The Queen Susan in Tashbaan, Part 2 of The Stone Gryphon

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Summary

Queen Susan and Lord Peridan of the Gryphon Aerial Corps aid the British war effort in 1942 America – a dodgy tale of espionage, seduction and garden insectivores.

- Inspired by The Rule of Threes Raid by Syrena_of_the_lake
At The End Of The Varsity Line

The Stone Gryphon, Part 2, The Queen Susan in Tashbaan

When last we left the story, after a summer in Oxfordshire with Professor Digory Kirke, Peter Pevensie receives a telegram from his brother, Edmund. Edmund reports that he, their sister, Lucy, and however improbably, their odious cousin, Eustace, have just been to Narnia and that Edmund and Lucy are never to return. In his most dictatorial, High King fashion, Peter orders everyone about and rushes to catch the next train on the Varsity Line out of Oxford to Cambridge to see his brother, sister, and cousin. Peter is escorted to the station by two friends of Professor Kirke's, Asim bin Kalil, an Arab mystic and spy for the British military, and Mary Anning Russell, a paleontologist with a passion for hips, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and magnificent drooling lizards.

Upfront blather: This represents Part 2 in *The Stone Gryphon* story arc. While I will try to bring it all up to speed through tedious exposition and overly explanatory dialogue, if you are new to this story line, you may want to read Chapter 8, *Lions' Business*, and at least some of Chapters 12-15, *Crossroads*, of *The Stone Gryphon, Part 1, Oxfordshire 1942*. *Queen Susan in Tashbaan* will include characters from my other stories accumulating in this vision, *By Royal Decree* and *The Palace Guard* as well Chapters 10 and 11 of *The Stone Gryphon*, Part 1.

Or, just do what I do and go with the flow, and make it up as you go along.

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Chapter 1, At The End Of The Varsity Line

*Wine can of their wits the wise beguile,*
Make the sage frolic, and the serious smile.
Homer, *Odyssey*

The only thing restraining Peter's raging impatience to get to Lucy and Edmund (*and Eustace? Eustace? How can that be?*) was his confidence that Asim would not have sent him astray. The train would get there even as it sat for hours, waiting for other, more mysterious trains to rumble by in the dark. There was a peculiar moment when a great number of people got on and off at a junction with "Bletchley," which he would not have expected given the location and the hour.

As irritated as he had been at the mothering and provisioning, when he became sufficiently bored to inspect the pack Mary and Asim had thrust at him, Peter was forced to concede that they really did know something about unexpected adventures. He found tins of sardines, packages of nuts and dried fruit, matches (in waterproof container), candles, torch (with battery), compass, notepad, pencils, collapsible container for water, a pocketknife with 23 attachments, and something at the bottom that he was fairly certain was a tightly folded oilskin tarpaulin for sleeping on damp ground. All were things that would have been very useful when they had been summoned into Narnia the last time.
The travel documents were not as helpful and included an outdated railway timetable from Bombay and a steamer schedule from Perth. There was a very detailed map, the topography of which was certainly North Africa, but all in Arabic.

There was reading material as well, including a battered volume of Alice's Adventures Through the Looking Glass, an even more bruised Hound of the Baskervilles, and intriguingly, a slim volume of what he thought might be Arabic verse. Peter was able to puzzle out the name, Muhammad Hafiz Ibrahim and the word an-nil, which he thought meant the Nile River. There was also a volume of stories in French by Guy de Maupassant. He remembered reading La Parure (in English) in school – the necklace of paste illustrating the principle of irony and all that. Based upon his painful classical Latin and barely manageable French, this collection appeared to be of a different, far more lewd and satirical character. Peter suspected it was Mary's book, although Richard or even Aunt Polly was a possibility as well; he did not know if Polly read French. Maybe in circumstances involving mosquito netting, a lot of gin, and yapping hyenas, it wouldn't matter.

It was after ten when the train finally stopped for good. Peter's only consolation was in checking with the sleepy station manager and learning that the train he might have otherwise tried to catch had been canceled, and the next three after. It was a dark walk north toward Histon and Impington; he would have to remember to thank Mary and Asim for the torch. Peter found he couldn't quite remember what it had been like when streets were lit with lamps.

He heard dogs bark, the occasional bang of a door, window, or bin, and finally, and it seemed an age, the street on which his aunt and uncle lived. The neat, dull rows of darkened houses lined the road and he heard voices from the back garden of the third house on the left.

He shined the torch over the fence and in the spotlight's glow saw Edmund and Lucy on the tiny patch of grass in the Scrubbs' backyard.

Lucy squealed and jumped up, Edmund behind her and then they were all fumbling, at the gate, and with the torch, his bag and the pack, until they were holding on to each other like the lifelines they were.

"Trying to pass me up, are you?" Peter said, gruffly, for his brother had gained some height even in the last three months. Though, Ed never had surpassed him when they had done this the last time. He inhaled deeply, caught the scent of the Lion still clinging to them and hugged Lucy tighter.

Somehow, Edmund had become sandwiched between them and the fence and gasped, "Geroff me! Geroff me!"

Peter laughed and loosened his grip, even if he didn't want to let go, ever. However, there was another here as well who was certainly approaching this reintroduction with some trepidation. Opening up the arm clasped around Lucy, their embrace was now wide enough to encompass Eustace coming warily toward them into the pooling light of the torch.

"Cousin," Peter said softly, "be welcome. You are a Friend of Narnia now."

Eustace Clarence Scrubb lurched forward, though not as awkwardly as he would have only the day before. He was trying to dash the tears from his eyes. There were many reasons for Eustace to weep tonight, and he should be ashamed of none of them. His cousin fell into them like a stone, but Peter was enough of a bulwark to withstand it. He kissed the head bent into his shoulder. "Welcome, Eustace" he repeated softly.

They moved their scrum back out onto the little patch of lawn. Peter grudgingly admitted that as odd as Alberta and Harold were, their extensive Victory Garden was lovely in the moonlight. A
summer of enjoying Kwong Lee's cooking had given him a new appreciation for the Scrubbs' vegetarian lifestyle; it was just too bad Harold and Alberta couldn't cook a whit and murdered perfectly innocent vegetables.

"I want to hear everything," he said, "but before we begin, Eustace, could you get us some cups?"

He opened up his case as Edmund and Lucy grinned at him.

"By the Lion, Peter, thank you!" Edmund said with heartening enthusiasm.

Mary and Asim would have been truly disturbed if they had known that practically the only thing Peter had packed was a single change of clothes and two bottles of wine from the Professor's shelf. His tutor would begrudge neither the wine, nor the cause in which the bottles would be consumed.

Lucy followed Eustace through the back door. Peter fished the pocketknife out of the pack, removing some of the other supplies to reach it.

"What's all this?" Edmund asked, fingering the compass and one of the food packages.

"Courtesey of my logistics and supply officer," Peter said, tossing Edmund the matches. "Light the candle, would you? We might as well save the torch."

"I'm your logistics officer, Peter. Are you saying after barely three months, you've replaced me?"

"Never, brother. It was a temporary appointment, only." Peter found the corkscrew attachment and started in on the bottle as Edmund lit the sturdy plumber's candle.

"So there's a story in it, then?" Edmund asked.

"It will wait. I want to hear your story first." With a glance back at the house, Peter asked a silent question.

Edmund snuffed the glowing match between his fingers; he'd always been fond of fires that way.

"A changed man, Peter, truly, by Aslan's grace. As profound a change as my own, once."

With a sigh, Edmund carefully set the candle in their little circle. "To answer your immediate questions, we were pulled in this morning, we landed in the water, in the middle of the Eastern Sea, Caspian picked us up in the new flagship of the Narnian fleet, three years had passed for them, we were at sea for, by my count, some months, though we lost track of time in the end, and we sailed to the End of the World and the border to Aslan's own country."

Edmund's voice thickened at the end of his recitation. Peter wanted to say, "I'm sorry," but knew that was wrong, and would just make the feelings worse. Instead, he pulled his brother into another rough embrace.

"It's not what you think," Edmund muttered into his shoulder. "Really, it's not. It's different." Peter just held on tighter. He had no idea what his brother meant, but it didn't matter. They'd get through it all in good time.

With the sound of the door shutting, they pulled apart. Eustace and Lucy came down the steps, holding mugs – there would be no wine glasses in the Scrubb household, of course.

"I'm sorry," Eustace said, handing Peter the cup. "It's all we have."

"Eustace, the only thing a Narnian needs to drink wine is something with sides and a bottom," Peter
told him, pouring wine into his cousin's mug.

"Centaurs drink wine out of buckets!" Lucy giggled, though there was an edge to it.

"I think I've done that before," Edmund commented, taking a mug from her and holding it for Peter. "Though I'm not sure I remember."

"You have," Peter said, pouring. "I remember it. Vividly. And do not recommend it."

Lucy settled next to him, as close as she could be, and held her mug for Peter to fill. "Thank you for coming, Peter," she whispered, resting her head on his shoulder.

"So," Peter began for them, "this morning, the day started perfectly normally, and then you found yourselves treading water in the middle of the Eastern Sea." He put the bottle down, wrapped his free arm around his sister, and leaned in toward the candlelight. "Tell me everything."

"So what was she like? The Dawn Treader?"

"You'll be able to see a picture of her in Lucy's room. She's a fine ship."

"Small, nothing like the Splendor Hyaline, but they were so proud of her, Peter. It was so good to see them reviving shipbuilding and seafaring after so long."

"Eustace?" Peter asked, wanting to be sure his cousin continued to feel part of the tale.

Eustace took a sip of wine from a mug, looking so mature, and thoughtful, and normal, Peter caught his breath. "Well, I was a right beast, at first, so…"

"Eustace!" Peter said sharply, "none of that." More gently, he reminded his cousin, "Given the Good Beasts of Narnia, that particular term is one of highest praise for us. Tell me of the crew."

"Reepicheep was aboard."

"Speaking of Good Beasts," Peter said fondly. "There was never a braver Mouse."

"He greatly admired you..."

The words got stuck and Peter helped him, divining some of his cousin's hesitation. "Call me as you always have, Eustace. My name hasn't changed."

Eustace stared into his mug then with a shaking hand held it out, silently asking for a refill. "I miss Reepicheep already."

"We landed first at the Lone Islands," Eustace offered. "It was a mistake to go in as we did."

Peter looked at Edmund and Lucy, waiting for some sign from them, but neither made any effort to contradict or correct Eustace's blunt critique. "Oh?"

"We ran into trouble, straight off," Eustace continued.
Peter did not say anything about the very many ways those small islands had been so important to them. And such trouble, as well. He wondered what Edmund's reaction had been on returning to a place that had assumed such a prominent and significant place in his life. He tried to catch Lucy's eye, but Edmund stopped him.

"Drop the covert looks, Peter." It was so strange to hear this undercurrent of abrupt irritation in his brother's voice again. Peter had not heard that particular warning tone since after Narnia, the first and then second time. The unspoken subject, the unnamed person, the wine, the dim light of a fire, and the way the cup sat in his hand, were all nearly the same; it was the lawn on which they were sitting and the presence of the others that were different.

"I didn't say anything," he told Edmund.

"You didn't need to," his brother snapped.

"What?" Eustace asked, two steps behind on a conversation he would never learn the full of, regardless.

"Ancient history," Edmund stated firmly. "Not relevant, at all."

Of course that's precisely what Edmund had always tried to insist, thirteen hundred years ago, or two years ago, or when he'd been twenty-four the first time, or… Edmund was right, Peter saw. It wasn't relevant.

"What Eustace meant, Peter, was that we ran afoul of slavers," Lucy said, bringing the conversation back with a warning look to both of them.

"What?"

"We left Narrowhaven in a rather better situation than it was when we arrived," Lucy said.

"We both had concerns about how Caspian handled the situation," Edmund admitted. "But, he showed his mettle well enough at the end. Lord Bern was an excellent choice to govern and we supported him wholly."

There were so many questions. Had Bern been descended from Ber or Berend Gunarr? Surely the great Banking Houses must have fallen in the intervening millennium too? Or perhaps been party to it? Had what they had done so long ago set the Lone Islands on this dreadful path? He saw no way to raise these things casually with Edmund or Lucy, and certainly not with Eustace there. As Edmund would say, "not relevant."

"Calormenes slaving on Narnia lands is an ugly business, though," Peter said tightly. "And Caspian handling it the way he did is likely to alienate any number of folk, both in Carlormen and on the Islands."

"He had to stop it!" Eustace exclaimed.

Peter put up a hand to quell the response that would come from both Edmund and Lucy. "We don't disagree, Eustace. Our concern is how Caspian chose to accomplish it in commanding such broad edicts. In acting as he did, he may have actually entrenched the practice, rather than eliminating it."

Lucy now put a comforting hand on his shoulder, knowing how difficult this sort of thing was to
say, even to contemplate. It was sickening, to hear of slavery in their country and to know that it was not their responsibility to remedy.

He looked up at his brother. "Ed?"

"I admit it. It was very hard to see. Narrowhaven was nothing like what I... what we had known." Edmund took a long, shuddering drink. "Everything we knew, and all the changes we had made, were gone, and so much worse. It felt very much of wasted effort."

"Caspian will learn these things as we did," Lucy said, reaching over to reassure Edmund with her touch.

"So, a storm, two weeks at sea, no mast, food, or water, and then land?"

Edmund and Lucy had both gone strangely silent; both were staring at Eustace.

"Aslan always says that he will never tell you any story but your own." Peter put a small splash of wine in his cousin's cup. "Will you tell me your story now, Eustace?"

Now it was Peter's turn to take a shaky drink. Eustace had gone quiet again and was rubbing his arm.

"Does it still pain you?" Peter asked quietly.

"Only in my dreams. It's not a pain I want to forget, if that makes any sense?"

"Of course it does."

"Do you have anything like that ... Peter?" his cousin asked, testing the name.

Peter stared at his hands, remembering the calluses and scars and how strange it was when those physical signs disappeared in the Wardrobe on the way back. Phantom pain? There were times when he was certain he felt old Narnian injuries paining him here, even though his skin showed no signs of the scars and trauma. Amputees could supposedly swear to feeling limbs that were gone. That analogy was a morbid one.

"We always remember," Peter decided upon instead. "Narnia is in our bodies and minds, our hearts and souls. You may not see the scars, or think on the skills you learned, but your body and mind will remember them."

"It's why we are drinking wine right now," Edmund added. "Why we can, and still have a taste for it."

Lucy giggled and Edmund shot her an amused look. "Tipsy already, Lu?"

Here or there, Lucy never was able to drink much at all without getting silly, and this was true regardless of her age.

"I liked how I felt," Eustace admitted. "After being the dragon, I mean. I got stronger. I mean, I was never going to have an arm like Caspian or the sailors, or you lot, but I wasn't so soft. I hope I don't go back to the way I was before."

"You won't," Peter assured him, remembering well these same questions they had asked
themselves the first time, and the relief they felt in finding that while some things did have to be grown into, the skills and talents acquired in Narnia had stayed with them. "If things atrophy or you forget, it will be for lack of practice, only."

"We should work on that arm of yours, cousin," Edmund said heartily. "So next time you don't go breaking Caspian's second best sword on a sea serpent."

"And then, I made a mistake," Lucy said quietly, staring into her own cup. "I used a spell from the book. It wasn't a big thing, but it was wrong and it was enough, and I should have been stronger."

Peter looked at Edmund, but it appeared that this was the first his brother had heard of it as well. "Lucy," he started to say, putting an arm about her.

She shrugged him off with a wan smile. "Absolution isn't yours to give, Peter, though I thank you for trying." With a little shake, Lucy continued. "I found the right spell, said it, and it was done. The Duffers were the strangest, funniest things and the magician, Coriakin, was no more wicked than I am."

"They floated," Eustace blurted out. Edmund and Lucy started laughing.

"Who?"

"The Dufflepuds. By the Lion, they were so …"

Mentally, Peter stumbled, hearing Eustace invoke Aslan with such warm and familiar affection. He took a deep, steadying sip of his own, let the laughter wash over him, and concentrated again as Eustace the Un-Dragoned told him of a fallen star.

"And then," Edmund said, turning very grim, "we come to two parts of the journey where, Peter, we'll ask not to repeat over much. By Aslan's grace, we had a narrow shave, found one of the Lords, dead, and it was my turn to be a royal arse."

"Only for a moment," Lucy corrected gently.

"One moment too long, sister."

"And then," Eustace began, but he spoke into heavy, suffocating silence. With a deep breath, his cousin checked himself, which would have been a significant miracle all on its own, even if it had not preceded an even more extraordinary statement. "By Aslan's grace, we had a narrow shave and found one Lord, alive."

Peter wanted to ask of Jadis' knife and how it had come to be there and what Lucy thought of it. But Edmund had gone cold and silent, and so he would wait.

Instead, his sister went all girlish on them. "Unless I am much mistaken, I think Caspian shall find a Star's daughter waiting for him on his return," Lucy said, with a dreamy lilt to her voice.

Eustace made a choking sound. Edmund clouted him on the shoulder. "Make too big a fuss, cousin, and when the time comes, we will be sure to remind you of every protest you make now."
"Such the experts you are," Eustace said sourly, with something of a return to his surly self.

"Don't!" Lucy squeaked with perfect mock horror. "Don't tempt them, Eustace, I beg you. I cannot possibly listen tonight to my brothers on the subject of women!"

"Women?" Eustace scoffed. "Peter and Edmund aren't that much older than I…"

Lucy urgently waved her hands to halt this alarming discussion. "Eustace. Stop. Look at them."

Peter had to admit, Edmund was sporting a bit of a leer. He couldn't quite stop the grinning himself. He and his brother hadn't had a good jaw on the subject of the pleasurable and necessary company of women and men for months. If Lucy and Eustace hadn't been there, he would have counted on Edmund to give him an untarnished and more candid assessment of the Star's daughter.

Eustace looked between the two of them and a wordless "oh" formed, along with a probable blush, although it was difficult to tell by candlelight.

"Cousin," Edmund said, helping himself to the second bottle, "a gentleman does not speak of such things."

Lucy snorted and Peter almost spit out perfectly good wine with that utterly outrageous statement.

_Not gentlemen perhaps; knights, brothers, and kings were another matter entirely._

Edmund ignored them, expounding at his most deliberately pompous. Peter suspected that he was the one actually being parodied. "No denying it though," Edmund declared, "it was good to be a King."

"Where sky and water meet, Where the waves grow sweet, Doubt not, Reepicheep, To find all you seek, There is the utter East." Lucy recited the Dryad's prophecy softly.

Peter sensed his family was nearing the end of their ability to tell the tale. "And so, you came to the End of the World and Reepicheep went on."

Eustace was nodding, briskly wiping tears away.

Lucy was leaning against his shoulder. "We saw Aslan," she murmured through a yawn.

"Lucy and I are not to return," Edmund said flatly into his empty mug.

"Ready for bed, Lucy?" Peter asked her softly.

She sniffed, nodded and yawned again.

Worn with care, joy, and sorrow, his sister was light and no burden at all to bear into the spare bedroom. Peter tucked her in and saw that someone, probably Lucy herself, had set out a blanket and pillow on the floor. It would be a hard bed, but he'd had worse.

On his way out of the darkened room, Peter tripped over a stack of magazines. In the dim light of the hallway, he picked up the volume on top, and reading its title, shook his head with bemusement.

He slipped out into the hallway where Edmund was waiting.

His brother shrugged, not at all apologetic. "If you had been more forthcoming, I wouldn't have been concerned."

"As you would say, Edmund, it wasn't relevant. In the slightest," Peter emphasized.

"And how often do you believe me when I assert the same thing?" Edmund anxiously clasped his arm, concern etched all over his tired countenance. "Speak truly, Peter. I nearly hopped the train a dozen times over worrying for you."

It was so completely and thoroughly and typically Edmund, Peter wanted to shake him. A day here, months in Narnia, now never to return, and Edmund still, somehow, found the capacity to fret over him, over this.

"Edmund, what was our one adage, hard learned, hard earned? What was the one, single, guiding principle to steer us through such things, as applicable there, as here?"

His brother grinned, the relief obvious. "Never…” he began.

Together they finished, "be the ass."

When Peter woke, the floor was predictably hard, the sun was bright, and Lucy still sound asleep. She had pulled a pillow over her eyes and would be sleeping it all off for some time yet. The first night back from Narnia would be like that, sleep to recover, sleep to escape, sleep to dream.

Listening closely, he was relieved to hear the sounds of footsteps, faint voices, and the door shut. Harold and Alberta were leaving for the day, and so he would be able to put off the awkward meeting. He'd forgotten to even ask if Eustace had told his parents that another unwelcome and unwholesome cousin was coming.

The pile of journals he had stumbled over last night was, he now saw, barely the beginning of it. There were neat piles everywhere, undoubtedly organized in some convoluted filing system only Edmund would invent. His brother must have been in quite the state to have accumulated so massive a collection to confirm a problem that wasn't.

Slowly, quietly easing away from Lucy, Peter collected his bag. Intending to creep out of the room, he made a point of looking first for the picture of The Dawn Treader they had said was on the wall. There was only one picture in the room. Spying it, his bag slid from his hand and landed with a thump so loud, Lucy mumbled in her sleep and rolled over. Peter stared at the picture.

"Do you see dreams, Peter?" Asim asked.

It was one of those statements that always reminded him of the Centaur sages and mages. Part philosopher, part scholar, part mystic, part soldier, Asim seemed to encompass all these things, and more besides.

"I have dreams," Peter admitted. "Doesn't everyone?" They were of Narnia, occasionally. Or, just silly dreams, about Brussels sprouts, or rugger, or girls with long hair and longer legs.

"No," Asim corrected. "I speak not of dreams that we have, but of dreams that we see. These are the dreams that God shows to us. Do you have dreams like that?"

"No," Peter said after a time, mulling the distinction. "God does not speak to me that way."

"I saw a dream of a ship, green, with a dragon on her prow, with a purple sail. She sails on a sea
of lilies. Have you ever seen a ship like that?"

The Splendor Hyaline had been nothing like that; nor any other ship he had ever seen, before or since.

"No, Friend, I have not. Someday, though, I should like to."

And here she was, hanging on a wall in Harold and Alberta's spare bedroom, sailing to the end of a flat world as the flagship of the Narnian fleet, and shown by God to an Arab Muslim in a prophetic dream.

Hello? Aslan? I'm listening. Really.

He stared at the painting a long time, waiting for a heavy paw to land on his shoulder or, more likely, thwack him on the side of the head. Eventually, his knees started to ache from kneeling and Peter, feeling a greater fool than ever in his double life, stumbled out of Lucy's room, wishing they had not drunk all the wine last night. At this point, a shot of that vile plum liquor lightening the Dwarfs distilled might be even better.

It was so quiet that when he made his way downstairs, he was surprised to find Eustace in the kitchen. His cousin was standing on a wobbly chair, rooting around in a cupboard, muttering to himself.

"Eustace?" Peter asked.

His cousin jerked his head and banged it on the shelf above. "Oww!"

"Sorry," Peter said, hurrying over. "You alright?"

Eustace pulled his head out of the cupboard. "Hullo, uhhh…"

"Peter," he prompted.

"Right. Sorry. It's just everyone called you High King."

"That can raise eyebrows here, Eustace. I don't recommend it." He gestured to the cupboard. "Are you looking for something?"

"Yes. I know your brother has stashed some tea bags here, not being the sort of thing Harold and Alberta take to. Do you know where he might have hidden them?"

"If they aren't in a locked box…"

Eustace shook his head.

"Then they will be underneath something hidden in plain view that's not used much."

Looking back into the cupboard, Eustace pulled out a tin labeled, Sugar. "The whole country is rationing it, so, of course, Harold and Alberta have pounds of it, unused." He tucked the tin under his arm, screwed off the lid and, "Excellent!"

As he took the tin from his cousin, Peter couldn't help noticing that Eustace was more nimble teetering on a stool than he ever would have expected. The old Eustace would have never made it on to the chair in the first place. Sea legs, he supposed, and the effect of Narnia overall.

Eustace hopped down and kicked the chair back toward the kitchen table. Peter couldn't help
smiling as he dusted off the tea bags Edmund had buried in the sugar.

"What?" Eustace asked, with a hint of his old defensiveness.

"You're a different man, Eustace," Peter said. "You don't even realize it."

Looking down at the floor, Eustace thrust his hands in his pockets, and kicked at imaginary dust. "You think so? Truly?"

"Do you doubt it, cousin?"

He shook his head. "Not really. It's more just that I can't quite believe it. I mean, I still feel like I'm a prat."

"Maybe," Peter agreed. "But the difference is that it's no longer an excuse."

Eustace nodded and turned quickly away. He was trying to hide his emotions again, and Peter would respect it. He put the kettle on and waited for Eustace to begin again.

"Alberta thought I was sick this morning," Eustace said suddenly, as he put the cleaned mugs from last night on the table and sat down. There were neither tea cups nor wine glasses in the Scrubb household. "She gave me cod liver oil." He made a vile face.

"That's going to happen until you get better at hiding the more obvious."

Eustace looked up from his contemplation of the tea bags and wrappers scattered on the table. "Were you always this wise and King Arthur-like and I just was too much a brute to see it?"

"Eustace?" Peter asked, instead of answering the unanswerable. "Just say, 'I'm sorry, Peter,' and we'll be done with this, alright?"

Flushing and stammering, Eustace managed to get it out. "I'm sorry, Peter. You don't know how sorry…"

Peter grasped his hurting cousin's hands from across the little table. "I accept your apology, I am sorry as well, and I am far gladder to see you improved and a Friend of Narnia, than as you were and a stranger to us." The hold became firmer. "I mean that, Eustace."

Eustace's hands shook a little and he pulled back to brush his leaking tears away against his shoulder.

The kettle whistled, tea was poured and Peter enjoyed, guilt free, a far sweeter tea than that to which he had been accustomed.

Eustace was drinking his tea strong and dark, a sailor's brew.

"Friend of Narnia," his cousin suddenly blurted out. "You've called me that twice."

"Yes," Peter responded mildly, waiting for Eustace to elaborate. This discussion could veer in several directions.

"I'm trying to work out what it means to be Narnian here. I heard Edmund and Lucy say that 'Once a King or Queen of Narnia, always a King or Queen.'"

"We heard that from both Aslan and from Professor Kirke."
"Lucy and Edmund mentioned him. Professor Kirke, I mean. You were with him this summer, right?"

"Yes. When he was a boy, he went into Narnia with a girl, Polly Plummer. They were there for several days at Narnia's Creation."

"Thing is, I'm not a King." Even when speaking so bluntly, Eustace's bad-mannered habits of yesterday were softened, even as his body and stamina had toughened.

"Professor Kirke was not a King and Miss Plummer was not a Queen, but they are both Friends of Narnia still."

"So how do you stay a Friend of Narnia? I should probably ask Professor Kirke this, but you're here, so I'm asking you. I wasn't a Narnian King, and there's something about it that doesn't sit with me well. Royalty isn't terribly democratic, is it?"

The statements, all run together, were classically Eustace – tactless – yet, Peter respected the very genuine sentiment behind them. In fairness, Peter was also making more of an effort to be patient. While his cousin had apologized first, he had been owed one as well.

"You are really asking about several things, Eustace. Most important, you are a Friend of Narnia and, even more, been Un-dragoned, by Aslan's grace. This means there are high expectations for how you conduct yourself and treat others, and that applies regardless of titles and so on."

Eustace stared into his steaming mug. "I figured that, and I have been trying. Like I said last night, I don't want to go back to the way I was before, and it's more than just feeling a bit stronger. Even," his voice dropped to an embarrassed whisper, "braver."

He said it so furtively Peter wondered if Eustace thought he might be mocked for expressing a noble impulse. "I assure you, Eustace, that sort of thing tends to happen when you have been in the company of the Lion."

Eustace nodded, round face scrunched up in thought. "I've been wondering what happens now? What am I supposed to do?"

"We four are all working that out," Peter said, for such heartfelt honesty deserved the same unvarnished truth. "You are asking the right questions. Narnians strive to do Aslan's will, and that guides us here as much as it does there."

"So Aslan is here?" Eustace asked. "Never mind," he said abruptly. "Of course he is. Harold and Alberta have a picture of The Dawn Treader on a wall in their house."

And in an Arab's dream. Peter took a sip of his own hot tea, struck by Eustace's comment and the ease with which he had arrived at so profound a conclusion.

"What?" Eustace asked, his pugnacity pushing through for a moment. "You look funny. What did I say?"

"I was thinking about what you were saying, and how perceptive it is."

If Peter had said a Talking Mouse was hiding in the cupboard, Eustace could not have looked more shocked.

"Really?" Eustace choked out.
Peter nodded. "Really," he affirmed. "I've come to see this summer that some of the best things of Narnia are here as well, if I make the effort to see them. It is harder to find them because the War really colors everything."

Eustace was looking thoughtful again; Peter steeled himself for another startling revelation.

"It was so beautiful there," Eustace said wistfully, "and it is all so ugly here. But, from what the others said, it was plenty ugly in Narnia at times, what with the Witch and Caspian's uncle, and his ilk. So I know it's not a fair comparison at all."

Peter cupped his chin in his hand, staring at his cousin, all amazement.

This time Eustace did not take a defensive turn. He did stammer, a little shyly, "at least, that's how I'm trying to see it."

Peter was almost embarrassed the thought had not occurred to him before. "You are right; it is not a fair comparison, and having been back there twice at the end of two tyrants' reigns, I really should have understood that." Poor England. How could she possibly compare to Narnia in the circumstances under which they had best known Her?

"For me," Peter confided to his cousin, "it has helped being with Professor Kirke and Aunt Polly this summer, as well as some of their friends. They all are able to look beyond the War and see this Creation as a very good one. Their enthusiasm and affection are infectious."

"I heard Edmund and Lucy talking about that some." Eustace dropped his eyes. "I suppose I listened in on them."

"You've apologized to me, Eustace. I assume you have done so to them as well. Try to improve going forward and not do it again."

His cousin nodded slowly and took a deep breath. "At any rate, you got to know Dr. Richard Russell, didn't you? And Mrs. Mary Anning Russell?" His expression became openly admiring. "They're famous. I've even heard Harold and Alberta talk about them and the Russells publish lots of articles."

"I did come to know them very well," Peter said, feeling a sudden pang of guilt. Richard had wanted him to come by today to talk about owls. "I spent a lot of time with Richard, in particular. I think, after seeing some specimens at the Oxford Museum, I have a better appreciation for your bug collection."

Eustace's hands jerked in surprise, splashing his tea. "It's not very impressive, or anything." He had to shake his wrist to flick the tea off. "I just have your common English bugs and beetles, plus a few some of Harold and Alberta's friends have collected for me."

"Do you think you might show them to me?"

They were in the drawing room looking at the beetles in Eustace's curio cabinet when they heard Edmund stumble into the kitchen.

"Oi! Peter!" his brother bellowed. "You told Eustace where to find my tea, didn't you?"

"We aren't speaking to you, Edmund, until you fix yourself a cup," Peter hollered back.

"Bloody High King you are, commandeering my tea!"
Eustace looked at him in mute horror, evidently not realizing the brotherly prerogatives at work.

They heard grumbling and eventually the sound of the kettle.

Eustace was extolling upon minute differences in carapaces and thoraxes as evidence of environmental adaptations when Edmund finally wandered in, still in pajamas, and looking every moment the grumpy English schoolboy in his brother's hand me downs and not at all like a Narnian King.

"First morning back, always the worse," Edmund muttered, staring at the neatly pinned and labeled bugs Eustace had ordered on cards on the floor.

Brimming with enthusiasm, Eustace looked up at his cousin not yet into the first cuppa. "You never told me that Narnian Crows would wager on beetle races!" He brandished a card in Edmund's direction. "Peter thought Narnian beetles looked like this one! Do you think so?"

Peter inwardly winced, regretting that he had not warned Eustace to tread more carefully. He waited several beats before looking up at his brother. A thousand different expressions were crossing Edmund's face, each more unreadable than the last, before he finally settled on mild interest. His brother was determined to show he was as emotionally detached as he purported to, and might in actuality, be.

"A bit," Edmund said with a shrug. "The Crows could see differences in them that we couldn't. I always thought they looked like black bugs."

Edmund took a sip, grimacing with the heat of tea and veered away to ask the obvious. "Lu not up yet?"

"No," Peter said, humoring the mood. "I'll take something up to her; we can't let her sleep all day."

Deciding it would be best to not subject Edmund to Eustace's enthusiasm for beetles, Peter started returning the cards to the cabinet. "Can we go over this more later?" he asked his cousin. "Maybe after we dredge up some breakfast?"

Eustace was looking at Edmund with a slight, sad frown. Peter nudged him, and with a shake Eustace complied, and followed back into the kitchen.

He started tea for Lucy while Eustace pretended to stare in the cupboards again. Peter had to stifle his own sigh as he heard a slight sniffle, and then a tentative, "Peter?"

"Yes?"

"Is Edmund angry with me?" Eustace asked in an overly loud, raspy whisper. "Did I say something wrong? Or is it just that he's upset because he can't go back and I might be able to, if I please Aslan? Because I am sorry about that, even if it's not my fault."

Peter held up a hand, and keeping a wary eye at the adjoining door, knew that if Edmund wished to, he would overhear every word. Eustace stepped closer, accepting Peter's offered comfort of an arm across his back. "He may be angry," Peter whispered, "although he also knows he should not be. Whatever Edmund and Lucy are and will be feeling doesn't have anything to do with you, even if it seems that it does, and you'll just have to remember that."

