After the End

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Teen And Up Audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>No Archive Warnings Apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Chronicles of Narnia - C. S. Lewis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Caspian/Susan Pevensie, Lucy Pevensie/Tumnus, Edmund Pevensie/Original Female Character(s), Jill Pole/Eustace Scrubb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Caspian (Narnia), Susan Pevensie, Peter Pevensie, Edmund Pevensie, Lucy Pevensie, Eustace Scrubb, Jill Pole, Polly Plummer, Digory Kirke, Tumnus (Narnia), Reepicheep (Narnia), Oreius (Narnia), Aslan (Narnia), Jadis</td>
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<td>Additional Tags:</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the End

by SilentCalling

Summary

Years have passed since the Pevensie siblings were involved in the train accident that brought them to True Narnia and to paradise.

But what happened to Susan?

Notes

This story is dedicated to first readers, who stuck with me through my first terrible draft on Wattpad. I cannot thank you enough.
The rain was torrential today, the drops racing down towards the windowsill with alarming speed. The sound of it drummed against the roofs of Finchley with astounding force, puddles collecting in every free space. Ballards Lane was swamped with the floodwater, gritty drops splashing up onto shopfronts in the wake of drivers who seemed to hurried to bother with caution towards pedestrians. The day was grey and miserable, somehow exceeding the normal dreariness that London was famous for.

Richardson's Grocers was full of unfortunate Londoners caught without an umbrella, the air inside steamy and warm with their breath. The produce on the shelves had almost been exhausted from the recent shortages, the few good fruit and vegetables crowded for space on the wonky wooden shelves. The old shopkeeper sighed. It had not been a good day.

From somewhere in the crush of people, a small pale hand stretched through to reach the last potato. Grasping her prize, Susan Pevensie filled her small bag with the less-than-appealing vegetables. Why did they have to choose today to be inside? Susan thought to herself. Her monthly grocery shop was her time. Being interrupted by inconvenient strangers only made the thought of a rainy day worse.

Susan had lived in Finchley as long as she could remember, but she had always hated rain. As a child, rain had signified another day spent inside doing lessons instead of games. As an adult, rain had reminded her of the siblings she had been deprived of, and that one rainy day that had started it all. The thought of Narnia made her even more cross. A silly child's game so absorbing that merely pursuing the thought had led her siblings into irrevocable danger. Susan closed her eyes for a split second. Pevensies had never cried in public, and she wasn't going to begin now.

Suddenly jostled out of the way by another careless Londoner, Susan realised that her shopping was finally complete. Checking the list once, she elbowed her way through the crowd to the counter. The old shopkeeper looked at her lipstick in disgust. Susan rolled her eyes. There was nothing wrong with wanting to look pretty, and honestly, this man's opinion was hardly monumental in her everyday life. The man inspected the bag, adding up the prices so slowly that Susan was almost ready to walk out of the store. Finally, he spoke. "Eighteen pence, love." His voice was as low as it was disapproving. Susan handed over the money with an icy glare. "Thank you." The reply was curt and without emotion, a social pleasantry, far from pleasant.

Susan made her way through the crowd once more, arms full of brown paper bags. The interaction with the grocer had put her in an even sourer mood, and she was in dire need of a cup of tea. Envisioning a warm drink, Susan stepped out onto Ballards Lane. The cars roared past, a grating sound, their horns beeping, it seemed, at the weather. Taking a cautious step onto the curb, she juggled the bags while trying not to slip. Before she knew it, Susan had fallen into the largest puddle on the street, groceries thankfully out of harms way. To make the day worse, a car roared past. In a few seconds, an exasperated but dry Susan Pevensie had become sopping wet, cold and all the more miserable. Slowly, she collected the groceries and began the several blocks' walk in the rain.

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Mrs Trunkett's boarding house had never been much. A building as old as the streets itself, it loomed above Finchley in an almost comical manner, its large windows haunting eyes to the daily life of hard-done-by citizens. The brass knocker on the door was faded so much that if Mrs Trunkett hadn't polished it, it might have disappeared into the grey door entirely. Susan opened the door with a
certain amount of difficulty, wobbling up the narrow stairwell once again in pursuit of the seemingly unobtainable cup of tea. Finally she reached her own faded door, the paint peeling off of the aged timber. Fumbling with her key, Susan unlocked the door to reveal a small room. Depositing the untouched groceries on a small table by the door, she began changing her wet clothes. The smell of pollution tainted the blouse she was wearing a ridiculous amount. She would have to wash it tomorrow.

The wet clothes were eventually hung out to dry on the clothing rack that somehow seemed to take up half of the small room, Susan herself slumping down onto the rickety bed. The wall opposite the bed needed a new addition. Finding another runaway pencil, Susan thought a while and started sketching on the sheet of paper that covered the wall opposite the bed. Soon, a familiar figure appeared. Small horns, curly hair, goat's legs, and a beaming smile. Tumnus the faun. Susan stood back to observe the mural that had been one of her only joys since the deaths of her siblings.

The paper covered the entire wall, filled with Narnian fairy characters. It didn't make sense to believe that the strange dream that was Narnia had actually happened, but something inside Susan had made her hold on to her childhood fantasies. The mural was just another expression of her pain, a way to remember her siblings. For amongst the giants, fauns, centaurs and dwarves four figures stood out. The four Pevensie siblings dominated the mural in astounding detail, dressed in royal robes, arms around each other, with facial expressions so accurate they could have been real. Susan had drawn herself in a lighter touch, as if she had never known them at all. She had known, she knew now, that they could never come back. She could never be where they were. Maybe, someday, years in the future, but not today, not for years. She was alone, no matter how many people were with her.

Tears gathered in her eyes, falling like the rain. Susan laid on the bed and sobbed.
Over the Divide

True Narnia was a flurry of activity. The sun was finally shining, a cause for celebration after three days of refreshing, yet hindering, rain. In England, today would have marked the middle of winter, and the True Narnians had decided to rejoice in their luck of having pleasant weather throughout what they had previously known as the cooler season. It was time to partake in what Narnians had always done best - celebrating.

The woods of Aslan's Country seemed even sweeter to eighteen-year-old Lucy Pevensie now that she lived among them. The mixture of coast and forest that surrounded Cair Paravel had always filled her with wonder, and surprisingly, she had not tired of it in the years she had lived in True Narnia. These thoughts swirled around her head as she stumbled along a narrow forest path. Her arms were filled with baskets full of fresh orchard fruits, and she hummed a little tune as she walked along.

A downy head emerged from the trees, startling Lucy from her reverie. "Hallo, Luce," Eustace grinned. Lucy laughed and shook her head. Eustace was remarkably different now that he had grown up. Sometimes, he was almost tolerable. Still grinning, Eustace took one of the baskets from Lucy and marched towards their destination. "Are you keen for the party tonight?" Lucy asked. "You know I am. Reepicheep hasn't been around for a while. I'm looking forward to seeing him. Oh, and the food of course. The food will be exquisite, I'm sure," Eustace responded, snatching an apple from one of the baskets. "That is, if you don't eat it first," Lucy teased. "Put the apple back, Eustace." With another exasperated grin Eustace replaced the apple.

By the time they reached their destination, Lucy and Eustace had discussed the endless outcomes of the night and had dropped dozens of apples along the way. A young centaur met them at the entrance to the forest clearing that was to be the venue for the night. "Ah, we were waiting for the fruit. The middle of the table will do. Thank you both." The two moved towards the large tables set out in the centre of the clearing. The branches above them were laced with fairy lights, a recent addition to the realm of Aslan's Country. It was set up to be a perfect celebration.

At the base of a tree, a faun sat playing an unusual flute. Lucy sat down beside him and embraced him as an old friend. "Nice to see you again, Mr Tumnus," she addressed him. The faun raised a curly eyebrow in disbelief. "I believe you saw me only this morning, Queen Lucy," he replied with a cheeky smirk. "Hmm, you're right. We've been preparing so much that today has felt like three days in one!" Tumnus chuckled at the thought. He brought the flute to his lips once more and continued to play a jaunty tune that was both happy and haunting. Lucy listened with a quiet sense of awe. Even without magic, the faun's music never failed to calm her worries. Finishing the song, Tumnus stood up to observe the tables where food was being laid out. Offering a hand to Lucy, the two walked back towards the castle for more supplies. Eustace smiled. The two had a lovely friendship.

Peter Pevensie stood in the kitchen with a focused expression furrowing his brow. The event was set to be relatively informal, but it was important that everything was done correctly. "Can someone keep an eye on that pot, please? It wouldn't do to have the meat burn," he requested, following the activity with precision. He had never taken himself as a planner or a domestic man, but he had found himself enjoying the role since entering True Narnia. He enjoyed baking almost as much as he enjoyed practising his combat skills, and he had found it to be an extremely rewarding pastime. Standing at the door of the kitchen giving orders, Peter felt as if this was what he had been missing as a King, being involved in the small things. With a small smile, he addressed the kitchen workers. "Great job everyone, we should have this done well in time for tonight."

Caspian burst through the back door in a cloud of flour. "Why did you assign me to bread-making?"
You know I grew up as a noble!" The former Telmarine prince was covered in flour, sweat and frustration. Peter almost laughed at the sight. "Blimey Caspian! I thought you could read a recipe!" Peter chuckled, answered only by a discontented grunt. Barking to the team a command to keep going, Peter followed the distraught prince into the adjoining room, and stared in amazement. Every surface in the room was covered in flour. "How on earth did this happen?" Peter was utterly perplexed by the sight. Caspian pointed towards the wooden mixing bowl with an annoyingly arrogant grin. "The recipe said to mix vigorously. I didn't know that my vigorous was too vigorous," another chuckle escaped Caspian's lips. Peter shook his head. "When we started an alliance with a Telmarine prince, I never expected this to happen." Caspian replied with a wider, more mischievous smile. "I bet you weren't expecting this either." Before Peter had a chance to move, Caspian had enveloped Peter in a firm hug, coating both of the men in flour. "You're it!"

If the kitchen workers would have looked into the adjoining room fifteen minutes after Peter checked on Caspian, they would have seen two grown men covered in flour, clutching their stomachs laughing, with tears streaming down their faces. When Edmund and Jill came to collect them twenty minutes before the party began, they saw the exact same sight. With a cheeky glance it was settled - a flour war was declared, Caspian and Peter against Edmund and Jill.

All four were late to the party, watery eyed, smiles wide, and hair not fully rid of flour.
Susan awoke to a knock at the door. Throwing herself out of bed, she hurriedly straightened her clothes and washed the tear stains off of her face. Whoever was knocking at this ungodly hour - oh, it was actually a decent time - would pay for their crimes. The door opened to reveal a smiling young man holding a bouquet of flowers. His hair was dripping wet, but the poor boy looked like he'd just won the lottery. "I got these from across the city. I thought you might like them." The bright flowers seemed to bring light to the small room, and Susan accepted them gratefully.

Since leaving school, Susan had obtained a ridiculous amount of affection from boys. The attention was nice, but to her they had all seemed quite predictable. This particular boy had been doting on her since her school days, where she had often caught him staring at her from the boys' school across the road. He was a sweetheart, but all too clingy, and smelt oddly of musty rooms. "I know the weather isn't ideal, but there is a wonderful film being played just down the road," his desperate face made Susan almost pity him. "Not today, Ernest. I'm dreadfully sorry." Susan almost sighed at the pathetic look on his face.

With a small but broken smile Ernest stepped back outside, closing the door behind him. Susan knew that he would be back the next day. She shook her head as she began to change out of yesterday's clothes. It seemed that she had cried herself to sleep. Suddenly Susan knew what to do. It was still raining slightly, but a visit to the Professor's country manor was most likely in order. A spot of cleaning would give her something to focus on for the time being. Gathering her cleaning supplies, Susan stepped outside to hail a cab.

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The house was still a grand place, despite having been abandoned for many years. Susan had heard many rumours about the place after old Professor had moved out, including it being used as a convalescent home for soldiers, but she had only visited the place once since staying there as a child, and on that occasion her eyes had been too misty to observe anything much.

With surprise, Susan realised how beautiful the house was. As a child, the manor had seemed a scary, foreboding place, signifying the war and uncomfortable newness. Now, although obscured by overgrown gardens, the manor was a place of elegance and grandeur, a stately estate that seemed to say to itself "I deserve to be here". Susan marvelled at the ornate chimneys and the fine brickwork for a moment, before fumbling for the key.

Finally locating the ancient key from the confines of her coat pocket, Susan slid it into the lock, surprised at how cleanly it turned in its place. Opening the heavy wooden door, Susan slid inside and closed it behind her. Immediately the dusty air filled her lungs, and she coughed as she observed the room.

Every piece of furniture was draped in a white cloth, immaculate and silent, almost as if Diggory Kirke had simply left for a long holiday. Little things had been left in place, the ashes of a fire in the grate, a book on the side-table, a record ready to be played to her right. A further inspection of the house proved the other rooms to be much the same. The room the Pevensie siblings had slept in as children remained virtually untouched, the heavy dictionary Susan once read, still sitting on the shelf. A quick search found one of Lucy's shoes behind a cupboard and a nonsensical note written by Edmund underneath the dresser. Susan laughed despite herself. She had always wondered where that
shoe had gone.

Cleaning supplies forgotten, Susan continued her journey through the manor. Little remnants of their time at the manor still lurked in corners, although it had been ten years since their arrival at the house. Susan found herself laughing at all of the memories made in the house, and for a short moment, she felt as if her siblings were with her. Oh, to be young again!

Finally there were only two doors left unopened - the wardrobe room, and the library. Susan walked to the least threatening of the two. The door to the library was a heavy, unyielding thing. Susan struggled to push it open, before encountering yet another round of sneeze-worthy dust. Rows and rows of musty tomes filled the shelves, sunlight streaming in through the stained glass. It was beautiful in an specific kind of way, Susan decided. This room seemed almost sacred, despite its obvious neglect.

A row of paper notes in a corner caught her attention. As she drew closer, Susan realised that they were documents and drawings, unceremoniously pinned to the ageing walls. What a peculiar collection! The seemingly random arrangement of paper seemed so out of place in the otherwise ordered room. On closer inspection, Susan noticed one common word. Narnia. Everything on the wall surrounded the topic, varying from experiences, drawings of the places 'inhabitants', and historical pieces. Diary entries dotted the collection, Diggory’s, Eustace's and... Lucy's. Susan took one of the papers off of the wall with disbelief. The girlish handwriting was a note, all about Susan. It read:

15th of August, 1948

Dear Diary,

I am concerned about Susan. Ever since we first went to Narnia, she had believed that it was real. In fact, she had defended me when no one else had. But, you know diary, things are changing. She's stopped believing. Peter says it's just a phase, but I'm not sure. I wish things were the way they used to be. I wished we could just go back in the wardrobe, back in time. I wish Susan remembered Narnia, where she belongs. Come back Susan, come back.

Replacing the paper like it was on fire, Susan climbed upstairs to face the final room - the room containing the wardrobe that started it all. A small flicker of hope arose in her heart. Maybe she hadn't been dreaming. The doubt crept over her like a wave, slow and murderous in its path. Climbing into the wardrobe, she curled herself into a ball, waiting for what seemed like hours. The tears began to fall. Silly girl. It had all been a dream.

Chapter End Notes

Hello Readers!

So...this is my Ao3 debut! I've been on Wattpad for a while, but I thought I'd like to post this elsewhere as well, so hi! I'll be uploading hopefully at least once a week, but life has been busy as of late, so I can't guarantee too much. Eh, I'll try my hardest to edit and post.

Oh, and by the way, thanks for the kudos everyone. It's been really nice :)

Sincerely,
The Author
Reflections and Revelations

The sun was setting, and the celebrations were well underway. The lights in the trees glowed alongside the fireflies and the fairies, and a bonfire was being lit in the clearing. Edmund sat on a pile of cushions with Jill, making faces at the Turkish Delight on the table. "Looks like you fancy some Turkish Delight, Eddie," Jill teased, watching Edmund's face contort even more. Edmund shook his head, too repulsed to say much more.

"You know that stuff has bad memories associated with it, Jilly. Please, don't put it anywhere near me," he responded. With a wicked smile, Jill marched up to the tables, which were now groaning from the weight of mountains of food. Seizing the Turkish Delight container, she ran towards Edmund, cackling madly.

Edmund jumped up with a start, dashing through the trees with Jill in hot pursuit. "I won't let it near me! I refuse to let it near me. I am a king! You must listen to my orders!" he screeched, Jill laughing even harder at his childish remarks. She moved the lid of the container up and down as if it were a mouth.

"Chomp chomp Eddie! Time to eat some yummy Turkish Delight!" Edmund emitted a high-pitched scream and bolted towards the castle.

Caspian watched from his balcony with a grin on his face. Ever since coming to True Narnia, the two had been inseparable, bonding over their sarcastic humour and hate for Turkish Delight. With a small pain he remembered his own friendship with Lilliandil. She had always teased him about his dislike for oranges, and a similar scene had taken place when she had chased him around an orchard with a basket of the nasty, foul-scented fruit. He laughed despite himself. Lilliandil had been lost to him the day she went wild.

His memory snapped back to the day it had happened. Lilliandil had initially been overjoyed to see her husband and son again in Aslan's Country, but had become strange in the weeks that followed. She walked around the castle longingly in the day, going out at night and staring vacantly into the dark. Caspian had first thought she was simply missing her son, who had chosen to live on his own, a little further out from the castle. Although Caspian made several attempts to reunite his son and his wife, Lilliandil remained cold and distant. Caspian had spoken to Aslan, but the lion had been cryptic and had insisted that he should be patient for a while longer.

The former Telmarine prince had tortured himself with the knowledge that Lilliandil was unhappy, and as a result had started sleeping badly, becoming snappy and irritable during the day. It all came to a head when Caspian woke up one night with Lilliandil's hands around his neck. She was screaming in a strange language, the jabbering intermixed with threats towards her own husband. From what he could derive, Caspian was being blamed for his wife's death and the years she had spent without him. She had stood back and grasped a sword hanging on the wall. If Caspian hadn't acted quickly, he might not have lived to see the next morning. Lilliandil had been removed from True Narnia, having broken the peace. Caspian had not seen her since, and had not been able to forgive her until years later. Last year, he had arranged with Aslan to officially divorce her.

Caspian glanced at his ring finger with a resigned sadness. A faint remnant of the tan from his wedding band still remained. Deciding to live in the present, Caspian made his way downstairs and out to the forest where he was needed at the party. His life was here now, with these people. It would be downright rude to reject them for selfish reasons.

