he took. When he finally reached the edge of the forest, he was confronted by a wall of impassable, twisted, and gnarled trees. Estienne walked up and down the edge of the forest, but could not find a spot to enter. He came upon one area where there were no trees, but instead a large patch of thorns that was over a mile wide stood in his way. Despairing and exhausted, Estienne fell to his knees. He cried out in exasperation, "Thorns and briars, let me pass. My grandmother is ill and I need to find a way to cure her!"

To his astonishment, the thorns responded.

"If it is for your grandmother, we will let you pass, but first you must remove all of the thorns from our stems in eight days."

Estienne felt helpless. He didn't have eight days to remove the thorns. Every second, his grandmother was growing weaker. He again contemplated giving up and going home, but, instead, he set himself and began to remove the thorns with his hands.

After a day and a night of removing thorns, with pricked and bloody hands, Estienne was not even close to finished. He sat down to rest and thought of how he could possibly finish the task. He remembered his dagger. The tip may turn things to gold, he thought, but maybe the bladed edge would still work like a normal knife. Estienne took the sharp dagger out of his pack and tried using the bladed edge to remove the thorns. It worked wonderfully, and the thorns fell away as soon as the blade touched the stem. After this discovery, Estienne worked like mad and, within four days, he was finished. When the last thorn fell to the ground, the stems gave way and revealed an overgrown dirt path. Estienne stepped onto the path and made his way into the dark forest.

Estienne followed the path for what seemed like an eternity. It was so dark in the forest that he could hardly distinguish from day or night. The only source of light was the faint glowing of the golden ring. Estienne checked it constantly to see if it was getting brighter, but it remained unchanged. After days of walking, eating only very small portions, and sleeping, Estienne came upon a river. At first, Estienne was joyful, because his canteen was dry and his throat was parched, but, as he came closer to the river, he saw that the water was muddy and foul. Not only was it not suitable for drinking, but it was also very deep and very wide. There was

no bridge across it, and he didn't think that he was strong enough to swim against the fast current.

Estienne stood there, staring at the water and contemplating a way to cross it, when his thoughts were interrupted by the cracking of sticks. Estienne turned and came face-to-face with a giant grizzly bear. Estienne looked for a way to run, but his path was blocked by the river. He looked at the grizzly bear and cried out, "Please do not eat me. I am trying to cross the river to find a cure for my dying grandmother."

The grizzly bear sat back on its legs and studied Estienne for a moment, then it opened its mouth and spoke. "I won't eat you for the sake of your grandmother. I'll help you cross the river, but first you must make the water clean again so that fish can swim in its waters and I will not be hungry any longer."

Estienne thanked the grizzly bear and promised to find a way to clean the water. He then proceeded to walk upstream, searching for the source of the pollution. He finally came upon a disheveled hermit who was digging a large hole in the earth. As the hermit shoveled, he flung the dirt into the river.

"Excuse me sir, but why are you digging that hole?" asked Estienne.

"Don't you see, boy? I'm digging for gold! These woods are full of it. The river is full of it! I just need to find it. I'm going to become rich and have hundreds of servants and live in a large mansion. I'm going to make everyone do what I want, when I want it!" cackled the crazy hermit. His eyes glimmered feverishly as he looked at Estienne, his smile as twisted as the surrounding trees.

"Sir, if I give you gold, will you stop shoveling dirt into the river?" asked Estienne.

"Oh yes! Yes! Give me gold! Give me gold and I'll never dig again!" cried the hermit, jumping out of the hole excitedly.

Estienne gathered as many stones as he could carry from the river bank and set them down. He took out his dagger and touched each one with its tip, turning the rocks instantly into shimmering gold nuggets.

The hermit squealed and rushed forward, grabbing the gold rocks in his hands, dancing for joy, shouting, "I'm rich! I'm rich!" over and over again. Then he turned his eyes back to Estienne and to the dagger.

"You, boy, give me that knife. I need it to turn everything into gold! Give it to me now!" yelled the hermit, coming towards Estienne. As he said this, however, the gold nuggets in his greedy hands disintegrated and the ashes slipped through his fingers onto the ground. The hermit stared at his empty hands, stunned. Then his face was overcome with rage. He began to scream at Estienne, "You tricked me! You no good scoundrel! You tricked me!"