Eustace frowned, with something close to, but not quite, surly. This whole business of thinking about others was a very new experience for him. "I guess I don't understand."
"You don't need to understand what may be saddening them, Eustace. Just try to be understanding."
He put the hint of an order in this. The Eustace of yesterday would have taken this as a personal invitation for obstinacy, teasing, and needling; the Eustace of today chewed his lip as he turned the issue over in his mind and then nodded thoughtfully.

"I'll try."

"Thank you," Peter told him with real feeling, truly meaning it. His cousin, brother and sister were going to be blundering about raw and sensitive for a time, and it was really impossible to know what might set a person off. Not getting upset over every unpredictable outburst would help immeasurably in getting them all through the next few days.

The kettle was singing and demanded his attention. "I need to see Lucy now. I suggest not seeking Edmund out; he will come around quicker if you give him the chance to speak to you first."

Leaving Eustace slicing tomatoes and bread, Peter headed upstairs with a brimming cup for Lucy. From the landing, he saw Edmund staring moodily at the beetles in the curio cabinet; Peter said nothing.

Lucy's door was ajar. His sister was still in her nightclothes, sitting cross-legged on her bed, eyes closed. She was praying and although she undoubtedly had heard him, she would not stop until she was ready to do so.

He loitered at her door, feeling the cup cool, and stared at The Dawn Treader. Since Aslan was certainly with Lucy, Peter had a concededly dim hope that perhaps the Lion might speak to him as well, being as he was already, so to speak, in the neighborhood. Peter tried clearing and focusing his mind, but he sensed nothing other than annoyance that he had been too thick-headed thus far. This was undoubtedly his own interpretation of the situation, and not especially helpful.

Without opening her eyes, Lucy said, "Thank you, Peter." She held out her hands, and Peter placed the tea in them. She inhaled the aroma deeply. "Aslan says hello, and thanks you for coming to see us, and for being so supportive of Eustace."

"Does he have anything else to say to me?" Peter asked, with another glance at the painting on the wall.

"Silly goose!" Lucy scolded. "You know he won't tell me your story."

_But it would save ever so much time._

"Sit," his sister instructed. "I shall be done in a moment."

Peter did as he was commanded to do, and waited, hearing, but not listening, to Lucy's murmured conversation. She then fell silent altogether.

He was studying the picture again when his sister's voice broke in, "Edmund and I knew this was coming, so we were more fortunate than you and Susan." She had opened her eyes and now sipped her tea. "If we went back, we thought it was probably going to be for the last time."

Peter settled himself more comfortably on the bed. "Susan and I had wondered if you both had come to that; we thought it likely as well."

Lucy cradled the cup in her hands. "I remember you saying it was not as you expected. I can accept that I won't see Narnia again." She sighed and rubbed her eyes. "It's Aslan I shall miss ever so much."
"As Eustace pointed out to me," Peter said, indicating the picture on the wall, "Aslan certainly is here. He finds ways to bridge his two worlds, and reach into this one, even if we cannot."

She smiled, perceiving where the most notable in his statement lay. "It really is remarkable, isn't it?"

"Eustace's change is nothing short of miraculous. I am very grateful to Aslan."

Returning to his sister's point, he offered, "I know you'll miss him, Lucy, but you have always had the strongest connection to Aslan. You certainly hear him more clearly here than the rest of us."

Snorting, Lucy repeated her old instruction. "That's because I know how to listen for him, Peter." Her smile made it a gentle admonishment. "I know he is with me. I know I'll see him again. It's…"

She trailed off, her voice hitching.

Peter gently pried the cup from her hands and set it on her nightstand. "What is it, Lucy?"

"I hear him, very well, as you say. But, I am going to miss seeing him, and being able to throw my arms around him." She hiccupped and the tears started again. Peter pulled his sister into his arms, wishing he could make that ache go away, and that he couldn't. They had all felt it. There was no wisdom he could impart that Lucy had not already divined, and long before he had.

"He is here, but not as the Great Lion; that's gone. For now. I feel him in my heart, but I can't touch him. Here, Aslan doesn't have soft, golden, fur and that beautiful fragrance. I can't see the grass turn greener as he walks with me or hear him when he teases Trumpkin or Cook."

He held her and let her weep out her grief.

"More than any of us, Lu, he knew you had the faith and strength to continue to know him here, even without that touch. You don't need it, even if you want it." Peter murmured the platitude, but really it was just patently absurd for him to say anything to Lucy on the subject of Aslan.

She sniffed. "I know it's a sort of childish dependence. I shouldn't need him that way and I know he wants me to be able to do his will without it." She uttered a little humph of indignation, and shot a dirty look at the picture. "But, you also know I don't like it at all when someone tries to tell me I can't do something."

Peter was not sure if she was speaking to him, or to Aslan – probably both.

"We're all like that Lucy. We all assume we can do anything." Except Latin and Greek, Peter thought with a silent, muted scowl of his own. "Aslan loves you so much, he accepts you are going to be angry with him for taking this away. He will understand, at least for a little while."

She smiled at him through her tears, and again, Peter felt the fool for trying to offer anything to his youngest sister on this. "He told us that the way to him and his country, for us, is through this world, not Narnia. He said he was trying to tell us how to get there all the time."

So, the same message. He supposed there was no reason to assume it would be different. "Yes," Peter affirmed, "Aslan said the same thing to me and to Susan."

Calmer, Lucy extricated herself and reached again for her mug. He sensed the conversation wasn't over, that there was still more she wished to say. Peter waited.

Lucy sipped her tea, eyes wandering over the room, but not lingering overly long at the picture.
"Having gone to the effort to take us to Narnia, teach us there, and then bring us back, he expects
us to continue do his will here." She spoke so flatly, it was not a question, or even a statement
inviting comment. "That's what's confusing me now."

This did surprise him. Given how closely Lucy was attuned to Aslan, Peter had not thought that his
youngest sister would have any difficulty divining what the Lion intended for her.

"Confusing … how, Lu?"

"I'm not quite ready to talk about it, Peter. It's something that started when I was writing to you this
summer."

Peter did not really know what to say. He hadn't picked up on anything especially unusual in Lucy's
letters. They were and had been cheerful, thoughtful, and funny.

"I'm listening, if you want to try to put your confusion into words."

She squeezed his hand, and with a deep breath, carefully picked through her words. "I'm finding I
don't have a lot of patience for those who claim to know Aslan and purport to do his will here. I've
become suspicious of such people, since I do know Aslan and am mindful of his will."

Lucy paused for a contemplative sip of her tea then continued, "I wanted to speak to Aslan about it
and didn't get the opportunity."

"And this is confusing because…" Peter prompted, leading her on.

"I'm confused because I'm not sure yet if what I'm thinking and feeling is bringing me closer to
Aslan, or further away."

Peter nearly snorted his incredulity. "I find it difficult to believe that anything you think or feel is
taking you further from Aslan, Lucy."

She nodded her agreement, for Lucy's confidence in the Lion and her faith in him was that great.
"As do I. Maybe to put it better, I don't know yet if this is what Aslan wants, but I mean to find out.
If it is, then I must act on it."

Lucy had this way of speaking with such insight, it robbed him of anything but stammering
admiration. She had indeed hinted at a lessening tolerance for hypocrisy in her letters; Peter
however, had not followed her musings to this logical conclusion.

"You were always the Valiant one, Lucy, there or here," he told her.

"Yes," she agreed, stating it without any false modesty, "I am. I'm not the least bit afraid or shy
about standing against those things and people that I believe are against Aslan, or worse still, when
they claim to act in his name, and I know they are not. I healed the wrongs they did with my
cordial, and fought them with my bow and dagger. This is what I did in Narnia, and I think this is
what Aslan expects of me here."

Unleashing the indomitable Queen Lucy the Valiant upon an unsuspecting England was a
fearsome, wondrous thing to consider. Peter stroked the golden head resting on his shoulder, and
knew that only Aslan could have given him the words that followed. "So, my Valiant sister, if the
Lion so commands, what you must do is find the equivalent of your cordial, knife and bow here."

Lucy threw her arms around him, fortunately setting down her hot tea first. "Yes," she whispered.
"Thank you. That's it exactly."
Leaving Lucy to get dressed and collect herself, Peter went back downstairs, hoping, selfishly, that there might be a few moments of relative normalcy.

Fortunately, whatever mood had gripped Edmund had been overcome. Eustace and Edmund were cheerfully munching on toast and tomatoes. They had broken into the rationed butter that, like the sugar, Harold and Alberta had obtained, but disdained.

"Lucy's up," Peter told them, as he pulled a chair to the table.

"We were wondering what we should do today," Edmund said, smearing a slab of butter on his toast that was thicker than the bread.

"Eustace, do Harold and Alberta know that I'm even here?"

His cousin shrugged. "I told them this morning, but I'm not sure they paid much attention. I'm not expecting them back until late tonight, regardless."

"Why is that?" Peter asked conversationally, helping himself to a plate.

"Because that's what they do," Edmund answered quickly.

Belatedly, Peter realized he had not been especially sensitive to the situation. From Edmund's letters, he had come to understand that Alberta and Harold did not concern themselves with their son's life and affairs in the slightest, except to the extent it inconvenienced them.

"So, we're on our own then," Peter said with firm enthusiasm. "Excellent! What did you both have in mind?"

"I'd thought we might visit some of the local churches," Edmund said, chewing on a crust. "There are a number of historical ones around here. I thought Lucy might like that, since we're all missing Aslan."

Strangely, Eustace shook his head. "I don't see that at all." With a sheepish look, he amended more tactfully, "Sorry, Edmund, I didn't mean to be so contrary."

"Why don't you say what you did mean," Peter prompted, before an argument started.

"It's just that I've never been to a church and if you all say Aslan is there, I believe you. But, I never would expect to only find him in a church. He's so big, for one. Remember what Caspian said about how Aslan spoke to him from the picture because he couldn't fit in the ship's cabin?"

Peter looked at Edmund. Edmund returned the look, with a Yes, he does this quite a lot and it does take some getting used to.

"So what do you propose?" Edmund did not like to be argued with, but he was trying as Eustace was to be agreeable.

"I just figured that we'd find Aslan here in the sorts of places we all have found him in Narnia, like a meadow or a pond or a wood, so maybe we should go there today."

"That's a smashing idea, Eustace!" Lucy cried, waltzing into the kitchen. "And I'm all dressed for it!"

Edmund gave her an askance look. "If you tear my trousers on a fencepost, you get to mend them."
"That's my shirt you're wearing, Lucy!" Eustace cried.

"Friend of Narnia you are, cousin," Peter said, through with a laugh. "But you are not officially a member of our family until Lucy steals your clothes."

To follow, Queen Susan In Tashbaan, Chapter 2

The Fen

In which there is more crying and Peter and Edmund have several overdue conversations.
Edmund had located where Harold and Alberta had squirreled away the ration books they did not redeem for all that unhealthful food. So armed, they were able to scrounge together an abundant picnic lunch from the cupboard, the garden, and the local grocer; for dinner, they successfully bargained for every sausage the butcher had.

They boarded a rattling bus that would take them in the direction of Fulbourn Fen. Finding it had been so very useful, Peter didn't wish to part just yet with the pack that Asim and Mary had given him. On the bus, Lucy and Eustace sat together, read from Alice, and laughed uproariously over the prospect of talking animals.

Edmund's French was not much better than his own so they, regrettably, weren't able to make much headway through the de Maupassant.

"Too bad Susan isn't here," Peter said. "She's always had an ear for languages, and probably knows enough French to help us with the translation."

Edmund looked up from the book, cast him an odd sideways glance, and passed a subtle hand signal. Later.

He frowned at his brother. Surely he had misunderstood.

Edmund repeated the signal, more emphatically. Thoroughly mystified, Peter nevertheless nodded his agreement to let it go, for the moment. Susan's adventures had not been something of which they had spoken or written at all. So, was the fact that she had some ability in French relevant to her trip to Washington? Or was it something else? It was part of several conversations he and Edmund were overdue to have.

His brother was carefully perusing what Peter thought was a clever, though lewd, parody in the de Maupassant book. Looking at it over Edmund's shoulder, he said, "If I am reading this correctly, regardless, we would not wish to discuss this with our sister under any circumstances ever."

"Very true," Edmund agreed, with a grimace Peter interpreted as distaste or even disgust. With an angry shake of his head, Edmund snapped the book shut.

"Something wrong?" Peter asked, confused again. Edmund had spent the whole of the summer trawling libraries for censored and indecent books with permission slips Harold and Alberta had provided for him to present to skeptical librarians. Given that Edmund had been reading Chaucer, Joyce and Lawrence, Peter did not understand why a suggestive French satire would elicit such a reaction now.

"No, not really," Edmund said enigmatically. "It will just have to wait with the rest of it."

"At this rate, it's difficult to find something we can discuss," Peter replied, his frustration beginning...
Edmund had the courtesy to look apologetic. "Sorry, Peter. I'm just jumping at shadows even more than usual."

This too was accompanied by the same signal. Which meant what, exactly?

"Is there anything else in that pack your new supply officer gave you that's interesting?"

"Only if you read Arabic." Peter started searching through the pack for the map. He could go over with Edmund some of the North African terrain he and Asim had thoroughly explored.

"You never did tell me that story," Edmund said. "So were Mary and the Driver the ones who outfitted you for your arduous trek to Cambridge?"

"Oh yes," Peter said. "They keep day packs in the boot of the car because one never knows when one's train might be diverted from Oxford to the Okavango Delta."

Pulling out the map, Peter noticed a peculiar expression on his brother's face. "What is it?"

"It's their discussion," he responded, nodding toward Eustace and Lucy. "I'd never really attended to the fact that a Lion and a Unicorn were in Alice as well on the Royal Coat of Arms."

"I suppose they are," Peter said slowly, not yet following Edmund's reasoning. "I remember Mary saying something about how in Alice they might be symbolic of Disraeli and Gladstone, although she didn't think much of the argument."

"Sorry," Edmund said with a shake of his head, "that's not what I'm meant, and I'm just being obscure here. I was remembering that Susan and I discussed those symbols on the Coat of Arms before she left. Hearing Eustace and Lu talk about Lions and Unicorns just brought it all back to me." It was followed by a frown and another Later hand signal.

Peter wouldn't let it rest quite yet and wanted to see if there was some way of pursuing this further that did not make Edmund so jittery and that would not require waiting until Later. "So you are finding that things from 'N' are also showing up here, but in different ways?"

"Three or four different contexts, depending on how I count them," Edmund responded, following Peter's oblique message with a knowing smile.

"Now you may appreciate what my entire summer has been like!"

Edmund cuffed him, none to gently, on the side of the head.

"You doubt me," Peter said loftily, "even after everything I've written?"

"Enlighten me," Edmund taunted.

"Well, understand that the reason why Mary and the Driver insisted upon outfitting me as they did is because, in Mary's words, and this is a quote mind you, 'it is never just a train ride.' Rather, as Mary said, it is the start of an adventure where you could, at a moment's notice, drop down The Rabbit Hole and not have matches in a waterproof container."

"Because it is never just a train ride," Edmund repeated eyes widening with the implications, "and you could, speaking of Alice," he nodded toward Lucy and Eustace, "drop down The Rabbit Hole..."
"Without matches to start a fire," Peter finished, grinning with the memory of the whole lunacy of Mary's instruction juxtaposed against that first cold night in the ruins of Cair Paravel. "As another example, I'll give you one opportunity to guess what Mary's favorite adjective is."

His brother's face lit up. "No! Really? Not valiant or gentle by any chance?"

"Nor just, unfortunately. Now, imagine if you will, that adjective in connection with giant drooling lizards, crocodiles so huge they ate dinosaurs for breakfast, and my personal favorite, owl vomit."

As reformed as he was, Eustace turned out to be no help at all on this expedition. He had lived all his life within ten miles of these ancient places and had never rambled in them. Edmund examined the driver about when to expect the return bus, Lucy queried a delivery man about the best route, and Peter was able to chart their course with the compass and a dated map of Cambridgeshire he had picked up in the village.

With good humor and a willing back, Peter shouldered the bulging pack, and they set off to Fulbourn Fen, Eustace and Lucy running ahead.

He walked with his brother through a stand of oak trees ringing the meadow and Fen. "It's strange," Peter found himself musing aloud. "Maybe I've been away too long; perhaps I've truly accepted it, but I don't really expect the trees to bow to us anymore, or that I'll be called upon to settle that swallow's dispute with her mate."

"You don't see Narnia here?" Edmund asked.

"Quite the opposite. I see Narnia more than ever, actually. But, I shouldn't blame these fine oaks or those squirrels for not having the gift of speech and the intelligence of Narnians. They are what they are, and are marvelous in their own right."

"You know you just espoused a version of the Professor's theorem?" Edmund asked.

"Did I?" The failure to see it momentarily resurrected Peter's own frustration at his seeming inability to grasp what the Professor had asked of him.

"You did." Edmund kicked a stone and it skittered away into a patch of ferns. There was a protesting flutter from a turtledove who launched from the ground to a tree. "So, if the Good Beasts and Trees of the English countryside are not your people, High King, who are?"

"I'm not High King," Peter chided. "Not here. You know that."

Edmund made a disapproving sound, but held off on his elaboration as they heard voices ahead. Turning the bend, they saw Eustace standing awkwardly next to a spindly, grey haired woman who reminded Peter of Aunt Polly a bit, but older, and with a terrier instead of a spaniel. She was squinting through a pair of field glasses up through the limbs of a mature oak tree. Lucy was nowhere to be seen, which could mean only one thing.

"Lucy's in a tree again," Edmund said with a snort.

"Is everything well?" Peter asked, approaching the group.

"Hello," said the woman absently. "Your sister has offered to climb this tree to fetch down my grandson."

Lucy waved down at them. She was already several feet up.
"Is he stuck?" Edmund asked, now peering up as well.

"Of course not!" Lucy called from her perch. "William simply isn't certain of the best way down as there are too many choices, isn't that right?"

They all heard a quavering, "if you say so, Lucy" from higher up.

Shading his eyes, Peter could make out a dangling leg, scuffed shoe and through the leafy limbs, the shape of young boy, about eight, he thought, desperately clinging to a branch.

"Well, our sister will get William down in no time," Peter said with the outmost confidence to the worried grandmother.

"Will she?" the woman whispered, anxiety in every nuance.

"Absolutely," Edmund said stoutly. "Lucy does this all the time."

_and has been climbing in ship rigging for the past few months, regardless._

Lucy had drawn up to within an arm's length of the boy. Cheerily, she said, "Hello, William. It's a lovely day, isn't it? I'd offer to shake your hand, but that's probably not a good idea."

William's grandmother squeaked in alarm.

"Truly, Mrs. …"

"Crufts," the woman supplied.

"Mrs. Crufts, you have nothing to fear," Peter assured her. "Lucy is quite the expert at coaxing children out of trees." Peter called up, "Lucy, do you and William need a snack before climbing down? We could toss something up."

To Mrs. Crufts, he whispered, "We sometimes find that distraction helps ease the fear."

"No thank you, Peter," Lucy said. "I stole some nuts from your pack this morning and have them in my pocket."

Next to him, Mrs. Crufts choked back a dry laugh.

"Lucy!" Peter said with mock severity. "You know we save those rations for emergencies! And joining William in a tree to admire the view and look for bird nests is not an emergency!"

He added that for Mrs. Crufts' benefit.

"Better share them with William before the squirrels find you!" Edmund yelled.

Mrs. Crufts' worried frown eased into a happier expression as Lucy began coaching William down.

"Now, William, just move that right foot, oops, no, I mean the other right foot! That's right, put that foot down just a little bit more and you'll find a nice thick branch…"

There was some movement and another foot slowly joined its mate on a sturdy limb. A grubby boy, dirty face streaked with tears, clambered fully into view.

Edmund was waving to him. "Hullo, William, I'm Edmund. Have you seen my sister? She looks rather like a squirrel, and but talks even more than they do."
"I heard that!" A large nut fell from the branches above and landed squarely on Edmund's head.

William giggled.

"So, William, do you think I look more like a grey squirrel or a red squirrel?" Lucy asked, hanging from her branch.

The boy stared at her. "I think you look more like a monkey!"

"Monkey! Monkeys don't eat nuts! Or, maybe they do. Brothers, what do you think?"

"Of course monkeys eat nuts!" Edmund announced authoritatively. "And when they get angry, they throw disgusting things at you."

Edmund had had some experience with spoiled pet monkeys in Tashbaan, Peter recalled. He tossed a glance at Eustace, who had been very quiet through all of this. His cousin looked a bit uncomfortable, but that might be because Mrs. Crufts' fearsome terrier was curling its tiny lip at him and grumbling in his little barrel chest.

Swinging easily from her limb, Lucy rummaged in the roomy pockets of Edmund's trousers for a nut, dropping a few on the ground. Eustace stooped to pick them up and tried offering one to the terrier, who returned the courtesy by growling.

Lucy handed William a nut and after a moment's hesitation, the boy cautiously reached with one hand to take it.

"Lucy, this is a walnut! How can I eat it without a hammer?"

"Edmund cracks them with his head."

"I do not!" Edmund protested, grinning.

Mrs. Crufts was watching the exchange intently, still nervous, but it was also obvious that William was much more at ease on his slightly lower branch.

To Peter, she whispered, "I am very grateful to you all. I can see this is helping William."

"No trouble at all, Mrs. Crufts."

With a meaningful glance at Eustace, his cousin understood Peter's implicit instruction and managed to stammer, "We're glad we stopped."

The terrier's growl indicated otherwise.

"On top of everything else, it would simply be awful if anything happened to him."

Uncertain as to whether Mrs. Crufts was making an inadvertent slip due to her anxiety or expressing a need to share a burden, Peter murmured back, "If you have had some ill news, I am sorry."

"No, but it was a near thing." Her accompanying sigh was heavy with frank relief and fatigue. "My son's unit was at Dieppe."

So, the later, and what a terrible burden it was. Over half of the 6,000 Canadian and British men who had participated in the Raid were dead, captured or missing. It had lasted only a few hours before the Allied forces had retreated in disarray. It was Dunkirk all over again.
"But your son is well?" Peter asked quietly.

Mrs. Crufts wrapped her thin arms about her in a lonely embrace. "Yes. We got word only last night he is in a hospital in Sussex and recovering comfortably."

"Thank God." Peter had to check himself from invoking the Lion specifically.

"You must be very relieved," Edmund said, eyes still on Lucy and William in the branches above. Eustace muttered something sincere, but unintelligible.

"Yes," Mrs. Crufts said, "I am. William's mother, my daughter-in-law, caught a train this morning to get down there to try to see him."

"This is a lot of fear and disruption for a boy of William's age to cope with," Peter said. He was reminded poignantly of similar conversations he had had with the bereaved in Narnia after an especially brutal northern campaign. He specifically remembered Lucy coaxing a young Satyr out of a tree whose father, Sir Leszi, had passed on to Aslan's Country. "Trying to escape into a tree is just the sort of thing for a child to do."

"You lot aren't that much older," Mrs. Crufts said, smiling. "And here you are advising me?"

Peter smiled in return. Shells were dribbling down as Lucy shared her pocketed nuts with William. "I suppose the War has aged us all, Mrs. Crufts," Peter said easily. "And we all certainly understand the fear of losing a parent."

"Have you?" she asked, now with the great empathy and frankness of one who has suffered loss herself.

"No," Peter said fervently, "for which we all thank God daily."

"Where is your father serving?"

"He is on temporary assignment to the Embassy in Washington," Edmund put in, obviously following the conversation, and smoothly inserting a lie. Why the lie was something else Peter would have to follow up on whenever the two of them got around to Later.

"I say, William, does that look like a swallow's nest to you?" Lucy was pointing at a lower branch.

"I don't know," the boy answered. "Let me take a look." William easily stepped down to another branch and leaned over.

Peter heard Mrs. Crufts suck in a nervous breath.

"No, Lucy, it's just a clump of leaves."

"Look at that!" Edmund exclaimed. "You are almost down, William. That's really excellent work! Just put your left foot right here." He patted a branch, and William found it with a searching foot.

"Ready to jump?" Edmund asked.

William looked anxiously at his grandmother. Peter stepped forward. "I'll catch you."

"If Peter misses, you can land on me and squash me into the ground," Edmund said cheerfully.

Peter held his arms up, and for a single, disorienting moment, it was Narnia again. The young
Satyr, Cyrus, stuck in an oak tree that was not a dryad, grieving for his dead father, Lucy chattering encouragement in the branches, and Peter himself standing below, waiting for the child to gather the courage to take the blind, terrifying leap of faith. Cyrus knew and loved his King; William had no reason to trust Peter anymore than any other stranger he met on a path.

"Close your eyes," Peter whispered to the boy. "I won't tell. And I won't let you fall."

"Promise?" William whispered back.

"Promise."

William looked about nervously. His eyes were very big and brown and again Peter was reminded of little Cyrus, dead for over a thousand years, now joined with his father in Aslan's Country.

"And you won't let me fall?"

"No," Peter assured him. "I've done this lots of times before for boys bigger than you are." *And a lot hairier. With horns.* Though the species was different, the fear was very much the same.

"How much bigger?" William asked suspiciously.

"Lots bigger," Peter assured him. "On three then?"

"Don't talk to me like I'm little," William scolded.

Peter shook his head solemnly. "I won't." He wouldn't mention the paradox that William was working himself into.

"But count from three," the boy instructed.

"One." On "two," William shut his eyes. On "three," William jumped, and Peter caught him easily under the arms – it was a very short jump and William was not nearly as heavy as the Satyr. Peter swung him round and deposited the boy next to his grandmother.

"Excellent job, William!" Lucy called down from her tree limb as Edmund thumped the boy on the back.

"My turn!" Lucy was higher up, and might very well weigh more, but Peter saw that this was to help William maintain his dignity.

"How about Edmund instead?" Peter asked.

"Absolutely not!" and "No!" came from sister and brother both.

"Oh very well. I shall be your target, sister. Again." Peter positioned himself under the tree limb and Lucy jumped.

For all that, with Edmund's steadying hand at his back, Peter caught Lucy easily and she landed lightly on the ground.

With a push and nudge from his grandmother, William shook everyone's hand very solemnly.

"Thank you again," Mrs. Crufts said. "It was very kind of you."

"We were glad to be of help to you both," Peter told her. Lucy and Edmund were now fussing over the terrier, who was on his back offering his round belly for a thorough rubdown. His dislike had
apparently been specific to Eustace. They would need to work on that.

"William!"

"Yes, Lucy?" the boy asked, taking his grandmother's hand.

"Always remember that if you were able to climb up, you can always climb down."

She gave him a warm squeeze and a wink. William blushed to his roots and the Queen Lucy had conquered another heart.

As soon as the Crufts were out of earshot, Edmund grumbled, "If you tore my trousers, Lu, I'm going to be very annoyed."

Their sister twirled about. "I don't see any tears!" She grabbed Eustace's hand. "You did very well, Eustace! I know talking to strangers can be hard, but they were very nice."

"Except the dog," Eustace grumbled.

Lucy started pulling Eustace off through a path in the trees to the meadow and Fen beyond. "Let's go look for Aslan!"

As his sister whisked Eustace away, Peter did wonder if Lucy was deliberately leaving him and Edmund behind. She must have realized that the two of them had not yet had the opportunity to talk of Narnia alone. There had been that brief, unguarded and sad moment where his brother had insisted it wasn't what Peter thought, that it was different. Otherwise, they had not really spoken to each other. Edmund, as was his wont, had waited. And now, apparently, would not begin until Peter pushed him. The things he needed to tell his brother could wait for Later.

Rather than following Lucy and Eustace into the Fen, Peter stopped, planting himself against a tree. "Edmund?"

His brother was watching Eustace and Lucy tear across the meadow chasing butterflies. He turned slowly back around. "Insofar as what we did not discuss on the bus, Later has not arrived yet. For that, we need to wait until we are back at the house."

"Those will wait," Peter agreed. "But, what about you? How are you, really? You can't tell me it was easy to experience some of what you did, especially in the Lone Islands, and..." He knew if he raised the huge, unspoken thing, Edmund would snap at him and close up again. Not that the alternatives areas of discussion were much easier. Everything to do with Narrowhaven was fraught, and particularly for Edmund. "... and especially to see Caspian making mistakes that we worked so hard to avoid. You spent years trying to improve the situation there."

Unguarded, with no one but the two of them, Peter now saw Edmund drop his impassive mask. He had not seen so haunted a look in his brother's face in years, however, time was measured.

"Yes, those things did bother me, at first. But, as the journey went on, maybe Caspian improved, maybe my understanding of him changed, I'm not sure. Maybe it was that I knew what was coming and that it wouldn't be my problem to try to solve. Again," Edmund added wearily and for good measure. "It was Caspian's time, not ours, that was Aslan's will, and I could see the wisdom of it."

Peter pressed on. "What you said last night, then. That it wasn't what I thought. That it was different. What did you mean?"

Edmund took a deep, mustering, and hesitating, breath. Peter waited remembering how Edmund
had told him that those who fear silence will try to fill it when they should wait instead.

Finally, his brother began to speak. "At the World's End, we were just on the other side of Aslan's own Country. Do you understand what that means, Peter? What that really means?"

Peter felt himself go very still. When had they last discussed this? Before his single combat with Miraz, he supposed. A bit when they learned that Father was coming home. He’d thought of it again, only just now, with Mrs. Crufts, her recovering son, and the thousands dead at Dieppe, and in recalling Cyrus and Sir Leszi.

"Aslan's Country is where we go when we die."

"Yes." Again, Edmund paused, his eyes following warblers hopping about in the trees. In another tree they could hear, but not see, the staccato rat-tat of a woodpecker, and rustling in the undergrowth that might be a vole. But these birds and rodents were not spies. They could not repeat what they overheard.

Edmund continued. "We were steps away from Aslan's Country, Peter. Reepicheep took this little boat, paddled up a wall of lilies and water, sat atop the wave for a moment, and then disappeared, right then, over the other side, right into Aslan's land." Edmund hunched up, drawing inward, staring at the ground. Again, Peter used the silence; he did not try to fill it and waited for Edmund to do so.

In a hoarse, choked whisper, Edmund said, "Reepicheep went on, and we stayed behind."

Peter put an arm around his brother's shaking shoulders. "Were you ready to die, Edmund?"

Edmund shook his head, in disagreement, not denial. "We've been ready to die for years, Peter. Time and again. Death is an old friend of ours." Raising his head, he stared into the middle distance, and there was a wall of lilies reflecting in his eyes. "But, watching Reepicheep on top of that wave, I knew that this time, I was not. However long the wait would be, I did not wish to be apart from you and Susan, and Mum, and Father only just back, and the Professor and Aunt Polly."

The words were coming slow and thick, but clear. Edmund had been thinking on this, all day yesterday, all last night, all day today, and not saying anything of it, holding it all in, harboring his grief, until now.

Fixing a defiant stare, Edmund pronounced the obvious, "I wasn't afraid to die."

"Of course you weren't," Peter quickly confirmed. "As you said, we've been prepared to make that sacrifice for years."

Edmund nodded and with another breath admitted, "I wasn't afraid, but, I wasn't ready, either, and there is a difference between the two. That's what Aslan meant, that when it's time for me to go, for all of us to go, the door back to his Country will open up for us here, not there."

"Yes," Peter agreed slowly. "If we stay true to him, I believe that." Still, Peter knew he was missing something. Such things were not the cause for the grief he sensed in Edmund, nor was it even related to the fact that he and Lucy would not be returning to Narnia again. Edmund seemed to have accepted this loss, as Lucy had. "What else, Ed?"

His brother stared at the ground, tears beginning to splash the dirt and his worn shoes. "It was the hardest thing I've ever done, Peter. Ever. I can't imagine enduring anything more wrenching ever again. I pray to Aslan it doesn't, for my heart and mind would break for it."
By the Lion, Peter had never heard his brother speak like this. He put a firmer hand on Edmund's shoulder, trying to catch his eye. "Edmund, tell me. What do you mean?"

"I heard them," his brother whispered. "I heard them in Aslan's Country. Everyone we'd loved, who was gone, dead these thousand years. I heard Merle, and Jalur, Sallowpad, all the Crows, Tumnus, Lady Willa, and our Captains and Masters, and the General, and Mrs. Furner and Mr. Hoberry, and Cook yelling at the Hounds, and…"

Edmund voice broke and now the tears finally came – tears for the ones who had died first, and for those who died later, never to know what had happened to the four of them the day they chased the White Stag back through the Wardrobe. Their soldiers, captains, loyal guards, palace staff, subjects, citizens, friends, lovers, consorts, advisors, counselors, children, and companions. Those who Edmund named, and the one who over a thousand years later, he still could not and would not name. They all had a long and loving list of those who were lost to them and for each of them there were some names that were simply too painful to dwell upon. All dead.

"They are waiting for us, Peter. I know it. I heard them."

Peter wrapped his arms around his brother until the weeping settled. He did wonder, in an idle way, just what a state his jacket would be in by the end of this. Probably for the dustbin and one hand me down that Edmund would not inherit.

"You'll laugh at me for this," Edmund muttered, pulling away. He wiped his eyes and nose on his sleeves, a habit he had never broken. "I heard them all calling to me from beyond that wall of lilies and my first thoughts were, I can't see them like this, back in this ridiculous boy's body. I wanted to see them again as I'd been. Vanity. Me? Who would have thought it?"