Eustace sat in close proximity to the food, a stack of playing cards in his hand. "Who here actually
knows some card games? Food does get boring after a while, surely," he whined, looking around for someone to answer his childish plea. Reepicheep jumped down from the trees, a rodent-like guardian angel to someone like Eustace.

"Forget the playing cards boy! We need to catch up!" Eustace smiled at the mouse, placing his fistful of playing cards on the ground.

"I agree. How have you been?" Eustace began. Reepicheep sat down. This would be a conversation worth waiting for.

The True Narnians fell silent as a lion entered the gathering. Aslan lifted his head as his subjects greeted him, before padding over to talk to Lucy. Diggory looked over with a burning curiosity. Sometimes Aslan's visits were casual. For goodness sake, the lion could be talking about the weather. But sometimes Aslan had something important to say, and Diggory felt that tonight was one of those nights. But why to Lucy? In Diggory's eyes she was still the little girl who had been afraid of the shadows during the war. The old professor decided he was over-analysing it all. Lucy would be fine.

Lucy looked up in surprise as Aslan approached her. The few times he had appeared in recent months had been to speak to either Diggory or Caspian. The lion laughed as if he had read her thoughts. "Don't worry, this message is for you, and it is for a reason, dear one. Although you mustn't tell anyone what is happening until it happens tomorrow," Aslan spoke softly into Lucy's ear. She nodded and listened. No one would be expecting tomorrow's events.

As the stars grew brighter in the sky, the call was made to pack up the gathering. Several hours of merriment had now passed, and the True Narnians were tired but fulfilled. Aslan watched as they walked back to the castle, laughing sleepily, nearly dropping their various bundles and platters. They would love tomorrow's surprise. The stars faded from the sky. It was nearly morning
Homecoming

By the time Susan had wiped away her tears, it had been hours since she had entered the house. Wincing as she exited the wardrobe, Susan realised that she had one more task to complete. The walk downstairs seemed drearier than before, her legs heavy, her eyes red and sore from crying. The darkness of the house now seemed perfectly normal to Susan.

The light outside seemed to burn her eyes as Susan picked up the neglected cleaning supplies. Locking the door and the memories behind her, Susan walked through the gardens surrounding the house. Ah! There. The perfect flowers. They were far from wilted, although they had been ignored for any number of years. Susan picked a bunch of the best flowers and walked through the grounds to the greenest forest clearing in the estate.

The place was more overgrown than when she had last seen it, but it still held a magical charm that Susan greatly appreciated. The clearing boasted nothing but nature - save for a few stones in the centre of the clearing. The graves of Diggory, Polly, and the Pevensie siblings rested in the clearing, with enough peace and quiet that even in death they could recount their Narnian fairytales. Pacing around the headstones, Susan laid a single flower on each of the graves, pausing for a second each time. Here were the people she had loved. The real world seemed to pale in comparison.

Quietly, Susan walked back to the village where she could take a cab home. Subdued by the rollercoaster of emotions she had just experienced, she barely greeted the driver before giving him the address. He was staring at her lipstick, she realised with a sigh. Make up had been one of her favourite hobbies for a few years now, but most people still saw it as indecent. It seemed the only people that wouldn't judge her were those lying in that forest clearing.

The rain began again on the journey back to London, little splats turning into heavy drops in mere minutes. The dirt road was becoming muddier by the minute. The sky grew dark, peals of thunder wracking the minutes of silence Susan had created. A sign appeared on the road, pointing to an unspecified direction. Did that say Narnia? No, she was still delirious. The windscreen wipers were a blur on the windscreen, and the driver was squinting to see past the sudden downpour. "Sorry, miss. We're going to have to pull over," the cabbie apologised. Susan nodded into the rearview mirror and murmured a prayer to Aslan as the cab turned off of the road. She heard a heart-wrenching shattering sound. The world went black.

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It was a beautiful sunny morning in Narnia. Peter woke up early, despite his late night. His archery skills were ridiculously rusty, and he intended to coordinate an archery competition in the next few weeks. A little extra practice wouldn't hurt. Donning a simple tunic, Peter ran outside to the armoury to collect a bow and a quiver of arrows. He laughed at the sheer number of replicas surrounding him. Almost half of Cair Paravel's armoury consisted of replicas of Santa Claus' gifts to the Pevensie children. Selecting a replica of Susan's quiver full of red-tipped arrows, and his own trusty bow, Peter walked to the archery range on the northern side of the castle with a swing in his step. Every day in True Narnia was a good day, but today would be especially good. He felt it in his bones.

Lucy had woken up with the sun that morning, eager for Aslan's surprise to the Narnians. It wasn't supposed to be a massive event, but Lucy felt she should prepare anyway. Grabbing some clothes, she headed towards the forest. There would undoubtedly be wildflowers there that would be suitable. Finding a patch of particularly sturdy daisies, Lucy began to make flower crowns.

Edmund made his way to the kitchen as soon as he woke up. The leftover food from last night would
serve well as a make-do breakfast. It had been far too long since he'd embarked on one of his all-important morning walks, and today presented the perfect opportunity. The Narnian revellers would undoubtedly be asleep for another few hours yet, delaying any duties on his behalf for at least that time. Carrying his breakfast outside, Edmund stepped into the fresh morning air with a beaming smile on his face. He had never thought that he would enjoy walking. It had always seemed such a boring pastime as a child. But yet, here he was, slipping his feet into wellingtons and heading out into the wilderness. The sun greeted him like an old friend as he traipsed down the forest path. What a beautiful day.

Susan woke up in an unfamiliar forest. It was no longer raining, but the air was fresh and clean, birds chirping in the trees around her. Standing up groggily, she dusted herself off and observed her surroundings. Wherever she was looked somewhat like England, but the sun was brighter and the air seemed... fresher. A sudden burst of sound echoed from somewhere near the forest. A sharp, twanging sound, almost like an archer's bow. Susan walked towards the direction the sound was coming from, the sound becoming more and more rhythmic as she walked closer.

Finally, Susan stood at the edge of an expansive lawn set with targets. In the distance, a large structure dominated the scenery. A castle? Maybe she had found herself somewhere in the countryside. Walking closer, Susan could see a lone archer practising with red-tipped arrows, shooting with astounding accuracy. *He shares my technique*, Susan thought with a start. On closer inspection, she saw that the archer was surrounded by another two people, the archer pulling the arrow back while in some sort of conversation. *Funny, they look a little bit like my siblings*, Susan thought, shaking the idea off almost immediately. *Still, it can't hurt to ask them where we are.* Susan walked slowly towards them. *Strange, the boys did really look like Peter and Edmund.* Suddenly, Lucy was running towards her, blowing on Susan's own horn from all those years ago.

"Everyone! Susan's come home!"
Susan was overjoyed to see her siblings again. It felt as if a part of her had re-emerged, a part of her that had been missing for a long time. Just seeing their faces was a breath of fresh air, overpowering even the Narnian scenery laid out before her. It seemed like she was caught in a dream, a perfect, wonderful dream.

Edmund looked at his sister with joy warming his heart. True Narnia had always been amazing, but it hadn't felt quite right without Susan. Sure, Susan had been far from his favourite sister when he was younger, but he was immensely glad she was finally in True Narnia, where she belonged. He hugged his sister tightly, followed immediately by Peter and Lucy, the whole scenario ending in a fierce group hug. The Pevensies were meant to be together.

Susan looked radiant. She was smiling, a smile Lucy hadn't seen in years. Giving her the completed daisy crown, Lucy found herself returning the grin. They had experienced many happy days in True Narnia, but today was by far the best.

Susan found herself looking at the crowd of Narnians that lived at Cair Paravel and its surrounding forests. Smiling at their returned queen, the Narnians bowed low to the ground, Aslan prowling forward through the crowd. Some of the spectators were wiping away tears, and many had to hold themselves back to avoid causing a scene.

Aslan approached the beaming Susan with a lion's grin on his face. "Welcome home, dear one. I always knew you would join us here. You have experienced many trials in the world you left behind, but you have worked through them and returned, and that is all that matters," Aslan addressed Susan in his normal gentle tone. Susan smiled back at the old lion. She could now see where she had gone wrong - logic had blocked her faith. But she was here now, everything forgotten, the slate wiped clean. She was now in paradise. Susan couldn't wait to explore.

Still grinning, the Narnians returned to their previous activities, slinking back through the doors of the castle and back to the forest, a river of laughter and joy. The Pevensie siblings, Caspian, Polly and Diggory, Jill, Eustace, Reepicheep and Tumnus remained. "I think a celebration is in order," Caspian started, raising his eyebrow cheekily.

"I agree. Last night didn't quite fill my entertainment quota," Eustace agreed with a nod.

"How large is your entertainment quota?" Jill looked confused.

"How about a ride in the forest? I'm keen for more of this lovely fresh air," Peter diverted.

"That was where I was meaning to go anyway," Edmund explained.

"Then it's decided. Somebody lead the way, I don't remember the place too well," Susan delegated. Caspian took charge with an impish swing in his step. "To the stables we go!"

The stables were filled with a calming silence, a stark comparison to the rest of the busy castle. Smelling of damp hay and animals, the stalls were dark and ancient. Caspian expertly chose horses for the party, selecting saddles and calling the animals each by name. Susan observed him with an intrigued gaze. She had never taken Caspian for an animal type, but he looked at ease in the quiet dampness of the stables. She wondered what else she didn't know about the former Telmarine prince.
The man was an enigma.

At last, the horses were saddled and the party was ready to depart. Mounting their chosen horses, the eleven rode out onto the green lawns of the castle. Susan laughed as she struggled to stay seated. It had been a ridiculous amount of time since she had ridden a horse. The rest of the group rode effortlessly, easing their horses into a comfortable trot. Even Eustace, with his infamous motion sickness, seemed to be a master of the reins.

A quick ride around the lawns dubbed all the riders ready to encounter the forest. With Peter leading the way, the Narnians ventured into the forest down the narrow dirt paths reserved for riders and pedestrians. The scenery varied from trees to forest brooks to clearings and shy rabbits, the paths winding in a picturesque way. The air was fresh, the sun peeking through the branches in patches of dappled light, the hay-like smell of the horses and the smell of fresh earth mixed together in a delicious scent. Quiet conversation was made along the trail, careful not to disturb the various colonies of forest creatures. Some Narnians had grown accustomed to living in the forest after the Telmarine occupation, and preferred their way of life amongst the trees.

Suddenly, a sharp turn in the path lead the riders into the depths of the forest. Here, everything seemed colder, fresher, somehow greener. A peculiarly straight blackened tree passed by Lucy's arm, a tingle of magic brushing through her hair as she shuddered. A rocky cliff face came into view, a single door cut into the stone. "Wait. I don't think I've ever seen this part of the forest before," Peter spoke warily, his usually confident voice quite shaky. "I'm sure I recognise it from somewhere," Edmund replied thoughtfully.

"Maybe we should be turning back," Susan was getting a little scared of the unknown place. The door looked like a gaping stone mouth leading into uncertainty. Tumnus suddenly laughed. "I don't see why you're so scared of this place. I recognise it."

"Well, why don't you tell us? Please don't tell me it's a dark magician's cave," Peter's brow was furrowed in a wrinkle-inducing way. Tumnus' laugh only got louder. The faun clutched his belly as he fell off of his horse, shaking the leaf litter off of his horns.

"I'm quite sure I would have known if a dark magician lived here. Although one did visit once, well, her henchmen. No, there were only happy memories here," Tumnus seemed a thousand miles away, reminiscing some unknown time.

"What is it then? We don't have all day you know," Eustace retorted, his eyebrows raising in a disturbing manner.

"Welcome, my friends, to my house!"

Chapter End Notes

A double chapter upload coming your way as a little Christmas present. Hoped you all enjoyed the holiday season!
The interior of the cave was as cold and dark as it had been in Narnian times. Tumnus had lead the group inside, expecting to see his house restored to its former glory, just like most things in True Narnia. The plethora of broken objects and the scent of dark magic was a rude shock as they entered. The cave remained in its post-White Witch condition, drawers open, crying tears of paper, Tumnus' father's portrait defaced and lying on the ground.

Lucy observed the scene with a sort of horror. She had visited the cave in this condition, when she was younger, but the horrific details seemed to have blurred over time. Here was the disrespect of the White Witch at its pinnacle, the cave serving as a chilling reminder that Narnia had not always been peaceful. To Lucy, the year she had discovered the lamp post seemed so far away, a distant dream of a time. But here she was, standing in the place where she had been lulled to sleep by Tumnus. This was the place their Narnian adventure had began. Lucy smiled in spite of the memories of the White Witch. Her and Tumnus' friendship had certainly lasted the test of time.

Tumnus looked around his former home with a pang of sadness. He could clearly remember the years spent making the place his own, filling the small cave with furnishings and ornaments, with gifts. Everything he had worked for had disappeared in the space of an hour or less. That evil woman had brought no benefit to Narnia since her arrival.

A single glimpse of colour in the wreckage drew Tumnus' eye. He had always been careful to keep a muted colour scheme in the house - brighter colours tended to hurt his eyes - but here was a single piece of colour, a testament to the hope that rose out of the rubble. Examining the object, Tumnus was even more surprised. The piece of fabric was soft and familiar in his hands. Turning the fabric over, the faun laughed as he saw a shakily embroidered 'L.P' in the corner.

"Lucy, look at this!" he called the young girl over to where he was standing. "I think I found your handkerchief!" Lucy looked at Tumnus in disbelief. Who would have known that a simple kind gift would have crossed the boundaries of a war, time and life itself? "See, it's yours," Tumnus insisted, revealing the embroidery in the corner. Lucy inspected her own shoddy sewing with a laugh. "I am glad to have improved my embroidery skills. Younger Lucy was never good at domestic tasks."

"I like it," Tumnus said sweetly, tying the runaway handkerchief around his wrist. "It's a reminder of everything we've been through to make it to now." Lucy smiled at the kind gesture and walked back out into the forest. It was time to leave the scars of the past behind and look to the future. The group followed her outside and mounted their horses once more. "We'll organise a group to clean this place up tomorrow. We'll leave some objects in place to honour those sacrificed to the White Witch, but we want to honour Tumnus' home as well. A museum of sorts. Agreed?" Peter spoke with a booming voice, anxious for his message to be heard over the group of chatting Narnians. Tumnus smiled at the young King. "I am so proud to have seen you grow up to be a wise and just King. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart," he responded in a gentle tone that reminded Lucy of firesides and flute music.

The ride back to the castle was peaceful and not without its fair share of laughter. Reepicheep's pursuit of a timid stag beetle had humoured them all, and left the Narnians muddy and out of breath on their return to Cair Paravel. The sun was setting behind the castle and over the water, creating a beautiful sight. Susan, Lucy, Edmund and Tumnus went to the throne room to view the sunset through the glass.

The water lapped at the shore and at the orange horizon, birds flying off into the swirling colours as the sun sunk below the horizon in a majestic farewell. Lucy looked at the sight with a childish
wonder, moving closer to the glass as if by moving forward, she could absorb the clouds and keep them in her heart forever. Tumnus stood beside her, a watchful guardian of the sunset, his wise eyes drinking in the beauty, scanning the horizon as if it was endless. Susan and Edmund stood closely together, Susan experiencing her first Narnian sunset in years. Edmund wanted to touch the clouds, to walk on them to the night. A strange thought, he speculated, but a lovely one.

Aslan padded to the glass window almost silently, his paws moving smoothly over the tiled floor. "True Narnia may still bear the scars of wars past, but at the end of the day there will always be the sunset to look forward to," he philosophised. "Your love for one another and my love for you, will be able to withstand even the most difficult of struggles and mend the deepest of scars." The four Narnians nodded, eyes still fixed on the glowing orb growing fainter in the evening sky. Together, they had made their way through Narnia's troubles, and had grown into a stronger force than when they began. Tumnus looked at Lucy. She had become an amazing woman in the years he had known her. She was strong and courageous, without losing the kindness and gentleness that had drew him to her in the first place. He was proud of what she had become.

Lucy and Edmund looked at Susan with love in their eyes. Today had only been proof of what had been missing in their lives since Susan had left. She seemed to fit in with the sunset, her laughing face reflecting the fading light. She belonged here. Susan was a Narnian Queen, in her heart, in her mind. Susan was a Narnian Queen in the depths of her soul.

The four stood at the window until the stars grew bright in the sky, twinkling their joy at Susan's return. From somewhere deep in the forest, a green mist slithered out of a ransacked cave.
Edmund woke up the next morning with a terrific idea brewing in his mind. Ever since he was younger, the black-haired boy had always dreamt of having a proper ball. A night full of dancing, food, dressing up - perhaps a masquerade! - had always enchanted Edmund. He had never expressed his interest in such an event - Peter had always regarded parties of any kind as silly and feminine - but now seemed to be the perfect chance for Edmund to speak his mind. He was an adult and a King, now. He deserved to run something of his own. And Caspian would be the perfect person to ask for help.

Caspian was polishing swords in the armoury when Edmund found him. The repetitive sound of the cloth gliding over the metal had always been calming to Caspian, and he often found himself polishing the swords during his free time. Edmund smiled as he approached. "Caspian, my friend. I have an idea," Edmund started, eager to put his plan into action. Caspian was uneasy at Edmund's casual tone of voice. "The fact that you preface the idea by calling me 'friend' makes me a little wary," Caspian laughed.

"Well it's nothing bad, I'll assure you. Although it has been a source of embarrassment for some time," Edmund explained with a kinder, less mischievous smile.

"Go on," Caspian's eyes returned to the repetitive task of polishing.

"Well, I want to throw a party of some kind. But not a Narnian party. None of this cavorting around the woods you know? Something proper, and fun, like a masquerade ball. I've always wanted to organise one, and Susan's always wanted to attend something similar. It would be the perfect way to welcome Susan back officially, and have some fun," Edmund explained, out of breath at the end of what was practically a paragraph in a sentence.

"Not the most masculine of aspirations, Ed, but it is a good idea. A great one in fact. Sounds like some of the parties we used to host in the castle," Caspian replied, taking another sword off of the wall.

"The castle?" Edmund was surprised. "I don't remember anything of the sort happening in Narnia. And I lived during the Golden Age. It was called the Golden Age for a reason you know."

Caspian laughed at how much Edmund had sounded like Eustace. It was easy to forget the two were related, but it was moments like these where it was clear they both had Pevensie blood. His face sagged as he tried to explain the blunder to Edmund. "I mean the castle I lived in as a boy. The Telmarine castle, you know," his eyes were distant as he relived it all.