Estienne clamped his eyes shut, anticipating an attack from the hermit, but instead he heard a scream and then a splash. The hermit had cast himself into the

river. The instant the hermit's body disappeared beneath the water, the river became dazzlingly clear. The fish instantly returned, and Estienne could see rainbow trout swimming beneath the surface. Satisfied, he turned and walked back towards the path.

When Estienne arrived back at the path, the grizzly was waiting on him.

"You made the water clear again, and the fish have returned. For this, I will allow you to hang on to me as I swim across the river," said the grizzly.

Estienne climbed atop the grizzly's back and held tightly to its fur as it plunged into the river and swam to the opposite bank. When Estienne swung down back to the ground, the grizzly lumbered off, ready to feast on the returned fish.

Estienne continued along the path, but now the trees were getting tighter, and the forest grew even darker. The land seemed dead and deserted. The air smelled of decay. Estienne started to grow frightened and listened intently for any noise, but the woods were silent. Yet, when Estienne looked down at his hand, the ring was shimmering brightly. He knew that he was close, so he kept on.

Finally, the trees gave way and Estienne stepped out into a clearing. The grass in the clearing was yellow and brittle. There were no flowers, and the sky overhead was grey. In the center of the clearing was a dark green stem and hanging from it was one blackened and withered petal. Estienne felt his heart sink. He walked slowly toward the center of the clearing, not wanting to believe what he was seeing. He had come all this way, faced so many obstacles, only to find that the Everlasting Lily had died. When he reached the withered flower, he fell to his knees and began to weep.

Just then, the wind began to blow gently, and Estienne thought he heard a voice coming through the breeze. *Dig.*

Estienne began to tear away at the earth with his fingers. Beneath the dying roots, he found a single bulb. His heart began to rise and as he reached for the bulb, he again heard a voice carried on the wind. *Leave the dagger. Take the bulb.*

Estienne froze. If he kept the dagger, he and his grandmother would never want for anything. They could leave that small one-room apartment and move to a bigger house. He could pay for doctors and for medicine. Yet, if he didn't get the bulb back, all the gold in the world could not bring his grandmother back to him. Estienne took the dagger out of his pack and placed it in the hole. He carefully removed the bulb and placed it in his pack. Then he covered the dagger with dirt, turned around, and left the clearing.

Estienne ran and ran. He hardly stopped to rest or to eat the remainder of his food. He didn't stop running until he reached his apartment building. He bounded up the steps two at a time and rushed to the door. He grabbed the handle and threw it open, bursting excitedly into the room.

“Grandmother, I brought back the Everlasting Lily! You’re going to be alright! Grandmother! Grandmother?”

Her bed was empty, and there was no sign of her in the apartment. The strange old woman, however, was still sitting on the stool in the corner.

“She must have regained her strength and left. Tell me, ma’am, where has my grandmother gone? Did she go to the market?”

“Estienne, I’m sorry, but your grandmother passed away three days ago. She has already been buried.”

“But I brought back the bulb from the Lily. I can still save her!”

“I’m sorry, young one, but no power can bring back the dead.”

The old woman stood from the stool and put her arm around Estienne’s shoulders. She led him out the door and down the steps. They walked to the makeshift graveyard for the poor in the slums and came to a small grave, marked only with a crooked wooden cross.

Estienne knelt down next to her grave, while the strange woman stood behind him. He was overcome with emotion, but the tears wouldn’t fall. He pulled the bulb from his pack, and using his hands, he dug out a small hole in the soft earth on top of his grandmother’s grave. He placed the bulb inside, and buried it.

“Goodbye, Grandmother,” Estienne said softly. “I love you always.”

At these words, the tears finally began to flow from his eyes. He wept silently, letting the warm, salty tears fall freely. They dripped down from his chin and from the tip of his nose, falling gently onto the soft earth. As he stared at his hands, he failed to notice small green buds erupting from the ground atop the grave.

“Estienne, look! St. Illtud has blessed you!” cried the old woman.

Estienne raised his eyes and saw the buds shooting from the earth, growing tall, and blooming before his very eyes. More and more kept springing up all around him, bursting open into dazzling, gorgeous lilies. They sprouted up along the sidewalks, through cracks in the cement, all over the city. They spread out into the plains surrounding the vast city. The forests became green once more. The clouds parted and the sun shone down. Estienne had restored the Everlasting Lilies to the land, and with the lilies, happiness followed.

Estienne became renown throughout the city. As he grew, he used the lilies and their mysterious properties to find cures for all types of ailments. He became a great physician and lived his life helping those who were less fortunate, and if he’s not dead, then he’s still alive.