His thin laugh was humorless, painful, and self-deprecating.

"No, I don't see it that way, Edmund. You would have wanted to greet our Dead as we were when we knew them best, when we'd learned to love them best. To go now would seem as if we were, going backwards, I suppose? And, really, I can't imagine anything more contrary to Aslan's plan for us."

"That's it exactly," his brother said with a steadying breath and a mournful sniff. "That's what Aslan meant. We can't go back; we can only go forward. And the way forward is here, not there."

Eustace did not see Aslan in Fulbourn Fen, but Lucy told him that you didn't have to see the Great Lion to know he was there. This business of believing in things you couldn't see was pretty strange. This business of being happy, and having friends, and doing something besides being a pest was pretty strange too.

Lucy was certain Aslan joined them as they watched two stoats playing outside a den. Eustace wasn't sure, but if Lucy said so, he wasn't going to second guess that. She'd grabbed his arm as they crouched together in a ditch. "Feel that?!" Lucy whispered, so as not to disturb the stoats.

"What?"

She put her hands over his eyes. That was another thing that was odd about his cousins. They touched each other a lot, hugging, linking arms when they walked, and those kisses on hands, heads, and cheeks, like what he saw Caspian do, or King George in newsreels. Alberta thought it was all very unsanitary. Harold had said it was the sort of thing that Americans did, and wasn't properly English at all.
Since Lucy asked, and she knew best, he did close his eyes. "Feel that?" Lucy repeated.

Eustace scrunched his head and tried to think very, very hard on those great, golden eyes. He could swear he felt a warm breeze stir in his hair and in the grasses in which they were crouching. It smelled wonderfully.

Next to him, Lucy sighed happily and when he opened his eyes, he expected to see her hair and the flowers around them swaying. But they weren't. There was no breeze at all.

Lucy elbowed him hard in the ribs. "Eustace! Say thank you!"

"For what?"

"Anything!" Lucy urged. "Quick! He'll hear you anyway, but it's even better to do it while he's right here next to us!"

Eustace cast about and blurted the first thing that came to mind. "Thank you Aslan for not letting that dog bite me." Well that was stupid. Eustace wanted to try again, with something that wasn't so stupid. Thank you Aslan for the High... Peter being nice to me and for Edmund not staying mad, even if he shouldn't have been mad at me anyway since it wasn't my fault. Thinking he probably needed to explain that last one more he added, It hurt when Edmund was mad and I'd be thankful if you could help me either by telling me what's going to make him mad so I don't do it, or help me be understanding about it, like the High... like Peter said, so that I don't get mad back. Oh, and thank you ahead of time for helping me try to be a better Narnian, whatever that is.

He said this all silently because he didn't want Lucy to hear, even if she probably knew already. That was the sort of thing Lucy always knew. Eustace wasn't sure if it was because Aslan told her, or because she listened so well, or just noticed things.

Lucy was murmuring a lot. She sighed again.

"Well, he's gone now, but he'll be back. He knows it's hard for us right now." Proving Eustace's silent thoughts, she said, "He's gone to talk to Edmund. I do hope Edmund's in a listening mood, though he's usually better about it than Peter."

"What's wrong with Peter?" At this point, Eustace had decided that the High ... Peter really was about as close to King Arthur as a person could be, which was silly, sort of, since there hadn't been any definitive archeological or historical evidence of King Arthur at all. It was all just a lot of children's fables. But he didn't think the High ... Peter really did anything wrong ever, so he was surprised Lucy said this and felt like he should defend the High... his cousin.

"There's nothing wrong with Peter," Lucy said. She sounded a little exasperated, but in a kind way. "He talks to Aslan all the time and Aslan loves him very much indeed. But, well, Peter can be a little thick sometimes. Once he decides what he thinks is right to do, it's really hard to get him off that track. It's not that what Peter ever chooses is bad, exactly. Peter never makes bad decisions. It's just that there may be things that are better or more right, and it can be really hard to get that through to him."

Eustace supposed he could let this go, though he really hadn't seen it himself. He'd been really nervous about seeing the High... Peter. Not the stuck up stiff prig of a stick he thought he had known. This Peter was very nice, in a very grown up sort of way. He listened and he said things that were really wise, which just sounded so old fashioned until you actually heard him do it. He always seemed to know just the right thing to say and Eustace deeply admired that because he never knew the right thing to say to anybody. It seemed like the High King liked everybody and
once a person met him, that person wanted to be his friend. He seemed to really care about everybody, like little William in the tree and that funny Mrs. Crufts, who Eustace thought looked like one of those tall wading birds they’d seen at the Lone Islands, with her long legs and arms. Only two days ago, Eustace would have gone right by them and laughed at William for being stupid. Knowing that made him feel very uncomfortable now.

On the *Dawn Treader*, even Caspian, who was King, spoke of his cousin in something like hushed tones. Reepicheep had said the High King was braver even than a Mouse, which coming from Reep was really saying something. And he knew really famous people, like the Russells and even knew quite a bit about things like bugs and birds and how they built things.

They found the High… Peter for lunch. Eustace had to admit he was enjoying eating meat. It was funny though, because the High… Peter made a point of talking about how good vegetarian food could be and how much he was going to miss it. Maybe he was fibbing to make Eustace feel better, but somehow, that didn't seem right. It was just another of those really nice things his cousin would say that made Eustace feel like he belonged and made his eyes watery again and his throat tight. And it made him feel guilty for all the stupid and mean things he'd done before Aslan had un-Dragoned him.

Proving that Lucy was right, again, the High … Peter said that Edmund was off somewhere to be alone with Aslan. Eustace wanted to know if Aslan could be in two places at the same time, but thought they would think he was stupid, so he didn't ask the question.

They met up with Edmund right before they walked back to the bus. Eustace thought Edmund looked like he'd been really upset, even crying, and was trying hard to get over it. He did feel like he should say something so Eustace tried to do what he'd seen the others do. He put a hand on Edmund's back, even though Alberta and Harold wouldn't approve and muttered, "Sorry you're down." He pulled away after because he didn't want Edmund to think he was being a pest. Edmund nodded but didn't say anything and Eustace tried not to let that bother him. He knew he shouldn't feel like he should be rewarded for doing something that was kind, and he supposed, *Narnian*, but it was all really new and it would have been nice if someone had said so. But, the High … Peter had said to leave Edmund alone, and so he would. He felt better when he saw that Lucy and the High… Peter were doing the same thing and let Edmund sit at the back of the bus by himself.

So, Eustace sat with Lucy and the High… Peter and they read *Alice* together. *Peter*, there he said it the first time) knew almost as much of it as Lucy did. It was really, really strange reading a book like *Alice* with its topsy turvy ways and openings into other places and talking animals. Eustace wondered if maybe Lewis Carroll had been to Narnia or if maybe Wonderland was real the way Narnia was real. He didn't ask the question though because he didn't want his cousins to think he was stupid and there was probably some really obvious explanation that he just hadn't thought of. Yet.

Their bus had slowed down and then stopped altogether before they made it to their stop because there was a frightful jam. A couple hundred people all in black clothes were pouring out of a Church. Eustace figured he should know the name of it because he did know it was an important church in Cambridge but that was just one more of those things that Harold and Alberta didn't hold with. People were cramming the Church steps, milling out all over the sidewalk, and spilling into the street. The bus wasn't going anywhere very fast until it cleared.

"What's going on?" Peter asked, looking out the window at the crush of cars and people.

Eustace remembered. "There was a memorial today for men in Cambridgeshire who died at Dieppe," he told Lucy and Peter. "I think the paper said two of them were in the RAF and their
fighters went down."

Edmund was walking forward from the back of the bus, looking more like himself. "Another man was in the commando unit deployed there."

Eustace saw one of those silent things pass between his three cousins. He always felt a bit envious of that way they had of talking without saying anything. Sometimes, he thought there were hand signals, but he could never be sure. Whatever it was, he saw Edmund nod, like he was agreeing to something, and then walk forward down the aisle to the driver.

"We'll just get off here," Edmund said to the old driver. "Thank you. Good luck getting out of this squeeze." Peter followed right behind Edmund.

Eustace felt Lucy's hand on his elbow. "Let's go," she said calmly.

So pulled and prodded, he followed her. "What are we doing?" he hissed at her. He could see Peter and Edmund get off the bus and wade right into the throng of mourners all around them.

"We are going to express our condolences," Lucy said firmly.

Eustace froze at the top step going down to the door off the bus. "What?!"

"We are going to go into that crowd and tell these grieving people that we are sorry for their losses," Lucy explained patiently, as if he didn't understand what the word "condolences" meant.

"Why?" Eustace demanded in a frantic whisper.

"You are a Narnian, Eustace! This is what we must do."

"I couldn't possibly know what to say!" Eustace knew that he was speaking to Queen Lucy the Valiant now, the adult, the one about whom the sailors told tales and to whom King Caspian deferred.

"You say, 'thank you for your sacrifice,' and 'I'm very grateful, thank you,' and 'I'm sorry for your loss,' and 'May you be comforted.' Mostly, you listen."

Eustace looked at the scene, and it seemed that Peter and Edmund were like candles in the dark, white beside all the black, except that they weren't wearing white and didn't glow. They moved into the crowd that seemed to part before them and started shaking hands and speaking quiet words. He could his cousins' heads tilt with interest and reverence as if they actually cared about what had happened to total strangers. They looked like Kings. They were Kings.

"She's a smart one," the bus driver said from behind him. Eustace looked over his shoulder and gulped. He'd forgotten the old man was there. "Don't know what Narnyan means or whatever she said, but she's right about doin' what's right, son."

Lucy smiled back and waved. "Thank you, sir!"

The driver tipped his hat.

"I can't do this Lucy."

"Yes, you can, Eustace. Follow me. Repeat what I say. Those who are grieving won't remember what they've heard today, except in the vaguest of ways."

"If they won't remember, then why are we doing it?"
"Because it's the right thing to do. Because it's the Narnian thing to do. Because they will remember that someone appreciated them, even if they don't remember who it was, or what you said. Oh, and they may say really strange things; people who are grieving do that. Don't react, just be kind."

"She's right about that, too, son. Been there myself, on both sides, and them's that made the sacrifice like to hear about it from them's that get the good of it. Makes you think it wasn't for nuthin'. Now both of you, off my bus, hear?"

Eustace never forgot that hour of shaking hands and weeping faces. He went through it numbly, following Lucy, and feeling the utter idiot for it, muttering what he thought were pointless platitudes that wouldn't bring back the dead or missing. He staggered from one person to the next, trying to copy Peter's gratitude, Edmund's gravity, and Lucy's compassion. Several times, he'd look around, swearing he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, pushing him, or guiding him, or nudging him to the next person, one after the other. There were dozens of them. It wasn't until the crowd thinned and the light dimmed, as he listened to an aging schoolmaster relate how similar Eustace was to one of the dead young men except for the differences in age, hair, eyes, shape, and height, that Eustace was able to connect the pressure on his shoulder to the Lion whispering words of encouragement in his head.

Next chapter,

Chapter 3 - Later

In which "Later" finally arrives for Edmund, Peter and someone else and Peter begins reading a very long, very strange Narnian story Queen Susan has written that isn't about Narnia at all.

A/N

First, I am greatly remiss in not thanking specifically my reviewers who gave me such excellent ideas and guidance with regard to Edmund and Lucy's reactions after their return from the Dawn Treader. Special thanks to Kay, Miniver, Autumnia, and others for the ideas and support that have greatly informed these two chapters.

The Raid on Dieppe is frequently characterized as Canada's Gallipoli -- a debacle from beginning to end that failed to accomplish a single strategic goal, and at incredible human cost. It has also been viewed particularly by citizens of Commonwealth countries and the former British Empire as evidence that Allied Forces deemed the Commonwealth soldiers as more expendable than the British Army. The debate about Dieppe continues to this day. I chose to reference the Raid on Dieppe for several reasons which I discuss in my Livejournal. I also discuss my misgivings for doing so.
Later

"Say from whence you owe this strange intelligence..."
Macbeth, Act I, scene iii

"Until Winston Churchill dispatched William Stephenson, aka Intrepid, to America as part of his plan to prod the country into action, no one had ever dared to mount such a large shadow force to wage war by means of sabotage, propaganda, and political subversion. As director of the BSC [British Security Coordination], Stephenson, according to the organization's official history, was empowered to 'do all that was not being done and could not be done by overt means' to assure aid for Britain and counter the enemy's plans in the Western Hemisphere."

It was late when they finally returned back to Harold and Alberta's house. A note on the table had said their aunt and uncle were out at a party and there were boiled potatoes and carrots on the stove. Eustace dumped the cold and tasteless mush straight into the dustbin without a word and began the fry up, Lucy chattering all the while about stoats, herons, and how well Eustace had done. There was, Peter saw, a certain familiarity to it all.

Peter wanted Later now, and more than he wanted supper. Catching his eye, Edmund nodded.

"Peter and I have to talk about some things upstairs," Edmund said, snagging a raw carrot from the table and a hunk of the bread.

"That's fine," Lucy said, unwrapping the sausages.

"Is it about Narnia?" Eustace asked, turning away from the stove. "Because if it is, I want to know about it too."

Peter looked at Edmund, curious as to the answer himself.

"It doesn't concern you," Edmund replied, poorly hiding his irritation at the challenge. "And that's all you need to know."

Eustace crossed his arms, sullenly stubborn. "Well, if it isn't about Narnia, then you can't order me around, because you're not my King, you're just my scrotty cousin and I'm just a prat."

Before Peter could step in to break up this sudden and ugly business, Lucy burst out laughing; Edmund joined her a moment later as Eustace broke into a wide, sheepish grin.

"That won't work anymore Eustace," Edmund said, punching him on the arm.

"It won't?" Eustace shrugged and turned back to the skittle. "Narnians joke, don't they?" he asked, now worried. "I know I've heard it before, but I'm not very funny, so I thought I'd try." Frowning, he poked at the sausages Lucy dumped into the pan, "Harold and Alberta don't joke at all, so I
"Narnians love to laugh," Lucy assured him. Leaning over she whispered, overloud, "Trust me on this Eustace. From long years of experience, I know that whatever they discuss will be very tedious and we will, eventually, hear a shorter, more interesting version anyway. Or, it will be about women, in which case we don't want to hear of that at all."

In this light, Eustace's blush was quite evident.

"As to that, all in good time!" Edmund said, with just enough heartiness to make Eustace turn even pinker.

Edmund discoursing with Eustace on the agreeable and necessary company of women and men was a thoroughly alarming prospect. Peter thought he'd probably have to manage that himself when the time came.

Don't wait on supper for us," Peter told them.

"I'll be down soon enough," Edmund said mysteriously. "Peter's going to be busy the rest of the night."

His brother tossed an apple over, "Take that, you herbivore, and we'll eat the sausages."

Peter followed Edmund up the stairs into the room his brother had been sharing with Eustace. Eustace the Prat. Eustace the Un-dragoned. Eustace Narnia Friend and Breaker of Caspian's Second Best Sword. Eustace Who Would Likely Return To Narnia When Her Kings and Queens Would Not. Eustace Who Joked. It would take some getting used to.

Edmund turned away at a desk, blocking Peter's view. He was, Peter suspected, disarming some security measure he employed to alert him if someone tried to access his things. Edmund opened a drawer and handed him a very thick stack of paper.

"And this is…" Peter ended with a questioning note, thumbing through the sheaf. Truth be told, it was significantly weightier than the sum total of everything he had done for the Professor, by several magnitudes.

"That pile is Susan's letters to me this summer while she has been in Washington."

"Her letters to me have been nothing like this," Peter said, skimming the paper. Her letters had been rather dull, short, and about the weather and parties, with the occasional name or location blacked out with a ******** by some censor. Peter folded back a corner to a random page and saw in Susan's flowing script, *Sallowpad instructed the Queen Susan and Lord Peridan that the Tarkheena was to be their next project...*

He looked back up at Edmund. "She wrote a story? A Narnia story?"

"To the censors, it has appeared to be an amusing and silly children's story an older sister was writing to her younger brother about a fantastical land of a Queen, a dashing knight, talking animals, and a long hot summer in the exotic, magical land of Tashbaan." Edmund sat down heavily on the bed. "In reality, that is an accounting of what our sister has been doing this holiday to further the British war effort in the American Capitol."

"Furthering the war effort?" Peter repeated, incredulous. "Susan? Our fifteen year old sister?"

"Peter, save the Royal Frowns, would you?" Edmund said, a little weary. "She's no more her
apparent age than the rest of us." He gestured to the other bed. "Take a seat. You're going to be
here a while getting through all that."

Skimming more pages, Peter saw references to Tarkheenas, Tarkaans, Tashbaan, Sallowpad,
Peridan, the Tisroc, Calormen, Narnia, Ettins, Telmarines, and other familiar names and places.
Peter caught a glimmer of the ploy. "So, she's been, as you say, aiding the British and telling you
about it in the form of a Narnian children's story, knowing that you would understand what she was
really saying?"

Edmund nodded. "We arranged some of the terms beforehand. She's had to add as she went along.
For instance, I know that Narnia is England, Calormen is America, Tashbaan is Washington, and
Sallowpad is a security or intelligence chief at the British Embassy. I'm not sure if he is an
individual or an amalgam, she obviously couldn't be clear. Archenland was supposed be New
York, but I think it's Canada now. Father is King Lune, though not in the story at all, and so on."

"And Lord Peridan?" Peter was trying to envision their loyal ambassador and knight in 1942
America and his imagination was faltering.

"Peridan was an addition. In the story, don't laugh, he is a young, dashing knight and veteran of the
Gryphon Aerial Corps who was wounded in battle when the armies of the evil Ettin Giant King
bombarded the beautiful city of Cair Paravel with catapults."

There was too much bizarre novelty to absorb at once; Peter forced himself to focus on the first.
"Gryphon Aerial Corps?" His mind was racing with the implications of this incredible scheme. "By
the Lion, it's the RAF!"

His brother nodded, and continued, "and the Ettin King is Hitler..."

"Who has bombed London into the Stone Age with boulders thrown from catapults!"

"The Ettin King of the Northern Giants is in league with the Telmarines who have declared war on
both the Calormen Empire and Free Narnia."

"Telmar being the Empire of Japan," Peter finished. What an amazing ruse. It was a classic Rat
and Crow maneuver for Edmund and Susan.

"Yes. I assume that when we finally speak with her we will learn that Our Lord Peridan is in reality
a combat wounded RAF fighter pilot assigned to the British Embassy."

Edmund scowled briefly and Peter sensed his brother had developed some opinions about RAF
Fighter Pilot Peridan – who wasn't Peridan at all, of course.

"It's a very dodgy business, Peter." He sighed and the haunted look of earlier returned. "It's
uncomfortable reading, if I understand what Susan is writing."

"Uncomfortable? For whom?"

"Well, Susan for one, although that's probably just brotherly protectiveness on my part."

Peter snorted. "Susan's never needed that. Although..." He looked again at the letters. "I can see
how her reliance on Calormen might make you uneasy. Is there a Rabadash in here?"

Edmund shook his head. "Fortunately, no." He took a bite of the bread, carelessly scattering
crumbs everywhere, very much like the Rats with whom he and Susan had worked so closely. It
was another habit of his. When preoccupied, Edmund tended to let ordinary things like eating and
sleeping slide, cramming them in when and where he could, which was regrettable as their absence could affect his judgment and certainly affected his temperament.

"When you read this Peter you need to remember that you aren't really reading about the places and people we knew. It can be disorienting. For instance, she has set up this whole political structure that I think is her way of describing the U.S. Congress."

Peter paged through the letters and read aloud, "'Sallowpad discussed with Queen Susan and Lord Peridan how they might be able to assist in the Narnian effort to persuade the Tisroc's War Council to bequeath the Gryphons and war horses needed for the retaking of the Lone Islands and the Marshes north of the River Shribble.' So, the War Council is the American Congress?"

"I think so, or possibly some committee of the Congress. There are two chambers, so I'm not sure precisely who it is. Remember that they are elected and there are women who serve in it as MPs, well, MCs, I suppose. That's just another example of how confusing it can be, because, of course, the Tisroc we knew would have never permitted elections or women in government service."

Edmund was now chewing on his carrot. His manners when he was distracted had always been careless. "That dissonance will happen quite a lot. You'll read names like Sallowpad and Peridan and think that the Beast or Man you knew would never do what Susan writes of. And you have to remember that it isn't Sallowpad or Peridan. It's someone else. It's completely out of character."

The glower returned as Edmund spoke again of Peridan. "I'm sensing you are not overly fond of RAF Fighter Pilot Peridan," Peter said to him.

With a disgruntled snort, Edmund said, "I'm not. I really want to box him, for all that he is probably a decorated war hero. But, I'm getting ahead of myself. You need to read it. As you come to confusing parts, I'll explain."

In the moment of hesitation that followed, his brother transformed, and suddenly, into so severe a demeanor that the only things missing were the crown, an additional ten years of physical age, and Ettin raiders at the border.

"What?"

"As I mentioned, this ruse fooled the censors all summer, Peter." He lowered his voice, now sounding furtive and wary, "until last week."

"What happened?" Peter asked in equally hushed tones.

Edmund scowled again, fiercely, with something between admiration and disgust warring across his face. "Spies. I really should know better."

A disturbing chill moved him. "What do you mean?" Peter asked, pulling from his brother what he did not wish to say.

"Asim. The man we've been referring to all summer in letters as 'the Driver' and with whom you have been discussing battle tactics. He came to see me last week to tell me the gig was up."

Vaguely, Peter knew that long seconds were ticking by as he stared, dumbfounded at his somber brother across the room. Edmund had even left off in his carrot gnawing to deliver this shocking information and Peter was thoroughly grateful for that courtesy.

"Asim?" Peter repeated, not really comprehending. "Here?"
"Yes."

So that's what it feels like when the floor gives way beneath your feet and you are kicked in the gut at the same moment.

Forcing calm, Peter found he was speaking through a tightly clenched jaw. Slowly, he uncurled his hands before he left nail marks in his palms. "I spent all afternoon with him yesterday. He said nothing of this."

The sadness Edmund had been projecting all day was now replaced with compassionate understanding. His brother crossed the room to sit next to him on the edge of the sagging bed, shoving the precious, traitorous letters to the side where Peter had heedlessly dropped them in his shock. 'I'm truly sorry to be the one to tell you this. I thought for about a minute about not saying anything because I knew this would be your reaction, but it wasn't something I could or should withhold from you."

"Thank you for that," Peter responded wryly. He let out a deep, aggravated breath. Anger was not something he permitted himself to feel very often as it clouded judgment. But this... this hurt and infuriated him and fury was warranted here. "I would have been very angry at both of you then. What happened?"

The night before he met Edmund Pevensie, for the first time, Asim was shown a dream. It was a strange dream, of the sort like that green ship with the dragon prow and the purple sail hung from a sword that he had come to associate with the older brother, Peter Pevensie.

The dream that preceded Edmund Pevensie, unlike the one that preceded his brother, unfurled completely in a single night, rather than over a period of weeks. Asim had known that some day he would meet Edmund Pevensie, and was impatient to do so. God who is all knowing had told him later, and so Asim would wait for later to arrive. When later did arrive, God showed him the whole of the dream, thus demonstrating that seeing and understanding are two very different things, for Asim would see the dream, but not appreciate the full of its meaning until much, much later. To a man such as he, a man of God, straddling many worlds, time was a fluid thing that spread like water and sand; time did not run straight and narrow as a European did.

Allah showed him a crow sitting in a leafy tree. Under the tree, rough, rude men sat, sharpening ugly swords and knives. He did not hear them, but even in his dream, his fingers itched for a blade or, more reliably, his service revolver. The crow perched above was listening to the men below. How could that be, a bird listening to men? Yet, in the bird's bright, keen eye, Asim saw a piercing intelligence and comprehension. The crow flew away into a sky so blue it became a thick, opulent drapery, of the sort that adorned King's tents and palaces. The drapery hung in a window beyond which Asim saw seagulls and ship masts, though the masts were of wood, not golden and silver swords such as were on the green ship with the purple sail in Peter's dream. The window was in a room with a long, wooden polished table, piled high with neat stacks of gold coins. Around the table sat soft, old men with piggish eyes who were sweating under dark heavy robes and heavier chains of office that weighed around their necks. Peeking behind the blue drapery, his dream showed him a small, whiskered nose, a thin hairless tail, and a beady eye. A rat, as comprehending as the crow had been, was listening to the money men.

Then it was dawn and time for morning prayer, fajr.

He had, thus, already been thinking of things that were not what they seemed to be when Colonel Alistair McFarland came to Russell Hall looking for Major Abdullah ibn Abbas ibn Muhammad al-Masri.
Now, everyone at Russell Hall knew that he was Asim bin Kalil when in England and when not wearing a uniform. He did, however, have many names. Some of this was that to the Arab man, it was not just a simple first name, nickname, and surname. An Arab name could be a statement of reverence to God, an expression of hope for the future by one's parents, and an expression of lineage by father, grandfather, occupation, tribe, and place. Arabs collected their names as the English collected curios and colonies. Being a spy added a further layer of complexity, what with work names, undercover names, code names, and all those other things so loved by the establishment that claimed him but to which he did not belong.

Mary was puttering about in the ballroom chipping away at fossilized dung and feeding the constrictors. Richard was locked in his room with his notebooks and muttering about birds, bees, beavers and preparations for Peter Pevensie. Asim suspected a formidable exam was in the offing and pitied Peter for it.

As he was at the moment in Oxfordshire and in robes, he was Asim bin Kalil. The Colonel at the door wanted Major Abdullah ibn Abbas ibn Muhammad al-Masri, but asked for Major Abdulala bang Massai. It was Kwong Lee's turn to answer the door, and she was not in a mood to forgive English colonial arrogance that could not be bothered to learn a man's name. So, Lee was pretending she spoke no English and feigning ignorance as to who Major Massai might be.

There was, of course, only one Major in residence at Russell Hall and as far as Asim knew, only one Arab in all of Oxfordshire. Learning one name, particularly his, should not have been that difficult. He respected Colonel McFarland and more importantly, actually trusted him, to the extent one could ever trust a spy (very little). Nevertheless, the man should know his name better by now. So, Asim let the fuss go on for 10 minutes, rather than 20 before rescuing the Colonel from Lee's pointed, amusing game.

Asim had known Colonel McFarland through the SIS and then the SOE for a number of years. He was a hard-working, hard-nosed Scot, competent and, Allah be praised, not from Cambridge. He'd done it all the honest way, flown Sopwith Camels in the First World War, been shot down, held, released, and then done something having to do with something when Hitler had been ramping up a wartime economy in violation of the Treaty of Versailles. When Asim had made those discreet inquiries into John Pevensie, writer, logician, and on holiday with the Irregulars at the BSC HQ in Rockefeller Center, he had made them to Colonel McFarland, knowing he would get what he wished to know, that the inquiry would go no further, and that the quid pro quo he would be expected to return would be modest.

Asim, now almost, but not quite, Major al-Masri as he was still in robes, suspected it was time for the quid pro quo to be filled.

Mary, reading glasses and hair askew, in a stained laboratory coat, popped out from the ballroom with an Emerald Tree Boa Constrictor draped from her arm. Or, it might have been a Green Tree Python. Asim could not tell the difference between the two as both snakes were green and ate dead mice. Mary insisted they represented some extraordinary facet of evolution, just like that orchid in Madagascar.

"Hello," she called, waving her green scaly arm at Colonel McFarland. She then chased Lee back toward the kitchen, asking about frozen pinkies. Lee, prodigiously observant of her Chinese heritage, profoundly revered dragons. Her reverence did not extend to snakes and other reptiles. Assuming Chinese dragons were reptiles. Asim did not know; he would have to remember to ask Lee or Lin Kun.

Richard was bellowing something inarticulate for Mr. Patel.
Asim who was almost Major al-Masri at this point gestured Colonel McFarland into the drawing room and locked the door behind them. "What can I do for you, Sir?"

"Changing into your uniform and heading to Cambridge will be the start."

The severity of the situation became evident when Major al-Masri understood that Colonel McFarland intended to run him the hundred miles all the way to Cambridge. There was a jeep and a driver waiting in the drive.

Mary took in the uniform without even a raised eyebrow. "Richard wanted to see Peter tomorrow, but if you aren't back, I will ask if Mr. Patel can drive us."

She and the snake returned to the ballroom. Colonel McFarland stared at the shut double doors behind which she had disappeared with a well-schooled, mild expression that might have otherwise been shock.

"First time?" Major al-Masri asked, adjusting his holster and collecting his satchel at the door.

"Quite."

Major al-Masri noted an envelope in the Colonel's pocket. It had the "Inspected by Censor" stamp on it and looked to be a woman's handwriting. Observing his subtle notice, McFarland patted his pocket. "For the car."

Once rumbling down the country lane that connected Russell Hall to the main line, McFarland handed the letter over. "This arrived, by flash, this morning, with instructions to tie up the dangling bits by noon or chop them off." He rolled his eyes in the unguarded way of two men sharing mutual views of their superiors. "When I saw the names, I remembered your inquiry from the start of the summer and so thought I would do a lateral grenade toss to you."

"My thanks," Major al-Masri said, and meant it, even if his dry delivery implied otherwise. There was no need to give away something for nothing; Colonel McFarland would owe him after this one, quid pro quo paid off, with more besides.

He turned the envelope in his hands, addressed in beautiful flowing script to Edmund Pevensie, Impington, Cambridge. The return was from Susan Pevensie, Embassy of Great Britain, Washington, D.C. and it bore all the stamps and handling of routine letters between family members that flowed in diplomatic bags by courier every single day.

"May I?" he asked.

McFarland grunted his assent. "Can't make heads or tails of it myself, but one of Intrepid's boys is sure there's something in there."

"Why did someone from BSC see it at all? This isn't their business. Family correspondence from Embassy-based personnel would fall under their standard review protocols."

"The Censors have been passing the sister's letters around all summer because there's a clever children's story in it about talking animals. Some chap in BSC has been following it." With a sarcastic grunt, he added, "probably one of those bloody writers."

Talking animals? Perhaps a rat and a crow as well? A green ship with a gold and silver sword from which a purple sail flies?

Asim and Major al-Masri both sent a silent thanks to God who hears all prayers.
"I don't suppose anyone owned up to keeping copies of the other letters?" he asked.

Censors were not to retain personal correspondence otherwise cleared. If they'd been clearing something all summer that they shouldn't have, any copies secretly kept by bloody writers would be reduced to ash if word got out that there was an inquiry.

"Of course not," McFarland griped. "And, Colonel Walker-Smythe doesn't want anyone asking either."

So, this landed at the door of the BSC's top wrangler at the British Embassy.

"Last week, wasn't it one of Walker-Smythe's men who..."

McFarland gave him a very wary, silencing look. "There's a lot more to that incident than what made it into the cables. Read it a certain way, and I understand you can find out what really happened in full in that letter." He thrust a finger at Susan Pevensie's letter to underscore the point.

"A cipher?" he asked, putting that proper note of wonder and incredulity into his voice.

"So it seems."

"You do know, Colonel that we are dealing with English schoolchildren? The sister, Susan, cannot be more than fifteen; the brother, Edmund, perhaps thirteen." Major al-Masri said this though some aspect of it was likely a lie. Asim had spent the whole summer peeling away Peter Pevensie's thickly layered and unexpected talents. From those long conversations, he had concluded there was something unusual about Peter's younger brother as well. He'd considered running by Cambridge to see if he might get a glimpse of Edmund himself. God had told him to be more patient and that later had not arrived. So, he had waited.

"Fifteen!" McFarland exploded. "With a god damned war on, I'm dancing around, traipsing across the countryside over a bloody schoolgirl?" He groaned dramatically and brandished a cable. "Orders, from Walker-Smythe, with the force of Intrepid himself behind it, and this was so hot it near burned my fingers when I read it, 'Make this go away. Stop. Quietly. Stop. Discreetly. Stop. No paper trail. Stop.' And, let me emphasize this last one as it screamed off the telex, 'Gently.' Stop."

"Gently?" Major al-Masri repeated. Gentle was counter to the whole of the BSC approach, best characterized as, "no job too dirty or too rough." It was in their charter from Churchill. Well, the path forward with regard to Edmund Pevensie was opening up plainly enough then. "Any guesses as to why the gentle treatment?"

"Several, each more unlikely than the last." McFarland shoved the burning cable back into his pocket. "Very few know the full of last week and they want to keep it that way. I'd guess embarrassment, but if that were the case, they'd spank the girl and send her packing with dire threats of prosecution."

"That's not what this smells of, though."

"No, quite the opposite in fact. If I'd hazard a guess, they want her. Until you'd told me her age, I'd thought she might be the runner I've heard about."

"Oh? What's that then?"

"I'd heard Walker-Smythe had some new babysitter for Intrepid's boys. But, it's obviously not the same girl, if the one writing these letters is fifteen."
"She is."

"Then, I can't fathom it at all."

*So, Peter, possibly Edmund, and now Susan as well.* He could not fathom it either; nor did it surprise him in the least. Not anymore.

The Major smiled thinly and began reading the letter.

"Let me out here," Major al-Masri told Colonel McFarland.

McFarland looked at him as if he was mad. "And you'll find a schoolboy in all of Cambridge how exactly?"