"It was a type of dance called a Ernteton Party, held at this time of the year. The idea was to ward away the winter with dancing and merriment. It was always a great cause for celebration and an excuse to meet up. The food was always divine - I still remember those hot chocolates well - and the dancing was the best bit by far. My father always danced with me. He taught me to dance, in fact. He would spend the whole night telling me stories about Telmar and Narnia. They were some of the best nights of my life. They were cancelled after my father died."

"I wish I could have seen them," Edmund replied softly. "I want to make my ball something like what yours was. I want it to be memorable for years to come."
"Well then, Ed, we have some work to do. Us Telmarines had a strong reputation for partying, and I'm going to do everything in my power to help you make this the party of the century!" Caspian had a strange light in his eyes now, beaming at the idea of a different sort of party.

Edmund beamed back at Caspian. He was more than ready to get moving on the party plans. "So, first of all, we'll need to organise music..."

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Susan, Lucy, and Jill sat in one of the castle's many bedchambers, relishing in a much-needed pamper session. The current activity seemed to be experimental hairstyles, and Jill giggled as two thin pigtails were tied above her head in a bow. "This doesn't seem like the most attractive of hairstyles," she teased, pulling a silly face at the mirror.

"Oh, but Jill my dear, it really is," Lucy teased back, pulling her hair into a similar style.

"Yes, very very fashionable. The height of trends in London," Susan joined in on the joke, also putting her hair into the ridiculous style.

Edmund walked in on his sisters and friend chasing each other around the room making ridiculous noises. "I'm going to get you, Jill Pole!" Susan cried, waving the ends of her hair in a threatening manner.

"No you won't!" screeched Jill, jumping over several decorative ottomans in an attempt to hinder Susan's pursuit.

"What on earth is going on here?!" Edmund had been joined at the doorway by a smirking Eustace.

"It seems to be a battle of sorts," Eustace joked, pointing out the clear 'strategies' being undertaken by each of the girls. Soon all of the room's occupants were clutching their stomachs laughing.

Caspian entered the room with a chuckle and a sigh. "I can't believe it took you all so long to get here, only to do nothing at all," he smiled at the laughing Narnians. "What darling Edmund was supposed to tell you was that we're having a ball on Friday, and that you're all cordially invited." Edmund and Eustace both looked up guiltily.

Eustace scratched the back of his head. "Yes, that was what we were supposed to tell you. I guess we got a bit carried away."

"Don't worry, Eustace. We're definitely attending," Jill said with a cheeky hair flick. "Us girls love dressing up. We'll be there!"

"We sure will. Now, get out, you! You're interrupting girl's night!" Susan ordered. The three boys quickly evacuated the room, closing the door behind them with matching grins on their jolly faces.

Chapter End Notes

Hey Readers!

This chapter is the first of today's triple upload, as I have been without internet for the past two weeks on beach holidays, then on camp. I'm really sorry for the lack of uploads, but you'll be pleased to know that the holidays left me refreshed and ready to
edit.

Hope your holiday season went well, and your school holidays (if you have them!).

Sincerely,

The Author
The night had finally come. Edmund stood beside the thrones in the Great Hall, observing the party through a dark purple mask. His eyes glinted as he watched the celebration, proud of his accomplishments. The whole thing had turned out significantly better than he had imagined.

The Great Hall had been cleared out to create a dance floor, save for the podium that boasted the four thrones. Twinkling lights had been hung from the roof, creating a starry ceiling for the Narnians to celebrate under. Tables to the left of the hall were groaning with an assortment of rich food, including the bread that Caspian had finally figured out how to make. A group of musicians filled the right hand corner, playing a variety of Narnian flutes and guitars. The Narnians themselves swept around the room with the grandeur of anonymity, elegant masks covering identities only for the night.

Caspian manned the food table with a sense of pride. Alongside the typical Narnian foods were several traditional Telmarine dishes, prepared by Caspian and Caspian alone. The smell reminded him of the Telmarine parties that the whole night had been modelled on. The sight of Narnians sweeping around the dance-floor took him back to his childhood. Edmund had made it a truly beautiful tribute to Caspian's own country. Susan swept by in a beautiful blue silk dress and a matching mask, pulling him out of his reverie. "Care for a dance, kind sir?"

"Certainly. I wouldn't miss it for the world," Caspian allowed himself to be pulled into the middle of the dance-floor by the queen who was making no attempt at anonymity. She was easily the most beautiful woman in the room. Come to think of it, she was always the most beautiful woman in the room. "What are you dreaming about, silly? You should be focusing on the dance," Susan scolded, noticing Caspian's faraway look.

"Ah, I was a little distracted. I'm sorry, I really am," Caspian replied. "My full attention will be on you from now on." Susan smiled back at him, her eyes underneath the mask revealing her identity even more than the soft timbre of her voice. *I am ridiculously lucky*, thought Caspian.

Eustace and Jill stood at the side of the room, drinking matching cups of punch and observing the crowd. "Something's going on between Caspian and Susan over there," Jill noted, sipping her punch with a raised eyebrow.

"Honestly, I'm not at all surprised. You should have heard how he talked about her when we were on the Dawn Treader all those years back. It was quite sickening at the time," Eustace responded.

"But not now? I never took you for a romantic, Eustace Scrubb," Jill teased.

“Well, I didn't consider myself one either. I probably don't now. You should know full well that I was an almost completely intolerable child, and therefore hated anything that anybody else called enjoyable," Eustace swallowed.

"I agree, you were completely intolerable," Jill replied.


"I was meaning to say that you've improved significantly, dear fellow. You're almost nice to be around now. Oh, and you have finally learnt to style your hair," Jill sipped the punch again with a cheeky smile.

"That I have, Miss Pole. Care for a dance?"
The two joined the crowds on the dance-floor, alternating between stupidity and seriousness in their dancing. Eustace stared down at the girl he was dancing with. His childhood friendship had ended up blossoming into something immovable and solid. Jill had been his constant in both Narnian and real-world adventures. *She looked remarkably beautiful tonight.*

Jill had never cared too much for her appearance, something Eustace had admired, being a highly practical man. But tonight she had gone all out. Her eyes glittered behind her dove grey mask, and Eustace felt his heart skip a beat. *Was this what love felt like?*

Peter Pevensie had made his way around the room, finally joining his brother beside the thrones, noticing the several blossoming romances with disgust. Honestly, he had thought whatever Caspian and Susan had had so many years back was disgusting, but this, was just *gross*. Edmund seemed to notice his brother's disgusted face. "So much love in the air Peter. I think its making you sick!" he chuckled, pretending to throw rose petals over his disgruntled brother's face.

"You're probably right. I have no desire to be witnessing the love lives of my sister and cousin, thank you very much!" Peter spoke abruptly, almost sounding forced.

"Or maybe," Edmund said with a wicked smirk. "Poor Pete is jealous. He wants a love like that!"

"Oh, come on with you. You want love more than I do. I am a happy bachelor, and a *young, attractive* bachelor at that. I am perfectly satisfied being alone," Peter replied almost snappily. But still Edmund saw something in his brother's eyes. He knew the emotion well from the war days, when they spent their time crying together for their parents. Longing.

Edmund felt quite lonely himself. For his sister and his cousin, love had seemed to come easily. For goodness sake, something seemed to be happening between Lucy and Tumnus as well. They had all found their soulmates at a drop of a hat, a flash of lightning. But here Edmund was, having lived nineteen years on earth, and a few more in Narnian eternity, and without even someone to be interested in. Maybe he would just have to wait.

The couples twirled around the dance-floor, sweeping around the room in elegant gestures. Love, bitterness, and jealousy all existed in that room that night, three emotions in a dance of their own.

The lights faded, the sun rising in the sky. The revellers stepped away from their dance partners and their drinks. Tomorrow would be a long, long, day.
The morning greeted the True Narnians all too soon for their liking, the sun smiling at the groaning citizens who had forgotten to close their curtains the previous night. The trees looked even greener in the fresh morning light, their branches cold and wet from the slight rain that had occurred while they slept. It was a beautiful sight for a less-than-beautiful group of waking Narnians.

Caspian woke up with the sun, cursing his eastern room and the minuscule gap in the curtains. It was truly a beautiful day, something that his sleepy eyes could barely register. The memories from last night flooded back through his mind. A sleepy smile graced his lips. Susan. What a wonderful night it had been. Although he was surviving on most likely less than four hours of sleep, Caspian felt as if he had as much energy as a child. He was renewed, restored, genuinely excited for the first time in years. He was probably also going mad, but that seemed to be no issue at that moment in time. He felt alive.

Clicking his heels, Caspian danced around his sizeable bedchamber, shouting his joy until it reverberated around the room. He was loudly humming a joyful Telmarine folk tune when Eustace burst in the door. "What on earth are you doing?" his tone was brash and insensitive, probably a result of his evidently tired state. "I was trying to sleep, you know. You do remember that I live next door now, don't you?" Caspian stared at the ground sheepishly. "If you understood the joy I'm feeling, Eustace, I'm sure you would have joined me," Caspian explained.

"I'm almost positive I wouldn't. I'm not the hollering sort, you know that," Eustace replied grumpily. "What is this joy coming from anyway? There seems to have been rather too much of it in the last few days. I am afraid it is making me quite ill."

Caspian laughed at Eustace's statements, chuckling at the man's frowning face. "The joy's coming from Susan, of course. I think I realised something last night, and I feel like a new man! I tell you, it's a remarkable feeling. You should try it sometime," Caspian joked, filled with newfound energy.

A smile crept up Eustace's face. "I think I have already tried it, my friend. Something happened between Jill and I last night, and although I am not quite as ecstatic as you, I do feel different. In a good way, not an about-to-turn-into-a-dragon way." Caspian smiled back at Eustace. So then, he wasn't the only one feeling this way. Maybe he wasn't crazy, after all.

Wandering over to the small living area in his room, Caspian offered Eustace a seat. "Here, I'll call for coffee. I think it's time we had a man-to-man talk." Eustace nodded and waited for Caspian to ring the magical bell that hung by the door, before giving the man his coffee order. The coffee arrived and the men began to talk, settling back into the plush seats as they swapped advice. "So, Caspian," Eustace enquired. "How exactly do you kiss a girl?"

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Lucy woke up to the sight of the sun rising over the Eastern Ocean, the water sparkling in the early light. The balcony had stayed relatively warm overnight, a blessing she was thankful for. Her party dress was fairly thin, and the ocean breeze had been known to deliver terrible chills at night. Standing up, she removed her head from Tumnus' shoulder and looked out to the sea. Everything seemed ethereal in the quiet of the morning. The magic she had always felt in Narnia felt even stronger in this exquisite moment.
Tumnus rubbed his eyes, his muscles protesting as he stood up. He was really too old for that amount of dancing. He gazed at Lucy as she watched the morning sky, her hair floating in the slight breeze as she laughed. Last night had been amazing, almost a dream sequence in his monotonous life. Lucy had truly been the belle of the ball, outshining her sister in her natural beauty. Tumnus walked up to her with a resolute smile. "Lucy, I think I have something to tell you..."

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Edmund woke up with a scowl on his face. Last night had been successful, but the citizen's attention had largely been taken away from the reason for the event. A ridiculous amount of romance had been taking place around the castle, and here he was, with no good memories to hold of last night, combined with a throbbing and insistent headache.

Rolling himself out of bed, Edmund stomped over to the washbasin, examining the dark circles under his eyes. A melody of laughter floated down the hall, a severe comparison to Edmund's current state. Whatever the people were laughing about seemed to bring them an impractical amount of joy. *Blasted Narnians! Why couldn't they keep some of the joy for me?* It would be nice not to be ignored for once.

Why was it so hard to meet people in True Narnia? Edmund was still down on his luck. Everybody else seemed to have someone that was 'theirs'. Even Peter was sure to find someone soon. But Edmund? He felt resigned to start looking for a dryad. Still cross, Edmund stormed downstairs to find some food to stress-eat. A good, unhealthy meal and a jog around the grounds would hopefully burn off some of the angry energy.

Eating a good portion of the biscuits that he found in the kitchen, Edmund tied up his running shoes and sped off into the forest. The cold air entered his lungs with a burning sensation, the trees whipping past him as his feet pounded the forest trails. He had no idea where he was going, but he needed to keep his mind off of the madness. Furrowing his brow with determination, Edmund sprinted ahead.

Soon the second-youngest Pevensie reached the forest clearing the Narnians had celebrated in only days before, his lungs heaving. The grass was fresher here. Edmund sat down underneath a tree to catch his breath. A strange shape lying in the grass alerted his attention. His eyes widened as he sprinted back towards the castle.

"Peter, Caspian! Come quickly!"
"Caspian, Peter! Come quickly!"

The two men burst out of the castle in a frenzy, wracked with panic. "What's happening Ed?" Peter looked like a warrior with wild eyes, clutching his sword like a lifeline. Caspian followed him, also fully armed.

"There's a girl in the forest. It looked like she fell out of the sky. I've never seen her before," Edmund wasn't sure if it was panic or excitement that was stringing his sentences together, but he was sure the girl wasn't just a wandering Narnian.

Peter laughed. "Are you kidding me Ed? All the fanfare, for this? She's probably a Narnian that fell asleep on an early morning walk." Edmund shook his head, urging his brother towards the forest.

"Why don't you see for yourself, then? Surely you can't be afraid of being wrong?" Edmund's adrenaline had quickly morphed into endorphin-induced arrogance. Curious, Peter and Caspian followed Edmund to the clearing.

The girl in the clearing had woken up, rubbing her eyes as she observed her surroundings. Edmund's heart skipped a beat. She was actually quite pretty. Maybe Aslan had granted his wish. Edmund shook his head. What a strange idea.

Her face developed into a grin as she saw them approaching. "I can't believe it! Are you Caspian the Tenth?" her voice was low but sweet. A kind voice, Edmund decided.

Caspian grinned, scratching his head. "I guess Peter was right, after all. She's obviously a Narnian. She knows who I am." Peter hi-fived the former Telmarine prince with a cocky type of finality. He began moving out of the clearing, motioning for Caspian to join him.

The girl laughed. "A Narnian? I wish."

"What? You mean you're not from here?" Edmund asked.

"Of course not, silly. Although you are all quite famous where I come from," the girl explained.

"What in Telmar do you mean? How did you know my name in the first place?" Caspian sat down next to the girl, searching for answers. Peter and Edmund joined him.

"All of the Narnian adventures were made into books, you see. They star you as some of the main characters. They were always some of my favourite books as a child, even though they were quite old," the girl responded casually.

"So you come from our world?" Peter enquired.

"When were you there last?" Edmund said excitedly. This girl was decidedly fascinating.

"Well the year I left was 2014. As I said, the books of your adventures were written quite some time ago," the girl answered.

"I never thought I'd meet a girl from the future! What's it like? Any exciting new developments?" Edmund was beyond curious.

"I don't know, really. Depends what type of things you're looking at," the girl said vaguely.
"Wherever you're from, we are more than glad to welcome you. It is quite obvious that you are supposed to be here with us. Aslan knew, I'm sure. Now let's get you up to the castle," Caspian diverted.

"Perfect! I can't wait to meet all of the supposedly made up people," the girl joked. The group started to trek back through the forest to the castle, which was now a hive of activity. Edmund stopped the party suddenly.

"I think we've forgotten something rather important," Edmund said with a laugh. "What's your name?"

"Harriet," the girl replied with a grin. "Harriet Carter."

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The table in the castle's best parlour was groaning under the weight of numerous plates in typical Narnian fashion, fine china glinting in the midday light. Rows of delicate tea foods were displayed immaculately, a tiny plume of steam rising from the teapot. The atmosphere was friendly as the True Narnians gathered around their newest member with a curiosity that was almost laughable.

"So, where did you live in England?" Susan inquired. "Anywhere near Finchley?"

"Nowhere near Finchley," Harriet laughed. "On the other side of the world in fact. I come from Australia."

Jill nearly spit out her mouthful of tea. "How dreadful! How many convicts do you know? Have you ever fought a kangaroo? What do you do about those killer koalas?"

Harriet collapsed on the floor in a fit of laughter. Tears streamed down her face as her laugh echoed in the small space. "You believe all those silly myths? Australia has three times less violent murders than the UK. And I've only ever seen 'roos dead on the side of the road. Killer koalas are a myth as well."

Eustace frowned. "How disappointing. I was planning on meeting a killer koala some day."

"Well I guess you'll just have to imagine one, Eustace. I'm sure that brain of yours is good for something at least," Jill teased.

"Savage!" Harriet remarked, winking at Jill. The room stared at her in shock, the quiet chatter dying immediately.

"Excuse me, I am not a savage. I can take teasing from Jill, but not from you," Eustace brushed himself off and faced Harriet with a scowl.

Harriet's eyes widened. "You must have gotten it wrong. Savage is slang, for something that's a good cutting insult. I was complimenting Jill."

The tension in the room lessened almost instantly. "We are going to have to get used to each other, that's for sure," Diggory guffawed. Harriet smiled at the Narnians, who were now reverting to their normal smiling selves. She could fit in here.

Edmund looked across the room at the girl from the future. Surely humanity had improved in the years he had been away from it. She was funny and beautiful. Edmund was in serious trouble. The next few days would undoubtedly be difficult. He wasn't used to having such a beautiful woman in the castle. The Narnians began to leave, cleaning up the early afternoon tea in their wake. Harriet
stopped by Edmund on her way out of the room. She smiled at him. "I said Caspian's name first, because his was the most distinctive. But, you should know, you were always my favourite character," she explained with a cheeky wink.

Edmund gazed after her as she left the room. She was going to be the death of him, and it had scarcely been hours.
A Suggestion Accepted

The Narnians awoke the next morning to the smell of a cooked breakfast wafting from the kitchens. It seemed someone was already awake and cooking up a storm. Jill ventured downstairs, expecting to see Eustace in one of his usual stress-baking situations, but instead found Edmund slaving over a stove that held several simmering pots. Edmund himself was red in the face from the heat, his hands covered in various ingredients, with one eye focused on the pot he was stirring and another on a pot that was close to boiling point. Jill put her hands on her hips as Edmund finally noticed her. "I never considered you a chef. What's all this for?" she asked.

"Well, I have an idea I want to present to the True Narnians today, and I thought a nice breakfast might sweeten the deal a little," Edmund admitted.

"Sounds good," Jill agreed. "What's the idea?"

Edmund winked from his position beside her. "I can't tell you that. It would ruin the surprise!"

Jill shifted her weight with a wicked glint in her eyes. "Well be prepared, Edmund Pevensie. I have use of some valuable information that would ruin your reputation with that future girl forever."

Edmund laughed. "What could you possibly know, Jill Pole? We didn't even know each other properly before our Narnian adventures, and even then, we've never been close enough for me to tell you anything particularly embarrassing."