"Family resemblance." He climbed out of the jeep as the driver slowed. "I may keep this?" he asked, holding the letter. Major al-Masri was anxious to get away from the Colonel. They had driven passed the cold, dull Impington house and it was plainly empty for the moment, for all that the windows were open. He had suggested the University Library only to spot two boys leave a bookseller in the City Centre. One boy was shining with God's light, just as Peter did.

"Fine, go. We'll meet you here in two hours."

"Three," he said curtly. There were issues of the cousin and sister potentially to be addressed.

The jeep rumbled off and the Major followed the boys along St. Andrews Street. It was not possible for him to be stealthy in these circumstances. His coloring alone set him off from the pale English and caused matrons,burghers and schoolchildren to shy away with the skittishness of colts when he encountered them on the sidewalk. The uniform, the rank and the achievements they broadcast were also not discreet and when coupled with the swarthy complexion of an Arab man, they presented a confusing picture that invited notice.

He kept back too far to overhear them, though the animated gestures of the shining boy and the sullen behavior of the other spoke loudly enough. His differences from Peter were obvious; darker coloring, lighter build. The similarities, however, were great enough that they could only be brothers. This boy, it had to be Edmund, moved with the same ease and competence as Peter; it was even odder because he was younger. Did he not notice how people stepped aside as he walked on the sidewalk? This boy, like his brother, was a fighter, and a deadly one.

Peter's light was warm and brilliant; God's favor filled him completely and rested easily within him. To the inner eye of the God-touched, Edmund's fire was simply different. Edmund harbored an intense, restless hot flame to Peter's crackling effulgent bonfire.

The boys disappeared into a pub. By the time Major al-Masri caught up, Edmund had already found a table that put his back to the wall and a view of all who entered. It was as sweet as any in the place; it would have been the seat Major al-Masri would have taken, had Edmund not already been occupying it. Was it happenstance? Or knowing and deliberate? And if so, how to reconcile it with the God-light?

The pub wasn't crowded. It was the in-between time, after lunch and before after work. Fortunately, the booth next to theirs was empty. Major al-Masri sat, his back to them and ordered tea. He could hear their conversation clearly enough. The boys in fact made no effort to keep their voices low.

"Well, Eustace, congratulate me. I've finally received my last censored book of the summer. It's
quite indecent, about an aristocratic woman who conducts a scandalous affair with her gardener. The explicit descriptions of their lovemaking go on for pages. Shall I read it aloud to you?"

"That's disgusting, Edmund. You are foul."

Major al-Masri heard pages turning. "Here's an excellent passage, all about heaving bosoms and a bodice being ripped apart with the gardener's trowel. 'He scattered kisses across her milky white…"

The cousin bolted from the pub booth. "I'm telling Harold and Alberta!"

"Oh, cousin, please don't." Edmund certainly used his voice effectively; Major al-Masri could practically hear pathetic, childish tears. "I promise I'll share the book with you, at night, under the covers…"

"You are demented!" the cousin viciously spit out. He stormed out of the pub, slamming the door behind him.

As Eustace stalked passed the window, he heard Edmund chuckle in the booth behind him.

Quiet descended, the flutter of turning pages barely audible over the slow din of the pub. The waiting girl brought the tea and Major al-Masri considered how to approach a young man, glowing with God's bright light, who like his brother, had killed, and in subtle and cunning ways. Edmund Pevensie was surely not a mere English schoolboy and the issue of the letter would have been far simpler if he had been.

Edmund Pevensie solved the dilemma, as he should have anticipated.

"Please introduce yourself, Major."

So, Edmund Pevensie shined with the light of God and did notice things as a spy would. That choice of seat had been intentional. He saw me on the street and when I followed them in.

He rose from his booth and turned to face Edmund. "Titles and names are such deceptive things."

"Cumbersome too," the boy said, following his purposeful ambiguity with no hesitation. "And so very long. They take forever, though, given time, one can grow into them and possibly earn new ones besides. And speaking of taking up a lot of space, surely you know my brother?"

He thrust out his hand. "Edmund Pevensie."

Major al-Masri shook the hand offered. "For you, Major, will do. Your brother, however, calls me Asim."

His spontaneous delight was unmistakable, and unguarded.

"I thought so!" Edmund exclaimed smugly. "Peter has been writing of you all summer and I have been thoroughly jealous! Please, do sit down, Major, if you can spare a few moments. I'd be honored."

The confident maturity rested as comfortably on Edmund as it did on Peter, most especially in contrast to the treatment of the cousin.

Major al-Masri collected his tea and slid into the seat across from this very strange young man. He had never seen such a thing, the light of God shining so brightly in two brothers. Both loved by
God, both so very different. There was something present in Edmund that was wholly absent in Peter, though he could not yet name it; it would require further study. Edmund Pevensie, what have you done in your not-so-young life?

"I apologize for you having to overhear that immature needling of my cousin." Edmund sighed ruefully. "I shall have to apologize to him. But, I did wish to find out what you wanted and could not have possibly done so with him hanging about."

"I am curious how you managed to procure a copy of Lady Chatterley's Lover." Mary and Polly had been looking for it for some time. Never mind how a schoolboy even knew of it.

Edmund smiled, feral beyond his years, and flipped the brown wrap off his book, to reveal a truly ludicrous title, Deutsch Lernen und Sprechen binnen 30 Tagen. "Ich dachte vorgeben zu lesen D.H. Lawrence würde ihn weggehen lassen schneller." ****

***[translated in full below]***

Major al-Masri managed to not wince at Edmund's mangled German accent; his grammar was marginally better. More impressive, indeed, inspired, was wrapping a German language textbook in brown paper and pretending it was Lady Chatterley's Lover in order to drive his cousin away. Perhaps the best use for an instructional language book he had ever seen. Learning German as promised by the book's title within 30 days was impossible and he told Edmund so.

"Deutsch lernen binnen 30 Tagen ist ein gewagtes Unterfangen."

"Gewagtes?" Edmund repeated "Was heißt das?"

"It means daunting, difficult, hard," Major al-Masri explained.

Edmund nodded his understanding then screwed up his forehead in concentration to work up a response and translate it.

"Ich denke das Buch hat mir Versprechen gegeben es konnte nicht halten." Edmund twisted his mouth about, getting it around the words that were mostly correct.

So, Edmund also recognized that he and a book's promise to Learn German In 30 Days were both a trifle too ambitious. Nevertheless, the self-taught effort was commendable, and should be recognized as such. "Das ist ein lobenswertes Unterfangen und sehr zu unterstützen. Ich vermute, du unterrichtest dich selbst?"

"Ist das so öffentlich?"

Major al-Masri managed to not laugh outright. Edmund had meant to ask if his self-taught German was obvious. He managed something rather more akin to Is my self-taught German public? He did want to encourage Edmund's endeavor, even if the results were rather humorous to the German speaker.

"Ja, und das macht deine Errungenschaften um so bemerkenswerter."
"Danke dir, ich…" A horrified look crossed Edmund's face, but not due to his annihilation of a blameless language. "Major, I am truly sorry! We are in a pub!" He tilted his head toward the bar. "Should we go elsewhere?"

A long moment passed before Major al-Masri understood what Edmund meant. It was the sort of extraordinary courtesy that Peter would have extended, albeit a bit sooner. The mysteries surrounding Peter were accumulating, each layered over the next and now compounded more confoundingly in the brother. Major al-Masri could count on one hand the number of English who would have even known of Islam's prohibition on alcohol and sought to accommodate it.

"Thank you, Edmund, for that deference to my faith. I am here though for a purpose and it will not keep us long."

"Well, please, do not let me keep you," Edmund said easily, carefully pushing his books to the side. In addition to How to Speak German in 30 Days, the Major saw Sun Tzu's The Art of War and Crime and Punishment, both in English.

The attentive look in his eyes, resting in an otherwise calm expression, showed Edmund understood something was unusual about this arrangement. Did Edmund regret the openness of his earlier greeting? Or, perhaps he had suspected from the beginning that this meeting was of a far different character than those his brother had enjoyed? The Major felt vaguely disturbed. Peter was talented, even tempered, and formidable. In Edmund, God's light burned in a very subtle and cunning young man.

Major al-Masri withdrew Susan's letter from his inner pocket. He didn't think Edmund would have seen it secreted there, but then Peter had had no difficulty spotting the knife. "This letter from your sister has come to my attention."

He handed the letter across the table even though Colonel McFarland had not actually said whether or not he could show it to Edmund.

It was another odd reaction. He supposed that Edmund was intelligent enough to have discerned that if there was truly horrible news, there would be telegrams and official presences announced to his aunt and uncle. So, the boy calmly took the letter.

"Thank you, Major." His finger circled the censor stamp. "I shall read this now, if you will permit me?"

He nodded his assent and watched closely as Edmund read the letter, first once, quickly, scanning it, then a second time, more carefully. Only a very minute observer would have noticed the heightened tension in his shoulders and between his eyes. He was expert at reading people's small cues and Edmund was very difficult to read. Where did Edmund learn this self-control?

Some minutes went by; the Major drank his tea.

At last, Edmund carefully folded up the letter. "Thank you, Major, for delivering this to me. My sister and I are close and we miss each other very much."

Edmund began to slide the letter into The Art of War (the discussion on spies perhaps?) but Major al-Masri interrupted. "I will need to keep that letter, Edmund."

"Oh? Very well." He handed it back over the table with no other protest. If there had been few cues before, now Edmund Pevensie had gone completely and politely blank.

"The thing about children's stories," Major al-Masri said, pocketing the letter again, "or indeed, any
writing, is that they are capable of multiple interpretations."

"Very true," Edmund said after a long, composed moment. "Even assuming there is a single, definitive interpretation, it would require divining the intent of the writer which might be impossible or unreliable even if possible."

"Indeed."

He had suspected it even from the first, but now Major al-Masri was certain. This ambiguous exchange between brother and sister had been going on for over two months. Edmund knew, perhaps not the particulars of his sister's experience, but he knew enough and he knew they had been caught. All in all, Edmund was a thoroughly, alarmingly knowledgeable young man. If Edmund was as good at this as he seemed to be, he would stick to his cover story. Major al-Masri had seen experienced men go through rounds of interrogator training at Camp X or Sarratt and not manage this as smoothly as Edmund was. He was an extraordinary liar.

"In this case, one might read your sister's letter as an adventure story written to her brother, a tall tale exchanged between two loyal English schoolchildren.

"Very loyal schoolchildren," Edmund repeated for emphasis.

"Alternatively, however, the same letter might also be read as a very clever cipher that reveals albeit in allegorical terms possibly illegal and certainly highly immoral acts of espionage that Britain is undertaking on American soil, against her American ally. That too is an adventure story, but of a sort that would cause much embarrassment and turmoil should it be more widely known."

Could that be genuine surprise on Edmund's face? It certainly looked like it.

"Surely not, Major. How could such an exchange even be possible between two loyal English schoolchildren, ages fifteen and thirteen?"

*Sticking to the cover story are you, Edmund Pevensie?* Major al-Masri felt perversely proud of this glowing boy.

"Perhaps, perhaps not, Edmund. In these troubled times it is best to avoid even the appearance of the slightest impropriety."

"I see your point," Edmund said, nodding thoughtfully as if it had never occurred to him. "Well, it is certainly a very good thing that the letter is merely an adventure story exchanged in a letter between two very loyal schoolchildren, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," Major al-Masri replied. "And it must remain that way, of course."

"Absolutely."

It was the only mistake Edmund made in the whole of the interview, but a small one, easily understood, and as easily forgiven. "My sister, is she well?"

"Were she not, you would have heard immediately, Edmund. I am certain of that. Further, the fact that you have heard nothing except now this meeting with me should tell you something as well." He hesitated but saw no harm in helping Edmund come to the conclusion he would likely arrive at regardless, either by himself, or from his sister on her return. "I do not believe that 'embarrassment' fully explains both the silence and these discussions I was ordered to have with you. I was specifically instructed to deal with you in a very discreet and gentle manner."
Edmund smiled broadly, as if from a private joke. "Discreet and gentle?"

"Yes."

There was no disguising it; those words were a relief to Edmund, leaving Major al-Masri to wonder if he had, all unwittingly, conveyed a message from the sister to the brother.

"And so you have, Major," Edmund said warmly. "I thank you for the discretion and gentleness you have given me, schoolboy that I am."

As Richard would say, schoolboy my arse.

"If you see Peter, will you be able to pass on my greetings?"

"No, Edmund, I cannot. This is a highly confidential matter and it does not concern your brother in the least."

Major al-Masri and Asim would have to come to peace over that aspect of this. Though Peter had no command over him, Asim felt guilt for the duplicity and omission he must surely make. The disloyalty he felt was unsettling and unpleasant.

He stood and held his hand for Edmund. "Thank for your attention and understanding."

"Thank you for your time, Major. Given these circumstances, I am not going to suggest we find my sister, Lucy, in the library. It is unfortunate, as I know she would have enjoyed meeting you."

It was for the best, he now saw, though he wished it otherwise. Surely, Lucy must shine as brightly as her brothers. Asim was impatient to confirm it and wondered what dreams might be shown to him, and whether it was she in the dreams he had already seen. Later, God who knows all promised him.

"I hope we meet again under different circumstances," Edmund said.

There was no doubt of that. Major al-Masri was certain of it. Later would come again. "As an older, possibly wiser, man, may I offer two suggestions to you?"

Edmund's small smile was delighted and genuine. "Please."

He gestured to the ridiculously titled German book. "Learn as many languages as you can, as well as you can."

"I was thinking a loyal English schoolboy of my ilk might do well learning Russian as well." Edmund said this so blandly, it was sly.

"Yes," the Major agreed, "he would."

"Second, Edmund, as you learn these languages, I strongly suggest doing so at any place other than Cambridge."

"And that is how I came to meet the Major, who is known to you as Asim."

Peter found his own concern mounting, so grave was Edmund's look. "And Susan? What about the letter?"

"I'll tell you after you get through that stack." Edmund pulled the papers closer. "It won't make any
sense until you do."

"But, you've not heard anything more about her?"

"Not a word. Someone in Washington, Sallowpad perhaps, will be delivering the same news to her that the letters had to stop. The Major was right, though. If something was wrong we would have heard about it."

"Major…” Peter repeated. "I can't believe he didn't say anything." The anger was rising again. Peter wanted to shrug it off, as dog shook water from his coat, but it seemed to stick all the harder.

Edmund clapped him on the back, but gently rather than one of his hearty, chest clearing slaps. "Anger is very understandable, Peter, but I think he handled this as honorably as he was able to under the circumstances. He couldn't speak to you about this without violating orders and secrecy laws. He didn't need to tell you, because he knew I would."

Peter looked askance at his wily brother. "This is King Edmund, head of the Rats and Crows of the Narnian Intelligence Service, speaking to me now, isn't it?"

"It is."

Little consolation that. Peter had shown more of himself to Asim than to any other, save the man sitting next to him. There had been a bond between them and Asim had betrayed the trust Peter had given him.

And speaking of Asim, Peter knew that it was now time to make his own contribution to things that were curioser and curioser, as Alice and Mary would say. "I don't suppose Asim mentioned a boat to you during your meeting?"

Now Edmund was doing the mystified repeating. "Boat?"

"Some weeks ago, Asim told me he dreamed of a green boat, with a dragon prow and a purple sail, sailing on a sea of white lilies."

Turnabout was fair play. Edmund was absolutely gobsmacked and he paled under his summer tan and gasped. "The Dawn Treader? He dreamed of Narnia?" His voice hiked in disbelief.

"Yes. A man who is a Major in the British Army, a spy and a Muslim, told me that in a dream God showed him a ship that I now realize was the Dawn Treader. I didn't put the two together until I saw the picture in Lucy's room this morning."

His brother sat very still, probably recounting every encounter in Narnia, trying to correlate what was impossible. "Surely, he's not been to Narnia?" It was a question and a statement which Edmund quickly answered himself. "No, that can't be right. The letter referred to Narnia; if he had been there, he would have said something."

Peter sighed and pulled his hands through his hair, going over the arguments, again. It had preoccupied him for weeks from Mary's startling appearance at the tea party and that remarkable first trip to the Museum with Richard. Time and again, small things and big things all pointed toward a Narnia connection.

Shaking his head, he finally said, "I've been through this, Ed. The Professor and Aunt Polly have known the Russells and Asim for years. There are echoes, there are coincidences, but no, I don't believe any of them have been to Narnia."
"But Down A Rabbit Hole or into Wonderland?" Edmund asked with a wry grin. "I suppose we shouldn't rule those out."

"They all refer to the Professor's 'secret,' but I don't believe any of them know what it is." He hadn't told Edmund about how close Richard had come to one version of the truth. As with Asim, if Richard had known the specifics of Narnia, he would have revealed it then.

"When you saw him last week, did Asim say anything to make you think that he had connected the letters and the ship or that he thought they were real?"

"No," Edmund said slowly, "not at all. The only concern was that what Susan was describing, albeit in Narnian terms, could be real and that it had to stop."

"So this is..." Peter was going to say coincidence, but that was ridiculous. This was not a coincidence. "This is another echo?"

Edmund grinned. "They do seem to be piling up about you, brother. Do you know what Lucy has said about all this?"

"That I haven't been studying enough?"

"Well, yes, possibly that. More to the point, she says that Aslan has wanted your full attention. He wants something from you, Peter."

Peter thought back to the lonely hour that morning he'd spent kneeling on the hard floor contemplating the picture of the Dawn Treader. In contrast, he had definitely felt Aslan's pleasure when he'd disclosed what he had to Richard. He was confident he had done the Lion's will there, and an ineffable rightness permeated the whole of it. However, he had also thought that Aslan had wanted him to befriend Asim, or had otherwise directed this extraordinary man to him for some purpose he had not yet discerned, and that had turned out so very ill.

He felt Edmund looking steadily at him, perceiving what Peter could never conceal from his brother. "You don't know what Aslan wants, do you?" Edmund asked.

"I thought I did. I thought I have been doing it, what with all that Father and the Professor have done for me. It's been our plan for a very long time."

"And the similarities and echoes?"

Peter shrugged. "As I see it, Aslan has wanted me to be more appreciative of this side of the Wardrobe, and I am very thankful to him for showing this to me. Also, Richard is very ill, and I thought, no, I knew, Aslan wanted me to spend time with him. If anything, I spent too much time with him at the expense of other important things. I can't believe Aslan would have wanted me to shirk my responsibilities to the Professor and the promises I've made to Father."

His brother picked up the letters and thoughtfully thumbed through them. "Susan hit on it first, Peter. She assumed she was sent to America for a reason and that Narnia is not just a pleasant memory, but that from it she developed skills that Aslan expected her to use here."

So, perhaps, Susan has found her purpose. Peter thought Lucy was well on her way as well. "Do you know, Ed?" Peter asked. "Do you know what Aslan wishes for you to do?"

With a contemplative frown, Edmund shook his head. "I don't know. Perhaps. I'm not prepared to say. I need to talk to Aslan about it more. And, as Lu would say, not talk, but listen."
Edmund handed the letters back and rose, dusting his crumbs off on to the floor. Peter settled back on the lumpy bed.

At the door, Edmund hesitated. Turning back he asked, "Peter?"

It was his brother's tone that spoke to him, heart and mind, a rarely used tone that demanded he attend to every carefully enunciated nuance. "Yes?"

"Do you remember when I would ask whether you desired the truth or the lie?"

"I could never forget that old gallows game." It was the brutal question his brother would ask when the odds were too high, the enemy too strong, the betrayal too painful, the losses too great, the deaths too many, the reinforcements too few.

"My brother and King," the Just King would say, "do you desire the truth, or the lie?"

"Lie to me," the High King would say.

"Our infantry broke the line. They are in retreat. Our reinforcement arrives by dawn."

"And the truth," the High King would say.

"If we do not withdraw now under cover of darkness, there will be nothing left to retreat come dawn."

"If a time came, Peter, where I could not tell you the truth, I would say nothing rather than tell you the lie."

If he did not ask, Edmund would not have to say anything. Peter wondered if his brother had ever faced this dilemma of truth, falsehood, or blessed silence. He decided he did not wish to know such a thing, ever, and so would not ask.

"I understand, Edmund."

"And so it was with Asim. He could not tell you the truth and did not wish to lie to you. So, he came to me, to one to whom he could lie, with impunity, if necessary."

So this was the truth. It was reassuring, Peter supposed, to know that it wasn't a lie.

"Spies really do live by a different code, don't they?" Peter asked, still cradling the bitterness.

"Yes, brother, we do."

Quietly, Edmund shut the door.

Peter bundled up his anger over Asim, his concern for Susan, and his envy of Edmund for being the confidant he had not been. Tying these churning emotions into a neat package, he set them aside, where, unprovoked, they would shrink until he was better able to dwell upon them dispassionately.

Peter slipped his thumb carefully under the envelope's seal, "INSPECTED BY CENSOR," slid the letter out, and began to read.

Dear Edmund:
I hope this finds you well. Our journey was, thank God, uneventful and quiet. As you know, we sailed from ******** and were ******** in a ********. We arrived in ***** and traveled to New York City by ********

New York City is amazing. It is brightly lit and very loud, with people and cars everywhere. New Yorkers drive very fast with a foot on the gas and a hand on the horn! Indeed, there are cars everywhere. At night, it is very easy to get about with streets and buildings that shine brightly in the dark. Central Park is beautiful and green. In the late spring here there are many flowers blooming, including fruit and dogwood trees, brilliant azaleas, petunias and geraniums. Such a contrast!

Mum and I went to the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Natural History. I found the Natural History Museum worse than a zoo, because all the many animals are dead and stuffed and horribly glassy eyed. It was disturbing and I did not stay long. The "Met" was better. They have an extensive collection of Egyptian artifacts and a fine collection of medieval art and armaments. Mum was bored in the medieval section, so I was not able to tarry as long as I might.

We went to Father's offices and met some very nice people. There are many Canadian women who are working there. They are charming and very clever and I had thought I might fit in well. It is not to be, however, as Mum insists that I accompany her to **********. She has learned that she will be a secretary at the **************** for ********** and is expecting to work very hard. She is, predictably, very unhappy and is certain that I shall be bored so left to my own devices. I have, of course, assured her that I shall be fine and am looking forward to seeing the sights and sounds and meeting new people!

To that end, I have had several nice, long talks with two of the office women over coffee. I feel better now about the arrangements for Father and Mum. They also gave me good guidance on how I might seek out things to do once we arrive in ***** and how I might best assure that my time there is useful and productive. I had told them that I would be missing Father very much and so they told me who might best help me keep in touch with him. I am ever so grateful to them for the very helpful advice.

I so longed to share my gossip with you even though I am sure it would bore you to tears, brother!

Mum and I have done a lot of shopping. There are beautiful stores near father's office. The stores are stocked with furs, cosmetics, stockings, and many posh frocks. The shoes would make you quite irritable, I'm sure. So, you can imagine what I have been doing, brother! Of course, there are still local customs to consider, so I am being prudent and patient. Mum hasn't seen the half of it!

Peter began to notice as he read what seemed rather pointless, rambling drivel that Edmund had read the letter far more closely. He had underlined words such as "brightly lit" and "cars," and "stockings." Words such as "local customs" were circled with scribbled notations about "DC." Not understanding, Peter went back and read it more carefully, knowing that with his brother and sister, an entire encrypt could be concealed here and he'd never know of it. It was her breezy discussion of a visit to a grocer that made Peter take special notice as Edmund had underlined words like "strawberries," "apples," "lettuces," "butter," and "beef."

Further, Edmund had circled the words "Such a contrast" and drawn lines and arrows to the words "disturbing," "dead," and "glassy eyed" with emphatic lines. In this, Peter finally saw the duplicity, saying one thing in one paragraph, signaling the contrast and the truth in the next. Susan was disturbed by the contrasts she saw. She was seeing and describing a world without the strict rationing of England, a world of consumption, a place where if you had money, one could buy things. Lights were on; there were no blackouts. The park was green instead of cratered, filled with
flowers instead of unexploded ordnance. Museums were open, not shuttered with their collections hidden in private homes and in underground storage in Bradford. There were cars, so many cars, they made noise, which meant they had petrol.

Peter wondered what the business about posh frocks and local customs meant and Mum being ignorant of the half of it... Oh... Susan is waiting until she goes to Washington to shop there and Mum doesn't know of everything she has been buying. Why? There was also this business of what sounded to be sightseeing, "office girls" who were giving the advice, and Susan stating how much she would miss her Father, which while true, in reality didn't seem to warrant the anxiety behind it, given that he was far safer in New York than North Africa.

As he thought further on this, Peter could almost hear Edmund patiently explaining the double meaning – Susan has chatted up the office girls in the spies' office where Father is working. She learned who will be the best people to contact in Washington. Mum and Father don't know anything about it.

Susan has a plan.

To Follow, Chapter 4 - Adventures in Babysitting, Part 1

In which the Queen Susan arrives in Tashbaan, gets down to business, and finds her charge.

A/N

A huge, enormous thanks to the awesome Doewe who translated Edmund and Asim's exchange, with particular attention to putting deliberate errors in Edmund's beginning German dialogue. The exchange, in English, is below. I have tried to have Asim signal some of the errors. Only Edmund would know the book, How to Learn German in 30 Days, had over-promised results, and nevertheless still try to learn a language in the allotted time.

The German scene translated:

"I am curious how you managed to procure a copy of Lady Chatterley's Lover." Mary and Polly had been looking for it for some time. Never mind how a schoolboy even knew of it.

Edmund smiled, feral beyond his years, and flipped the brown wrap off his book, to reveal a truly ludicrous title, How To Speak and Learn German In 30 Days. "I thought pretending to read D.H. Lawrence would make him leave faster."

Major al-Masri managed to not wince at Edmund's mangled German accent; his grammar was marginally better. More impressive, indeed, inspired, was wrapping a German language textbook in brown paper and pretending it was Lady Chatterley's Lover in order to drive his cousin away. Perhaps the best use for an instructional language book he had ever seen. Learning German as promised by the book's title within 30 days was impossible and he told Edmund so.

"Learning German in 30 Days is a daunting task."
"Gewagtes?" he repeated. "What does that mean?"

"Daunting, difficult, hard."

Edmund nodded his understanding, then worked to provide a response and to translate it. "I think the book may have made promises it could not keep." Edmund twisted his mouth about, getting it around the words that were mostly correct.

So, Edmund also recognized that he and a book’s promise to *Learn German In 30 Days* were both a trifle too ambitious. Nevertheless, the effort was commendable, and should be recognized as such. "I commend your effort and encourage you to continue. I take it you are self-taught?"

"It is *that* obvious?"

"Yes, which makes your accomplishment so far even more remarkable."

"Thank you, I…" A horrified look crossed his face, not due to his annihilation of a blameless language. "Major, I am truly sorry! We are in a *pub*!" He tilted his head toward the bar. "Should we go elsewhere?"
Adventures in Babysitting, Part 1

The Stone Gryphon, Part 2: The Queen Susan In Tashbaan
Chapter 4 – Adventures in Babysitting, Part 1

Head's up, from here onward, as Edmund said in the last chapter, it's "out of character" and may be a little disorienting. This isn't Tashbaan and Queen Susan of The Horse and His Boy. So, if that's what you're expecting, best turn around now.

The T rating is for some naughty, Otter-type language and other matters, including very bawdy drinking songs.

A link to the real life parallels and Key can be found in my profile.

"Desperately shorthanded, the BSC recruited brains and talent where it could find them, often making only a cursory background check. They brought in friends, family members, and personable colleagues like a club voting in new members, the only qualifications being evidence of a certain confidence and imagination and the assumption of shared values…. Once when they were having a hard time finding secretaries, [Bickham] Sweet-Escott could think of no one to recommend but his sister, Lutie, who happened to know shorthand. Just one word to the wise, and within a week she was on her way to Cairo via the Cape and the Belgian Congo."

The Irregulars: Roald Dahl and the British Spy Ring in Wartime Washington, Jennet Conant

Upon arriving at the Residence of Free Narnia in Tashbaan, Queen Susan's first reaction was shock. She had known that the Queen Iris of Archenland would, due to her status in the royal Household and vast experience in diplomatic matters, deign to assist the Narnian Ambassador to the Calormen Empire at the diplomatic Residence. Queen Iris was going to be very busy as the chatelaine and assistant to his Lordship the Ambassador and the Queen had been especially concerned that Susan would be lonely and bored.

Queen Susan had her own plan for remaining occupied. She assured Queen Iris that all would be well. She was very appreciative of the introduction to his Most Lordship the Ambassador. She had not, however, expected the Ambassador to be quite so … short. Or smelly.

Queen Susan knew, of course, that the placement of Ambassador Flobber in Tashbaan had been a matter of the utmost delicacy. There had been no question that the High King would appoint anyone but his brother, the Just King, to be his Chancellor and Minister of War. Flobber's lackluster performance and support of policies of appeasement during the accursed reign of the Jadis, the White Witch had assured that he would not receive the coveted positions so obviously due to the Just King - the Just King's cunning, guile and bravery made such an appointment a foregone conclusion. It had been necessary then to find an appropriate, metaphorically speaking, bone to toss to Flobber, for the loyal Bird had been prominent before the High King's ascension to the throne and he did deserve some modicum of recognition. More to the point, he needed to be out of Narnia so as to not constantly be second-guessing and undermining the High King and the Just King as they waged war against the Ettin Giants of the North.

Queen Susan, however, did wonder what had ever possessed the High King to appoint the Penguin
as Ambassador, to a post of such importance and one that was in, for all practical purposes, the hot deserts of the southern parts of the Known Lands. In Calormen, Ambassador Flobber was truly a Fish Out of Water.

"Edmund!"

Peter's bellow reverberated from the upstairs bedroom.

"Well that didn't take long," Edmund muttered, just sitting down to the fry up with Eustace and Lucy.

Getting up, he headed over to the bottom of the stair and yelled back, "What?"

"I did not appoint a Penguin as Ambassador to Calormen!"

"Of course you didn't!" Edmund hollered back. "Churchill did!"

There was a pause. Edmund could mentally hear his brother say, Oh, right then as he remembered This Was Not Narnia. Peter popped his head out of the bedroom, Susan's first letter clutched in his hand. He took the stairs down three at a time. Quietly, he asked, "Did our sister equate Lord Halifax, Ambassador to America, former Viceroy of India and Foreign Secretary for Prime Minister Chamberlain, to a penguin?"

"She did." Edmund held out a banger speared on a knife. "Sausage?"

Peter grimaced. "No, thank you."

"Bloody herbivore."

The Archenland Dryads had recommended to Susan that she seek out their sister, Fraxi, in Chief Sallowpad's office. Sallowpad reported directly and frequently with Archenland; moreover the Dryads had said their sister was in dire need of assistance as the diplomatic work load was very heavy and Fraxi's two sisters had been reassigned leaving the Ash Dryad with the many burdens of Sallowpad's busy activities and none to share them. One Dryad had been sent to augment the Just King's staff in the Lone Islands campaign; the other, more mysteriously, it was rumored had been sent to the Marshes beyond the River Shribble because she was fluent in Marsh-wiggle and Ash Trees were native to that part of the North. The Dryads all knew what that meant and they most earnestly entreated Susan to avail herself of the excellent March-wiggle instruction available in Tashbaan.

Sallowpad's offices were not in the diplomatic Residence. Indeed, they were quite far from the main offices of Queen Iris and Sir Flobber, in a small, dingy outbuilding. It was a rather different world than the rarified, stratified echelons of the main compound.

Walking in that first morning it was also, there was no other word for it, a zoo. Close to thirty messenger Birds, Pigeons mostly, were jostling, cooing, preening, flopping in and out the open window, all demanding to be relieved of their notes so that they could continue with their rounds. Parchment was piled on every flat surface, spilling to the floor. Detailed maps of the Lone Islands, Narnia, the Marshes north of the River Shribble, and Ettnsmoor hung from the walls.

A hoary Gryphon was at a desk, three messenger pigeons tangled in his ruff and feathers. He was trying, valiantly and unsuccessfully, to secure a message to a Falcon's leg. A Gryphon's eagle talons were not suited to the fine work of tiny ties and parchment scraps.
"Oh please hurry, Bardon," the Falcon pleaded. "I've got to get to the Tisroc's Palace, or Flobber will dry pluck me!"

"I'd like to see you try this with no hands, Liluye," Bardon the Gryphon replied, in a deep accent more melodious than was typical of native Narnian Beasts.

Susan hurried to the Gryphon. "Good morning, Friends. Might I assist?"

The Gryphon turned his head and Susan saw he was blind on his far side, his eye milky white and glassy, a dreadful scar slashing across his Eagle head from crown to beak.

"Thank you, yes!" Please!" the Falcon cried, hopping from foot to foot.

"Hold still, then good Lady," Susan chided gently.

The message was duly attached and Susan offered her arm to Liluye. She walked the Falcon to the window. "Aslan's blessings on you, Friend."

"And you!" the Falcon cried, and flew off into the bright morning. Susan had to duck as more messengers flew in.

"Fraxi!" squawked an irritable voice from the inner office. "Where in blazes is my tea?"

"She's not back yet, Chief," the Gryphon called.

"Where's my morning mail?"

"Not opened yet!"

"Why not?"

"Because I don't have hands!" Bardon reminded the unseen Chief.

"Find someone who does!" barked the Chief.

Susan turned back from the window opening her hands in front in a silent offer.

"Are you Queen Susan?" the Gryphon asked, shaking his head and dislodging the pigeons roosting there.

"I am. And you are?"

"Bardon," the Gryphon replied with a nod of greeting. "Hello and all that, hope you had a pleasant journey, but can we do all those pleasantries later?"

"Of course." Susan seized the nearest Pigeon who was trying to push its Cousins out of the way on the crowded ledge. Deftly removing the message from the Bird's leg, she shoved the parchment enveloping a nearby desk to the side, cleared a space, set the message down, and put a discarded tin cup on top of it.

"If I collect the messages, might you organize them?" she asked.

"Organization," the Gryphon mused philosophically. "I don't remember what that is." He ambled over to the desk Susan had commandeered and began reviewing the messages as she caught Bird after Bird, removed the slips on their legs, and sent the Pigeons on their strutting, cooing way.
Pointing his wing in the direction of the inner office, Bardon said, by way of explanation, "The racket in there is Chief Sallowpad."

Susan nodded, tossing another, very fat, Pigeon out the window. "The Archenland Dryads had said you all were shorthanded and suggested I come by."

Bardon purred his agreement. "Fraxi got a bird yesterday from her sisters about that and considers you a blessing from Aslan himself. She's been counting the minutes."

"We do what we must in these troubled times," Susan said. "The Lone Islands seems to be the news of the day here," she said, putting another in the growing pile to the right of the Gryphon's paw.

"And not good news, so it seems." With a cat-like sigh from Bardon, strange to hear it come out of a beak, the papers fluttered weakly on the desk. Susan caught one quickly before it blew away. "Come to think on it, I don't remember what good news looks like, either," the Gryphon said.

"Someone arriving to help with the work?" Susan offered, putting a message about the Northern Marsh occupation in another pile.

"Aslan guide us," the Gryphon invoked. "I'd say we're too desperate for help to be especially picky about the help when it does arrive, but that wouldn't be polite."

Susan smiled her understanding. Gryphon temperament varied, depending on whether they more strongly favored the solitary Eagle or the more social Lion. Bardon seemed to have adopted the sardonic humors of the Birds and the more conversational qualities of a Lion.

She separated out two messages direct from the Tisroc into a separate Very Important Pile along with those few from the High King in Narnia and the Just King in the Lone Islands. The Just King was clamoring for more Gryphons and war horses to better equip the Narnian companies and their Lone Island regiments.

She noticed that Bardon was putting Ambassador Flobber's windy correspondence into the same pile with the advertisements, bills, and notes from the personnel department about appropriate dress for Dryads and Beasts during the Tashbaan summer ("In deference to our hosting nation, the Empire of Calormen, all Narnians shall appropriately cover private parts.")

"Tea seems to be taking an awfully long time?" Susan said, enduring an irritated peck from a grumbling Pigeon Cock.

"Tea is his byword for reading the morning news." Bardon tilted his head to one side to read another missive about the Just King's mounting losses of soldiers and war horses in the Lone Islands. "Fraxi collects copies of the dailies that the criers shout the news from."

"I see," Susan said, and she did. There were three crier news services for a city as large as Tashbaan, each operated by owners with their own biases, favorites and enemies. The Archenland Dryads had mentioned that managing the criers and their reports on Narnia were a significant task in Sallowpad's office.

"You're here!" called an exuberant, lilting voice. "Praise Aslan!"

With a whiff of earthy, spring air, the Ash Dryad breezed into the room.

Bardon flicked his tail between them. "Fraxi meet Queen Susan; Queen Susan meet Fraxi."

Fraxi set the parchment she was carrying on top of still more parchment on the nearest desk, and
blew toward them, remarkably not sending paper flying everywhere. She took in the neat stacks with a shrewd eye.

"Organization!" Fraxi exclaimed. "It's been two years since we've had organization! Thank you!"

"My arrival is timely then," Susan replied, sending a silent thanks to Aslan for guiding her here.

"What news?" Bardon asked.

"The Trumpeter reports that the High King will visit with the Tisroc here, in two weeks," Fraxi said, grabbing another Pigeon who protested the Dryad's rough handling with a startled squawk.

"I hadn't heard that," Susan said, listening closely.

"We gave the exclusive to Tarkaan Kidrash of The Trumpeter, so you probably wouldn't have," Fraxi explained. "This was the first public word of the visit."

Bardon's side heaved another cat-like sigh. "We can usually count on The Trumpeter to air our side of things. The Daily takes the opposite view, and is very opposed to the Tisroc."

*And Narnia,* Susan knew.

"Tarkaan Ahshota and Tarkheena Lasaraleen manage that one," Fraxi added.

Bardon growled low, the sort of sound one heard in his chest, but not out his beak.

"Quite," the Dryad agreed briskly. "Lasaraleen does have wonderful parties, though."

Susan had been putting all the (and there were many) party invitations and society event notices into the same category with Flobber's correspondence and notes from housekeeping. ("With shedding season upon us, the cleaning staff reminds the Beasts who do so to kindly groom one another out of doors.") She noticed, however, that Fraxi was putting the invitations she handled into a separate pile. Susan discreetly followed the Dryad's lead and moved the social invitations she had sorted over into Fraxi's stack as well.

The Dryad, nevertheless, saw what Susan had done and smiled approvingly. "Excellent! Thank you, we'll get this sorted in no time!"

"And what of The Tattler?" Susan was curious about the third crier service, the smallest but, from what she had understood in Archenland, evidently the most widely read.

"The owner, Tarkaan Anradin, is the worst muckraker in the Known Lands," Bardon said.

"Is he our muckraker at least?" Susan asked, managing not to roll her eyes at another message from maintenance. ("A Labour of Moles will be on the premises to begin excavation of the Ambassador's swimming pool and diving pavilion. Please remember that Moles do not see well and kindly direct them to the construction site should you find one lost in the main Residence.")

"No," Fraxi said, "but he's not owned by anyone else either."

The Dryad wove a long, long branching arm over the desk and snagged Bardon's stack of social correspondence and announcements. Collecting them all in one group, the Dryad began examining them as carefully as if they were missives from the High King himself, shuffling the order, apparently prioritizing them.

Coming from war-torn Narnia, it was very strange to see so very many invitations to parties and
events. Entertainments simply weren't appropriate given the deadly seriousness of the War. Tashbaan seemed frivolous by comparison. Noting the tenor of the correspondence and from whom much of it originated, Susan was reminded uncomfortably of the sorts of love letters of which the Kings complained.

Nevertheless perceiving the way the winds were blowing, Susan pushed aside her growing sense of disapproval and proffered a very formal looking card toward Fraxi and Bardon's good side. "I believe this one is important. "Tarkheena Masikah requests the presence of Lord Peridan, Knight of Narnia, at a luncheon tomorrow."

Confirming Susan's hunch, Fraxi squealed, "This is well timed news! Sallowpad will want to see Peridan about it today. Bardon?"

"I'll round him up, yes," Bardon said with a rumble Susan thought was displeasure.

The questions Susan had must have shown; Fraxi smiled sympathetically. "Tarkheena Masikah is on the Tisroc's War Council," she explained.

"She holds some very unfriendly views about Narnia," Bardon said.

Yet she requests the presence of a Narnian Knight for luncheon? And we are glad of it? Then again…

"Where's my tea?" a harsh voice broke in. The Raven Chief, Sallowpad, had flown in and was perched on a chair behind them. "Queen Susan?"

She turned about, executing a curtsey. "Chief, it is a pleasure to meet you."

The Raven cocked his head, eyeing the neat piles of messages. "Organizing us already, are you?"

"Aslan's Blessing it is, Chief," Fraxi said firmly and underscored her support by wrapping a branch around Susan's shoulders.

Susan smiled. "Thank you, Fraxi," but then she politely extricated herself from the Dryad's supporting arm.

This interview she must handle unaided.

Sallowpad looked at her searchingly and Susan returned the Raven's stare calmly, knowing this was a test, perfunctory as it was. They were desperate for assistance, Sallowpad knew her pedigree already, and the slot was hers to lose. She had given a great deal of thought to how to best present herself so as to appear as the capable Queen she was and to not be dismissed as an insecure, unsure spoiled little princess. To that end, she had closely observed the competent, bustling Dryads of Archenland when she had been there and decided to model her own conduct on the manner and appearance of Fraxi's sisters – mature, proficient and discreet, though with conservative, practical clothing that covered far more than bark and leaves did. It was a persona with which Sallowpad would be unconsciously familiar. This package of brisk efficiency was what his office needed, and this, she communicated to the Chief, is what she would provide.

"You arrived with Queen Iris' entourage?" Sallowpad asked.

"She is, as you know, assigned to Sir Flobber," Susan replied. "Her husband, King Lune, remains in Archenland."

"And you?" the Raven challenged.
"Otherwise idle." That would bother the overworked, overburdened Chief.

"Aren't you rather young?" Sallowpad snapped. She had obviously touched a nerve.

"Not since the Ettins invaded Narnia and laid waste to Cair Paravel."

"Oh for Aslan's sake," Bardon muttered irritably, "she's got nothing else to do and she came with the Penguin's new personal secretary."

With a sour expression on her otherwise lovely, pale face, Fraxi said, "If we don't get some help in here, Chief, I'm going to put in for a transfer to a less stressful position, like being dropped into the Northern Marshes and Ettin controlled territory, got that?"

The Raven cawed in alarm and flapped his feathers. "Absolutely not!"

With such advocacy on her behalf, Susan deemed it better to say nothing. A moment later the remainder of the argument was made as four more Pigeons and a Flamingo swooped in through the open window, followed a moment later by Liluye, the Falcon.

The Pigeons landed on Fraxi who swatted them irritably.

"Oh, hurry!" Liluye pleaded. "This is urgent from the Tisroc and I have to rush back with your reply or he'll…"

"Give you to the First Wife for dry plucking?" Bardon finished.

Susan picked up the *The Trumpeter*, *The Tattler* and *The Daily* from the desk where Fraxi had left them. "Fraxi brought your tea, Chief. Shall I set it up in your office or would you like the morning mail first?"

"Tea," the Raven grumped with an irritable fluff of his feathers. "Bardon, find out where Peridan slept last night and get him in here. Fraxi, tell Queen Susan which desk she can clear off to call her own. Both of you look over the invitations and come up with schedules for Peridan and Prince Cor. I need to think about what's to be done in advance of the High King's visit. He'll need to be briefed."

Susan saw that Fraxi had been taking this all down on a scrap of parchment. She wondered where the charcoal and the scrap had come from; a Pigeon was still roosting on her shoulder.

"Me! Please! Don't forget about me!" Liluye cried, dancing from foot to foot.

"And would someone do something about that Bird before I strangle her myself!"

Sallowpad launched himself from the chair into his inner office. "And get me my tea!" he squawked.

Edmund stuck his head back in the bedroom. Peter was looking a little dazed, chewing absently on the apple. It was a lot to assimilate. He had done a chart and key earlier in the summer, but burned it after the meeting with the Major. His brother wasn't going to be able to keep it all in his head; it just wasn't the way Peter's mind worked. Glib familiarity would be the best he could hope for.

"The criers are newspapers, I assume?"

"Yes. Again I'm not sure if they are composites or distinct papers. Managing their reporting is an important part of the story."
"The Lone Islands are North Africa, I thought. What's this about you needing Gryphons and war horses?"

"I suspect it's weapons, tanks or planes. You'll read a lot more about them in the next few letters. Remember, though, it's not me, it's the Just King. She never names us.

"It's strange, she writes as if we aren't her brothers."

"No, actually, it's the opposite. Of a sort. The High King and the Just King are not you and me. They are others, Churchill and that collection of Generals and Field Marshalls they've had in North Africa."

"I don't think much of your leadership, General Auchinleck."

"Well, I'm Field Marshall Montgomery of the whole of the Eighth Army now, right?"

Edmund had to duck as Peter threw the apple core at him. It sailed over his head into the hallway and landed with a squelch.

"Well, if it isn't the most beautiful Ash from here to Archenland."

Susan glanced over and around her stack of parchment for a look at the newcomer. A very young, very blonde Knight was leaning over Fraxi, who was sitting primly at her desk. The Knight was in the smart, trim scarlet uniform of the Narnian Company. A golden Gryphon emblazoned on the shoulder of his doublet indicated his service in the Gryphon Aerial Corps. A pilot, then.

Fraxi looked very weary for this outrageous flirtation.

"Last time, Peridan, you said I was the most beautiful Ash in all the Known Lands. Have you found a more attractive ash for your wood?"

Susan snickered quietly.

Fraxi nodded in Susan’s direction. "Be polite, Sir Knight, and make your introductions to a monarch of Narnia."

Susan stood. "Good afternoon, Lord Peridan. I am Queen Susan."

He executed a very handsome bow to her curtsey and took her hand in his own. Closer now, Susan could see a fine scar down his face, disappearing under the tunic. It would have been a fearsome wound, but now added to the rakish air Peridan projected. She firmly pulled her hand away before he could raise it to his lips.

Her subtle rebuff did not stop him from thoroughly appraising her, top to bottom, with a lingering leer in the vicinity of her chest.

Deprived of her hand, and still focused rather too intently upon the region above her waist and below her chin, Peridan executed an indolent salute. "Hullo, Luv."

Susan pointedly looked about the room. "There is no one here who answers to that name, Lord Peridan." She turned back to her desk, knowing he was undoubtedly assessing her ash now as well. A summer of this behavior would be tiresome indeed.

"These are your invitations for the next two days," she said briskly handing him the cards. "I've made you a schedule as well, with a copy for Bardon."
"My! Aren't we efficient?"

"No," Susan corrected. "I am efficient." She paused, giving him the same slow, mocking once over he had awarded her, but with a frown that implied something decidedly lacking. "You, I think, are not."

"Fraxi!" Peridan tossed over his shoulder. "I like this one! Can we keep her?"

"Peridan! You good for nothing lout!" Sallowpad squawked from the inner office. "Save it for the Tarkheenas and get your ash in here!"

With his free hand, Peridan mimicked a beak open and closing. He glanced at the schedule in his other hand and his lighthearted features turned dark and scowling. "That Vulture," he snarled.

He spun around and stormed into the inner office. "I'll be hanged and burn in Tash's Hell before I…"

Stretching a long limb across the office, Fraxi swung the inner room door shut, muffling the caws and yelling.

"Is something wrong?" Susan asked, not concerned for her own sake. She had followed Sallowpad and Fraxi's instructions. "It seems Peridan does not approve of his social calendar?"

"Probably didn't include enough time for gambling with the Crows and drinking with the Dwarfs," Bardon said, coming through the door. He cocked his head toward the inner office, and Fraxi swatted him lightly on the hindquarters with a leafy twig.

"No eavesdropping," she scolded.

"Doesn't make any difference," Bardon said with a sad mewl. "I have an Eagle's hearing, not a Lion's." The Gryphon fluffed his feathers and settled his wings on to his back. "Oh, and Fraxi?"

"Yes?" the Dryad asked, not looking up from the parchment she was copying.

"I brought Prince Cor as well. He should be here any moment."

Fraxi's charcoal dropped to the floor. "Oh! I…"

Susan looked up at this interesting exchange. The Dryad was now blushing deeply, which on an Ash had a pale, green tinge to it. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Bardon!"

Of course the Dryad was now arranging her leaves more artfully and craning her neck to look out the office door.

Bardon turned away, catching Susan's attention with his good eye and winked. Susan managed to suppress the smile.

Leaving Fraxi to her preening anticipation, Susan returned to the summary of who was saying what about Narnia so that Sallowpad could determine what they might do to refute it, and who could go about accomplishing it. Whatever it was. Susan hadn't quite yet deciphered that part of the mystery.

Bardon strolled over toward the window and settled himself in a patch of sunlight, ceding to the Cat that shared half his body.

"Hullo, Fraxi!"
Now why, when Prince Cor said it, was the greeting warm and cheery?

"What a surprise, Cor!"

Susan heard Bardon huff lightly, amused at the dissembling.

"Oh! Those roses are beautiful! Wherever did you get them?"

"The Moles are digging up the rose garden for Sir Flobber's bathing pond, so I asked a chap for one. Didn't want something so pretty to go to waste."

Susan did look up at this; the yellow rose bush was indeed impressively large. In contrast to the battered bush he was juggling, Cor cut quite the neat figure. He had darker hair and features to Peridan's blonde, and was in the uniform of the Archenland infantry. Goodness, no wonder they were inundated with invitations from bored Tarkheenas.

"She's going to need a wheelbarrow for that thing," Bardon muttered.

As to be expected, Fraxi managed prickly rose bushes as easily as she handled everything else, already maneuvering the thing into an, however improbably, empty dustbin. The Dryad fussed with the plant. She stuck her arms in and with a few muttered words, the bin filled with a rich loam. She poured water from a pitcher on her desk over the planting and the bush visibly brightened.

"You are amazing, Fraxi…"

Bardon evidently thought it best to remind the two of their presence and rustled his feathers. On that cue, Susan stood.

Cor tipped his cap. "Bardon, thanks for the lift again. And you must be Queen Susan!"

He was so enthusiastic, Susan couldn't help smiling in return. "I am."

Instead of the smarmy attempt to kiss her hand, Cor offered a civil bow and salute that Susan returned with good heart.

"You'll do as I say, Peridan, or I'll see you returned to Narnia in a box!"

They all winced collectively at Sallowpad's screeching. It really could bend metal.

Cor cleared his throat. "If you'll excuse me, I'd best get in there before murder is done."

Fraxi sighed dreamily, finding the view of his leaving evidently as enthralling as that presented when Cor arrived.

"Bardon, this is the schedule for you, Cor and Peridan." Susan held the parchment out for him so he could study it. "Once you are done, I can put it in your neck pouch if you like." Like many Beasts with neither hands nor clothing (and the requests of the personnel department notwithstanding), Bardon kept important things in a satchel slung over his neck and shoulders.

The Gryphon turned his head to the side to review it.

"Fraxi?" the Gryphon asked. The Dryad was coaxing a small bud on her rose bush to bloom. "Fraxi?"

"What's that Bardon?"
"Do you and Cor need a lift to Tarkheena Lasaraleen's dinner tonight?"

The Dryad sighed. "I suppose we should go with you to make sure Peridan shows up."

"Aren't you more worried about him getting thrown out?"

"It would make it so much easier! But, no, he won't get thrown out. Remember what happened the last time when he accused Tarkaan Ahshota of deliberately trying to sour relations between Narnia and Calormen? Lasaraleen invited Peridan back for supper the next day!"

Susan had been following the conversation closely. "Why would the Tarkheena invite a rude guest back?"

"Fights like the ones Peridan tends to pick make her events more exciting," Fraxi said drearily. "Everyone talks about them, Tarkaan Anradin writes it up in The Tattler, that sort of thing."

"And Peridan?"

"Well, it is difficult for a combat wounded Narnian Knight to sit quietly and listen to the manager of a crier service go on about how the Known Lands would be better off if the Ettins overrun Narnia."

Bardon snorted. "Well, yes, Peridan takes ill to that, true. Fact is though, Queen Susan, our good Knight loves the attention of a dust up as much as Lasaraleen."

With everyone leaving the office for the day, they weren't quite yet prepared to let her remain there by herself. Susan gathered several months' worth of newspapers for evening reading – The Washington Post, The Washington Times-Herald, The New York Herald Tribune, and The New York Times. Given the way that Gladys and the Colonel tossed the names of the Washington power players about, she knew she had to master the intricacies of this new game quickly to be valuable to them. She thought reading Drew Pearson's Washington-Merry-Go-Round column would be a quick, and very dirty, shortcut. It really did make for foul reading.

Susan went back to the Embassy to see if Mum was going to be released any time soon. Interestingly, Lord Halifax was not invited to Cissie Patterson's dinner party. She had seldom taken so instant a dislike to a person as she had to their country's Ambassador. Knowing the formalities of a dozen Courts, and further understanding the limited place such formalism served in 1942, Susan could but conclude that Lord Halifax was simply not of this century.

She picked up a light supper for them both at the Commissary, marveling, again, at the overabundance of everything. Even the British stationed in American looked, there was no other way to say it, better fed then everyone back home. Oh, there were the obligatory signs up about saving butter and red meat for the soldiers, but it seemed, even at the Embassy, perfunctory at best. She hoped Edmund had understood how dismayed she had been by the stark contrasts.

It was disturbing, knowing that her every word was being read by someone else. She was already composing a description of the day in her head. It had been so sweet to see how Gladys reacted to Captain Lowrey bringing her that enormous rose bush. Gladys was very reminiscent of a Dryad – an exceptionally quick thinking, very loyal, very efficient Dryad. All the office girls were like that – smart, good legs, better memories.

She had immediately thought of Prince Cor when she met Captain Lowrey – physically, they were nothing alike, but that kind, steady, self-effacing goodness reminded her very much of the Prince of Archenland.
As for Tebbit, he was already tiresome and of an ilk she had really had quite enough of in Narnia. There had been no reason to assume that young men might be better behaved here than there, but she had hoped that combat wounded, decorated officers in His Majesty's Service might have been a slight improvement. Plainly, immaturity was a universal invariant.

"Oh, hello Darling, have you been waiting for me long?"

Susan gave her tired Mum a kiss. "I picked up some supper, can you leave now?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose. I must be back first thing, though. Tea you know." Mum yawned. "And as London is hours ahead, there are cables to go through first thing."

Looping her arm in her mother's, Susan guided her out, saying good night to the security guard.

"You look so grown up, Susan, I didn't recognize you for a moment. You look just like the office girls in New York. Did you have a good day? Did you do anything fun?"

"Oh, yes, it was very good. I went over to one of the offices in the Annex and helped with filing and paperwork."

"That sounds very dull, Dear. I would hope you would at least see the sights."

"Mum, I told you before, with everyone else working so hard, and so short-staffed, I really do not feel I can just sit idly by, visit the Smithsonian, and shop in Georgetown."

Her mother sighed as they revisited the argument. "I am proud of you, Susan. I just don't want you to spend your holiday working."

"Pot meet kettle, Mum?"

"It is different for me, sweetheart."

*No, Mum, it is not different at all.*

She squeezed her mother's arm, and they walked together under the lamps lining the well-lit street back to their flat. It was such a strange place. The Americans were so blissfully ignorant and did not begin to understand what Europe suffered. She understood better what the British were up against here. Reading some of those papers – *The Washington Times-Herald* had been worse – there were many influential and articulate Americans who felt that all of savage, bloody, Europe should burn in a Nazi fire and good riddance to it and the tricky British.

Lit street lamps were such a small thing, yet so profound. How long had it been since she had been able to enjoy a normal evening stroll down a lighted street, and without concern for air raid sirens? On a breeze, the last of the cherry blossoms floated down, swirling in the light of the street lamp, looking very like snow. Inwardly, she smiled for the reminder and the affirmation. *Thank you, Aslan. Let it be as you will.*

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*To follow, Chapter 5, Adventures In Babysitting, Part 2*

And so now you see how it shall be, and how mad I was to undertake this. If you are interested, I have posted from my profile a link to where you can find my "key" of persons, places and things. As I researched the real life biographies of some of these people about whom Susan is writing, I have found they seem too colorful and fanciful even for fan fic. Surely, they cannot be real, and yet, they are. So, if you are interested, check out some of the real life inspirations, including Drew
Pearson, Cissie Patterson, Vice President Wallace, Frank Waldrop, Congresswoman Clare Booth Luce, Roald Dahl, Ian Fleming, William Stephenson, and the process by which over 250 Sherman Tanks made their way from the U.S to Field Marshall Montgomery in North Africa in time for the pivotal Second Battle of El Alamein.

This is a very dodgy story. All the more so because so much of it very close to the reality.

Fraxi, Bardon, Lord Peridan, Sallowpad, and Prince Cor are more subtle amalgams, yet all of them have real world counterparts and I did not have to go very far for inspiration.
I know the last one was a bit dense. There's lots of world building as we establish Susan's milieu, and the characters, who you think you would know, are not whom you expect. With this chapter and the basics out of the way, I hope we can settle in and take the story within a story (within a story?) on its own terms.

I was remiss in not mentioning that it was a son who suggested a Penguin as a stand-in for a very staid English Ambassador.

The T rating is for some naughty, Otter-type language and other matters, including a very bawdy drinking song about a Moose. Any time Gryphon Aerial Corps Peridan/Wing Commander Tebbitt is in a chapter, some coarse language will necessarily ensue.

A link to the real life parallels and Key can be found in my profile. Also in my live journal, I posted a discussion of Some Very Good Questions posed in the last rounds of reviews and comments.

"Desperately shorthanded, the BSC recruited brains and talent where it could find them, often making only a cursory background check. They brought in friends, family members, and personable colleagues like a club voting in new members, the only qualifications being evidence of a certain confidence and imagination and the assumption of shared values.... Once when they were having a hard time finding secretaries, [Bickham] Sweet-Escott could think of no one to recommend but his sister, Lutie, who happened to know shorthand. Just one word to the wise, and within a week she was on her way to Cairo via the Cape and the Belgian Congo."

The Irregulars: Roald Dahl and the British Spy Ring in Wartime Washington, Jennet Conant (internal quotations omitted).

Susan was waiting at the door when Sallowpad arrived. She had been inspecting the lock and saw that its mechanism was more involved than what she had learned to pick in Narnia. The diplomatic Residence in Tashbaan would, of course, have intensive security. She added "Tutorial with Cracksman" to the "Lessons in Marsh-wiggle" as something additional she should pursue while at the Residence.

"Good morning, Queen Susan," the Raven croaked. He was perched on a rack in the hall, likely there for his purposes. "No key, yet?"

"Good morning, Chief. No, I don't have a key." She wondered where the Raven kept his, and how he got into the office when there was no one with hands to use the key.

"Close your eyes, stare at the wall," Sallowpad ordered.

Oh by the Lion, this was ridiculous. Peter was fuming. Susan would have never been ordered about by Sallowpad, the Chief of the Narnian Murder. He opened his mouth to call for Edmund, again, when his brain caught up with the duplicity. This isn't Sallowpad and she's not Queen Susan the Gentle of Narnia.

But then what's the rest of this about...
"Edmund!"

"It's not Sallowpad," his brother yelled back.

"I know that! What's Marsh-wiggle?"

"French!"

French? Susan was studying French? Peter then recalled his earlier discussion with Edmund on the bus to Fulbourn Fen.

"And what about..."

"Locks!" Edmund shouted back, ambiguously.

Locks? He heard a clatter on the stairs and Edmund stuck his head in the room.

"Locks?" Peter said, now aloud.

"Yes. In Narnia, Susan and I learned how to pick locks."

Peter stared at his brother, figuring he would need to work on some response other than open-mouthed astonishment. Finally, he managed, "You did?"

"Yes," Edmund said, dangerously bland.

Peter had had no inkling of this at all.

"Who taught you?"

"A Red Dwarf, one of Captain Roblang's lieutenants. Do you want to know why?"

Peter turned that around in his mind and decided that he did not.

"No. As you would say, 'not relevant.'" But, rather more to the point, "Why is Susan looking for a tutorial from our country's Embassy in lock picking?"

"Self-improvement?"

Susan heard a flutter of his wings and a minute or two later – so it was far enough away, or Sallowpad was pretending – there was a clatter at her feet.

"Open your eyes, and the door. Please."

Susan did so and then held the key for the Raven so that he could hide it again. He picked it up with a claw and disappeared.

There were Pigeons, a great many of them, all pecking at the window with the morning mail. Sallowpad took it in with an indignant squawk. "That won't be good news." He cocked his head toward the open door but there was no sign of Fraxi.

"Perhaps the Tarkheena's party went late?" Susan offered, speaking to his silent complaint.

More politely than she had yet heard him, Sallowpad asked, "Would you mind seeing to the mail?"

Susan was already heading to the window. "Of course, Chief."
Fraxi arrived a few minutes later, tired and frazzled, carrying the crier sheets under her arm. "Hello," she muttered absently. "Chief! You need to see this!" To Susan she asked, "Anything bad in the morning mail?"

Susan shook her head, deciding that having successfully inserted herself into the office, now was not the time to remind Fraxi that she had not been there long enough to identify what might be bad as opposed to normal or catastrophic.

"Not thus far. There are a rather a lot of invitations and a sour note from Sir Flobber Requesting The Honour of Chief Sallowpad to his Lordship this Afternoon for Tea." She enunciated every capital and did wonder at the sensible Queen Iris' reaction to penning such ridiculous correspondence. *Tea. With a Penguin. A Family of sardines to be sure.*

Fraxi grimaced at the summons from Flobber. "Chief!" she called again.

"What?" Sallowpad demanded from behind the Dryad. He had already flown in and landed on top of the crier sheets.

"Best take a look at *The Tattler*. Tarkaan Anradin wasn't even at Lasaraleen's last night and still he managed to dig up the dirt."

The Raven pulled *The Tattler* out from under *The Trumpeter* with his beak. "Peridan?"

"Who else?"

Susan crossed over to the desk to share the reading with the Chief.

*NARNIAN KNIGHT SAYS DAILY OWNER ASHOTA "IN BED WITH ETTINS" ACCUSES TISROC WAR COUNCIL CHIEF OF SELLING LIVES FOR ETTIN KING TO EAT*

"It's the top news the criers are yelling. *The Tattler* started it, but the others have all picked it up."

More Pigeons and then the hysterical Liluye flew in.

"Oh please, hurry!" the Falcon cried. "The Tisroc…"

"Will boil you in oil if you do not return immediately?" Susan completed. She had always thought of Falcons as steadier Birds. Liluye was more like a Songbird than a Raptor. *Perhaps we should detain you here for an hour or two and see what happens.*

Bardon arrived before the noon hour, muttering something about pointless errands in search of squid for the Penguin in the deserts of Calormen. Fraxi was in with the Chief and Cor discussing the latest that had flowed from dinner last night, including, but not limited to, Peridan publicly accusing the owner of *The Daily* of outright support for the Evil Ettin King and tussling with Head of the Tisroc's War Council over Narnia's policies toward native inhabitants in the Lone Islands and Terebinthia.

Peter had been following pretty well until the accusation of unjust treatment of natives of the Lone Islands and Terebinthia. Granted, the Lone Islands had always been a touchy subject, but…

"Ed!"

"Isolationists."

Peter near jumped out of his own skin. It was a game Edmund had played, but only when neither of
them was armed. "You know I hate it when you creep up like that. How long have you been standing behind me holding your breath and not giving yourself away?"

"Long enough for you to re-read that headline from The Tattler a few times."

"Isolationists?" Peter repeated.

"Those who oppose any American intervention Europe; Susan is also referring to anti-British colonial sentiment generally."

Peter's own views on England as Empire had that summer taken a turn more sharply in the direction of anti-colonialism – logical given his time with Asim and the Russells, but strange to consider as a (former?) Narnian monarch. He'd been meaning to discuss it with Susan and Edmund, actually. However, that did not really address a far more befuddling point. "And isolationists believe that fascism is preferable?"

"For some, yes, I think so. Trains runs on time, you know. Also, in America there are some who prefer German cooking to British, or believe the world would be better off if all of Europe killed itself."

"I don't suppose you are being unduly cynical in offering that opinion?"

"No, regrettably. If I were truly cynical, I'd suggest…"

Peter held up a silencing hand. "This is quite far enough. Thank you, brother." Returning to the letter, he did not hear when Edmund left the room.

"Hello, Queen Susan," Bardon said. "All by yourself today?"

"Fraxi and Cor are in with the Chief, so I am manning the defensive line." She was bent over a piece of parchment using her own diplomatic skills to fashion a polite declination to Sir Flobber on Sallowpad's behalf.

"And Peridan? I was going to give him a lift to Tarkheena's Masikh's luncheon if he has not left yet."

"I have not seen Peridan today."

"You haven't?" The cold tone in Bardon's voice drew Susan's attention to the Gryphon. "Peridan's not been here at all?"

"No," she replied, finding a growing sense of unease from the stolid Gryphon's reaction alone. "Did you bring him home from Lasaraleen's dinner?"

"No, he told me to take Cor and Fraxi and that he'd get back to his flat on his own."

"Perhaps he is too ashamed to show his face here?"

The Gryphon blinked, good eye and bad, and Susan smiled ruefully. "Well, perhaps not."

"Usually, he makes a point of appearing to gloat of his success and cleverness."


Her skepticism must have shown more than she might have wished.
With a nod Bardon gestured to the ever growing pile of invitations. "After last night, there's an uptick in demands for his presence, isn't there?"

She nodded. Tashbaan was, Susan decided, a very strange place where success was measured by party invitations received. It was impossible to reconcile the frivolity of Tashbaan with the dire war the Narnians waged. The incongruity of the two worlds was very disturbing to her.

A pink Flamingo swooped in through the open window. Susan was very weary of them; they were even more stupid than the Pigeons and reeked of shrimp.

"That's Tarkheena Masikah's messenger," Bardon said glumly. "It bodes ill. If he's not been here, he may not be there either, and she may be asking when her escort for luncheon is arriving."

*Oh no.*

The Gryphon went to Sallowpad's office door and rapped on it with a talon.

"Enter!"

Susan did not hear Bardon's words but she did hear the subsequent screeching.

The Flamingo pecked at Susan's ear and she pushed the bird's dull head away. "Hold a moment, would you?"