Jill smirked, moving closer to the laughing boy. "I'll say two words. Reindeer antlers. Yes, I know about that. And thanks to your delightful siblings, I also have pictures."

Edmund shook his head, blushing. "Alright. I want to challenge Peter to a proper duel. That's my idea." Jill jumped up and down, clearly excited by the prospect. She called out a haphazard goodbye and ran up the stairs, presumably to tell the other girls. So much for surprise, thought Edmund. Now, how is one supposed to cook potatoes on a grill?

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Harriet stood in Lucy's room, her head filled with confusion. What on earth did these people wear? And where on earth did they store it? The room seemed to be a maze of hidden panels and drawers, similar to something she had once heard about in the Palace of Versailles. But then again, she didn't want to intrude. This was Lucy's personal room. She sighed, flopping down on the makeshift bed she had been assigned for the night.

A knock sounded on the door. Jill peeked in with a smile, a shawl wrapped around her nightdress, the state of her hair indicating she had run somewhere. "Harriet! I have news, and I think it concerns you." Harriet motioned for Jill to continue, curious. "Edmund's going to challenge Peter to a duel, and he's doing it over a delicious cooked breakfast that he made himself!" Harriet tried to conceal the multitude of thoughts running through her head. She had never known Edmund could cook, and to be frank, she was rather impressed. But there was also the issue of a duel. From what Harriet had read of Edmund, he was an expert swordsman, but the whole idea was extremely risky. She hadn't know Edmund for long at all, but her motherly instincts were kicking in. She shook her head to rid herself of such thoughts. He's grown man. He'll be okay.

Jill appeared to have noticed Harriet's long train of thought. "Hello? Harriet are you there? You're just thinking of darling Eddie in armour, aren't you?" Jill joked. "Don't you think I haven't noticed
that you're attracted to him?" Harriet laughed nervously. She had always liked Edmund as a fictional character, and the real version of him was rather attractive too. But being so obvious? That was a worry.

"Stop overthinking it, lovely," the pet name seemed out of place coming from cheeky Jill. "We'll just take it one thing at a time. You do know how to get dressed, don't you?" Harriet blushed, shaking her head. Jill took her by the hand and pointed out the various hidden drawers holding some of Lucy's old clothes.

The two girls exited the women's wing of the castle dressed perfectly for breakfast. Jill wore a lighter green dress that perfectly complimented her eyes, while Harriet wore a medium blue frock that brought out her freckles. They giggled as they ran down the stairs to a full dining room. They had spent far too long getting dressed, it seemed. Eustace had to hide his amazement. Jill had never been particularly girly, so seeing her wearing a pretty dress in everyday life was uncommon. Edmund, too, had to hide his appreciation of the dress that flattered the 'new girl' so well. Concentrate, Ed, he thought to himself. This is important.

The food arrived as Edmund began to speak, rising up from his chair in clothes a little better than his everyday tunics. "Ahem, can I please have everyone's attention?" His voice boomed as the room instantly turned their eyes to the young King.

"It has come to my attention that we have lacked sporting excitement in the last few months here in True Narnia. It has also occurred to me that a duel between kings would not only allow my brother and I to test our skill set, but also give some entertainment to you all. Peter Pevensie, High King of Narnia, do you accept my challenge?" Edmund held his breath. From the outside, he radiated confidence, but inside, he was afraid his brother wouldn't accept. This would be the perfect opportunity to prove his potential to his brother and to all of Aslan's Country.

Peter grinned, addressing his brother in a loud voice, "I accept!" The room filled with cheers as the True Narnians started to enjoy Edmund's feast. Peter smiled at his brother jovially. This would be fun.

Edmund stayed a small while, then disappeared to the armoury to polish his armour and sharpen his sword. He would fight like a king, and he would win like a king. It was time to prove himself. Now, or never.
The True Narnians assembled on the lawns at midday the next day, arriving early to obtain the best view of the action. They were peaceful people, but this was a realm where sword-fighting was not only a method of attack, but a sport. The Pevensie brothers had always been spectacular swordsmen, and the match had come with its fair share of anticipation.

Those not participating in the fight had spent the morning preparing refreshments as well as armour and horses for the fighters. All were anticipating a large turn out and a relatively safe fight. Narnian armour was built to withstand the harshest of blows, and the boys would undoubtedly look after each other. Today would simply be a fun event.

Edmund and Peter stood on opposite sides of the armoury, assisted by separate teams of Narnia's greatest swordsman. "Wear a Telmarine breastplate with a Narnian helmet," Caspian advised Peter. "Our old breastplates can withstand harsher blows than yours can."

"Just keep moving, ol' chap," Eustace told Edmund. Despite his earlier struggles with the sword, Eustace had ended up being one of Narnia's best sword-fighters. His thin frame had come to an advantage in impromptu fights, he had found. Reepicheep tried to model proper grip to Edmund as the young king started strapping on armour. The fight would begin in less than half an hour, and he wanted to be ready.

Two horses were saddled, bearing each man's personal colour and crest. Ever since their first adventures in Narnia, Peter had preferred red, Edmund preferring green. The crests had been created later during the Golden Age, when both men had been required to have crests of their own, signifying their property and households. Peter rode Vinnig, the white unicorn-horse breed that he had been reunited with in Aslan's Country. Edmund rode Phillip, his chestnut stallion, another old friend.

The two were led in front of a cheering crowd by Caspian and Eustace, wearing their crowns as a mere formality. Dismounting their horses, the men adjusted their armour a final time, handing their crowns to the red dwarf in charge of the royal jewels.

Edmund observed his older brother as he donned a Telmarine helmet. From inside the helmet he could hear himself breathing heavily, hear his heart thumping faster and faster. This was his moment. He would not throw away his shot.

Peter stared at his younger brother as he adjusted his armour. Edmund looked scared. He has never done this before, Peter realised with a start. This is completely foreign to him. Edmund's helmet reminded Peter of his own fight against Miraz in his youth. At least this time, he wouldn't be fighting for his life.

Edmund waited for the call to fight with nervous anticipation. The crowd chattered in the background. Suddenly, it was called that they should begin. The two men walked towards each other and tried to gauge each other's thoughts. Edmund, in a burst of energy, suddenly lunged towards Peter, attacking his right side with his blade. Peter, however, dodged the blow with graceful ease, countering the movement with a slash at Edmund's chest, which was quickly blocked resulting in a scraping of metal as the two swords met.

The crowd's cheers melted into a single sound as Edmund swept his blade towards Peter's shins. The older Pevensie avoided the blow almost completely, suffering a painful but inconsequential wound on his right leg. Falling briefly to the ground, Peter slashed at Edmund's shoulder, making a
cut in the space in the gap between Edmund's armour. Edmund grimaced, switching his sword to his other hand and making a leap at Peter.

Peter used his shield to block Edmund's sudden move, rolling onto the ground as his injured leg began to give way. Fighting against Edmund's new advantage, Peter used his shield to cover his head while flailing his sword blindly at Edmund. The sword missed its mark, and after a few minutes Peter rolled back up onto his feet.

The sound of metal against metal dominated the lawns as the men continued to fight. The sun was starting to set as the tables had turned on Edmund. He was now fighting from the ground, mimicking Peter's earlier moves by blindly slashing at his opponent. Suddenly, a choking noise rang out across the lawn from behind Edmund's shield.

Peter put down his sword and grasped Edmund's shield, throwing it to the side. Edmund's face was turning purple, partially obstructed by the golden Telmarine helmet he wore. Peter strained to remove the helmet, but the harder he tugged on the golden object, the tighter its grip became on Edmund. Caspian sprinted into the arena. "There's a safety catch on these things, let me get to it," he explained, pulling at the bottom of the helmet. The helmet would not budge, much to Peter's disdain. Edmund was slowly losing consciousness as a green mist floated towards the arena. "Everyone go!" Eustace ordered. "Barricade yourselves in the castle! Close all windows and doors, and locate Aslan!"

Peter bashed at the safety catch with the handle of his sword, trying desperately to open the helmet. "Aslan, if you are there, please spare my brother's life!" he sobbed. Only Caspian, Edmund and Peter remained on the misty lawn as dark clouds began to obscure the sky. Edmund smiled as he jabbed his brother lightly in the chest, falling unconscious as the helmet squeezed tightly around his neck. Peter sobbed against his brother's chest as the light faded in True Narnia.
The castle had become the epicentre of chaos, even as cool-headed Eustace commanded the operation of locking the castle. Footsteps echoed around the building as the Narnians ran up stairs and through corridors to close windows and find their families. Dark clouds had settled on the castle. Eustace and Jill looked at each other as they directed the frazzled Narnians. They had known evil, and it was evident here in every breath of oxygen they took. Susan and Lucy were shaking as they clung to each other in the stairwell. Their brother had been lost to them too many times already. The castle had become cold as the clouds closed in, and blankets were fetched as the Narnians completed the arduous but urgent task of making the castle secure.

Diggory and Polly sat in the library together, researching types of dark magic. They themselves had known a few types during their times in Narnia, but any little clue to Edmund's predicament, and addition to their knowledge, would be incredibly useful. The automatic lamps in the room illuminated as the light disappeared in Narnia. Polly was searching the shelves for useful books as Diggory read and summarised the useful information. *We're still a great team after all this time,* Polly thought, smiling slightly. There was always good in the world, no matter what evil lurked in dark corners.

Peter and Caspian had moved Edmund to the shelter of the parlour. The double doors had opened for them and them alone since the castle had moved into lockdown. Caspian struggled with the helmet as Peter laid his brother down on one of the chaises spread out in the spacious room. Finally, the safety catch gave way and the helmet split into two, revealing an unconscious Edmund. Caspian quickly opened a window and tossed the parts of the helmet outside, not wanting any dark magic to stay inside the castle.

Peter examined the red ring around his brother's neck while Caspian checked Edmund's pulse. The mark seemed to cut deep into Edmund's pale flesh. Suddenly Caspian cried out. "He's alive! His pulse is slow, but he's alive!" Tears gathered in both men's eyes as they hugged each other in a sudden moment of joy. The two carried the still boy up to the men's wing of the castle. The others didn't need to see him like this.

Now their only question was whether Edmund would wake up.

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The news spread throughout the castle like wildfire - Edmund Pevensie was alive, but unconscious. The Friends of Narnia and Susan were beyond worried. Here is Aslan's Country there was said to be no sickness or death, but how the influence of dark magic effected the lore of the land was entirely unknown. All they could do was watch, and pray.

Susan, Lucy, Polly and Jill soon planned to visit Edmund's room and make sure he was cared for. "I think I know Peter and Caspian," Susan joked with a sad smile. "They probably just dumped him into bed!"

The women were preparing numerous items to take to the other side of the castle when Harriet piped up. "Can I come too?" her voice was small as she made her request. "I know I haven't known him long at all in real life, but I really do care about him."
Susan smiled at the younger girl, remembering when she, too, had felt that way about Caspian. "Feel free to. Carry some of this, will you?" she said, handing Harriet a basket of first aid supplies. Harriet accepted them with an internal sigh of relief.

The walk to the men's wing seemed to last days, but finally Edmund's blue door gleamed into view like a beacon. It was strange how everything seemed almost normal. The sound of Eustace and Cor playing cards loudly floated down the hall, and all the portraits on the walls were exactly as they usually were. However, upon entering Edmund's room it was clear that something had changed. Edmund's usual wit and joy had been consumed in a matter of minutes by dark magic.

The black-haired boy looked so small in the large four-poster bed, the thick tapestry-like blanket covering his form. He usually looks small, Lucy thought. But he looks so sickly. Steady breaths from the bed's occupant cleared up one thing at least - he was still alive. Susan quickly peered under the bedsheets to make sure Edmund had been changed out of his tunic, before inspecting the wound on her brother's shoulder, which had been forgotten about in the helmet incident. "Get some water, will you Lucy?" Susan delegated. Lucy rushed to the washstand to fulfil Susan's wish. Susan gently washed the wound, motioning for some of the medicinal herbs in one of the baskets.

The women worked silently under Susan's command, making sure the room was equipped to alarm them if Edmund woke up. Finally, the work was finished, and they sat staring dumbly at the sleeping boy. Slowly, Lucy began to sing a familiar hymn, her sweet voice filling the silent room.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul...

The song floated around the room, filling its occupants with hope. Soon the song increased in volume, and nearby Narnians joined the chorus. A song of hope and of life was declared in that dead room. They now knew surely that Edmund would wake up.

The women began to file out of the room as the song died down, the tune coming to a peaceful end. Harriet lingered, hesitating before pressing a kiss to Edmund's forehead. She scurried out of the room, embarrassed that she would do such a silly thing. Caspian smiled as he ran past him to catch up with the others. The thought ticked in his mind: Edmund and Harriet, how interesting.

Harriet returned to her newly appointed chamber with a reddened face. She didn't think she had ever been so bold in her life! Hopefully he would wake up and not remember the kiss. Settling down, she bowed her head and whispered a prayer to Aslan. He had never let her down, and he wasn't going to now.

Edmund swum in a dreamland, mind foggy and full of strange images from other realms. And then, an angel from the future kissing his forehead. Edmund smiled in his sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Hey Readers!
Sorry it's been a while - the first two weeks of school have been pretty hectic. I'm still
trying to fit writing into my schedule but I'll try and update as much as possible. Stay tuned!

Sincerely,
The Author
Behind the Mask

Caspian, Peter, Diggory and Polly met in the library the next day to discuss the helmet and its origins. Caspian had retrieved the helmet from the garden outside the parlour and had brought it into the space to examine its qualities. He sat listening to the conversation as he traced the grooves that covered its front panel.

"We've been looking at the types of dark magic in history, both those we have experienced and other forms we have not experienced. Our findings suggest that this type of dark magic connected to dark magic we have experienced before, namely the green mist," Diggory started. Eustace entered the room with a knock. Polly smiled at the boy as Diggory continued. "We're going to need to source some information from those that have experienced this type of magic first-hand. Although we suspect the Lady of the Green Kirtle could be working with others against Narnia, we will start with those who have encountered her personally and who have knowledge of her power. Eustace?"

Eustace entered the conversation with confidence. "We know that the green mist is inexplicably linked with the Lady of the Green Kirtle. The type of mist is the same in its form and mostly in its powers wherever it lurks, yet the places and objects it has been linked to so far have been associated with the other villains we have faced in the past, namely Jadis and the Telmarine army under Miraz. The type of sorcery typical of the Lady of the Green Kirtle seemed to be partially included in this current mishap that involves Edmund. In enslaving Rillian, the Lady used a combination of an item and witchcraft. This does have links to Edmund's strangulation by the helmet," he explained.

Caspian's voice filled the room. "I think I've remembered something that could be to our advantage," he said, subdued. The others nodded, indicating for him to continue. "Every Telmarine soldier requires a last name to be engraved in their helmet in case they are found dead during battle. This specific helmet was quite worn in the spot where the name is usually written, and I have grown rather rusty in reading Telmarine script in the past few years, but from what I can make out, this helmet belonged to my uncle Miraz." The quiet chattering between Eustace and Diggory ceased as Caspian made his statement. Caspian continued with a sigh. "The helmet, like Tumnus' house, must have been untouched during the transition from Narnia to True Narnia, considering its magical properties. I am honestly, not surprised. My uncle was known to not only have worshipped the pagan gods of the Telmarines, most of which were harmless, but also to have practised dark magic in the confines of his chambers. A particular chamber was even created in his helmet to hold a stone bearing dark magic, to give him luck in battle."

Caspian held up the helmet in his shaky hands, pressing a compartment in the centre of the helmet. A seamless panel slid down into Caspian's hand, exposing a shining green crystal. His jaw dropped as he quickly closed the compartment. Eustace stared open-mouthed at the spot where the crystal had just emerged from. "I recognise that crystal. I saw it once. The Lady of the Green Kirtle wore three of them on a chain around her neck."

Diggory stared around the room with a grave expression on his face. "We will wait until Edmund wakes up, but I think we need to address this, and soon. Aslan's Country must prepare for war."

Papers remained strewn on the table as the group left the room in silence.

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Eustace had been greatly unsettled by the conversation in the library. The whole ordeal had brought back memories of an underground kingdom and an enchanted prince, memories that usually only appeared in his dreams. Nobody seemed to understand the true evil the Lady had brought. There was
only one person to talk to.

Eustace made his way across the castle, asking after Jill. He finally found her reading a book in the castle's extensive gardens. He sighed as he sat next to her. "What's wrong, grumpy?" she laughed.

"They asked me about the Lady of the Green Kirtle. It's possible Edmund's condition might have something to do with her magic," Eustace revealed. "There are so many bad memories, you know?"

"I know." Jill encompassed him in a bear hug, holding the anxious man tightly in her arms.

"Sorry for being so weak," Eustace wiped the tears from his eyes as he attempted to laugh.

"Only strong men cry," Jill replied warmly. "You know what? We need something fun to do to take your mind off of things for a while." Eustace nodded enthusiastically at the idea, morphing back into his normal self.

"What do you suggest we do? The weather's not too shabby, so we could do something outside," Eustace suggested.

"I know. We're having a cheer-up-Eustace picnic, just the two of us. Let's go to the kitchens and see what we can find," Jill decided. The two walked in the direction of the kitchens, planning the night to come.

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Lucy had been cooped up in the castle all day after the scare involving Edmund. The fresh Narnian air seemed to be calling her, and she decided a walk in the forest would do her good. The youngest Pevensie ran down to the cloakroom to fetch her wellingtons and her coat, running into a familiar faun on the way.

Tumnus laughed as Lucy bumped into him. "Woah there, where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"I'm just excited to be going on a walk. I need some fresh air." Lucy admitted with a small smile.

"Then let me come with you," Tumnus insisted. "I'm in want of a little forest wandering as well."

"Ooh I have an idea!" cried Lucy. "Let's see if we can find the lamp post again!"

"Well then," said Tumnus. "I'll beat you to it!"
The dappled shade flitted across Eustace and Jill’s smiling faces as they munched on some of True Narnia’s sweetest strawberries. “I am sure glad fruit isn’t season-dependent in Aslan’s Country,” said Jill. “I always missed strawberries in winter when I lived back in England.” Eustace nodded in agreement as he bit into yet another strawberry. The juice trickled down his chin as he looked around at the small forest clearing they sat in. Jill laughed at his messy state, handing him a napkin from the picnic basket.

“I do miss England sometimes,” Eustace admitted. “The weather here is almost constantly sunny. I miss a little bit of cloudiness every now and then. And, I miss English tea. Narnia has its joys, but it’s just unfortunate that they can’t make a good cuppa.”

Jill laughed. “I can’t say I agree with you about the weather. I always hated rainy days. But I do agree with you on the subject of tea. I’m rather fond of some of the traditional herbal teas around here, but sometimes I just want a good, strong cup of Earl Grey.”

“Well, I have a bit of a surprise for you. I did come across a bit of a rare item when I was on the hunt for a decent jar of jam,” Eustace explained. A small container of teabags was produced from a cleverly hidden spot in the picnic basket much to Jill’s delight. “They’re Earl Grey. I remembered that blend was always your favourite when we were in school together,” Eustace reminisced.

“My favourite by far! Thank you Eustace,” Jill enveloped Eustace in yet another hug. Eustace smiled as he picked up the accompanying thermos and sugar from the basket.

“Piping hot and strong enough to bend a teaspoon with no milk and two sugars, right Jill? I think I still remember it from our time at Experiment House,” Eustace asked.

“Yes. You’re white with a sugar?” Jill replied. Eustace nodded and they began to make the tea, working in a comfortable silence. The birds chartered in the trees. All was right with the world.

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Caspian sat meditating on the events of the morning with a sour look on his face. His uncle had never appeared trustworthy, but finding out that Miraz had practised darker magic than what Caspian had suspected put him into a deep funk. Still, there was something else lingering in the past that seemed to tickle the edges of Caspian’s consciousness. Determined to know what the elusive event was, the young king checked the calendar in his chambers. His heart sunk as he stared at the day’s date.

He still remembered it as if it were yesterday, although today marked the fact that the event had happened years in the past. Caspian closed his eyes to drink in the memory.

She had looked so beautiful in a white dress, her golden hair shining even in the pale winter sun. The lawn of Cair Paravel had been decorated with a large variety of winter flowers, a white arbour created specifically for the day. Caspian could still remember the feeling of the expensive robes against his skin, how his heart beat faster when he saw Lilliandil, the smile she wore as she walked down the aisle.

How the crowds had cheered for their newest king and his bride! He could still smell the pine
needles of the forest he had walked through with his new wife straight after the ceremony, could still
taste the oldest spiced wine reserved specifically for the wedding feast. The dancing still swirled in
his mind, the jewel colours of his wife’s eyes, the unfamiliar feel of his wedding band on his ring
finger. Caspian traced the line where his wedding band sat, tears falling onto his lap.

The image of Susan flashed into his mind at once, her dancing eyes filling his thoughts. The way she
smiled, her ferocious archery skills, the way she protected her siblings with her life, enchanted him.
He started to smile through the tears at her undying spirit and her strange passion for lipstick. And
her passion for him. How she always laughed at his terrible jokes, gave him the best of her famous
scones and woke up early specifically for archery practice with him. Caspian shook his head. It was
all too confusing. Where was the love inside of him? And who was it for?

He barely heard the sound of paws padding across the room in his distress. Aslan spoke quietly,
almost as if he was speaking to Caspian’s very soul. "We can love more than one person in a lifetime,
dear one. Perhaps it's time to walk the road ahead of you, instead of looking at the crossroads you
have left behind."

Caspian stood up. "I need to talk to Susan. She deserves to know the truth. And the whole truth as
well."

Aslan’s face spread into a lion’s grin as Caspian dashed out of the room.

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Eustace and Jill stared up at the leafy canopy of the forest, having eaten their fill of borrowed
Narnian food. The sky was darkening as the shadows grew longer, but the position was all too
comfortable to leave behind prematurely. Jill traced the edges of the trees with an extended finger,
squinting in concentration. Finally, Eustace took a deep breath and summoned his courage.

"Jill, I’ve known you for a very long time now, and I have something to confess."

"Go on," Jill replied curiously.

"I have been... rather smitten with you for quite some time Jill, and I have a suspicion you might feel
similar feelings. I was wondering if we could maybe... be something more?" Eustace said nervously.
It had sounded more like an anxious schoolboy's plea than an admirable declaration of love, but it
might be enough...

"It’s about time!" Jill blurted out. "I was afraid I was going to have to tell you myself and be wildly
nontraditional!"

The leaves closed in on the new lovers with a gentle breeze as Eustace kissed Jill for the first time.
The sweetest part of True Narnia wasn't the strawberries or the warm days - it was Jill.

Chapter End Notes

Hello Readers!

I realise that it has been a ridiculously long period of time since I last posted. Year
eleven was so much more stressful than I thought it would be, and I'm now super
involved with heaps of stuff at school, hence the lack of updates. Good news though,
I'm going to try and upload every Sunday afternoon, so I remember to do it. Keep your eye out for that!

Thanks for your constant support, and all the lovely kudos. They really make my day!

xo

Sincerely,

The Author
Edmund had been drifting for days. He wasn't sure if he was awake and delirious or dreaming realistic dreams, but everything he saw seemed to be blurry around the edges. Every aspect of time appeared to be upside-down and non-functional, with only one safe haven - the angel.

The young king could never determine the person's identity in the haze of his own mind, but her voice and her touch cut through the fog swirling in his head like sunlight cutting through clouds. Sometimes he thought he could see her, a graceful shape wearing white, always singing and humming, holding his hand and occasionally kissing his forehead. Yes, she was definitely an angel.

As a child, Edmund had been fascinated by the idea of supernatural beings. Angels had always come to the forefront in his research, which he had always kept secret in fear of his mother's prying eyes. He had been obsessed with these heavenly beings who wore white and sang for the coming of a new king. Even now in his foggy mind Edmund knew the being wasn't a real angel - there was something distinctly human about their manner - but the angel, whoever they were, brought him comfort from the confusion of the in-between state he was floating in.

Sometimes the angel would sing songs he knew, hymns and songs from his time in England. Other times she would sing foreign, strange songs, with pretty melodies he had never heard of. There was one she sang often that he loved to hear, the French words rolling off her tongue effortlessly and sweetly. He thought he had heard it a few times in his later years in England, but he was sure the song had never sounded sweeter than when sung by his angel.

He remembered one night quite well. He had started coughing somewhere within the haze, coughs that wracked his body and pulled tears from his sleeping eyes. The angel had appeared suddenly, her warm hand holding his, singing a lullaby as he fought for breath. He had let the fog consume him afterwards, the only feeling remaining - her hand holding his for the rest of the night.

Harriet had been visiting Edmund almost every day since the incident, taking almost complete control over the man's care, save for the changing of his pyjamas every now and then. She often sat in his company for hours at a time, singing to him occasionally. He had been mostly unresponsive since the event, but sometimes he muttered and cried softly to himself. It was almost as if he was sleeptalking, thought Harriet. If only that was the case.

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Diggory had been working tirelessly since Edmund's accident to comprehend the dark magic that had caused it. The library had become his personal room, and he hadn't been seen at a community meal in days. Numerous Narnians had been interviewed, and Diggory found himself collating a collection similar in size to that the Friends of Narnia had kept in England.

There are still so many people to interview! Diggory thought with a grimace. We need to get to the bottom of this, and quickly. Something is in the air, I can feel it! He returned to his work with a sigh. It almost felt like he was back at Oxford, swamped in endless stacks of paper and books. At least this time, it was for a far nobler cause.

Polly swept into the room with a mug of tea, steaming and fragrant in the musty space. "I thought it might be time again for a cup of tea," she said kindly. Diggory accepted the mug with a grateful smile.

"Stay with me for a while, won't you Polly? This work is becoming quite menial." He sipped on the
tea with an expectant eyebrow raise. Polly laughed and cleared the seat next to the professor from a stack of old tomes with a sigh.

"How long has it been since you've had nothing but books for company?" Polly teased with a cheeky smile.

"A little too long than I'd care to mention, dear Polly," Diggory sighed. "Nobody ever told me how lonely it would be to be a don."

"I bet no one expected you would have a good friend like me up your sleeve either." Her voice grew softer in the quiet room. "I'm always here if you need someone to talk to, Diggory. I think I've known you longer than anyone else," she laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. Diggory smiled at her with a boyish ease he hadn't felt in a long time. The two sat talking in the library until the light of dawn lit up the stained glass windows.

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Lucy sat at the castle gates, making daisy chains out of the wild daisies that grew there. The appearance of the mountains in the distance soothed her as she went through the repetitive motion of fitting the daisies together. She hummed a little tune as she watched the clouds drift above her. The day seemed to have cool tones in it that soothed her.

Tumnus approached her as she had her back to him. She jumped as he spoke. "Hallo Lucy!"

"Tumnus!" she scolded. "You scared me! You know I don't like to be scared."

"I'm sorry," Tumnus said sincerely. "I never think of myself as having a loud voice."

Lucy laughed. "I wasn't mad at you, really. I just got a fright, that's all. Come and make a daisy chain with me!"

"What's a daisy chain?" the faun questioned.

"You've never made a daisy chain? You haven't lived! Here - I'll show you how to make one." Lucy cut the daisy stems and wove them around each other, handing them to the smiling faun. "See? It's easy!"

The sun grew higher in the sky as the two retreated back inside the castle for lunch. "You know Lucy, I think daisy chains are one of my new favourite things," Tumnus resolved.
The next morning appeared, shrouded by a horrible storm. Thunder crashed around the castle as all available Narnians hurried to move metal objects from outside, working together in drenched teams. Heavier clouds had been seen in the distance, and no one wanted to be taking a chance against the forces of nature.

Harriet watched the oncoming storm from Edmund's bedside, the rain beating the glass windowpane in an alarming manner. She had learned quite quickly that the glass was quite old, and susceptible to cracking from the slightest force. Caspian had cracked the windowpane in his room the week before by throwing a grape at the glass. At least, Harriet thought with a slight chuckle, a dose of cold water would wake Edmund up.

The majority of the women had migrated to the kitchen to ensure there were enough dry ingredients to provide for the next few days. True Narnia's food supply still relied heavily on produce from the forest and surrounding country, a supply which would be damaged by the incoming storm. The wind battered the exterior of the castle, and if Lucy stood still, she swore she could feel the stones moving around her.

Caspian had ventured out into the forest with a team of men to issue crisis supplies before the worst of the storm hit the region. An unavoidable number of trees would most likely be blown down in the storm, preventing later access to the people that dwelt in the forest. Bundles of food and other supplies could be the saving grace of a trapped family, and Caspian was not going to neglect his duty as King.

Finally those outside had made it to safety, and the final set of doors were locked behind them as the storm rolled towards the castle. The majority of the Narnians gathered together in the Great Hall to pray for those outside the castle, petitioning for their health and safety. Harriet remained upstairs, holding Edmund's hand. She wondered if he could hear the thunder from wherever he was inside his head. She wondered if he could feel her reassuring touch.

The Narnians braced themselves as the worst of the storm hit the castle. Rain and wind battered the walls of the castle, thunder deafening it's listeners. The lightning seemed to strike at the hearts of everyone that heard it. It was almost as if the land itself was roaring for something, Susan thought as she stood in the Great Hall.

Peter had put on a brave facade for the Narnians, determined to be strong for his people. Inside, he was terrified. It was the worst weather True Narnia had seen in the time Peter had lived there. Fear's talons gripped Peter's insides, his heart rate increasing until he felt he could burst from the pressure.

Caspian stood next to Peter, feeling much the same. The unknown loomed ahead of him, a towering monster with sharp teeth. He could see through Peter's act of confidence, having copied it himself. He reached out for Peter's hand and held it tightly. The two men clung to each other like a lifeline.

Suddenly, a knock sounded on the main doors of the castle, surprisingly loud in the noise of the storm. Eustace hastened to answer it with thoughts crowding his mind. Who was knocking in the storm? How did they manage to make it to the door in these kinds of winds? And who on earth was in need of their help?
It took some time to open the multitude of doors that barricaded the main entrance, but Eustace struggled through each level of security with valiant determination. There was someone out there, and they needed his aid. The final door opened with an ominous creak, and Eustace felt dread sink down into his shoes. *It's a feeling with no real back to it*, he chastised himself. *There's nothing to worry about.*

The woman was a stranger, garbed in a dark cloak, her matted hair concealing her eyes. "I'm sorry, I didn't make it inside in time. Would you mind offering me shelter? This storm is unbearable to be in." Her voice was hoarse and grating, her breath smelling of rotten cabbages. The hygienist in Eustace felt like dismissing the woman straight away. *Had she never brushed her teeth?* But the feeling of disgust morphed into the compassion that Eustace more frequently associated with his post-dragon self.

"Come inside. We're serving up warm soup in the Great Hall," Eustace replied, answered only by a toothless smile. The doors were closed behind him. Eustace almost laughed at himself. That feeling before had been nothing but a malfunction in his neural pathways, a chemical imbalance. Old Eustace was getting paranoid.

The Great Hall was home to clusters of worried Narnians comforted by mugs of hot soup. A line to the pots manned by Susan and Lucy snaked down to the grand doors at the entrance to the room. The usual spectacular view of the ocean had been blocked by boards placed to protect the glass. Steam filled the room, the smell of soup and stew overpowering the pungent smell of the crowd.

Eustace led the woman to the front of the line, hanging her sodden cloak on a hatstand in the room. "She's just come in from the cold, poor dear. Can you give her a little more than usual?" Eustace asked Lucy. The girl nodded, ladling a large serving of the tomato soup into the cup. The woman sat by herself in a corner, quietly sipping the soup.

After some time, she stood up, pacing to watch the foaming sea through the small gaps in the boards. She smashed the mug, her emotions morphing into something purely dangerous. She lifted her hands to the roof, standing as she transformed into a younger woman, with piercing green eyes and thin hands that were not afraid of cruelty. The room filled with a green light as she cackled at the crowd. Her face turned deadly serious as she addressed the crowd in a cold, booming voice.

"Where is my Edmund?"

Chapter End Notes

*Hiya Readers!*

Decided to give you a double upload this week, as I missed last week's and I now have a bunch of spare time! Woo! I just love exam block.

Thoughts? This part of the plot is really different to the previous version, but I thought there needed to be a little bit more build-up to the reintroduction and fighting of the villains (wow, great grammar Hannah!). Hope you like it!

Next update will be next Sunday. Get keen!

*Sincerely,*
The Author

p.s. Thanks for the kudos! They make my day! :)
A Queen Returned

Jadis stood next to the thrones of the Great Hall with a wicked countenance. "Well then, where is he?"

The Narnians trembled before her. It had been so long since any of them had encountered evil, and the landscape of fear already prominent in the room hardly aided the situation. Peter took a deep breath, approaching the witch with newfound confidence. It was his time to speak for his people.

"Jadis the sorceress," he spat. "What do you want with my brother?"

The woman laughed at Peter. To her, he still looked like a petulant child futilely trying to resist her power. *Children were so stupid. "I just want to talk to him, you little brat. We haven't caught up in a while. Now, tell me where he is, her voice rasped dangerously in the threat.*

"He is unavailable at the moment," Peter snapped, his eyes hardening as he spoke. "So I will have to ask you to leave." He motioned the woman towards the large doors at the entrance to the Great Hall. Jadis refused to move.

"It's fine. I'll wait."

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The storm raged on outside the window as Harriet sat beside Edmund. She could sense something was amiss, but she could not figure out what was happening, no matter how much she tried. The only thing to do was to go downstairs to gain some clarity. "I'll be back soon," she whispered to Edmund. She went to leave the room, automatically stealthy in some strange instinct.

Edmund's eyes shot open, his mind clear of the fog instantly. "Harriet. Don't go. I know who's down there." Harriet hesitated, sitting on Edmund's bed.

"What do you mean? You're in no state to go down. I'm sure it's nothing. Just let me go," Harriet replied, irritated.

"You are not going down there. At least not without me," Edmund insisted in a raspy voice. "Now, wait outside. I need to get changed into something worthy of the occasion." Harriet waited outside the door with a strange curiosity. What in Narnia was going on downstairs, and why did he feel the need to protect her from it? It was probably just a gigantic magical cockroach.

Edmund was suddenly at her side, clasping a long silver sword. He handed her a sharp, thin dagger. "You may need this. Its operation is fairly straightforward." Edmund had gone from a sleepy invalid to a warrior in a matter of minutes. Harriet was downright amazed by the transformation.

Edmund had a mind full of strategies as he quietly made his way downstairs. His thoughts now spun like well-oiled gears, and he mentally mapped out every portion of the castle as he marched downstairs. Something instinctual was drawing him to the Great Hall. The feeling was associated with the colour green, a strange coldness and the sickly sweet smell of confectionery. He needed to get there, and fast.

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The Great Hall had lost its warmth in the hours since Jadis had arrived, icicles hanging off of the rafters like snowy daggers. The supply of blankets did not provide enough heat, and the Narnians
had gravitated into groups to keep warm. Eustace held a crying Jill to his chest, trying desperately to soothe her. *It's not my fault I'm so insensitive,* Eustace thought crossly. *It would have been remarkably useful if my parents would have taught me some social skills.*

Jadis sat on Susan's throne in the room, watching the Narnians with the eyes of a hawk. Her wand, somehow restored to its former glory, twirled in her hand lazily, a single twig that had been proven to cause an inordinate amount of pain and suffering. Tumnus shuddered at the sight of it. The image of his friends and countrymen frozen into agony in her cold castle all those years ago still haunted his nightmares.

The White Witch was getting impatient. "Where is he? TELL ME!" she roared. Peter prepared for the inevitable. She was going to find out the truth eventually.

One, two pairs of feet at the door. "Here I am, Jadis." Edmund stood in the doorway, sword in hand. Mouths dropped around the room. The boy who had been seemingly comatose for the past few weeks looked stronger and healthier than them all. Most of all, he was confident. The time in his own head appeared to have changed him for the better.

Edmund wandered into the room with an unafraid smirk. "Oh, and by the way, I'm not going anywhere with you. I don't plan to have a civil conversation, either. Leave, now. Or suffer the wrath of a victorious army."

The White Witch laughed. "Ah, I thought Peter seemed childish. Your ferocity is even more laughable! To think you can bargain with someone like *me*?" She shook her head in pity. "I thought you knew me better than that, Eddie."

Edmund saw red. "This is your final warning. Leave, or we will use all of the power at our disposal to make you."

Jadis stood up and raised her hands, cackling madly. "You don't know a thing, any of you. This is just a *taste* of what is to come. I was sent to warn you all, and it seems I have completed my task. I am leaving, but I will return. And don't you worry, I'll bring your darkest nightmares with me." And with a slow smile, the witch disappeared into thin air, leaving only a singe on the wood of the platform.

The majority of the Narnians returned to their beds, shaking. The walk up the stairs seemed unbearable, as did the thought of yet another war. There were dark days ahead.