The Bird offered her leg and as Bardon had predicted, it was indeed an abrupt note from her Honorableness Tarkheena Masikah, daughter of blah, daughter of blah blah, daughter of blah blah blah, going back seven generations to Tash the Terrible and Inexorable. Her most Tarkheena-ness was demanding the appearance of Lord Peridan immediately.

Susan quickly scribbled a diplomatic lie to give them (and Peridan) time and attached it to the Flamingo's leg. "Take that back to your Mistress."

She then hurried into Sallowpad's office. They were surprised enough at her boldness that the four of them all stopped talking.

"It was Tarkheena Masikah's Flamingo; she is asking for Peridan. I put her off for the moment."

"How?" Sallowpad barked.

"The first line of defense is that the message was received by the wrong person, in this case someone who is new to the Narnian Residence and does not know who Lord Peridan is."

"And the next?" Bardon asked.

"Diplomatic emergency, family emergency, and illness."

"That is a very sensible hierarchy," Fraxi said after a moment. "I shall have to remember it!"

"We've put a lot of effort into this," the Raven said mysteriously. "Especially after last night, Peridan should attend upon the Tarkheena." His shifting from foot to foot hinted at Sallowpad's concern.

"You did order him to as well," Cor supplied.

*Orders? Effort? For a simple luncheon engagement?*
"We are going to need her in our nest come the High King's visit," the Raven said.

"The Just King is going to need her too," Cor added.

*The Gryphons and war horses! That, Susan realized, is what so concerned them. To continue the Lone Island campaign, Narnia needed to replenish its Cavalry and Air Corps with purchases from Calormen. That acquisition would have to pass by majority vote of the War Council. Tarkheena Masikhah was a powerful member of the Council, and if she opposed the request, it would bode very ill for Narnia.*

Fraxi was already gathering her things, Cor holding the door for her. "Cor and I will go look at Peridan's flat, his club, and…"

"The race track," Cor added, following her out. "Bardon, you should check his other haunts."

"What are you waiting for?" Sallowpad snapped as Bardon tarried at the door.

"I need Queen Susan to go with me. I won't be able to get into some of the places Peridan might be otherwise."

Bardon's words brought her up short. She stared at him. "Why is that, Bardon?"

"I'm not human," the Gryphon responded.

The answer did not add to her understanding, but Sallowpad evidently comprehended what he meant. "Very true. Take Queen Susan with you, then."

"What did you mean about not being human?" Susan asked, as they hurried out the building.

"Many places in Calormen popular with humans don't permit Beasts."

Susan was so shocked she nearly tripped on Bardon's tail. "Why ever not?"

The Gryphon shrugged, a movement that shuddered up his powerful shoulders through the wings neatly folded on his back. "We are different. Dirty, I suppose. Savage?"

"That is abominable!" she hissed, truly outraged.

The Gryphon stopped and fixed one unblinking eye upon her. Susan felt her fury cool under his calm gaze. "Hold your temper," he admonished with the gentleness large Beasts so often had. "I appreciate your support, but now is not the time to address the injustices of hundreds of years, and not in Calormen alone. Do you understand me, Lady?"

Susan clamped down on her anger and put a hand on the noble Gryphon's side. "Would that I had your dignity, Friend."

Bardon bowed his head and ducked his mighty shoulder. "If you sit far enough forward, I can carry you."

"Where do you suggest we look?" she asked, swinging aboard and adjusting her satchel and skirts.

"There are a few taverns he likes; then, we probably should check the Crow Murder." He craned his head backward. "Are you ready?"

"I am. Do you mind if I hold your collar when you take off?"
"Better that than falling off, Lady." Bunching his powerful hindquarters, Bardon launched into the air, and took a loop around the Residence before moving south and west toward the River. "Best if you start thinking now of another excuse for Tarkheena Masikah."

"Why is that?" Susan shouted, wind whipping her hair as the Gryphon steadied, his wings beating the air strongly.

"Because I doubt Peridan will be in any condition to attend upon the Tarkheena."

It was all just too incomprehensible for a Narnian Knight, both to cause so public an uproar and to embarrass his Country and his honour. Then, worse still, he apparently shirks the duty called upon to do under orders from Sallowpad. It was worse than irresponsible; if she properly understood the tenor of conversation of earlier, it was also very dangerous to Narnian interests and security. Tarkheena Masikah's invitation was an overture to kindlier relations and to scorn her was foolish. By all accounts, the Tarkheena was no fool. Given the War, Narnia needed to cultivate every friend it could muster on the War Council. Susan hoped serious damage was not done, especially so soon before the High King's visit and with the looming needs for rearming the Lone Island campaign as severe as they appeared to be. It was going to have to be a fantastic lie to mollify the Tarkheena, with overtures of good faith thereafter.

Susan mulled potential falsehoods, thinking more than anything that such last minute deceptions would not be necessary if Peridan received a spanking like the child he was.

Bardon circled down to a grubby, rough street near the River's docks. She hopped off lightly, eyeing the pubs with distaste. They were the sorts of places that you were really best off never seeing in daylight.

"He likes to roll from one to the next," Bardon explained almost by way of apology. He nodded toward the "No Beasts" sign in one window. "You'll have to go in alone."

That she had to venture into these places by herself did not bother Susan a whit. That Bardon could not join her was infuriating.

She did not linger, going into the four taverns lining the street, and hurrying out as quickly as she was able.

"Should I be appalled, Bardon, that these establishments all know Peridan by name?" Susan asked. She was scrapping her slippers on the walk, not wanting to foul the Gryphon's feathers and fur with the muck from the floors of these holes.

"Has he been here?"

"Oh yes, and thrown out of everyone. I had to settle his bill at the last pub."

"The Crows' Murder it is, then," the Gryphon said wearily. "Climb aboard."

"You are not too tired?"

"Of you? No, not at all. Of trying to manage Peridan, yes, I rather think so. I'm ill-suited to it, as you can see."

"May I ask why Sallowpad tolerates this childish behavior, Bardon? Is that too impertinent?"

"Not at all. The staff at the Residence asks the same question all the time." The Gryphon sprang into the air again. Susan clutched the collar with muttered apologies as Bardon swung about north.
"It's like everything else in this outfit. You take what you get, and we got Peridan."

That did not explain the whole of it, though. "Yet, Bardon, in my observation, Sallowpad is not the sort to suffer fools."

She felt a huff along his back even as his wings beat steadily. "Very perceptive, Queen Susan. For all his appearances, Peridan is very, very good at what he does."

So, that feckless appearance allows him to do what he does? Admittedly, Susan was not certain exactly what Peridan and Cor did; yet, it was important to Sallowpad, and therefore must be important overall. Appearances were, she well knew, deceiving and to judge on the basis of them alone was a grievous error. Why, at that very moment, she was wearing a disguise of her own.

Bardon circled in a crisp spiral downward into the courtyard of an airy private home in a very smart area, not far from the Narnian Residence. It was not the ramshackle hovel Susan had expected and the Gryphon must have perceived her surprise.

"Peridan only gambles in the very best establishments," Bardon said. "Tarkaan Kidrash of The Trumpeter owns the home. All the great Tarkaans of Tashbaan come here, the Grand Vizier, the members of the Tisroc's Inner Circle and War Council."

"Peridan knows the Grand Vizier?" Susan repeated, not wanting to sound too incredulous. And knows him so well Peridan joins one of the most powerful men in Calormen at the gambling table?

The Gryphon swung his head around and stared at her very seriously. "Peridan's business is to know everyone."

"And report it back to Sallowpad?" she asked very quietly.

The Gryphon bobbed his great Eagle head.

Perhaps things were becoming clearer.

At the front entrance, Susan could hear raucous shouts and singing. As prestigious as Peridan's wagering company might be, she suspected most of the great Tarkaans were in their offices now and not singing… oh no. Not the Moose song.

The front door opened before they could even ring the bell or summon a servant. A tired, plain woman stood there, the costly cut and styling of her gown doing little to offset her dowdy sullenness.

"Praise Tash," the Tarkheena muttered. "I was just going to send a Bird. Could you please get him out of here so we can all go to bed?"

"Hullo Maris. Nice to see you. This is Queen Susan. Queen Susan meet Tarkheena Maris. Yes, we'll collect him now."

Susan murmured her greetings, deciding she would ask later whose sister Maris was, for a sister of someone powerful or beautiful she most certainly was, with instructions to keep the fine house for the use of others.

With the door open, the singing rolled down the hallways of the gracious home and shook the walls. A glorious tenor soared above the caws of the Crows and the rougher bass of what Susan knew must be Dwarfs who were pounding out the reprehensible chorus of the Moose song.
Moose, Moose, I like a Moose
I've never had anything quite like a Moose
I've had many women, my life has been loose
But I've never had anything quite like a Moose
When I'm in the mood for a very good lay
I go to the closet and get me some hay
I open the window and spread it around
'Cause Moose always come when there's hay on the ground

Feeling tremendous sympathy for Maris to have suffered so, Susan followed the Gryphon through a maze of marbled hallways and mirrored walls, down the servants' stairs. The infamous strains of the Moose song grew ever louder, a man's voice rising in soaring notes above the din.

Woodchucks are all right, except that they bite
And foxes and rabbits won't last through the night
Cows would be fun, but they're hard to seduce
But you never need worry should you find a moose

"That fine voice?" Susan asked. "Is it…?"

"Oh yes," Bardon confirmed. "Another of Peridan's unexpected talents."

The bottom of the stair ended in a very large, cool, crowded cellar. A large circular table dominated the space. Peridan was at the far side, with a Crow on each shoulder, a Red Dwarf at each elbow, and a bottle in each hand. There were cards, chips, coins, and Crow Shinys piled on the table. Worse even than the taverns she had just visited, the place reeked of home stilled anise liquor and White Lightning, the even more vile Dwarf plum brandy.

Peridan spied them, waved, and began singing a chorus particularly in their honor,

Now griffins are fine for a hot summer night
But jackals and tigers they put up a fight
I've done it with a walrus, a duck and a goose
But I've never had anything quite like a Moose

"Queen Susan!" Bardon had to shout over the racket. "Would you please?"

At the pause in the chorus, which if memory served, had to do with women still not comparing to a Moose, Susan applauded loudly. "Thank you, Friends! Alas, it is time for Our Lord Peridan to leave!"

"Ahhh, Su," Peridan drawled, waving a bottle and dislodging a Crow. "Take the branch out of your Ash and hava a drink."

Rage washed over her, pushed quickly away by the far more useful feline cunning. She could do nothing about the drunken Gryphon flyer. She could, however, underscore to her audience the peril of mocking a Queen of Narnia.

She smiled the sort of gracious smile an enemy would never wish to see on her countenance. "Thank you, Lord Peridan for that cordial and musical greeting. We are well met." Susan pitched her voice, not in volume, but in gravity, filling the room, for the benefit of those who were sober enough to hear it. "Alas, our meeting is not timely and you are too late to be escorted to the obligations you were bound to undertake by oath to the High King himself."
Susan let that startling warning settle upon the other Narnians who had all fallen silent and were wisely ignoring Peridan's ill-advised rude guffaw. Their companion was in the uniform of Narnia and while she had no doubt but that the assembled Dwarfs and Crows were loyal, they needed a gentle reminder of where their greater duty lay. They had merely been beguiled by Peridan's humorous company. Next time, they would be more vigilant.

Reaching across the table, Susan placed her arm next to the tower of chips, coins, and Shinys stacked in front Peridan. She swept her arm across the table scattering the booty. "Friends," she said to the stunned Narnians, "our Lord Peridan is pleased to give his evenings' spoils to you."

"Oi!" Peridan shouted, flailing and dislodging the last Crow. "Tash's Hell, those are mine!"

"Not any more, Lord Peridan," Susan said firmly. No one made any move to claim the winnings; indeed the Dwarfs had pushed their chairs away from the table and looked ready to flee. Two Crows tried winging back up the servants' stair; with an angry snap from Bardon, they meekly returned to the chair backs around the table.

"Next time, we may not be so understanding of those who abet a Knight's dereliction of duty to the detriment of Narnia." Susan let the threat hang cold and heavy.

Susan stooped down, making to haul the leaden, stunned Peridan to his sorry feet. Two Crows launched to Peridan's shoulders and began pulling him by the tunic.

The two Red Dwarfs scrambled from their seats. "Good Lady, allow us to assist," one of them said. They placed themselves under Peridan's arms, a more sturdy support than Susan herself could provide. Not that she was especially concerned if she dropped the flyer down the stair.

"Thank you, Friends," Susan injected over the beautifully on key humming of the Moose song refrain. "Lord Peridan had a very important engagement and we are disappointed that he is unable to attend it now."

The Crows all bobbed their heads in an apology; the Dwarfs mumbled theirs. She regally ascended the stairs, not deigning to look back.

Behind her, she heard Peridan squeak, "Stairs? Boys, I don't think I can do stairs."

"Lord Peridan," Susan said over her shoulder, "did you know that every Narnian female knows the feminine version of the Moose song?"

Peter refused to believe it. All that time in Narnia and he'd never heard it before. Impossible.

"Absolutely not!" he shouted.

"Moose, Moose, I want a moose, I've never had anything quite like a moose," the voice rang from the downstairs. Except it wasn't Edmund who was singing.

"Lucy! Where did you learn that reprehensible song?"

"From Susan!"

Peter heard peals of laughter drifting up from the kitchen.

"Really?" Peridan said, and began climbing, the obstacle now overcome. "There's a Moose song
for girlz? Do you know it?"

"Of course I do," Susan said.

"Cud ya teach me?"

"What's sauce for the gander, is sauce for the goose," Susan sang. She had a decent throaty alto voice, and it echoed nicely off the stone walls.

"Waz next?"

"Oh, I am sure I will not remember the remainder of that stanza until you sober up."

"How many verses?" Peridan slurred, following her lure up the stair.

"Ten," Susan invented out of the air.

"The men's only has nine!"

"Well, women have rather more to say on the subject of why a moose is so much more superior to a man."

Susan thought she heard some muttered oath, which was quickly followed by a sharp yelp. "Ouch! What the damned Tombs...?"

There was another yelp.

"Speak that way to the Lady again, and we'll give you to the Otters."

One of the Dwarfs had spoken.

"Thank you, Friend," Susan called.

"Blood bi... Owww!" Peridan shrieked. "Stop pecking me, Chayton"

"I'm Gawayne, you fool," the Crow scolded, pecking Peridan again.

They were weaving through the halls now, Bardon leading and she following the Gryphon. Maris was waiting for them at the door, looking dour and very tired, though her relief was also evident.

"Thank you Bardon, Queen Susan," she murmured, holding the door open.

Susan heard a disturbance behind them. "No! I'm not gonna do it"

Peridan was trying to dig his feet in. "It's bright out there! It'll hurt! I'm not going!"

"Oh for the sake of Tash," Maris snapped. "Get him out, would you?" Maris needed to get to bed, and possibly have some of that anise liquor for lunch.

Susan sang her enticement, as surely as the Mermaids would sing to the sailors,

'What's sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose,'
Said I as I set out to find me a moose

Peridan followed, rather like a puppy following a morsel. "I like that!"

Susan stepped gracefully to the side so that the good Dwarfs and Crows could maneuver the
Knight out into the courtyard.

At the door, Susan realized that only she and Maris remained. She dropped to a deep curtsey. "Thank you Tarkheena for seeing so well to our Knight. Narnia is in your debt. Should you require assistance again, please do not hesitate to send a Bird to me and I shall see to it."

Maris was surprised nearly motionless by the courtesy. Susan imagined that the Tarkaans and Knights who came here for their gambling pleasures probably looked right through her and passed her as if she did not exist. Peridan might know the great Lords who came here, yet it was Maris who let them in the door.

"Thank you, Queen Susan." Maris executed a complex bow of her own that Susan thought, in the language of Calormene protocol was addressing her as Lady to another Lady. Susan smiled her thanks.

"Would you like me to send the Dwarfs and Crows down to clean up the mess?" Susan asked.

"No!" Maris swiftly amended her strong statement. "No, thank you, Queen Susan. Our own slaves will see to it."

Susan knew she could be in Calormen decades and still would unconsciously flinch every time she heard the word, "slave." Was it any wonder they treated Good Beasts as savage, dumb animals?

She joined them in the courtyard. Peridan had his head buried in Bardon's wing, and was whining about the bright sun. Solemnly, Susan shook the hands of the Dwarfs and gravely saluted each of the Crows who were perching on the iron railing surrounding the house's flower beds.

"You all will seek your beds now, yes?" she prompted. To the Dwarfs she asked, "Do you have a way home, or do we need to send a cart for you?"

"Thank you, Lady, no," one said; the other shook his head.

"Thank you, Lady, no," one said; the other shook his head.

To them all, she addressed a final, gracious request. "I would ask, Friends, that should something like this occur again, please contact me so that I might see to our Lord Peridan."

Bardon was lowering his shoulder so that Peridan could clamber gracelessly aboard. "If you get sick on me again, Peridan, I'm going to toss you in the River," the Gryphon said.

"Thaz fine, Bard'n," the Knight slurried. "Jus make sure you empty my pocketses first."

"Can you carry both of us, Friend?" Susan asked, as she gave the Dwarfs a final wave.

"Certainly, Queen Susan. I am worried that Peridan may get sick all over you."

She shuddered. "Well, there's nothing for it. We can't just leave him here."

"I'm going to fly!" Peridan trumpeted.

He sounded for the moment, so jubilant, Susan felt a moment's, but only a moment's, pity, for the grounded Knight. While other soldiers were out defending Narnia, he was combat wounded and attending parties in Tashbaan. Easier and safer though it might be, Susan knew better. A Knight would always long for the battlefield, and worse still, would always feel something of a failure for not being there when his Comrades were.

Whatever sympathy she felt boiled away as Peridan grinned maniacally. "This one's for you, Luv."
I've found many women attracted to me
A few of them have had me over for tea
Some say they love me, when they're feeling loose
I'd trade the world's women for one lovely moose.

"I hate this song," Bardon muttered as Susan swung aboard.

"Speaking of shared misery, you realize, Bardon, that I must put my arms around Peridan to avoid falling off?"

"My sympathies, Queen Susan."

"Let's change!" Peridan said gaily. "Then I can grab your…"

"Shut it!" Susan and Bardon both snapped at the same moment.

Susan swallowed her reluctance. With a powerful spring, Bardon launched into the air, forcing her to grip Peridan's tunic more tightly than she would wish under any other circumstance. "Take us to Tarkheena Masikah's home, if you will, Bardon," she called.

"What?" Peridan bellowed in chorus with Bardon's incredulous, "Why?"

"I need to make our apologies to the Tarkheena, Bardon," Susan said, ignoring Peridan. "I shall handle it."

"I luv it when you shout in my ear, Su," Peridan said, "tho would be better if you …"

"Shut it!" Susan yelled back in his ear. She felt Bardon's menacing growl beneath them.

"Not so loud," Peridan whimpered.

"If I ever meet Peridan, I shall murder him."

"How about you hold him down, and I run him through?"

"What an utter ass."

"Ash."

"Do you think he's really that …?"

"Immature? Feckless?" Edmund decided to help Peter out as he had had all summer to invent pejoratives to describe RAF Pilot Peridan. "It gets worse, Peter. Much worse."

Susan walked as quickly as was seemly from the Georgetown row house, very relieved when she heard its front door shut firmly behind her and block out the sounds of the posh champagne lunch.

To their driver, she said quietly, "Mr. Hill, as quickly as possible, away from here, please."

Susan slid back into the car, pulled the door shut, and Guy sped them away. "The Embassy, Miss Susan?"

"Yes, please."
"Everything alright with the Congresswoman, Miss Susan?"

She permitted herself a sigh and a smile. "Yes, Mr. Hill, as well as can be for the moment, unless I misjudge."

"Bet you don't do that very often, Miss."

"Not usually, no," she admitted with another smile at the driver. Still, it had been a near thing. What did she and Edmund call it? Damage control. Doing the best you could and hoping you could work fast enough to get ahead of it and prevent the problem from spreading. The Congresswoman would have to be better managed after this or the Colonel and Wing Commander Tebbit would have a lot of explaining to do when England's relations with the Military Affairs Committee of the U.S. Congress' House of Representatives became even more uncomfortable than they already were.

Susan pulled her gloves off, tucked them into her handbag and removed her compact and lipstick to correct her running make up.

"Everything alright, Miss?" Guy repeated, but now with a worried tint to his voice.

She understood his concern. "I am fine, Mr. Hill, thank you for asking. I am not distressed in any way. The weeping was for the benefit of the Congresswoman."

Guy whistled low and admiringly.

"Shut the fuck up, you kettle!" Whatever modicum of control Tebbit had pretended to own evaporated with a stinking belch of ethanol fumes. "Is she gone?" he moaned, his arms still supporting his head. Susan had threatened him with dire consequences if he did anything but lie, utterly silent and wretched, in a prone position in the backseat of the car, imitating, from a distance, a man in the throes of profound grief.

"Yes," Susan said flatly, not really expecting a thank you for getting him out of this sticky wicket, but it would have been nice to hear one regardless.

Instead, Tebbit began patting down his clothing and squirming in the seat. "Here," he slurred, "take these. I got too many of 'em. Might lose 'em." He began pulling scraps of flimsy, scribbled on paper out of his uniform pockets, from his trousers, shirt, and jacket. There were napkins, matchbook covers, corners of newspapers, two American dollar bills, and, appallingly, what Susan thought was a condom wrapper.

"What is all this?"

"Notes from last night," he muttered, shoving them all into her lap. "Bloody hell, Guy, pull over!"

Guy curbed the car just in time for Tebbit to vomit out the window, into the street.

"Better out than in," Guy said.

"Absolutely," Susan affirmed feelingly, shuffling through Tebbit's notes. It had been that way with all four of them, especially after a festival, and any time the Dwarfs were responsible for the libations. Lucy never did learn to hold her wine. Only Peter had ever developed a taste for Lightning, the Dwarf plum liquor.

"The Wing Commander should clean the exterior of the car for you as penance," she told Guy.

"I'd like to see that happen, Miss Susan."
"Give me a day, Mr. Hill."

"Be sure to hold on to those papers," Guy said, looking at her in the rear mirror. "The Colonel will want to go over every one with Tebbitt and make a report on it to New York. It takes days to sort through a big party."

The pilot hauled his head back in, wiping his mouth with Susan's handkerchief. "Thanks, Guy." He had knocked his cap off in his haste to get out the window and now began teasing out notes from the inside of it, handing these sweaty slips of paper to her as well.

"These are your notes from conversations at Cissie Patterson's party last night?" Susan asked.

"Damned straight. Hold on to those for me, will you, Luv, unless you'd rather take a nice tight hold of something better." Tebbitt yanked his cap down over his eyes and leaned against the side of the car. "Wake me when it's dark. Damn, I hate sunlight with a hangover."

"Hangover? You're still drunk," she murmured absently, focused fully on the grubby slips in her hands.

*Gen. 2nd Front*
*Pears dirt Gen*
*Wall 44?*
*Wall secret?*
*Morgenthau*
*S. Reynolds/Nye dirt? Bund?*
*Eisen 2 Europe?*
*Promis 2 Stalin? 2nd front? Hopkins*
*Air routes after? Pan Am?*
*Mrs. R for 4th?*
*Astrol H. fall?*
*Pears to Ick, Morgen,Biddle*
*Molotov promise 120,000?*

There were many others.

*Morgenthau* was President Roosevelt's Treasury Secretary. *Wall?* Who was *Wall?* Susan felt her heart beat a moment faster. *Vice President Wallace* who Guy had said played at Tebbitt's poker games? *Molotov* was the Soviet diplomat who had been meeting with President Roosevelt in the last week or so. *Pears* must be Drew Pearson, except that Gladys had said he hadn't been at the party. So, was this about information the muckracker had? *Reynolds* might be the Senator on the Military Affairs Committee and Susan had heard of him even before arriving in Washington when he had accused Britain of instigating the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was also Cissie Paterson's son-in-law.

Susan could not begin to analyze the full of Tebbitt's sloppy encrypt, although the fact that she had been able to decipher it at all was very troubling from a security standpoint. She glanced over at the snoring pilot, understanding at last why such a town clown was cavorting about the Washington social scene.

"You did say that Wing Commander Tebbitt is very good at what he does, didn't you, Mr. Hill?"

"Did I, Miss Susan? I don't remember."

Guy knew his role, to be sure. Susan smiled inwardly, again reminded of the stolid, reliable, silent
"mules" she and Edmund had used for ferrying messages, equipment and personnel.

Carefully examining the scraps again, Susan was amazed at their profound intelligence implications, and shocked that a drunken RAF pilot had been carrying them around for the last twelve hours in his pockets. She and Edmund would have both sent such a miscreant somewhere very cold for a very long time to reflect upon his inadequate safeguarding of Narnian secrets.

*This simply did not add up. Something fundamental was missing.*

"Mr. Hill?"

"Yes, Miss Susan?"

She rustled the notes, now organized as neatly as could be done, for him to glimpse in the mirror. "If you can say..." Susan stumbled a moment, unsure of the terminology. In Narnia, she and Edmund had referred to them as "spiders" – their agents in place who held the strings and coordinated the activities and intelligence gathering of the other agents who were out doing the footwork. Wing Commander Tebbitt was the foot soldier, the agent on the ground, but who held his string? It couldn't be the Colonel. There was a go-between in the middle who was missing.

"Excuse me for the lapse," she amended. "If you can say," she repeated, "who, for lack of a better word, 'runs' Wing Commander Tebbitt?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Miss Susan."

Was he being evasive? Or were they not yet speaking the same specialized language? "Let me be plainer, then. Wing Commander Tebbitt must have someone who keeps him in line, makes sure he attends his important meetings, and handles his," she waved the notes again, "correspondence?"

"Well, I'm the leg man - that's the way we describe someone like me who does the driving, opens the mail and pours the drinks. But, babysitter is probably the word you are looking for, Miss Susan."

*How completely and utterly appropriate.*

"Yes, a babysitter, that's it exactly. Where is Wing Commander Tebbitt's babysitter, because as talented as he is, he does not seem quite, how shall I say this, mature enough to be let out without one?"

Guy grinned, but didn't comment on her editorializing. "That was Betty. She left a month ago."

Oh yes. Susan had heard about Betty, both from Gladys and in New York. Betty was very pretty, very smart, fluent in French and seemed to have, so the parlance went, *gone on extended holiday*. That disclosure was always followed by a knowing look, a wink, or a finger brushed along the edge of the nose.

Without even being told, Guy drove them through the Embassy's service entrance, with a casual wave to the security guard.

They were able to hustle Tebbitt up the back stairway of the Annex to the second floor office. Susan let Guy deal with him. She had already had a lifetime of dealing with drunken, singing young men, although her brothers at least had the courtesy to keep the ribald commentary to themselves.

She saw now this was part of Tebbitt's cover. No one could possibly believe that the young, good
looking, genial drunk of a town clown was working in British intelligence. He would never be mistaken for a Sidney Riley or Francis Walsingham. Yet, if the contents of his pockets were any indication, Tebbitt was the sort who attracted confidences, overheard things, and was certainly very good company. Such actors and agents were invaluable; Susan had played the role herself, though with more emphasis upon being an empty headed, vain coquette than a sot.

Still, Tebbitt was young and perhaps foolish enough to get caught up in the glamour of it all. Gifted though he was, he needed management and a firm hand. Betty's absence was being felt keenly in Colonel Walker-Smythe's office, and the timing could not be more ill.

The Wing Commander was groaning under Guy's supporting arm. Susan pushed open the door to the office anteroom just in time to barely glimpse Gladys and Captain Lowrey break apart in a close conference that was, perhaps, a shade toward the intimate.

"You found him!" Gladys cried.

Lowrey jumped forward to give Guy a hand

"Colonel! Guy and Susan found Tebbitt!"

One practiced look at the pilot and Gladys was hurrying over to the coffee pot.

"Certainly not!" Susan said to the secretary. "Give him coffee now and all we'll have is a wide awake drunk.

Gladys stilled her swift movement toward the coffee, turned slowly around and with a smirk, arched a querying eyebrow.

Susan knew she had sounded imperious and smiled to take away the sting. "I apologize for being so abrupt, Gladys. I've dealt with drunken young men a fair bit and they are much easier to handle asleep." Or dropped down a well. Or locked in a dungeon. Or deposited in a manure pile. Or left in a very noisy Aviary. Susan had many ways to deal with drunken, disappointed men.

"You are right of course," the secretary said with a crisp nod. "That's the second bit of good advice you've provided today, Susan."

"Dump him in here," Colonel Walker-Smythe growled from the doorway of his inner office. The Colonel looked livid, which given his naturally florid complexion, was alarming, his features ranging from red to purple and back again. It clashed horribly with his bushy, whiting red hair.

Captain Lowrey and Guy dragged the somnolent pilot into the Colonel's office and Tebbitt sagged to the floor. Gladys followed with an ice pack; Susan hadn't seen from where the secretary had procured it. Like flower pots and notepads, things just magically appeared when Gladys needed them. She really was a Dryad that way.

Susan took the ice pack from Gladys and plopped it right on top of Tebbitt's head.

"Owww! That hurt," he whined.

"What happened?" the Colonel asked.

Susan let him see her eyes shift toward Gladys and Captain Lowrey loitering at the door. They probably knew the extent of Tebbitt's activities, but the plan she had been forming in the car wasn't for their ears. Colonel Walker-Smythe blinked once. "Gladys, hold my calls. Lowrey, get out."
She did have to admire the alacrity with which both followed the order. For all the apparent disorganization, Colonel Walker-Smythe had an eye for talent. He simply did not have enough of it. It was time to change that.

Susan waited ten seconds after the door shut. Colonel Walker-Smythe returned to his throne, the oversized office chair that seemed to swallow the wiry man up in a cracked leather embrace.

"You have a problem, Colonel." Opening her handbag, Susan removed the whole of Tebbitt's night's work and dropped it on the Colonel's desk. "Your man is cavorting about Washington, drunk, and keeping the whole of our nation's war interests recorded on cocktail napkins, in language so plain, I can read most of it."

Tebbitt giggled from the floor. "Give the girl a medal! Even Betty couldn't read my writing!"

The Colonel's eyes narrowed and Susan felt him really apprise her, in the same calculating way that she or Edmund would have given a new recruit the once, twice, and thrice over. She knew what she would have looked for then; she would infer the same to Colonel Walker-Smythe now. She put her palms flat on his desk and leaned forward, shifting her eyes toward Tebbitt this time. "You have a problem," she repeated, so softly only the Colonel would hear, and picked up the gum wrapper on which Tebbitt had scrawled, Hopkins promis 2 Molo/Stalin.

Colonel Walker-Smythe plucked the wrapper from her fingers. "Miss Pevensie, I don't have much use for people who point out our failings without offering concrete solutions."

Guy coughed politely from the corner.

"Need a pastille, Hill?" the Colonel spit out.

"I think Miss Susan is offering to babysit Tebbitt, Sir."

Before Colonel Walker-Smythe could react, undoubtedly violently, there was a polite knock.

"What?" the Colonel barked.

The door slowly pushed open, revealing an enormous arrangement of lilies in a vase adorned with a perky pink bow. Captain Lowrey was the teetering muscle behind the lilies, Gladys standing next to him with a formal-looking card in her hands.

"Excuse me, Sir," Gladys said, with a mysterious smile. "These flowers just arrived from the Congresswoman, for Tebbitt and Susan. I think you want to read the note that came with them."

Well, that was quick work. Susan schooled her features to perfectly bland neutrality, as if she was not surprised in the least that a Congresswoman had sent her a flower arrangement the size of a palm tree. Inside, she was crowing for an arrival that could not have been more well-timed. Thank you, Aslan.

"You can put them next to the rose bush, Captain," Susan said. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," came the Captain's voice from behind the greenery.

Walker-Smythe snatched the card from Gladys. Susan watched his eyes as he skimmed the card once then went back and read each line more carefully. Gladys, with Captain Lowrey juggling his second flowering shrub in as many days, again exited the office.

The Colonel flipped the card on to the pile with Tebbitt's notes but only spoke after the door was
shut. "Do you want to know what it says?" he asked.

Susan shrugged. "Best wishes for a speedy recovery, I should think, with the hope of seeing Wing Commander Tebbitt at a time more convenient for him?"

"Cleverly managed, Miss Pevensie. And you think because you lie well and glibly and think fast on your feet that you can handle him?" The Colonel jerked his head in the direction of Tebbitt, still in a pile on the floor.

"I know it, Sir."

Colonel Walker-Smythe shook his head, his ever present and unsmoked cigar clamped again between his teeth. It was a miracle he could still enunciate his perfect upper class accent by way of the Indian sub-continent. "Working in the office is one thing. But, out with Tebbitt? Impossible. We aren't that desperate. Hill can babysit."

On the floor in his Dunce's corner, Tebbitt snickered from under the ice pack plastered on his forehead. Susan had thought he would be unconscious by now. "Just try to take Hill's ugly Island arse face into the front door of a Georgetown soiree and see how many socialites, debutantes, and matrons collapse from shock. Explain that to Intrepid."

Guy's white teeth flashed a contrasting smile in his dark face. "Unfortunately, I have to agree with the drunken sot of an RAF pilot in the corner."

Susan held out her hand, palm flat to Colonel Walker-Smythe.

"What, girl?" he snapped, his patience fraying. He knew his options were gone, but he didn't have to like it. "Trying to feed me like a pet dog? Aren't you worried I'll bite you?"