The Friends of Narnia were joined by Caspian, Tumnus, Reepicheep, Oreius and Glenstorm in the war room. Caspian quickly took charge of the situation. "It is evident from recent events that we are indeed dealing with dark magic once more in Aslan's Country. From Jadis' words, it is safe to assume that dark forces intend to wage war with the Narnian people once more. It is highly possible that Jadis has been cooperating with other dark magicians, some we have encountered before."

Peter sighed. "Men and women of True Narnia, we need to prepare for war."
Things had changed since Edmund had woken up. He had long since identified Harriet as the angel that had made his time 'asleep' brighter, and he had treated her appropriately. For once, he seemed to have someone who cared for him deeply. It was a nice feeling.

His burst of sudden energy and wellness upon waking up had gradually faded, making Edmund feel invalided once more. Thankfully, he had plenty of time to rest. His days were mostly spent walking in the garden with Harriet, occasionally reading in the library or exploring the so-called 'heritage wing' of the castle. They had recently found a shared passion for history, and they constantly quizzed each other on battles and the funniest names of nobles.

"I have one for you," said Edmund as they walked in the garden one sunny morning. "Who was the handsomest Narnian king?"

"Oh, it would have to be Caspian," Harriet joked. "I have a thing for those flowing locks of his."

"Not me?" Edmund pouted.

"Nope. Sorry!" Harriet teased.

"Well I guess I'll just have to convince you otherwise," said Edmund, pecking Harriet on the lips.

Jill and Eustace witnessed the whole scene from where they sat reading under a tree. "Eddie and Harriet are at the affectionate stage? Who would have known?" Eustace said sarcastically.

"We're probably just as bad, Eustace," Jill speculated.

"I didn't hear that," Eustace winked.

It was a strange effect, that of a war. Everyone seemed to be making up for lost time, knowing that every moment could be their last. The various war meetings and strategizing sessions intermingled with romantic wandering in the forest and gifts from 'secret admirers'. Cair Paravel filled with fear and romance, a strange compound fuelled by exhilaration. Almost every Narnian spent their days in the arms of a loved one. The mood surrounding the castle had changed, but whether it was for better or for worse was still up in the air.

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Shadows danced in the war room as Caspian, Peter and Glenstorm sat at the broad table that dominated the space. "I have called you here because a new development has been made in regards to the war," Caspian began. "Others will be arriving soon who also have war experience, namely in matters against dark magic. I'll explain the situation then. This issue needs to be addressed as soon and as expertly as possible - we need as much help as we can get."

"So, tell us," Peter said, leaning forward onto the table. "What is this new development?"

Caspian sighed, running his hands through his hair. "There has been sight of a camp being formed outside the castle gates, a few kilometres away, over the river. We have yet to catalogue the occupants, but Jadis is definitely among them. It can be assumed that the camp is full of
sympathisers. Naturally, a camp being made shows signs of an attack that is near. We need to formulate both a defensive and offensive strategy to protect Cair Paravel, to ensure we are ready at any moment's notice. From now on, all Narnians must be armed at all times."

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The armoury was a flurry of activity, the production line of restoration extending out of the large space. Here, all hands were at work, sharpening, polishing and restoring every sword, axe and bow in the Narnian supply. A makeshift shooting range had been constructed on the lawn, with a group of Narnians to check the quality of the bows and arrow-shooters. The smell of metal and sweat permeated the air, the fear and excitement of war brought to the forefront of every citizen's mind.

Edmund sat in a corner, sharpening his sword lovingly. This sword had been his favourite since his adventures on the Dawn Treader, and even though it had never been as impressive as Peter's, he had always been proud of it. It had served him through thick and thin, and he was looking forward to fighting with it by his side yet again.

Reepicheep was in his element, having taken control of the weapons operation. He had never craved violence, but the control of an army was something he excelled at. The control of his blade as it whipped through the air, the sound of battle cries, the sweet taste of victory and the fight for a noble cause never failed to fill him with a surge of adrenaline. They would be ready, he would be ready, when they attacked.

Susan stood with the weapon testers on the lawn, holding her bow and arrow with practised ease. She had been rather out of practise when she arrived in True Narnia, but within weeks muscle memory had kicked in and she had been shooting targets as well as she used to. Now she had regained her place as the head of the Narnian archery core, where she truly felt at home. Susan had been spending the past few days running a harsh training regime for the archers in the castle, working alongside Reepicheep as he trained the swordsmen and Oreius as he trained the cavalry. She felt busier, but more satisfied than ever.

Edmund continued to observe from the outskirts of the operation, wishing that he could be involved in something more than spectating. He wished that his leg weren't as weak as they currently were from weeks in bed, that his eyes weren't weary after the shortest time, that his arms were strong enough to shoot a target, to fight for the land he loved. All he needed was time. After all, when they faced the White Witch, he wanted to defeat her. Once, and for all.

Chapter End Notes

Hey Readers!

First of all, Happy Easter Sunday. He is risen! Hope everyone is having a good break.

So unlike the last edition of the book, chapter twenty is not the final chapter (yay!). The new edition has thirty full-length chapters, so more is still to come. As you might have guessed, the plot development is quite different, but I personally think it's way better.

I'm going to a writer's camp next week, so I hope it will help me bring more quality content to all you amazing humans. This, as long as Camp NaNoWriMo (with a different WIP) will probably take up a significant part of my time, but I should be able to upload as usual next Sunday.
Have a great week!

Sincerely.

The Author
Caspian and Susan were one of the many couples spending their days together in the lead up to the war. Susan had found it difficult to believe the amount of abuse Caspian had suffered at the hands of his former wife. From Lucy’s descriptions, Susan had thought Lilliandil to be a pleasant and kind woman, the sort that was a puzzle-piece fit for Caspian. But then, some things change, she thought.

She had spent the morning with Caspian on the archery range, the wartime preparation put on hold for a day’s rest. More practise seemed to be a noble and sensible option in such dire times, and Caspian wholeheartedly agreed to shoot alongside Susan for the morning. He lost graciously every time her arrow nudged closer to the bullseye. A good archery partner, she thought with a laugh. He knows how to lose well.

The next challenge came in the form of horseback riding. All of the horses had to be ridden regularly in the lead up to the inevitable battle, to keep them mobile and ready to carry their riders. Caspian chose two of the most unpredictable horses for them to ride through the trail in the forest. The person who arrived the first - and safest - of the two would win the competition.

"I'm going to win, and you know it," Susan boasted.

"I wouldn't be so sure about that!" Caspian yelled, bolting into the forest.

Susan was soon on his heels. "I'm not too fond of cheaters, but I'll let this little mishap slide." She paused for a moment with a deep grin. "That doesn't mean I'll let you win, though!"

The two returned from their lap of the forest at almost the same time, eliminating the competitive intent of the ride. Caspian sighed. "I think we defeated the point. We'll never know who won!" he whined. Susan smiled at him.

"We had fun, and that's all that counts," Susan said amiably. "Now, come on, I think it's time for lunch. Let's go see what we can find."

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Lucy Pevensie was bored. She had been almost entirely forgotten in the war preparations, having been delegated to the kitchens on washing-up duty for most of the previous week. Worst of all, most of her closest friends were occupied either with the upcoming war or with their various love interests. Even Edmund of all people was spending an inordinate amount of time with Harriet. Susan was with Caspian, Jill was with Eustace, Polly was busy with research work. There was no one to talk with and nothing to do.

Tumnus approached from the woods, a large grin on his face. "Lucy, I just had a wonderful idea!"

"Tell me it doesn't have anything to do with war or spying on my friend's romances," Lucy replied glumly.

"Absolutely nothing associated with it," Tumnus replied, annoyingly cheerful to a cross Lucy Pevensie. "I'll just show you. Follow me!"

Lucy reluctantly took Tumnus' outstretched hand and allowed him to lead her to the forest. A carpet
of leaves crunched beneath their feet as the sunlight filtered through above them. The air was sweet as Tumnus lead Lucy through to a clearing. "So, I was walking, and I found a heap of dry material that had been blown down from the storm. Some of it looks like a little shelter already, and I had a genius idea," he explained with a grin.

"And?" Lucy said unenthusiastically.

"We're going to build a fort!" Tumnus said simply. Lucy's eyes lit up as she clapped her hands in glee. She began searching around for additional materials.

"I used to do this in Girl Guides. I loved it," Lucy reminisced. "I won a prize once for building the best shelter."

"I'm sure this one will be even better than the one you built then. For one, we have better materials. But also, I'm helping you build it," he said with a laugh and a wink. Lucy returned the wink and continued to pile leaves on the frame of the fort.

In less than half an hour, the fort was complete, covered in colourful leaf litter and wildflowers. The two sat inside underneath the relative shade of the structure, playing a deck of cards Tumnus kept with him. The worries of the world seemed less pressing here. The world was just this forest clearing, this little fort and Tumnus' kind smile.

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Caspian met Peter later that night in his chambers, his hands shaking as he ascended the stairs. This question seemed all-important, more important than this war, more important than the past. He had known after today, when Susan had talked to him about the family she wanted, the family she wanted with him. How she wanted to get married. He was going to grant her wish.

Peter answered the door with a solemn look in his eyes. "I heard you and Susan today," he said bluntly. "I think I know what this is about." Caspian nodded as he followed Peter into the room. This is integral to your future, Caspian thought. Don't mess this up.

"Go ahead," Peter said softly. Caspian took a deep breath.

"Ever since I got to know your sister, I have loved her. Even in the times when I truly loved Lilliandil, she never left my mind. And I've been a second chance at love, it seems." His voice slowed, becoming more measured and solemn as he continued. "Susan and I have talked about marriage for a while now, but I realised there is one step I would like to take, for English tradition's sake. I would like to ask you, as I cannot ask your father, for permission," he paused. "To marry Susan."

Peter took a deep breath. Caspian had made mistakes, that was certain, but he was a man of integrity. A man who would protect his sister and love her unconditionally.

"Yes. Just, please, stay with her and love her devotedly. I love her as much as you do, and I would never want to see her hurt," Peter responded.

"Thank you!" Caspian exclaimed, throwing his arms around Peter.

"Just one condition though," Peter smirked as Caspian paused. "I have to be your best man."

"Deal."
Hey Readers!

*smirks* you're welcome. The proposal was a little slower this time coming! Hopefully it was more realistic, too!

Have a great week and I'll see you next Sunday.

Sincerely,

The Author
Sirens and Summons

Sirens wailed in the background. "It will be okay," her mother chanted, holding Lucy close. Tears streamed down their faces as a shell flew past their little shelter. "Get down!" Peter screamed as the shrapnel hit the outside of the structure. They cowered in a heap together, trying to ignore the sound of destruction in the background. The small comforts they had brought into the shelter had barely helped. The books and toys had been forgotten in the terror of the situation. Edmund cried in the corner as the bombs flew overhead. The sound broke Lucy's heart.

Another siren. The all clear. Helen Pevensie let go of Lucy and unlocked the door with shaky hands. The cold metal of their shelter was a stark contrast to the outside world. Everything was burning. Pieces of scrap metal littered the streets as ash rained down from the sky. Cries rung out through Finchley, desperate people, dying people. The Pevensies stumbled out into their garden, Edmund clutching at their father's portrait as if it were a lifeline.

A woman emerged from the blackness, her eyes red from weeping and smoke. "My son!" she screamed desperately. "Have you seen my son?"

Lucy awoke with a start. Tears were flowing down her face. All was fine in the world, she assured herself. She was in True Narnia. The war was over. There were no bombs, the fire did not exist. She stepped out of bed, pulling on her dressing gown.

This morning is remarkably cold, she thought as she walked down the hall.

Susan's room was silent as she slept. Lucy tiptoed over to the side of her bed, crawling under the covers. "Susan?" she said sleepily. "I had a nightmare." Susan rolled over, enveloping her younger sister in a hug.

Suddenly, the sound of a horn rung out throughout the castle. Susan leapt out of bed. "We need to get dressed and go to the Great Hall, quickly. Come on, Lucy."

"Wait, what's happening?" Lucy asked. Susan was already getting dressed, fetching her bow from beside the bed.

"That's our summons. The enemy have started making their way towards us," she explained. Lucy ran out of the room to dress and fetch her own healing cordial and dagger. She wanted to be part of the fight this time.

The Great Hall was a flurry of activity as sleepy Narnians handed weapons and armour to each other in a steady production line. Caspian oversaw the operation confidently, already dressed in his armour. He looks so handsome, Susan thought absently. No, Susan focus! She walked to retrieve a fresh supply of arrows and a small dagger. She walked to her archers with a wide smile. "Let's do this for Narnia!" she cried. "Are you ready?"

The last of the archers joined the core and Susan moved them outside and into formation. The sun was barely rising above the Western Woods, its golden rays promising only bloodshed and war. The enemy army could be seen at the edge of the woods. They have a cavalry, Susan thought. That hasn't happened before. From so far away she couldn't tell whether they were humans on horseback or centaurs, but they would be hard to shoot at either way. "Right, archers," she projected. "We seem to have a cavalry situation. We need to make sure we shoot ahead of the army's current position if we're shooting at moving targets. We will shoot at the same time to ensure we have as much impact as possible, so you only shoot on orders from me, unless in self-defence situation. Is that clear?"

There was a chorus of agreement. "Okay, lets move to higher ground."
Caspian stood in front of the infantry as they prepared their armour. "Men and women of Narnia, we are working on a defensive strategy. We will hold our position about two kilometres away from the castle, beyond the gates. This gives us more time to fight the enemy before they reach the castle and the dwellings of those who live in the forest. Our opponents may be using dark magic, so it is important to disarm them of any wand-like objects immediately. Do you understand?" A cheer swelled up from the crowd, morphing into a rousing chant.

"I think they're ready, don't you?" Peter whispered to Caspian with a chuckle.

"We will advance to our position now. Forward, march!" Caspian commanded. The cavalry, having received their own pep talk, quickly followed. The steady tramp of feet echoed across the lawns, accompanied by the clinking of armour and the excited chatter of experienced fighters. Now was the time.

Edmund and Harriet watched the action from the first-aid procession that followed behind the rest of the troops. Edmund had been told he was not yet well enough to fight on horseback or on foot, having been delegated to the first-aid section of the army. Harriet had been nominated to go with him, her lesser fighting experience putting her in danger.

Edmund had been grumbling the entire trip to the position, adjusting his grip on his sword constantly. He wanted to fight. He was perfectly capable. It was just Peter's over-protective spirit that had prevented him. Edmund might have been a little weaker from his illness, but fighting on horseback was still a real possibility for him. If only Peter had believed in him a little more. At least Harriet was by his side. Her bright personality could make even a dingy medical tent into a wonderland, and she seemed to feel the same way about not being able to fight. I guess Mum was right, Edmund thought with a chuckle. Misery does love company.

The army had finally reached their position. "Stay strong men and women of Narnia!" Peter yelled. "This is for the country we love. For Narnia!" The enemy army approached. The Narnians prepared to hold their ground.
The enemy approached in a flurry of shouts and weapons. Led by Jadis, they advanced on the Narnian troops with a remarkable amount of force, waving axes, clubs and swords. Peter stood strong with the infantry, fighting off every enemy that he could with a single hand. I could have done with two swords, he thought. That would have made things a lot easier.

Jadis was not alone. She was clearly the head and the mastermind of the operation, but she was accompanied by all of their old enemies leading their own divisions. Tash led the cavalry, screeching as he rode a nightmarish horse that was seemingly of his own creation. The Lady of the Green Kirtle rode alongside Jadis, her green dress floating in the air, emitting an acidic smell as she charged towards the Narnians. Miraz followed the cavalry in a chariot leading the infantry, his eyes hardened through his helmet. The army reeked of evil. Caspian sneered.

Suddenly, the bulk of the army was upon the Narnians. Oreius, leading the cavalry, fought off dark creature after dark creature. His swordsmanship was being tested like never before. The creatures weren't afraid to cheat and throw chivalry to the wind. Don't fall down, the centaur reminded himself. These beings know no justice. He slashed and jabbed his enemies with his sword while knocking others down with his shield. He paused for a split second to breathe. The world went black.

Susan stood on a rise with her archers, partially obscured by one of Cair Paravel's many orchards. They were all so anxious, tensed as they waited for a move. Susan watched the charge carefully. A section of the army had not yet been released, waiting a few hundred metres away from the battle. "We aim there," Susan shouted, motioning to the waiting army. "On my count." The archers aimed towards their target.

"One, two, THREE!" A spray of arrows arched through the air, working as a single body to rain down on the enemy army. The cries of the army rang out as far as the rise. Susan smiled. "Great work, archers. Prepare for another bombardment. We will continue to attack the stationary portion of the army. Those in the midst of the fighting are too close to our own soldiers," she explained. The archers agreed and aimed once more. Another group of arrows hit the enemy, eliminating more and more soldiers. "Keep up the good work. By the time the next section of the army are ready to advance, there won't be anyone left."

The battle raged on as the sun grew higher in the sky. The Narnian infantry had made their move towards the enemy army. As the full skill of the opposition had been realised, the defensive strategy had been abandoned. A full attack on the enemy army would be the only way to win.

Caspian led the infantry with a newfound ferocity. The knowledge that he was facing his uncle only increased the amount of adrenaline pumping through his veins. It seemed like every swing of his sword was more precise, conquering every enemy he faced. This was significantly easier than fighting the Telmarines. They had been people he had known, laughed with, shared dining tables and stories with. These people - and creatures - were nameless.

Time seemed to stop as quickly as it had started. Miraz charged towards Caspian with a wicked glint in his eyes. He stopped right before he reached his nephew, inspecting his sword casually. "I killed your father with this sword." He let out a twisted chuckle. "I'm looking forward to killing his son with the same blade. It has a certain type of poetry to it. I've always liked poetr-" The man's speech...
was cut off abruptly as Caspian plunged his sword into Miraz's chest. This man was not going to continue invading his nightmares and his life. Miraz fell to the ground, clutching his chest. The light went out of his eyes as Caspian said the Telmarine prayers for the dying for his uncle in a final trickle of compassion. Caspian walked away with a weight lifted off of his chest. It was finished.

Jill rode further into the enemy's ranks, clutching her sword tightly. There was only one goal for her in this battle, and she was determined to achieve it. Eustace rode beside her, his brows furrowed in determination. He would fight alongside Jill, they would both achieve what had been one of their greatest wishes since their first encounter with the evil woman.

They could both see her in the distance, her acidic green aura burning into their senses. She was surrounded on all sides by Narnians, every one desperate to defeat the woman who had ruined their family lives forever. Jill rode faster, fists clenched on her reins. Eustace Scrubb and Jill Pole were going to be the ones to kill the Lady of the Green Kirtle.