Tebbitt sniggered, "Woof! Woof! Grrrrrrrr…. I'd like to give her a nice bite, I would, right in the …"

Oh for Aslan's sake.

"Quiet!" Susan, ordered, Guy repeating it, even more loudly a moment later.

The Colonel raised a very bushy eyebrow as Tebbitt whined and crumpled under the shouting. "Got him whipped like a cur already, have you?"

"Yes," Susan said, still holding out her hand. Guy pointed, mouthing, "It's all her."

"I want the ring from your cigar, please," Susan announced.

"Why?"

"The ring, if you will, Sir."

Colonel Walker-Smythe unclenched his teeth, removed the cigar, eased the ring off, and handed it to her.

"Thank you, Sir." Susan slid the ring on to her finger. It was a bit large; she'd need to find a better fitting cigar.

Rising to her full height, Susan said most regally, "Colonel Walker-Smythe, you will have to forgive my cousin, Wing Commander Tebbitt." She indicated the (now thankfully snoring) heap in the corner with an arrogant tilt of her head. "He is terribly sorry to have missed the
Congresswoman's luncheon but his dear friend, and my beloved husband, Captain Caspian took shrapnel flying maneuvers over Malta."

She sent a quick apology to the sweet, young King and hoped he would never find out how she was using him.

Back to the task at hand, Susan let her lip tremble and her voice quaver, just for a moment, before mastering her (seeming) emotions. "We have, however, overcome our grief, so relieved we were to learn that," here she dashed crocodile tears from her eyes, "my dearest husband is recuperating at a hospital and will soon take to the skies again. My cousin and I are prepared to continue to soldier on in service to our mutual cause, for the good of England." She paused, "as soon as my cousin, Wing Commander Tebbitt, sleeps it off, of course."

Guy clapped for the performance.

Susan curtsied, beautifully of course.

"You're too young," Colonel Walker-Smythe snarled. Still, Susan could sense his weakening; he had shifted nearly imperceptibly from "impossible" to "desperation that can be overcome with properly applied persuasion." The last day had been a near disaster. She pushed the advantage, and sent another silent prayer to Aslan.

"I'm as old as you need me to be."

"You're a child. And don't evade me, I know it!"

"I am more mature than Tebbitt."

"That's not saying much."

"She's more mature than every junior officer here," Guy put in.

"Still not saying much." The Colonel was chewing so viciously on his lips he could swallow his mustache, which was nearly as full and bushy as his eyebrows.

Susan would have to thank Guy later for the support.

"Your mother is working at the Embassy, for Lord Halifax."

"And we are in the Annex, working for someone else. She. Will. Never. Know."

"I don't want to do this," Colonel Walker-Smythe grumbled.

"Fine," Susan said playing the final card. "Find someone else who will babysit your pilot, the one whom newspaper publishers, hostesses and Congresswomen are all courting and clamoring for, the one who plays poker with the Vice President of the United States and other members of the President's Brain Trust, and who is receiving personal invitations from the First Lady. Then, explain the resulting cock up to New York, and let them explain it to ... whomever..."

Colonel Walker-Smythe sagged in his seat. "There must be someone else."

"Mr. Hill, are there any other applicants for babysitter positions queuing up outside that office door?"

Guy wisely and true to his role had removed himself from the conversation and was waiting out the argument in a chair by the door, with a-booted foot up on the coffee table. He didn't bother
looking up from his perusal of the latest issue of LIFE. "No."

Susan took her passport out of her handbag and handed it to the Colonel. "Please keep that Sir until I leave. What it contains is between you, me, and Mr. Hill, as innocent bystander."

Guy turned the page of his magazine. "I don't hear anything, Mrs. Caspian."

Colonel Walker-Smythe grinned and Susan knew she was nearing the finish. "Good man, Hill." He waved irritably toward Tebbitt, sacked out and curled up with his icepack. "What about the drunken Lothario of an RAF pilot you wish to take responsibility for? Shouldn't he know?"

"He may not have so flexible a view, Colonel, nor recognize the exigencies of the situation."

She stood before him, straight and unflinching as the Queen she still was. Only a fool would not recognize the asset she potentially represented and every bit of diplomatic acumen Susan possessed told her that this man was no fool. Colonel Walker-Smythe, for all the fuss and bluster, understood as a soldier and spymaster the many reasons she wished her age to remain a secret. Were it known, it would be a severe impediment to her ability to move as she needed to, and as needed to serve him and their country. In the Colonel was a leader, more powerful, more experienced, and shrewder than she, who was neither her brother, nor an enemy. He was an ally of a sort she had never had before. She sent another silent prayer as she saw something entirely new in this man that she now knew she wanted desperately. A mentor.

"Keeping the options open then, are you?"

"Yes," Susan stated firmly.

"Willing to exercise those options, if need be?"

"Certainly," Susan replied promptly.

"You think you understand what we do here, Mrs. Caspian," the Colonel asked, still staring at the passport she held out for him. "Are you willing to sacrifice your innocence for our dodgy cause?"

"That assumes I am innocent, Colonel Walker-Smythe. Second, even if I am, which is a query I decline to answer, far more than the innocence of one Englishwoman must be sacrificed if we are to prevail. It is a very small price to pay." Aslan help me, she pleaded. Colonel Walker-Smythe snatched the passport from her hands. "Hill, take her downstairs and introduce her to the Shoemaker. Get her a new ID card, full set of documents." The Colonel threw her passport into a drawer and slammed it shut. "Don't forget where I put it. I want the three of you back here tomorrow morning with him sober."

"There's a plan then?" Susan asked.

Guy snorted, and flipped the magazine back on to the table.

"There's no plan Mrs. Caspian," the Colonel said. "We're making it up as we go along. Devil take me if I'm wrong, but I don't think I am. You're a godsend and I intend to make use of you."

"We will collect our pilot on our way out," Queen Susan said with a nod toward the slumbering Lord Peridan. She turned to follow Bardon out of the office, stepping wide to avoid the Gryphon's lashing tail and his blind side.

Over her shoulder, Queen Susan said to the Raven, "And you are correct, I am."
"You're what?" Sallowpad asked.

"A Godsend."

He found Peter staring moodily out the window into the unlit streets, the first letter hanging limply in his hand.

"Ed?"

"Yes?"

"Did Susan do what I think she did?"

"What do you think she did?"

"Make herself indispensable to some intelligence office attached to, but not part of, our country's Embassy?"

"Yes, I think that sums it up."

"And Mum and Father?"

"Father is in New York playing some part in this same shady outfit; Mum is working so hard handling Lord Halifax's ridiculous correspondence and social calendar, she doesn't have the time or energy to notice."

"And Sallowpad is the sort of man who will put a fifteen year old girl in this situation?"

"She wanted this, Peter. She sought it out. She believes this is what Narnia trained her to do."

"Edmund, do you really believe that Aslan wants Narnia's Gentle Queen to be party to this unseemliness?"

He flinched - at Peter's harsh disapproval, at his characterization of the ugliness, and at the implicit luxury of never having to question whether ends justify means.

"Sallowpad is desperate, doing what must be done, but given too little to do it."

"Doing what he must?"

"To win the war, yes."

"Even if it means…" Peter trailed off, his imagination undoubtedly wandering into gray and shadowy places it did not often go.

"Even if it means espionage and dirty tricks against an ally?" Edmund would lay it out for him. He knew where the tale was going and could see Peter struggling to comprehend it in full. "Yes, brother, I think, I know, that is what our country is doing."

"And Susan is helping them do it," Peter concluded. "That's what you really meant, about this being uncomfortable, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Ever the understatement, Just King."
It was not that his brother simplistically saw the worlds in which they had lived and lived now as always posing easy black and white decisions; Peter, however, had delegated the gray to others. If Peter asked whether he and Susan had done such things in defense of Narnia, Edmund had already promised he would not lie. Edmund wondered if his brother would ask, or if these were, perhaps, truths that Peter did not wish to know.

"Anything else, my brother and High King?"

Whatever his question was, it died in the making. Peter shook his head. "No. I'll keep reading."

Next Up, Chapter 6, *Tools of the Trade*

A/N

Was that a little better?

Acknowledgement to *Lord Gyric of Otershaghe's, Bawdy Song Book* (google the name for the site) for the Moose song.

I've posted some thoughts and answers to a few persistent questions on my LJ. I've enabled the anonymous posting here and there, so if you want to avail yourself of that, have at it.

Apart from the obvious, I do take some deliberate liberties as this story crosses into real life. Susan's time in Washington is a few months, not years, and so for the sake of storytelling, I have compressed some real life events to fit within this timeframe – some of them actually occur before the summer of 1942, some after, but they make such a good tale, I can't resist. The reader must also assume that the BSC was so shorthanded, "Sallowpad" was willing to accept a girl as a babysitter and runner for one of his valuable agents. I spent some time developing why he might do so, but if you can't buy that premise, there's no story.

I have freely adopted and adapted from several non-fiction sources and from one fiction source in particular, John LeCarre's masterful George Smiley series, including the amazing *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. Some of the lingo comes from that source and to the extent any of those terms first appeared in LeCarre's universe, they found their way into the tradecraft of spies as well. Edmund's use of splits in hinges to reveal if someone has opened his things (used both in this story and in *By Royal Decree*) is a technique borrowed from George Smiley.
"Rumors are most effective if they can be originated in several different places simultaneously and in such a way that they shuttle back and forth, which each new report apparently confirming previous ones."

*From the Official History of the British Security Coordination, excerpted in J. Conant, The Irregulars: Roald Dahl And The British Spy Ring In Wartime Washington*

"[According to recently declassified documents, Astrologer Louis De Wohl] was sent by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who did not believe in astrology, to the U.S. to persuade Americans that the Nazis would lose within months if they entered the war. … His task in the U.S. was to counter a convention of pro-German astrologers that had predicted Hitler would win the war. *From Associated Press and MSNBC com, "Britain Used Astrologer In Fight Against Hitler," March 3, 2008*

"There are a terrible lot of lies going about the world, and the worst of it is that half of them are true."

*Winston Churchill*

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**Dear Edmund,**

_Washington is hot, Mum is busy, and I have been shopping in Georgetown, visiting the Smithsonian, and attending open public sessions in the United States Congress. The later has been very interesting. I have been visiting all the posh neighborhoods along Embassy Row and in Georgetown, Capitol Hill, and Chevy Chase. I have visited an estate in Virginia where I was able to ride a lovely horse and join a drag hunt. The hostess, a beautiful woman from Texas, says that every girl should know how to handle a gun, so we have been practicing skeet shooting of clay pigeons on her estate. I have been to many balls, occasions, tea parties, lectures, breakfasts, luncheons, dinners, and dances. I have several new dresses, with matching shoes, and will need to buy more! Let me tell you about them._

Peter had to turn the letter over to get through the discussion of frocks. He noticed that even Edmund had not made any markings in this section other than a, thick, dark line through the whole of it. Peter skipped it altogether and so nearly missed the important concluding paragraph.

_It's a very exciting time to be here right now and everyone is so lovely and kind, intelligent and thoughtful, and ever so concerned for all that is happening in Europe. As just you and I would say, I am a veritable King among Princesses!_

To his brother's everlasting despair, Peter had never bothered with the Rat and Crow cipher of the Narnian Intelligence Service that Susan and Edmund had devised. However, he needed no aid in deciphering it here. There was nothing so miserable, so galling, so superficial, so tedious, then being a Narnian King forced to endure vapid, stupid, ignorant, manipulative, conniving Princesses.
Susan could have filled her letter with obscenity an Otter would have blushed to utter, and her condemnation could not be more severe.

And so my dear little brother, it is time to continue the story of The Queen Susan in Tashbaan.

When last we left the story, Sallowpad was so desperately short handed (or winged as the case may be), the Raven asked Queen Susan to assist in the onerous diplomatic tasks assigned to Gryphon Aerial Corps Pilot Peridan. Their first order of business –the High King was arriving in Tashbaan to visit with the Tisroc and discuss the urgent Narnian need for war horses and Gryphons in order to continue the Just King’s campaign against the armies of the Ettin Giants in the strategically important island kingdoms of the Lone Islands.

Sallowpad set out an ambitious schedule of tasks for the Gentle Queen and her Knight, focused particularly on the business in which Rats and Crows specialize – that is, whispering of the invincibility of the Great Lion of Narnia and the death and destruction that would be visited upon those who opposed Her …

Rats and Crows.

Rats and Crows had been the catchall Edmund and Susan had used -- it described the cipher for their coded messages, the intelligence operation itself, and the network of agents within it. Planting rumors in foreign courts and cities had been a cornerstone of their spectacularly orchestrated strategy. People would overhear a furtive, whispered conversation from behind curtains, outside windows, behind closed doors and in dark hallways, never knowing that it was in fact Narnian "undercover" agents who spoke the words and then, literally, disappeared down the laundry chute or flew away. The sources were untraceable and the same message could rapidly appear in several places at once, thereby lending credibility as each rumor reinforced the others.

The Rats and Crows whispered everywhere that Narnia was protected by a an invincible "demon" in the terrible aspect of a Lion, that her Kings and Queens were powerful sorcerers themselves to have overcome the Deathless Enchantress and her 100 years of Winter, and that the very Waters and Lands of Narnia would rise up to join her defense. To launch attack upon Narnia was a dark and dubious enterprise, the Rats and Crows whispered and would-be despots and invaders had best take heed.

The Fortune Teller's Street was too narrow for Bardon to navigate in flight. One of the downsides to being Peridan's babysitter was that they had to sit too uncomfortably close when Bardon flew. Here, at least, they were able to walk, she and the (now sober) Knight together; the Gryphon following. Of them, Bardon seemed the most comfortable, amid the heat, the noise, and the hawkers of the crowded market street.

Narrow, stone lined, and noisy, this tiny district of Tashbaan was of the sort simply never seen in Narnia. The Centaurs of course, with their wise and mystical ways, gazed at the Stars, studied the Tides, and divined how all the World's rhythms moved one within the other, a part of Aslan's Great Song. Here, the wisdom of the Centaurs' sage divination seemed twisted into base, carnival fare, charlatans peddling the answers vapid Tarkheenas and gullible Tarkaans wished to hear. Signs swinging from brightly colored store fronts showed lidless eyes, palms, and cards. Susan did not share the confidence of the others that anything of substantive interest to Narnia could be accomplished on Fortune Teller's Street.

"Bardon?" Peridan asked out of the corner of his mouth. "Anything new, or should we just proceed as we have?"
"Agnes didn't mention anything," the Gryphon responded. "Best start with the All-Knowing Lady Ramla."

With a nod, Peridan pushed into the corner shop with the confidence of one who had been there before. This storefront had a palm and an eye above the door. Susan followed Peridan into the store, her nostrils assaulted with the scent of burning incense and sage that hung heavily in the close, dim space. Queen Susan glanced about, not wishing to betray her unfamiliarity with this strange setting and, for the moment, following Peridan's lead.

Feathers, herbs and bones hung from the ceiling; tiny bottles lined the dark paneled shelves. There was a small table with two chairs and a giant glass ball, bowls of water for scrying, and stacks of cards wrapped in colorful scarves. Pigeons cooed drowsily in cages on the window sill.

"How I wish the beautiful Lady Ramla would materialize before my eyes!" Peridan called lustily.

This "fortune teller," however, merely walked through a curtain of beads from a back room. She was toothy and plump, with wispy graying hair and the seeming warmth in her manner that did not meet her cold eye. Susan would have disliked her regardless on the basis of the "No Beasts" sign in her window.

Lady Ramla blushed and giggled. "You are the rake, my Lord Peridan! Would you like to come with me to the back room for..."

The calculating eyes found Susan. "Who is this?" Lady Ramla asked, apprising and a lip curling in disappointment.

Susan did not suggest that the fortune teller surely should know already who she was, or that what followed were lies.

She dipped into a modest curtsey, as Peridan boomed out, "The Queen Susan, good Lady. My commander's decorous and gentle wife, evacuated to the Narnia residence for her safety."

The rehearsed lines slipped as easily from her lips as well, "My cousin has spoken so highly of your skill, Lady Ramla."

As predicted, "wife" and "cousin" caused the old fraud to brighten and thaw. Whatever Queen Susan might be, she was not competition to another woman for the attention of the Gryphon pilot.

"What might the All-Knowing Eye see for you?"

Susan withdrew the artfully prepared parchment from her own satchel and handed it to Peridan. "Something of significance has come to our attention, lovely Lady," the Knight purred.

Lady Ramla became very businesslike. "Bang it on the counter then, Peridan!" She pushed a monocle seeing glass into one eye and peered at the parchment he spread out for her review.

"This is a star chart prepared by the Narnian soothsayer, Darkwool. You know him, of course?" Susan had no idea whether the philosopher Centaur was in fact a soothsayer; Peridan spoke so authoritatively, one felt the fool to disagree with him.

"Of course," Lady Ramla murmured. "The Lord Darkwool is renowned for his wisdom and the accuracy with which he reads the portents of the Heavens." Her finger ran across the parchment. "So, the Stars, Tarva and Alambil, have met in the Northern Sky?"

"And of course you know that that means," Peridan continued smoothly. "The Lady of Peace and
"The Lord of Victory embraced even as dead stars rained down on the Ettin King's abode in Harfang."

"Truly?"

Susan could not tell if the excitement in Lady Ramla's voice was due to this remarkable portent, or that a coin bag had suddenly appeared in Peridan's hand. Even amid the cooing pigeons, the sound of coins clinking was a loud and special music to the Lady's ears.

"The Stars do not lie and in his own hand, Lord Darkwool predicts the fall of the Ettin King," Peridan intoned, rather pompously in Susan's opinion. He set a stack of coins atop the parchment. "Such important news should not be kept secret."

"Certainly not," Lady Ramla agreed. Whatever other dubious skills of Lady Ramla, the coins disappeared magically into her ample front. "The All-Knowing Eye thanks you for this confirmation of her own prophetic dreams."

"What absolute rubbish!" Peter bellowed from the upstairs bedroom. Edmund was camped out on the stair, perusing Lady Chatterley's Lover, speaking of absolute, and not even particularly entertaining, rubbish. As literature, it was passable; as erotica it was pathetic. It was truly pallid in comparison to a genre of illustrated Calormene poetry in which he, and someone never thought about or spoken of ever, had shared both academic and applied interests. In this drivel of D.H. Lawrence, he suspected what really incensed England's class-based readers was that the aristocratic woman was cavorting with her gardener.

He removed the magazine page he had been using as a bookmark – reserved for the eventuality of Peter's outburst – and handed it to his brother who had taken the stairs three infuriated steps at a time.

"What's this?" Peter demanded, grabbing the clipping from him. He read aloud, "Eminent Astro-Philosopher predicts Hitler's Fall! The Fuhrer's horoscope does not lie!" Edmund had to snatch the clipping back because Peter was going to shred it. "Where in Aslan's name did you get this nonsense?!"

"Harold and Alberta subscribe to it," Edmund replied. "The prediction was repeated by an astrologer in Egypt and a holy man in India."

"All planted by British intelligence?"

"So it would seem."

"Pardon the obvious, but why!?"

"Americans are a gullible lot," Edmund intoned in his best imitation of the eminent Hungarian Astrologist Louis De Wohl.

Calormenes, Queen Susan decided, were a gullible lot. She followed Peridan to more shops and salons, spreading the Centaur Darkwool's predictions and the Narnian purse more widely among the self-proclaimed oracles and quacks of Fortune Teller's Street, and their naïve customers.

At one posh salon, as Peridan charmed the mystic in a private and lengthy meeting, Susan mingled among the bored Tarkheenas who were waiting their turn to have their fortunes read and their
bodies pampered with massages, facials, and waxings. She wept for her injured husband and in gratitude for her stalwart cousin, Peridan, and assured the bejeweled (and very relieved) dolls that Lady Ramla had already predicted her Lord Caspian's speedy recovery.

"And this, in his own hand, is the prophecy of the Centaur Darkwool that the defeat of the Ettin King is assured," Susan told the three gaping Tarkheenas. "Surely the Tisroc and his War Council should know that standing firm with Narnia is written in the Stars."

Handing out copies of the Star charts, Susan saw that Peridan had emerged from the private conference and was surveying the whole of her exchange with the Tarkheenas. He was leaning carefully against a shelf of crystal balls, skulls, and snake skins. The owner of the skin, a bright mottled green constrictor, was lying lifeless on the shelf digesting its last meal. Though Peridan looked somber, for indeed, the fall of the Ettin King was most somber business, she caught an approving nod.

With complex bows and curtseys and many flowery compliments, Susan finally extricated herself from the tittering Tarkheenas. Peridan's leave-taking took even longer and was not courtesy alone. With all the lingering looks and straying hands staying in one place just a shade too long, Susan stood politely aside and admired the lovely green patterns on the snake coiled on the shelf.

"Well played, lady," Peridan muttered as he escorted her from the shop, straightening his uniform.

Bardon was waiting for them, preening on the sidewalk.

"Thank you," she murmured in return, handing him the handkerchief he had been using all morning to wipe away the face paint Tarkheenas smeared on his face during their affectionate greetings and clingy farewells. "To what end?"

Peridan's light eyes darted up and down the street, but no one seemed to be minding them at all. That he would be skilled at what he did was no surprise – Bardon had said Peridan was talented and Sallowpad would not have tolerated a fool. It was maturity and management that Peridan lacked.

She took the handkerchief back, checking his uniform critically for any face paint stains but miraculously, he managed to stay clean. If she had not been there, Peridan would have undoubtedly tarried in these shops a good deal longer, and likely accepted one of the many invitations extended for some greater adventure elsewhere.

"If we are ready then?" Bardon injected, a little impatient. With a nod from Peridan, the Gryphon turned off Fortune Teller's Street, weaving through the lounging litter-bearers and carriages toward a far less fashionable side street.

"Two of those Tarkheenas you flattered are married to Tarkaans on the War Council," Peridan explained once the crowd thinned.

"So they will be certain to hear from their wives that Calormen backs the winning horse if the Tisroc supports the High King!" she exclaimed. Thank you Aslan.

Peridan nodded. "And, the third little bird was the wife of Tarkaan Anradin."

"The one who owns that scandal sheet, The Tattler?"

"The same," Peridan said with a grin. "And, Tarkheena Lasaraleen gets her daily readings and facials at that shop, so I knew if we went there the news would get to The Daily as well."
The Daily, Susan remembered was virulently opposed to Calormene involvement in the Narnian war. Tarkaheena Lasaraleen co-owned the news service with her husband.

"The Daily and The Tattler will fight for the exclusive that a respected soothsayer predicts the Ettin fall," Susan marveled.

Peridan smiled broadly and steered her down an even dimmer, grungier alley; they were following Bardon's swinging tail. "And our man Kidrash at The Trumpeter will cover the cat fight between them!"

Bardon turned back around and growled. "Another metaphor, please."

"Where to now?" Susan asked. She trusted Bardon's judgment in this more than Peridan's, and the Gryphon was comfortable, even eager. Still, it was a disconcerting place, with trash and rubbish piled high, the creeping sweet smell of rot in the summer heat, and the sounds of rats scurrying away in the gloom.

"We are going to see Bardon's family," Peridan explained.

In the middle of a block of tightly packed buildings, the Gryphon squeezed through an anonymous back door.

Susan recognized the smell the moment she and Tebbitt followed Guy through the narrow back door of the Washington tenement. It was a particular stench of the Narnian kitchen, Cook in a foul mood, and doing to death over the fire the last, poor remnants of a dumb hog, even if Dwarfs, Gryphons, and Wolves were the only ones with a taste for it.

Guy sniffed appreciatively and led them up the narrow, dark stair. Behind her, Tebbitt discreetly coughed on the fumes. He had a guiding hand at her back, which did feel to be a courtesy and not a grope given the grim, creaky climb. However, these small gestures could grow to larger ones if encouraged. With a shrug, she dislodged his supporting hand. It was not polite, but this was a game she knew very well and it was important to set very clear boundaries that Tebbitt should not be encouraged to test.

"Sadie and Earl are making chitlins," Guy said, now taking the steps two at a time.

"Chitlins?" Tebbitt repeated behind her. "Is that …"

"From the smell, yes, I think so," she interrupted in a hurried whisper. "I suspect this is an American version of cooked offal -- haggis perhaps, or tripe." Or. Oh Aslan, not that!

Strains of a tinny piano and a brass instrument, Susan thought trumpet, mingled with the stink. "You can always count on good music in this building," Tebbitt said, his free hand now tapping a beat on the rickety rail. "Some of the Capitol's better jazz and bebop players live here. You can pay to hear them in the U Street clubs, or come here and sit on the roof, and listen."

"Top floor!" Guy called.

"Is this Guy's home?" Susan asked.

"I don't think so. It is difficult to know, though."

In response to her confounded look, Tebbitt grinned. "You'll see what I mean."
At the top floor landing, there was a sideways number on a door illuminated by light from a single, grime covered window. The smell, far stronger now, was of the sort that made the eyes water and, in Susan's case, the stomach churn.

Susan never did meet everyone crammed into that cheerful, crowded flat. She did not know who owned it, or how all these British West Indies immigrants and American Negroes were related to Guy, or if they were related at all. Guy introduced her to an awesomely proportioned hostess, Ludie, who pushed a cold drink into her hands and offered boiled peanuts and something fried to eat them with. Having lost any appetite with the malodorous odor, Susan gratefully accepted the glass on the hot day, then nearly choked on the cold, sweet tea. Susan excused herself to the washroom, and dumped most of the contents into the sink. She came out as Tebbitt was going by and he gave her jaunty and knowing wink, raising his frosty glass and managing to sip it without grimacing.

*Show off.*

She followed Ludie's summons into the kitchen, met Sadie and Earl, the elder Statesmen of the kitchens and agreed diplomatically that the chitlins smelled wonderfully. When asked to taste, she judged who held most power in the kitchen by who held the ladle and agreed with Sadie that a bit more salt was in order. She washed the taste away with the loathsome sweet tea and thanked Earl graciously for the generous refill.

She felt Aslan laughing at her discomfiture, for the Great Lion did have a sense of humor. *And she just knew what Peter and Edmund would have to say about it. Again.*

Peter's booming laugh rolled from the upstairs bedroom. His brother thundered out of the bedroom, letter clutched in his hand.

"Three ages, two worlds, two continents, an ocean filled with U-boats in between and…" Peter had to wipe the tears of glee from his eyes.

"Oink!" Edmund responded.

"And still our gentle sister cannot escape stewed pig intestines!"

Edmund raised his after dinner cuppa in salute. "Washed down with cold tea!"

"To quote our esteemed and ill tempered Cook, 'Gotta use everything but the squeal.'"

"The more I think on it, Peter, the more certain I am. In Aslan's Country, Cook is chasing everyone with a ladle, insisting they take just one more taste."

"Surely then it is our hell, if Cook's heaven?"

"Eyeballs and grasshoppers!" Lucy called from the drawing room.

"What was that Lu?" Edmund asked.

"The Calormene grasshoppers and Terbinithian fish eyes were worse!"

Peter laughed again and turned back up the stairs. "There are some things about diplomacy I do not miss at all."
"You are doing better than I expected," Tebbitt murmured in her ear, materializing out of nowhere. Edmund had that same skill of coming upon someone unawares. They had to crowd against the wall as three small shrieking children barreled from one room of the flat to the next. Samuel was chasing after them pretending to be a roaring monster.

"And you as well, Wing Commander," she responded.

"I have been here before." The pilot frowned and sipped his drink again. "You seem more at ease than I was the first time."

Susan did not think she could tell Tebbitt that she spent her first adulthood in places far more diverse even than this one. She opted for a more conventional, and safer, response.

"The more time I am with those who are different than I, the more I am drawn to one conclusion, Tebbitt."

"And that is?"

Susan raised her drink to his and clinked their glasses gently. "That we are all more alike than we are different, and where we are different, that is to be celebrated."

They had moved into the living room to avoid the stampede of children. The large floor window was open, letting the cooking pig fumes out and the band music in.

"As merry as this domestic scene is and as much as I enjoy it, Tebbitt, what are doing here?"

A male voice bellowing from outside the window interrupted his response. "There you are, boy! Get yourself out here once you see Agnes!"

"You can find someone else to bang that drum, Charlie! I'm on duty," Tebbitt yelled through the window to the unseen speaker.

A trumpet blared back, followed by, "We've got a good bottle of sippin' bourbon with your name on it, Reggie!"

Susan spun away from a laughing Tebbitt to stick her head out the window. Looking up to the roof, she spied the men, the instruments for their impromptu riff, and the bottle. "To be clear, Mr. Charlie," Susan called back, "Wing Commander Tebbitt is on duty and shall not be joining you for rounds of Wild Turkey!"

The smiling man, younger even than Tebbitt, raised his trumpet in a jaunty salute. "And who might you be, Ma'am?"

"Mrs. Caspian, of the British Embassy."

"Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Caspian of the British Embassy. We're all playing tonight. The bottle was for the Wing Commander!"

Again relying upon her sense of where the power in this household lay, Susan said, "I would not wish to discuss with Earl or Miss Sadie my warning of no Wild Turkey, or any other alcohol, for Wing Commander Tebbitt." She had thought further clarification and expansion of the order was called for. "Am I clear, Mr. Charlie?"

He blew a five note affirmation from his trumpet.
She pulled her head back in the window to face a glowering Tebbitt. It merited barely a shrug. "With two brothers, you'll need to work harder on that scowl and frown before it has any effect upon me whatsoever, Wing Commander."

"You can be such a …"


After the better part of a day spent in ladies' salons, parlors, and shops with cosmetics and Tarot cards, Agnes' plain white bedroom was a stark contrast. There was a little, neatly made bed and a bookshelf of girls' titles that Susan assumed were American fare: *Little Women*, *Little House in the Big Woods*, *Anne of Green Gables*, and *Caddie Woodlawn*. There was a well-worn Bible on the nightstand.

The young woman, barely older than Susan herself sat, composed and prim, at a dainty white covered table. She was wearing the starched black and white of a servant's dress for a great social house in Georgetown or on the Potomac River. The stark severity of her uniform underscored rather than diminished her astonishing beauty. She was darker in complexion than many of the Calormenines Susan recalled but far lighter than the others in the flat. Susan had spent the day planting rumors and watering them by flattering the matrons and daughters of Washington society. None of those pampered women approached the loveliness that rested effortlessly and unaffected in Agnes.

"Hello, Reginald," Agnes said softly, not rising, nor offering a hand. She spoke with the same rich Island accent as Guy. Though they were very different, Susan felt instinctively that the two were related in some way.

Tebbitt smiled warmly. Now that Susan saw it, she made note of what true regard looked like in the pilot. The mocking and flirtatious quality so often in his manner was replaced with a kind affection. "Thank you for seeing us." With a tilt of his head, he said, "With me is Mrs. Caspian from the Embassy."

Automatically, Susan reached out to shake her hand, then as quickly withdrew it as Agnes stared at her offered hand and then up to her eyes.

In the gaze that met hers, Susan felt as she sometimes did when looking in a mirror at her own reflection. A soul far older than the body it inhabited stared back at her. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Agnes," Susan managed.

Agnes nodded, her eyes lingering a moment longer. She then turned her attention back to Tebbitt. "Will you set it out, please?"

The pilot withdrew from his jacket their last copy of De Wohl's dire horoscope for Hitler and set it on the table in front of Agnes. Her eyes flicked over it, perfunctory and disapproving. "He is a fraud, you know. Whatever you pay him, it's too much."

"But he is our fraud," Tebbitt responded. "And he is still believed, isn't he?"

"Yes," Agnes agreed reluctantly. "There are many who pay attention to this nonsense."

"So you will do it? Spread the rumor during the readings you do?"

Agnes looked away. "Put it away please, would you Reginald? It's painful to see something so false."
"But you will?" Tebbitt pressed. "Usual terms?"

"Yes, I will," she murmured through a sigh. "There is a new Laura Ingalls Wilder book to be published; I have it on order."

"I will pick it up at the booksellers for you," Tebbitt assured her. "Thank you Agnes. I'm very grateful."

There was gentleness to how he addressed Agnes which struck Susan as odd. Yes, Agnes was slight, beautiful and had a very quiet, soft manner. Yet, nothing about this woman was soft in the least. Susan perceived a soaring strength and wisdom. Or, am I seeing myself in her?

"Will you favor me with a reading?" Tebbitt asked, puppy-like with a pleading quality.

Guy snorted from his guard position at the door. "But it's always the same!"

Tebbitt flashed a grin so charmingly adorable, Susan almost laughed aloud. Goodness, no wonder the socialites were all clamoring for him. "But the Page of Cups also says I am always the romantic idealist!"

"Or the Fool," Guy retorted.

"Please sit, Reginald," Agnes said. "I will read for you."

With a triumphant, "Ha!" Tebbitt eased himself into the dainty seat opposite Agnes at the pristine table. From her lap, the woman removed her cards, peeking from beneath a sheer white scarf. She reverently unwrapped the cards and tenderly shuffled them as if they were made of glass.

"I will not do a whole hand today, Reginald."

Agnes set the first card down, and Tebbitt visibly deflated.

"The Moon, again. And it will be followed by the…"

"Hush," Agnes commanded, and set out the Seven of Swords, and then another card next to it.

"The Eight of Wands," Tebbitt said with a grimace. "You stack the deck, don't you Agnes?"

"You may leave if you like, Reginald," Agnes replied serenely, studying the three cards.

He settled himself more firmly on the stool with an I'm not going anywhere look.