The metres between them vanished, and at once Jill found herself looking into the eyes of the only person she had ever hated. "I wondered when I would see you again," the witch laughed, her voice dripping with poison. "You were always so adorable, with your babyish gallantry."


"What did you say, Eustace? I sure hope you won't demeaning my reputation. I don't tolerate that from low lives like you," the witch took a sudden jab at Eustace's ribs with her glinting sabre. Eustace glared at the spiteful woman as he dodged the blow. Now was his chance.

"Now, Jill!" Eustace cried. The two took lunges at the woman from opposite sides. Their swords pierced her flesh as she fell to the ground with a blood-curdling scream. Her body emitted a sickly green cloud as it disappeared. Eustace and Jill cleaned their swords and rode away.

Chapter End Notes

Hey Readers!

Sorry I forgot about uploading last week. I'm giving you a double upload this week to make up for it, at least!

I was busy last week because I was at a special ANZAC Day service (for those who don't know, that's Australia and New Zealand's day for commemorating military service) as part of a tour that I went on last year. I got to meet the governor, so that was pretty sweet.

What have you all been up to in the past week? What's your country's version of ANZAC Day? I'd love to know.

Until next week!

Sincerely,

The Author
The battle had been raging for hours. Daylight waned as lives were lost and stampedes of soldiers paced the battered ground. *We need to finish this before the light fades,* Caspian realised with a sigh. *Aslan, grant us strength to fight for justice,* he prayed. *Protect us as we fight for your cause.* With newfound courage, Caspian pushed back another five enemy soldiers.

Edmund had been watching the action on the battlefield with wishes for victory. He sent his prayers as he bandaged wounds, rejoicing with those who had defeated enemies. *Two down, two to go,* he thought. He had witnessed the death of Miraz and heard of the death of the Lady of the Green Kirtle, but knew that Jadis and Tash were still fighting somewhere on the battlefield. His mind was swimming with strategies and tactics as he watched the battle, his hands caring for the wounded but his heart with his siblings, friends and countrymen as they fought the enemy. His hands were itching to unsheathe his sword and charge onto the battlefield.

In the meantime, Lucy fought a ghoul. Her opponent ducked and darted around her as she made short, pointed jabs at the creature with the thin dagger she had come to know as her good luck charm. Finally, the weapon made its mark as the ghoul fell to the ground, vanishing into dust. Lucy felt a deep sense of satisfaction. She was no longer the little girl afraid to fight, now a woman of True Narnia.

The light was dimming as the enemy's numbers diminished. "We're winning!" Peter cried out. "Keep moving!" The soldiers started to grow faint, despite Peter's encouragement. The day had been long and the warriors of Aslan's Country were becoming less and less skilled in the midst of their fatigue.

A dark cloud dimmed the sky as thunder rumbled. The air smelt like burning ash as the grass began to shrivel below the feet of the Narnians. A terrible voice rumbled from the clouds: "I am Tash. Fear me!"

Gasps rung out from below as the Narnians began to lose their strength. Soldiers began to curl up below the rocks as the clouds continued to darken the sky. Peter took a deep breath.

"We pray to Aslan, maker of the skies and ruler of everything the light touches,
Healer to the blind and the sick, friend to the outcast,
Just and loving king, bringer of justice and peace.
We ask that you protect your people and your land, your promised new city from all harm,
Grant us hands as victorious as the morning sun,
Swords as sharp as the tongues of the wicked,
Power from Him who is stronger than any evil and any impostor!"

Instantly, the sky cleared of all clouds and was filled instead with a booming voice.

*I am Aslan, God Almighty,
The beginning and the end,
The lover of all humankind,*
The friend to the weak, healer of the broken.

I have answered your call, I have not left you in suffering.

I will give you deliverance from the evil that constricts your land, that you may live in accordance with my commands.

The sky took a breath.

I now address the demon Tash, the corrupter of souls and root of evil.

Leave my people, and never return, for you have no power over them.

These people I hold in my hand, a place too lofty for you to reach."

The ground began to shake as roots rose up from the ground, seizing the enemy army and pulling them into the earth. Tash began to tremble as a large stone rose up from the earth, crushing his wispy form, leaving only dust.

A roar sounded over the plains, a roar which the Narnians felt deep in their bones. The voice returned, kinder than before. "I have one last challenge for you. I tell you, complete this task and have peace."

The battlefield was empty, except for a single figure dressed in white. Her wand twirled in her fingers as a sinister smile crossed her face. "Your 'god' cannot touch me. His power cannot defeat my divine nature. It is clear that I should be ruler. Don't you all agree?"

The White Witch stalked towards Edmund, who had exited the medical tent to witness Aslan's splendour. "I'm sure Eddie agrees," she said slowly. "After all, it was he who betrayed you in the first place." Edmund shrunk down to a smaller size. His betrayal had always been his Achilles heel.

Aslan's voice echoed in Edmund's head. "You are loved, dear son. You are forgiven."

Edmund unsheathed his sword slowly, staring the witch in the face for the final time. "I am not on your side," he said confidently. "I will never be on your side as long as I live!" And with that, Edmund plunged his sword deep into the Jadis' heart.

The witch's eyes widened as icicles began to form across her chest where Edmund's blade had struck. The ice covered her body until she was completely frozen on the ground, where the ice began to transform into stone. Her mouth was stuck open in disbelief as she turned into a statue, cold as her heart had always been. Aslan's voice roared out triumphantly: "Feel the eternal winter you have caused!"

The White Witch shattered into tiny pieces. They floated into the sky like ash, filling the air with the joy of victory. A cheer sounded from the True Narnians, so loud that it filled the space as fully as their laughter. "All praise be to Aslan! All praise be to Aslan! All praise be to Aslan!" the cheer rung out until the sky was painted with a gorgeous sunset that turned into the brightest stars any Narnian had ever seen.

"I think a celebration is in order!" Edmund suggested, holding Harriet close. He led the charge to the castle with a grin splitting his face. The Narnians followed behind, weapons disposed of and laughter abounding. Victory was theirs.
An impromptu party was quickly pieced together by the exhausted but exhilarated Narnians as the sun sunk behind the mountains. A large pile of weapons and armour had been left in the entrance hall, helmets and chain-mail mixing with bloodstained swords and axes in a strangely peaceful gesture. The war was over, once and for all.

The kitchen was full of Narnians, practically sweating adrenaline and joy. The food would be far from fancy, but it was who they ate it with that counted. Besides, it was common knowledge that anything tasted heavenly after a battle. Peter caught Caspian as he left the kitchen, delivering a wicked smirk. "I was wondering if you wanted to make the bread," Peter laughed.

"It would be an honour," Caspian replied. "I promise I won't coat you in flour this time." Peter followed him back into the kitchen with a grin as wide as a Narnian shield gracing his face.

"I really do love these lights," Lucy admitted to the faun beside her. "They remind me of Christmases when I was littler." The lights sparkled above her as she wound them over the rafters of the Great Hall. The victory seemed even sweeter when celebrated with things that were a direct juxtaposition to war, objects that demonstrated beauty, love, and life.

"I must admit I was a little sceptical of electricity when it first came to Narnia. The idea of fairy-lights, in particular, were an odd concept to me. But I must say they have become a favourite of mine for parties. They look like little stars brought down from the heavens," Tumnus reflected. Lucy smiled at the faun as he gazed up at the glimmering lights. *I'm glad he sees the world the way I do,* Lucy thought.

Edmund had volunteered himself to pack up the medical supplies with Harriet. He could have tried to help with the party preparations, but he had concluded he could not survive so many trips up and down stairs. Here was fine.

The area still smelt of blood, antiseptic and despair as unused bandages and dressings were rolled and stored away. The various wagons that had composed the first-aid procession were covered in dirt and various bodily fluids. The hygienic side of Edmund shuddered. *Maybe I'm more like my cousin than I thought,* he pondered. He quickly became absorbed in the repetitive tasks, cleaning each wagon methodically with soap, water, and finally, antiseptic.

Harriet was the shining angel who made even cleaning bloody carts fun. Ever since his accident, Edmund hadn't been able to stop thinking about her as an angel, and frankly he didn't mind the comparison. He was fully aware that she wasn't perfect, but she was his kind of perfect and that was enough.

"What are you dreaming about?" Harriet asked a distant Edmund. When left with no response, Harriet filled her bucket with water for the umpteenth time, making a pretence of washing out part of her wagon. A wicked grin lit up her face as she hurled the water at Edmund, laughing.

Edmund spluttered as he wiped the water out of his eyes. "Do you know how much blood probably came into contact with that water?" he guffawed. With a quick flick of his wrist, Edmund had emptied his own bucket over Harriet's head. "Now we're even!"
"Over my dead body," Harriet exclaimed, filling up another bucket and throwing a clean sponge for good measure. "I will win this thing, and you know it."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," Edmund retaliated. Soon the two had forgotten entirely about cleaning, drenching each other to the bone as they chased each other around the lawn, screeching wildly. Multiple buckets of water were wasted as sponges were thrown and random objects were made into weapons.

Eustace and Jill watched from inside the castle with a type of amusement that only comes from exhaustion. "What on earth are they doing?" Eustace snickered. The water fight had morphed into something bigger, now taking up a massive portion of the lawn. Playful insults were shouted as the two laughed and ran around each other.

"They're having more fun than we are, that's what they're doing," Jill concluded. "C'mon, let's go!" Eustace and Jill ran outside to join Edmund and Harriet, wielding extra buckets and sponges. Edmund greeted his cousin with a sponge in the face. Their laughter could be heard from the other side of the castle.

Finally, the celebration was underway. The Great Hall was filled with tired yet joyful Narnians as they took in the feeling of victory. Music sounded from all around the room as various Narnians showcased their talents, accompanied by lively chatter and enthusiastic, if not skillful, dancing. The thrill that came from finally defeating their enemies and inner demons was just about the only thing keeping them awake. It had been a long day.

Peter discovered Lucy curled up asleep on Tumnus' shoulder about half an hour into the party. Sometimes he forgot how young Lucy still was. The faun looked at him apologetically. "I did not initiate this, believe me," he whispered. "It's like I'm her teddy bear these days."

Peter gave him a warm smile. "I know you'll look after her."

Eustace and Jill burst into the room with beaming grins that bordered on terrifying. "Where have you two been?" Peter asked. They both looked like they had swum in an ocean filled with some kind of happiness serum.

"Oh, in a water fight with Edmund and Harriet, but that's nothing important. I have other news," Jill started.

"Well, we have other news," Eustace grinned. "We're engaged."

The room filled with a massive cheer as the news was passed around. "A toast to the happy couple!" Susan suggested. The sound of echoing clinks and cheers dominated the Great Hall.

"Isn't this a little premature?" Peter asked Eustace in a low voice.

"Far from it!" Eustace replied. "Jill and I have had a pact to get married for years now. We've talked about the subject thoroughly, and we realised that this is what we want."

"I'm happy for you," Peter said softly. He shook his head. "I never thought little bug-collecting Eustace would get married before me!"

Eustace chuckled. "Well, I had to be better than you at something!"
Hiya Readers!

Yep, I forgot to upload again. I went to one of Australia's biggest national parks for the long weekend (and my Dad's birthday) and there was no reception. Then I got lazy during the week. Sorry.

I did get to climb a gigantic mountain though! It was amazing!

In other news, this chapter is one of the last - the 25th out of 29 chapters, and I'm giving you a double upload this week to make up for the week I missed.

I've been considering what I'll upload after this for a while now. I started writing another Narnia fanfic, but my passion for this fandom just isn't there anymore. I started writing the first draft of this book almost five years ago, and I've changed a lot.

However, I am proud to announce that my next book will be a Harry Potter Fanfiction set after the crew's '8th year', starring Draco Malfoy, Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger. It's a bit of a deep take on Draco's post-war journey, and it will be quite different to this fanfic stylistically, but it's a little deeper, and I hope you guys like it! It's called Open Road - keep your eyes peeled for it's release sometime in the next few months.

Sincerely,

The Author
Preparations

The party continued until first light, full of merriment and stories. The True Narnians had stumbled back to bed with smiles on their faces and music in their heads. Tomorrow was going to be heaven, and hell. Soreness from battle and soreness from parties had never been a good combination.

Lucy woke up weary but excited. Now that the battle was over, there were other things to prioritise, namely the weddings. The excitement of the previous night had only been heightened by Eustace and Jill's engagement, although she had only heard of it a little later when she had woken up from her nap. Two weddings to plan for! It sounded like a mammoth task, but Lucy was completely ready. The fact that her sister and her best friend were getting married only made the idea more thrilling.

She raced out of her room only to find the common areas empty. Of course they're sleeping in, she thought. Yesterday was a big day. The only sound reverberating in the castle came from the parlour, a sweet, lilting melody that lifted her spirits. She ventured downstairs to hear the song more clearly.

Suddenly she was met by a distracted Tumnus, a Narnian flute falling out of his mouth. "I'm so sorry," he apologised. Even in all the years Lucy had known him, Tumnus had never been impolite. Lucy smiled at him, retrieving the flute from the floor.

"What are you doing up this early?" she asked, wrapping her dressing gown around herself. "I'm just ready to start the wedding plans, if I'm honest."

Tumnus laughed. "Lucy, it's not early at all. Right now it's two o'clock in the afternoon. Check if you don't believe me." Surely enough, the clock in the hallway showed that it was indeed five past two in the afternoon.

Lucy shook her head. "I'm still tired, which is the worst thing. I was even caught napping last night, which means I most likely got more sleep than most of the others."

"Napping isn't necessarily a bad thing," Tumnus philosophised. "I believe it can be extremely beneficial."

"Well, I'll take your word for it and try to nap more often," Lucy chuckled. "I could do with some breakfast, actually. Would you care to join me, kind sir?"

"Certainly," Tumnus replied. "I think I know where Aravis hid some of her famous jam, and trust me, it's perfect for a morning like this."

The two sat at a small table in the kitchen in the afternoon light, chatting and laughing as they munched on a mismatched afternoon breakfast. The chequered tablecloth was covered in jam stains and toast crumbs, the last dregs of tea in the best teacups. The scene was messy and more than a little imperfect, but Lucy had never been happier.

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It was three o'clock when the Narnians finally emerged from their chambers, disoriented and sore from fighting. Yawns echoed around the castle as a procession of people and creatures made their way downstairs in search of breakfast. "They look like they're dead," Lucy giggled.

"I heard you," Susan grumbled as she moved around the kitchen. Lucy and Tumnus soon felt claustrophobic in the small space filled with people, deciding to move outside to a place with more
fresh air and less grumpy Narnians.

Breakfast seemed to be survival of the fittest as each tired, sore and hungry occupant of the castle scavenged for food. Susan finally managed to procure a halfway decent piece of bread, fighting for a seat at the kitchen table. Jill sat next to her, laughing at her soon-to-be cousin-in-law’s predicament. "You could have just gone around the perimeter, you know. It's a million times easier to get to anything that way," she suggested.

Susan sighed. "How are you so chipper?" She herself felt like she was slowly drowning in a tar pit of tempting sleep.

"Well, the excitement of getting engaged does give you a bit of energy," Jill explained.

"I guess. Can I please steal some of your energy?" Susan whined.

"I'm not sure that's something you can steal," Jill snickered. "Besides, I need this energy for wedding planning."

"Wedding planning," Susan groaned. "Caspian wants to get married in two weeks, the ignorant man. I understand he's excited, but if he wants it to happen that quickly, he better be helping with getting everything ready!"

Jill laughed. "I'm more than happy to help, and I'm sure the rest of the girls would be keen as well. You have an army of wedding planners on your side, Susan," she paused. "It might be a little cliche, and more than a little corny, but I think I just came up with a genius idea."

"Go ahead. I'm open to any suggestion at this point."

"How about..." Jill tested. "A double wedding."

Susan smiled. "I agree with you on the corny part...but it could work. We all know the same people anyway."

"Settled then?" Jill asked.

"Settled."

The two women spent the rest of the breakfast discussing colours and table settings for the wedding. The tables were full of laughter again as everyone began to fully wake up, remembering the victory and the fun of the day before. A wonderful morning...of sorts.

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"Okay, I call this meeting of the wedding preparation committee to order!" Susan called.

"Is a committee really necessary?" Caspian doubted. "This whole meeting scene comes across as a little extreme."

"This committee is entirely necessary." Susan reassured. "We are attempting to plan the best wedding Narnia has ever seen in the space of two weeks - a mammoth task. We are going to need all hands on deck to make this dream a reality."

Jill nodded. "Our first motion will be to appoint research teams. We need to know what type of centrepieces will be appropriate." The Narnians scurried into small groups.

Eustace and Caspian sat next to each other in the corner of the room. "What on earth are they talking about?" Caspian shook his head.
"I used to think I knew about weddings," Eustace moaned. "Turns out that knowledge was just the tip of the iceberg."
To Have and to Hold

The morning of the wedding was dewy and fresh. Half of the castle was awake at dawn to begin setting up the Great Hall for the gigantic event. *It's strange,* Lucy thought. *We're putting in so much effort, and we're going to be the only ones at the wedding anyway.* All of the Narnians in the surrounding district had been invited to the event, but in reality the couples were mostly concerned with their close friends and family - who just happened to be the people organising the event.

The Great Hall had been set up with vines that twirled over the rafters and trailed to the floor in certain places, accompanied by touches of gold and silver leaves. The wooden pews that were usually kept in the Cair Paravel chapel had been moved into the grand room, giving an old-fashioned touch to the decor. *We've done a good job,* Harriet thought. *I hope the girls like it as much as I do.*

"Stop daydreaming!" Lucy called to Harriet. "We need to help the girls get ready!" She was already halfway through the doors as she finished her sentence.

Well, I guess it's not everyday that your sister gets married,* Harriet thought. *She has the right to be excited.*

The rooms assigned to the the bridal party were chaotic, to say the least. Various makeup and hair products littered the vanities that had been set up around the room, dresses and other items hung up wherever there was space. Hair pins were pinned to clothes and tossed around the room, along with words of encouragement and frustration. "We can do this ladies, we can all look amazing by the time the wedding starts," Susan encouraged.

"Sit still Susan!" Lucy scolded. "These hot irons will burn you if you keep fidgeting!" Susan stopped moving, resigning herself to being less animated. A burn would not be a good start to her wedding day.

"Bridesmaids!" Jill called. "We're ready for you, now." Most of the girls started moving towards the far corner of the large room to collect their dresses. The operation quickly followed them, as the two brides watched their friends see their dresses.

"I feel like a princess," Lucy sighed. The satin dress' blue folds swirled around her as she twirled around the room. Harriet followed suit, and soon all of the girls were twirling around like excited children.

"You ladies look absolutely gorgeous," Jill sighed. "I'm so glad to have you as my bridesmaids." The response came in the form of warm smiles from all of the girls. There was an exodus to the vanities to finish their hair and makeup.

"We're going to go get changed into our dresses," Susan explained. "You finish off here. Then, we'll come out and show you."

"Do you need any help getting into them?" Lucy asked.

"No, some of these ladies will help us if we need it," Jill reassured, motioning to some of the other women who lived in the castle.

The bridesmaids finished their makeup with a sense of anticipation. Gasps echoed around the room as Jill and Susan emerged from the adjoining room they had changed in. Lucy ran and hugged her sister. "You look beautiful Susan," she said warmly.

Susan wore a dress similar to the one she wore when she had left Narnia all those years ago, a Grecian-style white and blue dress with vine-like embellishments. Jill had taken the more traditional
route in a long gown trimmed with white lace and a sheer panel over the shoulders. Both of the women were beaming.

"Well then, let's go," Harriet exclaimed. The women filed out of the room, a cluster of excitement.

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Eustace and Caspian stood at the altar, both extremely nervous. Caspian fiddled with his cuffs as he stared at the doors. She would be here any minute. "Nervous?" Eustace whispered.

"Beyond belief," Caspian returned.

"They're going to be here soon," Eustace smiled. "I can't wait."

Music swelled as the doors were opened by two fauns. Diggory and Polly led the procession, walking perfectly in time, just as they had practised, followed by Harriet and Edmund. Maybe one day I'll get to see her walking down the aisle, Edmund thought with a smile. Peter and Lucy walked together as the Best Man and Maid of Honour, followed by the two girls, Susan walking a little in front of Jill.

Eustace's jaw dropped. Jill had come a long way from the tomboyish girl he had met at school. She looks stunning, he thought. Caspian's face looked almost identical to Eustace's as he looked at Susan. Her dress was so similar to the one she had worn the day she had left Narnia. The day of our first kiss, he thought with a smile.

Finally the procession was over, and the wedding party stood on the platform where the thrones sat, waiting for Aslan to speak. The lion had been appointed as their official pastor to marry them, after a long discussion. After all, he had known both of the couples for a long time.

"We are gathered here today to witness the union of Caspian X and Susan Pevensie, as well as the union of Eustace Clarence Scrubb and Jill Pole...."
"Jill, on the day I met you, I made a promise. I made a promise that I would never leave you alone. I don't know what you did to change a selfish, bratty Eustace that day, but that was the first promise I ever made to you. And somehow I knew that that promise would not be the last one I made to you. Since then, you have changed me for the better. You have put up with my hardships and my whining, you have shown me what it is to be a compassionate human being, to have passions not only for occupations or hobbies but to have a passion for people, for loving your fellow Narnian brothers and sisters. So here, today, I chose to make another promise to you.

"I promise to love you unconditionally, with all that I am and all that I can give. I promise to be there in the moments of joy, in the moments of sorrow. I promise to be there when you are healthy, and when you are sick, when you are laughing and when you cry. I promise to be my best self so that you can spread your wings even further. I promise to support you in every possible way, emotionally, financially and in any way I couldn't think of when writing this speech.

"My final promise to you is the one I made secretly that day at Experiment House - I will never leave you alone. I love you, Jill," Eustace wiped a tear away from his eyes as he read his vows to Jill. His vows had been more sappy than the ones Caspian and Susan had decided to exchange, versions of the traditional English marriage vows. He only hoped that Jill's vows were just as emotional.

She smiled at him as she began. "Eustace, when I first encountered you at Experiment House, I thought you were an odd boy. You were obsessed with hygiene and bugs, and reading old newspapers. But there was one thing that changed everything, that stopped me from walking away from our friendship. You were kind. Ever since then you have grown tremendously, but that value remains at the core of you. It was that value that caused me to make a promise of my own. I made this promise on a day that I knew hadn't been the best for you. It was a rainy, miserable day and your mood matched the weather. Yet, when you saw a baby bird lying on the ground in the garden, you nursed it back to health. It was then and there that I promised that I would love you for the rest of my life. I make this promise again today to you.

I promise to love you for the rest of my life, through anything and everything that happens to us. I promise to always be there, to love and support you as you chase your dreams. I promise to care, to learn, to love, and to not outdo you in speeches and vows," Jill laughed. "I promise to never let you go. I love you too, Eustace."

Aslan smiled at the couple. Caspian and Susan had already exchanged their rings after their separate vows, and stood to the side as they witnessed Eustace and Jill exchanging theirs. Aslan's voice boomed over the crowd "I now pronounce you both husband and wife. You may kiss the bride!" Applause resounded through the great room as both Caspian and Eustace dipped and kissed their new wives. "May your lives be fruitful together. Go in peace."

The bridal party danced back down the aisle to a lively Narnian flute tune reminiscent of Irish folk music. The smiles seemed to be contagious.

The guests followed the bridal party onto the lawn, where numerous picnic baskets had been set out earlier that morning. A wide range of food had been prepared to a high standard, ready for a casual picnic reception. It's absolutely perfect, Susan thought with a sigh.

Jill had come up with the idea when brainstorming ideas for receptions. The wedding reception had been a major dilemma, as most of the planning would be focused on the dinner that was included. The reception would be expensive and difficult to arrange. Jill had suggested something simpler, and
there it was - the idea of a picnic reception.

*At least everyone's enjoying themselves,* Jill thought. *This really did turn out much better than I expected.* The ceremony and reception had gone well for something that was planned in two weeks. The lawn was full of laughter and food, just the way she liked it.

Harriet and Edmund had started yet another water fight on the far side of the lawn, now joined by some of the younger children as they ran around the lawn wildly. *Thank goodness they changed out of their formal clothes before,* Susan thought with relief. *What is it with them and water fights anyway?*

The light started to fade from the sky as a dance floor was constructed for the couples' first dances. The couples would start in separate corners to each other, and then glide into the centre, before being joined by the rest of the wedding party and guests.

The music started off slower as the couples danced slowly in their separate corners. Then, the music started to pick up as they met each other in the middle. Soon all of the guests danced around them in circles, swirling opposite ways to the music.

Susan smiled at Caspian as he danced with her, the Telmarine prince making pretences of watching his feet. *Today had been truly wonderful,* although a younger Susan would have thought that she had dreamt it. *I hope I never wake up from this,* Susan thought.

Caspian looked at Susan as his heart overflowed with joy. He had left Lilliandil behind once and for all. For once in his life, he could truly enjoy himself.

Eustace gazed at Jill as she danced, laughing in the moonlight. *Eustace Scrubb and Jill Pole married. Who would've thought!* he reflected. *Wait, she's Jill Scrubb now,* he reminded himself. *She's my wife!* His grin was as wide as the Great Hall.

Jill looked at Eustace as she smiled. Today had been perfect. She couldn't wait to experience the world as Mrs Scrubb. *Bring it on.*
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

~Five Years Later~

It was a beautiful evening for a picnic. The sunset was a canvas; reds, pinks and blues perfectly combined. The food had been prepared that afternoon, spread out by the various families on a mess of picnic blankets that covered most of the lawn. The air was fresh and crisp as the night set in on True Narnia - it was time for some fun.

Caspian sighed as he finally allowed himself to relax. The whole picnic had been his idea, and he had been in the kitchen all afternoon trying to coordinate the food and drinks. It has turned out well, he congratulated himself. Susan waved him over to a picnic rug, smiling at him as he sat down. Little William clutched at Caspian's hand, excited to see his father after a long day of absence.

"He's been asking where you were all day," Susan laughed. "It's pretty clear that you're the favourite."

"I'll tell him to take it easy on you," Caspian winked. "You deserve a little bit of recognition every now and then." Susan gave him a peck on the cheek. They both settled down to watch the festivities. Susan picked up a piece of bread from the basket.

"Yours?" she asked. The bread was delicious - light, fluffy and just crusty enough.

Caspian nodded. "I never thought bread baking would become a hobby, but here I am."

Eustace and Jill were still distributing the food as the sun went down. "When did we get so many people living here?" Eustace asked. "It seemed like only yesterday that there were barely ten of us in our little group." The stream of hungry people kept coming as Eustace worked to pack the baskets.

"Well, you know, we have had a few new additions to the families since then," Jill pondered. "And we're only adding to the number, so don't you complain, mister!" Eustace smiled at his wife. He was still getting used to waking up to a pregnant Jill. Soon, he would wake up to a miniature Scrubb as well.

The sun set quickly, revealing the fairy lights strung around the trees and the castle. It was truly a sight to behold, almost as if little pieces of the sun had stayed with them. Lucy and Tumnus looked at each other, hugging and jumping up and down. "It worked! It worked!" she exclaimed. Tumnus beamed at the woman who was currently doing some kind of victory dance. I couldn't have chosen anyone better, Tumnus thought with a sigh. "Come on Tumnus!" she called her husband. "We need to go switch on the ones on the balcony!"

"Who on earth came up with that idea?" Harriet snickered.

"I place my bet on Lucy," Edmund whispered. "I think she loves her fairy lights more than she loves Tumnus!"

"Well, rest assured I love you more than fairy lights," Harriet laughed, gazing down at her hand. The diamond twinkled in the faint light, reflecting the lights that twinkled above them.

Peter sat polishing swords on one of the picnic blankets, his eyes focused on the simple task. The
cloth he was using slid down the sword with a strange type of accuracy that only came from experience. Caspian approached the man with a jovial grin on his face. "Don't tell me you're polishing swords for fun instead of socialising."

"Well, my mother always told me there's no rest for the wicked, and I'm quite sure I fall into that category," Peter chuckled.

"I think you deserve some rest. Come sit with us and have a chat," Caspian suggested. He started trying to pull Peter up off of the ground to no avail.

"Sit with you married folks and talk about kids and table settings? No thank you," Peter refused.

"Come with me or I'll spray you with water," Caspian threatened. "I've found those gun-like water things Edmund made are very capable of the task."

"You wouldn't," Peter said in disbelief.

"Try me." Within seconds Caspian had seized a water gun from behind him and was soaking Peter to the bone. Peter spluttered as he was blasted by the jet of water, trying to move his hair out of his eyes.

"Okay, okay, I surrender. This noble bachelor can afford to spend a portion of his precious time with the married peasants," Peter joked.

"She was in on this?" Peter spluttered.

"Of course!" Susan replied. "You seem to have forgotten that side of me, brother dearest."

Peter felt another blast of water as little William shot him from the back. The little boy giggled as he ran away from his mother and uncle brandishing the water gun with astounding ferocity. Thankfully Edmund caught him before he could do too much harm. "What are you up to, little man?" Edmund cooed.

"Defeating you with your own weapon!" William screamed, shooting Edmund with the gun. Edmund ran for cover, reaching blindly for one of the other water guns. He would not be defeated by a three-year-old. Crouching down low, he approached the rampaging toddler from behind, hitting him with another blast of freezing cold water. Edmund Pevensie was the king of water fights, and he intended to keep his crown.

"Who are we fighting?" Harriet whispered, suddenly by his side. She wasn't one to pass up a good water fight.

"The one and only William," Edmund explained. "Do you have a gun?"

"Yep," Harriet replied. "Let's go get 'em." The two moved out from behind the bush they were crouched behind, rolling along the lawn at an alarming speed.

"The target is in sight," Edmund reported. "Aim, and fire in three...two...one!" The toddler was hit with twin blasts of water, a surprised look melting onto his chubby face.

"Got hi-" Harriet was cut off by a blast of water hitting her torso.

"That's what you get for squirting my son!" Caspian cried, brandishing a gun of his own. He turned
around wildly, squirting anyone that got in his way as he sprinted across the grass.

"How many of those did you make?" Harriet asked, shaking her gun slightly.

"I might've made one for everyone in the castle..." Edmund admitted, rubbing his neck.

"Boy, we are in deep trouble," Harriet guffawed. The lawn had quickly turned into an impromptu battlefield, picnic baskets being abandoned in place of Edmund's invention. Teams were formed and alliances made as guns were handed down to even the youngest Narnians.

"I think we might have started something a little too big for us," Edmund laughed.

"Who says? Are you ready to defend our titles as king and queen of all water fights?" Harriet challenged.


The two took off in the direction of Eustace and Jill, who were the most exposed of the fighters. "Alright, sneak attacks are our best bet," Edmund strategized. The two crept up behind Eustace and Jill, spraying them with some of their last water. Eustace turned around with a playful glint in his eyes.

"Run!" Harriet screamed. The two sprinted away from Eustace and Jill to no avail, suffering more cold water as they retreated. Edmund set his brow.

"Our next point of attack?" Edmund asked.

"Hmm, I say Caspian," Harriet suggested. "I think he deserves payback." Edmund nodded and pointed to where the oblivious man stood, still gloating at his victory over the two.

"Let's do this one as a casual conversation. We chat a bit, then we shoot," Edmund recommended. The couple walked towards Caspian, keeping their guns by their sides.

"William is so cute, isn't he?" Harriet started. "Such a chubby face."

Caspian let his guard down. "That's my son alright. Takes after his father." Edmund sprayed Caspian in the face before he could say another word.

"That's paybackkkkkkkk!" Harriet screamed as they ran away into the night.

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At last, the Narnians flopped down on the grass to stargaze, soaked and happy as they watched the stars. It was truly a perfect night.

Caspian looked at the stars, then back at his friends. He really could feel no difference in the awe he felt for both things. He had grown immensely in True Narnia - here he had defeated all kinds of enemies, both physical and psychological. He had found himself, somewhere that wasn't being a Telmarine or a Narnian, and he had found Susan. For the first time in his life, he was at rest.

Peter absorbed the moment with every fibre of his being. In True Narnia he had found a purpose and a passion, he had found a place to belong. After years of being shunted around between England, America and Narnia, he had finally gotten to the place he was meant to be. It was a good feeling.

Edmund lay under the stars with a feeling he had been awaiting for the longest time. Ever since his betrayal, Edmund had never felt truly forgiven, or truly loved. It had taken him years to overcome his
demons and realise the truth - he was more loved than he could ever imagine, and was completely forgiven. And right in the moment, he could feel it surrounding him, filling his lungs.

Lucy studied the stars as she looked back at the first time she had seen stars in True Narnia. Even in Aslan’s Country, she had always found it hard to be brave. *It's been a journey,* she thought with a smile. *I'm sure my younger self would be proud of me.* Lucy stared at the beautifully ferocious stars and had never related to them more.

Eustace admired the view with a strange sense of nostalgia. *I've grown up,* he thought. *That child that last saw these stars in England is no longer who I am. I'm leading armies, I'm protecting my family now.* The stars winked at Eustace in proud applause. The boy from Experiment House had become someone to look up to.

*I used to be so afraid of the dark,* thought Jill with a funny smile. *I used to be so afraid of being alone in the dark. Something has changed for the better.* In all her Narnian adventures, Jill had found light and companionship in abundance. The crying girl was gone.

Diggory and Polly looked over the mountains as the stars twinkled brightly above. It had seemed so long ago that they had seen the old version of this world formed, Aslan singing over the land they had learned to love. *These years have been a lesson in belief,* they thought.

Harriet took in the beautiful scenery with love materialising into a smile on her face. The world she had loved as a child had fulfilled every expectation, given her the wishes she had always kept close to her heart. True Narnia was the place where she had finally felt was hers.

Susan looked up at the glittering stars and laughed joyously, a soft twinkle of a laugh. True Narnia had filled the void in her life once and for all. This had been what she had needed, the fresh air, the green grass, the beautiful stars. England was not where she belonged. She belonged with fauns and fairies, beautiful sunsets, pristine beaches and the love of her family and friends. And here she was, fulfilling her dreams with the people she loved by her side, living a life of family, of community and most of all, a life with Aslan. Her heart had filled with so much love that it overflowed. In the end, she was glad for the unfortunate accident that had brought them to her. Aslan had always known what she needed. And all she needed, was right in front of her.

The author sat at her computer with a smile on her face. The characters waved to her from the page, old childhood friends and new muses. She had finally finished the dream, the idea, that she had created five years before. The worn Narnia books sat on a shelf down the hall, inspiring writers even decades later. The author stretched her back and smiled. One book down, hundreds to go.

Chapter End Notes

Dear Wonderful Readers,

It's hard to believe that this is the last author's note I will write for After the End. Five years after the creation of the original concept, this book is finally complete. It's a surreal feeling, one of the most bittersweet I've ever felt.

In some ways, this book represents my childhood and the dreams I had then. Obviously the story has evolved significantly since the original ideas were formed, but so have I.

I would like to take a moment to thank you, the readers, for your ongoing love and
support, from the times where this book was just a dodgy fanfiction with a good cover, to what it is now (hopefully something of value). Thank you for the kind words and the reads (and the constant addition of this book to Narnia reading lists). You have given me courage to write, and courage to continue doing what I love. Thank you again.

This is After the End, but this isn't the end. I am sad to say that this is my only, and last, Narnia fanfiction. I have had other ideas, but my passion for the fandom has weakened to a point where writing a novella based on it is no longer plausible. So if you're here for Narnia fanfic, I'm dreadfully sorry. I might write a text chat fic or something, but never another full novel.

I am, however, already in the process of writing a Harry Potter fanfiction called Open Road, which I expect to start uploading in the next month or so. It's a bit darker and very character-development focused, so if you like a bit of angst mixed with fluff, a common road trip cliche, and lots of Draco Malfoy, watch this space.

I would like to end with the heart of this story, which is the same as CS Lewis' heart of his beloved Narnia novels. While this book might not be allegorical, Lewis' original Narnia books are. Aslan, as you might be aware, is the representation of Jesus, God's loving son who gave His life so that we don't have to serve the punishment of rejecting God and His ways. True Narnia is representative of heaven, the place where those who believe in Jesus Christ will one day live with Him. While I have taken some creative liberties with the world of True Narnia (I actually realised halfway through rewriting this book that there's no sequel for a reason - heaven is absolutely perfect and nothing bad can happen there, therefore no plot.), Heaven is actually a perfect and wonderful place.

God loves you, no matter what you've done, and wants to have a relationship with you. Get this - the creator of the universe wants to chat with you! And I know it sounds cliche, but following Jesus is not something you want to miss out on.

So if you are curious about God and what Christianity is all about, what motivated Lewis to write his books in the first place, feel free to DM me or talk to a Christian you know. Jesus promised to give us life everlasting and life to the full, and I don't know about you, but that sounds pretty good to me.

Goodbye, my friends. Thank you for the journey.

For the last time,

The Author

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!