"The Moon shows the life of illusion you lead now, Reginald. With Swords and Wands, this illusion is active, not make-believe, and involves deceit and even dishonor. While the Moon often suggests change, I do not see that here. The cards show your life of lies continuing for some time."

A fourth card joined the other three, and Susan saw Tebbitt start in surprise. "What's that one?"

"The Two of Pentacles. You have increased proficiency and skill at deceit, Reginald."

Susan craned her neck to see the cheerful yellow and red card. A Juggler, balancing, balls in the air. How very apt for a man in intelligence work.

"So I am a very good liar!"

Susan winced as Agnes set out very carefully, the Devil, on top of the Moon, the Swords and the
Wands. The Devil was a disturbing card of chains and fire. "I have explained this before, Reginald. This is not a card of evil or even misfortune, but of control. Others control your life and your lies, sometimes for good and sometimes for ill."

"The same as always," Tebbitt muttered.

"Yet, here is something new!"

Susan could not tell if Agnes knew of the card before she turned it over, setting the Nine of Pentacles over the Devil.

"There is a new, external force exerting control, one you resist, but would do well follow, for that force brings stability, advancement, and success."

"See, Susan!" Tebbitt said, pointing at the card. "That's you!"

Her breath caught in her chest. Indeed, the Nine of Pentacles was a woman, in a garden, with a bird on her hand. Susan glanced at Guy; he was studying the card intently, a bemused smile on his face. He sees it too.

It was not identical, but it was close, very close. Susan had spent years looking at books in the Tower Library of Cair Paravel with illustrations very like the Nine of Pentacles.

"Reginald, do you wish for me to finish?"

"Yes, Agnes," Tebbitt responded meekly.

"And here we have the Lovers." Agnes set the card down. "As you know, Reginald, the Lovers by themselves is a card of passion and pleasure, not love. So we must look to other cards for what surrounds the Lovers." She set the Five of Wands on top of the Lovers and its meaning seemed clear even on its face as Susan saw men struggling under and with the five staves.

"A card of difficulty and difficult choices, not love," Agnes said.

"As long as I have the lovers, that's fine with me!" Tebbitt tossed a wink over his shoulder at her, but Susan made a point of pretending she did not notice it or the accompanying leer. He had actually been tolerable today; she supposed the pilot was reaching his limit of good behavior. Maybe she should let him up on the roof for a drink or two. It would be useful to know if Tebbitt was able to restrain himself and this was a safe environment in which to test whether he or the alcohol controlled. With the Peridan she had known before, the liquor usually had the upper hand.

"There is more Reginald," Agnes broke in, "if you wish to hear it."

"Hell yes!"

The woman glared at him angrily. "Sorry, Agnes," the pilot muttered contritely. "Please continue."

Guy shifted next to her and muttered, "That's unusual, Mrs. Caspian. Usually, the Lovers and whatever goes with it are the last cards she reads for the Commander."

Agnes stroked the top card with her palm, and looked up. "Are you certain?"

"Absolutely!"

"The Five of Swords," Agnes said, setting the card down.
A man, alone, three swords in his arms, two on the ground.

"I like that one; it looks like a victory!" Tebbitt exulted.

Susan thought something rather different. Futility. Gain not worth the cost.

"The card in this context is a warning, Reginald. Here, it signifies an impending failure, one which you can avoid, if you are cautious."

"Well, that's not so bad!" Tebbitt exulted. "I was expecting something worse!"

Susan was watching Agnes. The woman ran her fingers over the cards, frowning, as if weighing a decision. Susan suspected the "something worse" was lurking in the next cards.

"Are you done?" Tebbitt asked this time.

In the quiet room, Susan could hear Agnes' fingers restlessly tapping the card.

"Yes," she announced. "I am not prepared to read the last cards for you."

"Thank you, Agnes, as always." Tebbitt unfolded from his little pouf seat and gestured extravagantly. "Mrs. Caspian, would you like a turn?"

"Oh, surely Guy first," but Guy was shaking his head.

"Agnes don't read family, Mrs. Caspian."

Susan looked over at Agnes; the woman sat, as imperturbable as before, carefully shuffling her cards.

"I don't know," she said slowly, hesitating. Anyone who knew anything of Tebbitt would have no difficulty at all making those readings. On the other paw…

"Oh, I don't believe in it either. It's just fun!" Tebbitt said casually.

Tebbitt had not understood the reason for her reluctance. Even without Guy's contradicting frown, it was Agnes herself that was cause for caution. While she did not really believe in this particular mechanism over any other, Susan did believe in power. Something within Agnes transported Susan back to the deepest, most mystical Centaurs, mages, and Calormene priests and shamans she had ever known. The drawings on the cards themselves had reminded her strongly of illustrations in some of the Narnian historical texts in the Tower Library at Cair Paravel. Strange as it was, there was power in this sparkling white bedroom of a Washington tenement and Susan respected it.

Agnes looked up and Susan fell into her limitless dark eyes.

"Reginald, would you leave us, please?"

He frowned, curious, and sent a look her way. It was surprising how easily they had slipped into a pattern of silent communication. Susan nodded he agreement. "Two drinks, since you have been so well-behaved."

"Thanks Mum," Tebbitt grumbled, slouching petulantly toward the door. Guy was following, but Agnes interrupted.

"Please stay, Guy."
As the door closed, Guy again assumed his post. Susan decided not to ask how Agnes already knew that she would trust Guy with secrets known only to her siblings. Sitting on the tiny stool across from Agnes, she clasped her hands tightly, praying that if there was power here, she might receive a clearer word from Aslan that was not filtered through layers, dreams, worlds, and spans of ages.

"I've not yet found how to do it," Agnes said.

"What is that?"

"How to describe other lives lived."

*Other lives lived.* It was as if Pliny or Fidrian had spoken it and Susan was again in the presence of their Centaur tutors.

"I do not see it very often, you see," Agnes went on, as if they were discussing weather or biscuits. "Europeans and Americans live with an ordered mind and neatly stacked soul. You have an old soul in a young body, like an onion, in rings and layers, but it grows larger the deeper you go."

"And I assumed the same of you, Agnes."

Agnes fingered her deck again. "The cards are restless in my hands. I would like to read for you, Susan. But, to the extent I can comprehend your mystery, I understand why you hesitate. I will not go very far."

This was not dark power; Susan was sure of that, even from the few times she had felt it. There was something strangely Narnian about it all, though with less animal hair. Faintly, from the roof, she heard the beat of a drum and could still taste the pig stew on her breath.

*Aslan, your daughter is listening.*

Susan nodded.

"So, here we have the Two of Pentacles, the Moon, the Eight of Wands, and the Seven of Swords." Agnes' face flickered with a smile, and she set down the same cards as Tebbitt had received.

"Yes," Agnes said, responding to Susan's unspoken thought. "In this you are very much like Reginald – an accomplished liar, and even better at it than he is."

Another card. The Three of Wands. Agnes paused, studying the card, and how it stood in relation to the others, a man on a cliff, looking to the sea, three staves to support him, ships in the distance. "If you are the Nine of Pentacles to Reginald, this is an interesting card." She looked up. "Understand, I do not say that you are; such a thing is impossible, though Reginald believes it."

Susan nodded. "I understand. Nor do I believe it a bad thing if Tebbitt thinks it so."

"The Three of Wands may denote many things. It speaks as you see to one who has journeyed, but not to an end. Rather, Wands denote more action to come. On that journey, a foundation has been laid for future success. While it appears to be a solitary journey, it is not necessarily so. For clarity, we shall turn over another card."

The Six of Swords, a boatman, poling his way to sea, alone and purposefully.

Agnes set the Six of Swords next to, not on top of the Three of Wands. "$This card can often mean leaving your troubles behind. I think that too blunt here. With the Three of Wands, we saw the
foundation that has been laid on your journey to this point. Now, the cards suggest you have left, or have the choice to leave that past and go onward, with clarity of purpose, guided both by intuition and logic."

In quick succession, Agnes put down five cards, the Emperor, the Hierophant, the Chariot, Justice, and the Knight of Pentacles.

"So many important men in your life, Susan. You stand like a lily, straight and tall among swords." She tapped the Emperor first. "There is a new guide in your life. He is important and trustworthy. Cherish this guide."

Agnes slid the Hierophant next to the Chariot and studied them intently, a slight frown creasing her lovely face. "This is interesting, Susan. In the Hierophant, you have the teacher – a man of experience and divinity. Yet he rides the Chariot, which is always struggling for control, balancing on two wheels, pulled by two Sphinxes, one black and white."

Snorting lightly, Agnes tapped the cards. "This guide of yours does not wish me to read about him; the cards are resisting me. This man follows two masters, one light and one dark, and yet somehow shackles them together in pursuit of the path he wishes to follow. He is a very unusual guide."

Agnes raised her eyes. "He is a man I would like very much to meet."

"So would I," Susan agreed. The Emperor had been plain enough, though in the guise of Colonel Walker-Smythe.

"When you are ready, he will appear," Agnes said simply. Her finger gently traced the black and white Sphinxes.

"And this one?" Susan asked, gesturing, though to her it seemed obvious.

"Justice, of course. This Judge is important to you and you to him, though you do not value so strongly what he does, as he does. With the Three of Wands we saw the foundation laid and readiness to move forward. Justice also reminds us that we bring our past with us on this journey."

Agnes looked up. "You recognize this?"

"Oh yes." Susan would recognize the Just King in any disguise and she felt a stab of longing for Edmund's sound advice. "And the last?"

"The Knight of Pentacles."

"Not King?" Susan mused. So in addition to a second adolescence, Peter was again winning his spurs. If not slaying Maugrim, what would it be this time?

Agnes shrugged. "That is to come, to be sure, for with the Knight of Pentacles, patience brings its own rewards. First he must be the Knight, dedicated, loyal, doggedly pursuing the tasks set for him, honoring his commitments to the bitter end, strong in character, word, body, and mind."

"Might that be a bit dull?" Susan asked, smiling, and thinking of Peter toiling away with the Professor at Oxford.

"A lack of imagination, perhaps," Agnes said, "but when the Knight of Pentacles acts, it will be decisive and forceful."

Agnes took a deep breath and sat back, staring at the handiwork before her, hands restlessl
moving over her cards. "There are others, but I will stop there. That is quite enough of swords and teachers."

What she meant was ambiguous for Agnes pulled from her precious deck another card and set it down, apart from the others.

"Strength." Susan whispered the card's name, both shaken and exultant, seeing the card of the girl, wreathed in flowers, the red lion with her.

"The card has many meanings, Susan. Control of passions, inner strength of character, determination, and courage may all be part of the Strength card."

"And perhaps it is just the card itself," Susan said. It was as with the Justice card; she did not need Agnes' interpretations here. To Susan, a flowered girl with a red lion by her side could mean only one thing.

On the other paw, Susan could not guess what Agnes would interpret from the next card, the Four of Swords. Agnes sighed. "And yet another Knight. You are quite surrounded by them, Susan."

Agnes touched the Four of Swords and its image of a Knight. Was he sleeping? Dead?

"The suit of Swords is one of conflict, save for the Four. This card tells of the Knight at rest and peace after his long toil. And yet…"

Agnes turned over another card, Temperance, and set it next to the Four of Swords. The picture was of a winged angel, pouring water from one cup to another.

"Temperance is not moderation, here, but cooperation, partnership, two minds in perfect accord. Your resting Knight in the Four of Swords is waiting for the personal completion promised in the Temperance card."

Susan stared at the cards, trying to puzzle the meaning, if any, here. A feeling of a tremendous longing rose within her. She could see herself with perfect clarity sitting in the Tower Library, looking at a text so very similar to these cards, with the same carefully drawn illustrations and handwritten lettering. From these sources, she learned the lore, secrets, and rhythms of Narnia; Lambert, her Wolf-Guard, always patiently at her side.

*Lambert.*

Dimly she heard Agnes repeat, "A resting Knight waits for the completion only you can bring to him."

Susan shut her eyes to stop the tears that threatened. Her throat tightened unbearably and she had to choke back a sob.

*Lambert, Wolf, Friend, and Guard.*

*Oh, my Friend, are you well, dead these thousand years past? Did my sudden return hurt you as it hurt me? Did you feel the thread between us break when the walls between our worlds sprang up and separated us? Aslan said he comforted you. Were you truly eased, or did the Lion say that to comfort me in my grief for our parting?*

With a mustering breath, Susan forced herself to composure and opened her eyes. Agnes was looking at her with such compassion it was nearly her undoing.
"There is more, but it will wait."

Susan staggered to her feet, stammering her thanks, blinking back the tears. They left Agnes sitting in her chair, precisely as she had been when Susan had entered the room.

"This way, Miss Susan," Guy said quietly, taking her by the arm and leading her through another bedroom at the far end of the hall. "There's a washroom in here. You get yourself together." He waved a giant, red and white checked handkerchief, but Susan shook her head.

"I'm fine, Guy. Truly."

"Whatever you say, Miss Susan. But you don't want to be going out there and have the Wing Commander think you've been crying over something Agnes said when he thinks it's all just good fun."

Looking in the mirror, Susan saw that her face was running. She used a tissue to blot her makeup, nearly stabbing herself in the eye. Her hand was shaking too much for the lipstick.

"Agnes sure can affect people," Guy said. "Did you ever meet someone like her before?"

"Yes, though not here," Susan replied, applying fresh powder.

"Don't know where it comes from, God, or St. Agnes, or the loas, Aunt Nancy, or the Trickster, but it's a true gift."

With a comb, she teased her hair back into order. "Agnes has real power," Susan agreed. "I had wanted a sign." She managed to hold back the self-deprecating snort. "I should be more careful of what I wish."

"Never truer words, that, Miss Susan. If you don't mind me asking, the resting Knight who is waiting for you? Is that your wolf friend?"

"I think so, yes." Lambert. Wolf Friend and so much more.

"Just think of him biting the Wing Commander in the arse will set you right, Miss Susan."

She laughed. "It will indeed."

Lambert would have hated Tebbitt and probably would not have been content with a mere bite on the arse. On the other paw, the Wolf would have deeply respected Guy, and the others in the office, the Colonel, Gladys, and Captain Lowrey. He would have enjoyed the company in this homely flat, the music, and the cooking chitlins as well.

Guy leaned against the door, whistling to the jazz riff pounding on the roof. A minute's composure later and Susan was able to apply her lipstick. "I owe you another story for this, my friend."

"At your pleasure, Miss Susan, but I'd be glad to hear more about those fighting mice. The gryphons, too. I like how you talk of them."

They walked together back toward the kitchens.

"Bardon, I do not care that the Dwarfs, Wolves, and Gryphons are so fond of stewed pig intestine. I am not tasting another bite."

"I like it even better raw," the Gryphon said. "Though, admittedly it's not to everyone's taste."
Queen Susan cocked her head toward the courtyard where the Fauns were piping away, loud, merry, and more exuberantly even than before. It was impossible to stay still listening to such amazing and impromptu rhythms. "I do not hear that lovely music tainted by any reprehensible lyrics. Perhaps our Lord Peridan has stayed sober?"

"I'd wager your crown to a Crow he's not," Bardon said with a feline sigh.

"Good thing it's her crown!" Peridan said gleefully, popping his head out from the kitchens. "You owe me another stanza of the Moose Song, Queen Susan!"

Queen Susan had to hide the grimace as an intimidating voice summoned her to the cooking pot for just one more little taste. She knew Peridan and Bardon were both laughing at her as she assured Cook that really, the stewed pig intestine was sufficiently seasoned for the most robust of appetites. She endured a tirade on how the stew was for refined palates, not Ettin monsters, and that this wasn't some shoddy Tashbaan imitation, but a genuine Narnian recipe.

And that gave Queen Susan an idea.

Peter came down the stairs, looming a few treads above Edmund, trying to get a look at whatever his brother was reading. Edmund snapped the cover closed.

"You would not be remotely interested in this, Peter."

"That salacious?"

"It's dull drivel – all about gardening."

"So you are wrapping a book about gardening in brown paper to protect the cover?"

"Yes. I am very protective of my books given how rough you and Lu are with them."

Edmund had tried that same trick with the Calormene erotica and Peter hadn't been fooled then, either. Though, for all the effort, Peter had never quite seen the point of it; the illustrations weren't bad but there was an awful lot of text to wade through, in verse no less, to find anything interesting.

"So, according to what I just read, Susan is manufacturing rumors?"

His brother nodded.

"And planting the rumors in American newspapers to what end? Sway popular opinion?"

"Yes, I think so. Remember when she was writing this, it was just in advance of Churchill's visit to Roosevelt. I think the British were trying to generate positive stories in the newspapers so that Americans would be more supportive and maybe even pressure their Members of Congress to act favorably toward Churchill."

Peter looked at the date on the letter. "This was right before Tobruk fell, in North Africa. It fell in fact while Churchill was in America. The papers here said we lost hundreds of tanks; tens of thousands were taken prisoner. Rommel nearly made it to Alexandria." Peter's voice caught and he had to pause until better able to control his simmering anger. "Asim had said the situation was very grim."

Edmund leaned back against the wall, tucking his book protectively under an arm. "I think this rumormongering was part of a bigger strategy to make weapons dealing with the British more
palatable for the Americans."

"The war horses and Gryphons," Peter said.

His brother nodded.

"Which are likely tanks and planes headed for the second front everyone knows must be opened."
Again Peter had to brutally smother the feeling of betrayal as he remembered the long hours with Asim discussing these very issues. "General Eisenhower is here for a reason. The Allies will have to move to retake North Africa and Europe, eventually, and relieve Stalin in Russia."

A frown ghosted across Edmund's face.

"What is it, Ed?"

His brother shook his head. "You'll get to it in the next letter, Peter, and then, I want your serious attention to it. The problem with relying upon rumor is that it is more difficult to know what's true. Things are being hinted at in news reports that seem very unreal; they could be dismissed as invention…"

"But?"

"I don't think they are manufactured rumors. I think they are real."

Next up, chapter 7, What's Cookin?  

Astrologer Louis De Wohl and how British intelligence made use of him is a fascinating story that has only recently come to light. Hitler's doomed horoscope was just one example of the many types of rumors the British disseminated in order to sow support for Allied efforts, obtain America's fuller engagement in World War 2, and discredit British critics and Nazi sympathizers.

Many, many thanks to Anastigmat for her invaluable help with the Tarot card reading. It is her suggestion too that Edmund has an appreciation for Calormene sensual verse.

Agnes uses the very popular Rider-Waite tarot deck for her reading. The Wikipedia entry under that title includes all the beautiful images on these cards.

"Aunt Nancy" is the Americanized version of Anansi the Spider, the Trickster, from oral traditions of the West African religion and mythology; his stories came to the Americas with the slaves.
What's Cooking

The Queen Susan In Tashbaan

Chapter 7, What's Cooking

"Nothing deceives like a document." Sir William Stephenson

"I have in my possession a secret map ... made in Germany by Hitler's government -- by the planers of the new world. It is a map of South American and a part of Central America as Hitler proposes to reorganize it." Excerpted from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's March 11, 1941 Navy Day radio address

Queen Susan arrived at the office to find one of the poor gardeners from the Labour of Moles shambling about in the hallway, staring at the door to the office. The Moles and other diggers were still working on the grounds excavating Flobber's swimming pond and had a habit of getting lost in the Narnia residence.

"Hello, Friend."

The Mole whirled around in the direction of her voice, blinking furiously. "Hello," he said, looking passed her, into the distance over her shoulder. Moles had notoriously poor eyesight. "I was looking for the maintenance shed, but it seems to be locked, so maybe this isn't the maintenance shed?"

"No, it is not. You are in the Annex, Friend. Would you like me to help you outside?"

Susan saw the good Mole on his way back toward the Labour. Looking up as she again entered the lowly, anonymous building, she saw a flurry of Birds, pecking madly at each other, fighting to get into the office window. It looked to be a busy day.

Fraxi was already dealing with the messages, looking very grim. Feathers were flying throughout the room as the frantic Birds dove and jostled to unload their burdens and continue the rounds.

"Me, please! Please!" Liluye the Falcon cried, hopping from leg to leg.

"Well hold still then, you hen!" Fraxi snapped at the nervous Falcon.

"I've only just arrived from the Lone Islands," the Falcon snapped right back. "I flew all night, I've not had a thing to drink, and oh my poor nerves!"

"Take a tonic then, Liluye, because we've got the High King arriving himself!"

The Ash Dryad removed the messages from the panicked Bird's leg; Susan came up and took them from her while Fraxi dealt with Liluye.

"You have one more for Flobber," Fraxi told the Falcon. "So get there now. Get some rest because it's certain you'll be back to the Just King by tomorrow."
Liluye squawked out her distress, flapped awkwardly to the window, and flew away.

"It's more on the Lone Islands?" Fraxi asked as Susan unrolled the messages. "That's what the rest of this lot has been."

"Yes," Susan said, heart sinking and apprehension rising. "Worse and worse still. I think the Just King has lost half of his War Horses and Gryphons, at least. Avra has fallen, they are retreating across Felimath."

"Doorn still holds, though?"

"Thus far."

Fraxi shuddered, shedding Ash leaves as if they were nervous Beast hair. "If Felimath and Doorn fall, the Ettins will have all the sheep they need to feed their armies and a port to ship them from."

Peter glanced at the date on Susan's letter. Even without Edmund, he had no difficulty puzzling out the story behind this story. The Lone Islands were North Africa; Doorn was Egypt and its main port, Narrowhaven likely Cairo and the Suez. Susan was writing of the fear that if the Suez fell to the Nazis, Hitler would control access to the Mediterranean, the oil fields, and have an easier route north to supply his campaign against Stalin and the Soviets on the Eastern Front of the War.

These were in the days leading up to the disastrous fall of Tobruk that he and Asim had dissected. The Eighth Army had been pushed inexorably back, east, outmatched by the better led, better trained, better equipped Afrika Corps of Wüstenfuchs, the Desert Fox, Field Marshal Rommel. Thousands dead, 32,000 Allied prisoners captured, and thousands of tons of food and fuel, and 2,000 vehicles all fell under Nazi control. The Allied tank losses had been severe, reduced to a skeletal force. It was not until the Eighth Army retreated to El Alamein that it had been able to make a stand, and a month later was able to halt the Nazi advance, trapping Rommel and his tanks between the Mediterranean and the Qattara Depression.

It was strange. It was not that Susan did not have a good strategic mind. She did; they all did. But, of his siblings, Susan would have been the last to whom he would have sought for a discussion of War Horses and Gryphons, tanks and fighter planes, or the geography of North Africa. Susan had never had Edmund's brilliance, nor Lucy's quick intuitive situational grasp. Yet, here, she was managing in a foreign country, aiding British spies, comprehending strategically what was going on in the War, and then converting it into a story that only her siblings would understand.

Peter found his appreciation for his sister's skills, already profound, increasing further still. Perhaps more accurately, he was coming to appreciate more deeply just how wide-reaching Susan's abilities were.

Fraxi finally shut the window to keep any other Birds out. The important mail had already arrived. Now, the messages were all from Residence administration and for the dustbin regardless: Queen Iris had dutifully penned Flobber's edict that the Dryads deadhead the flowers so that the gardens (not dug up for the bathing pond) would be blooming for the High King's arrival; Maintenance was reminding everyone (again) about the Moles getting lost — "Kindly escort any Mole found to the excavation site;" Housekeeping — "Great Cats are asked to please stay off the furniture in the Residence when napping as they break the loungers intended for Humans;" and Personnel — "In anticipation of the High King's arrival, dress uniforms are to be worn at all time; fur should be combed and trimmed; all feathers preened."
Susan was attending to the filing of the confidential messages that were always stored in the locked strong box when Peridan sauntered in, conveniently just after she, Fraxi, and Prince Cor had seen to the mail and distilled the crier sheets for the Chief.

"Where is everybody?" Peridan was balancing a very full tea cup, a large bun, and a wad of parchment crammed under his arm.

"Chief is in his office, Bardon is running messages to the Tisroc, and Cor and Fraxi went over to the Residence."

"With a detour in the gardens to visit the Moles?"

She laughed. "I couldn't possibly speculate." Susan swiftly returned to her seat before he commandeered it. The pilot was fond of rearranging her workspace, spilling crumbs everywhere, and hiding her quills. It was very immature.

"How was the gambling?" she asked.

In one fluid movement, Peridan dumped his parchment on Fraxi's desk, gulped down his bun, and arrived at her own desk to make himself comfortable, leaning indolently on its edge. He stretched out his long legs, and yawned into his tea cup. "Tarkheena Maris says hello. She wants you to join her for a day at the baths."

Maris was the dishearteningly dour sister of Tarkaan Kidrash, owner of the pro-Tisroc crier service, *The Trumpeter*. She had the ignominious task of keeping the fine house where the great Tarkaan lords gambled.

"So she was grateful when I sent the Dwarfs to collect you before the wee dawn hours?"

"Very. You have also intimidated all the Narnians at the gaming table and *they* have threatened the Caloremenes. They cut me off after half a bottle. I am not sure I could get drunk in Tashbaan without really significant effort."

"A tragedy, surely, my Lord Peridan."

"Odd that no one had mentioned it to me when I was drunk, but I do win more when I am sober."

"Then I am entitled to a percentage of your winnings?"

She could tell in the burgeoning smirk that he was going to say something rude. Before Peridan could encourage her to check his pockets for rolls of Calormen Crescents and other "winning hands," she injected quickly, "Who was at the game? Any news?"

"The Grand Vizier. Some of the War Council Tarkaans. Tarkaan Kidrash and Tarkaan Anradin, both still spatting about who scooped whom on Lord Darkwool's prophesies."

He sighed and took another sip of his tea. "All the talk is of the High King coming, who will get invitations to the Residence dinner, and," he nodded toward the closed door behind which Sallowpad was reading the messages, "the Lone Islands, of course."

"The situation there is dire," Susan told the pilot. "We had word this morning that the Just King is withdrawing across Felimath toward Doorn and sustained heavy losses to Gryphons and War Horses."

"Poor Beasts," Peridan said with real feeling. Susan remembered that he had lost his own Gryphon
co-fighter during the Cair Paravel raids. "We have lost so many already."

Susan nodded sympathetically. "Chief thinks that when he arrives the first business for the High King will be to ask the Tisroc to supply reinforcements for Narnia's defense of the Lone Islands."

A shadow moved across Peridan's face, followed by a deep frown.

"Does something trouble you, Cousin?"

He snorted lightly and drained his tea cup. "Many things. Even if the Tisroc wants to supply us, based on the conversation last night we will have a difficult time getting the High King's request through the War Council. They remain very focused on the Telmar battles away South and are not terribly concerned with the North. And, the Grand Vizier is no friend of Narnia."

"He has been very critical of our policy in Terebinthia and the Lone Islands, but is not as if the Ettins would be a preferable overlord." Susan said. There was, despite his unorthodox views, nevertheless, something grudgingly honorable about the Grand Vizier.

Peridan nodded. "From the way he spoke last night at the gaming table, I almost sense he would be glad to see Narrowhaven fall and let that be an end to our savage and uncivilized imperial Narnian rule."

"Unfortunately, he is hardly alone. Tarkheena Masikah says the same thing today in the crier sheets. Calormenes should not be dying in our own bloody problems when they have their own battles to fight against Telmar."

Peridan grimaced – but he always did at the mention of the persistent and politically influential Tarkheena. "And at least a third of the War Council falls in line behind her when she says it, by my count."

Peter had been able, a few pages back, to just insert "Roosevelt" whenever he saw "Tisroc" (neither of whom would live forever). He managed to switch "War Council" to "Congress" and "Telmar" to "Japan." The business about anti-Narnian sentiment was surely anti-Colonial rhetoric and that Americans should not be dying for the sake of a rabble of landed English foxhunting gentry. "Tarkheena Masikah" was a Congresswoman and for now, it did not much matter which one – surely there were not that many women MPs in the U.S. Congress, and even more unusual, the Tarkheena wielded some power in that body's war committees or Cabinet.

Reading "Grand Vizier" brought him up short. He had seen the name before, but never so bluntly. His mind was not quite able to comprehend the enormity of it as he read Susan's comment to Peridan about the Grand Vizier being next in the "line of succession" in the Calormene capitol.

RAF fighter pilot Peridan was playing poker with Henry Wallace, the Vice President of the United States.

Peridan sighed and put down his tea cup.

On her desk.

Susan arched a very disapproving eyebrow. They had had this conversation before. She was not the Lord Peridan's housekeeper, or mother, or maidservant and he could pick up his own purloined dishware and return it to the kitchens.
Peridan scowled. "Yes, I will see to it. I remember what happened the last time I cluttered your pristine space. I do not fancy salt in my tea."

He must have caught her flinch because his look sharpened. "Yes, Queen Susan? Something you wish to say?"

He was far too perceptive. The mention of salt had brought back to the fore an idea Susan had been nursing for several days; the burgeoning needs in the Lone Islands and continuing hostility to Narnia shown by some of the powerful members of the War Council were making the ploy seem less outlandish and more urgent.

"An idea came to me when we were with the Narnians and saw Agnes."

"Oh? Do tell." Peridan softly cajoled. *He was such a manipulator.*

Susan laid out her plan to an audience so rapt, it was flattering. In the telling she saw where his skill lay as a spy. Peridan gave a speaker his complete, fascinated attention. He listened, attending as if you were the most important thing in all the known worlds, and every word you said, profound and important. He listened so well he invited you to say more, perhaps more than was prudent.

For all that though, it was even more gratifying to see the expression on Peridan's face change from pleading and mocking to shrewd and conniving.

He seized her hand, hauling her unceremoniously to her feet. "You, my cousin are a deviously clever woman. Chief!" he barked, "let us in! The Queen Susan has an idea you need to hear!"

"And so, it seems to me," Susan explained to the Raven, "that if we were able to fabricate a document that makes the Ettin threat as terrifyingly real for Calormenes as it is for Narnians, the War Council might be more amenable to the High King's requests for Gryphons and War Horses when he makes it."

"Calormen still believes she is secure, with the desert between here and Narnia, with Archenland and the mountains besides," Peridan added. "I hear constantly that the Giants will never cross the desert, and so they should just let the North burn in Ettin fire. If we can heighten the fear, Caloremenes will pressure the War Council members to throw their support behind the Tisroc and Narnia."

Sallowpad cocked his head to the side, listening intently. He glanced at the map behind him then focused again on them. "As you both know, the Cobbler can forge anything we need. His work has fooled the Ettin and Telmarine Generals themselves."

Susan had seen the Cobbler's "shoes" already. His work was brilliant. She now carried his forged documents with her.

"I think we should use as much of the reality of the situation as possible," Peridan said. He was stalking the floor between Sallowpad's perch and the door, animated and gesticulating, very keen on the plan. "We should build on what would happen if the Lone Islands fall and how the Ettins will be able to feed their armies for a sustained assault on Calormen."

"Queen Susan?" Sallowpad asked. "What is your suggestion?"

She told him. Peridan was grinning like an idiot; Sallowpad stared at her so intensely, she wondered if something was amiss. In the end though, the Raven bobbed his head in enthusiastic
approval. "Excellent, Queen Susan."

"We would want the Calormenes to find it Chief," Peridan put in. "It would have more credibility that way."

"There is an Ettin safehouse on the coast, near Zalindreh. We could plant it there and..."

"Saving it for a special occasion?" Peridan put in with a knowing smirk.

Susan stuck her legs out and tripped him as he paced by her.

"I like to know where the enemy is," the Raven snapped irritably. "If I close that building down, I will only have to find out where their new one is."

Sallowpad did not like interruptions. He continued, "We put it in the safehouse. I then alert my counterpart in Calormene intelligence and let them take credit for the raid and the find. We should also leak it to The Tattler."

"The Tisroc won't like that," Peridan said.

"The Tisroc won't know," the Raven bit out shortly, as if Peridan were thick.

"If this is that hot, we cannot assume the Tisroc will be permitted to distribute it and we want Calormenes terrified in their own beds. This should panic them just when we most need them afraid of the Ettin threat."

"Of course I know the way," Susan tartly replied to Peridan as they wound their way down the stairs to the cellar. "I have met the Cobbler before!"

"You have?" Peridan blurted. "When?"

"You were unconscious with drink."

"Oh. Hrrrm. Queen Susan? Cousin?"

Susan stopped at the landing and impatiently turned about to face the pilot. The stammering was very unlike him and irritating. "Yes? What?!"

"If you've met the Cobbler, than you must already know..." He looked a mite sheepish, a faint blush creeping across his fair cheeks.

_Oh By the Lion._ Her irritation gave way to outright disgust.

Putting as much stunned outrage into her voice as she could muster, "Peridan, did you know there is _gambling_ in the Crow Murder?"

He stared at her stupidly.

"Did you know that Otters swear most profusely, and that, oh my goodness, Songbirds take more than one mate?! Are you not _shocked_? _Shocked_?"

The pilot blinked. "No..." he began hesitantly.

"The Cobbler is a _Faun. Of course_ I am aware of his possible proclivities."
"Oh! You are?"

Truly, this must be a military problem, though given how rampant it had historically been in the Navies and all male institutions generally, Susan could not begin to understand the inanity of it. Men could be so wretchedly thick about this.

"Yes, I am." The pilot's so abundantly displayed foolishness and her simmering frustration over Bardon's treatment combined together and boiled over. "Between your nonsense about our highly skilled Cobbler and all this No Beast business in Tashbaan, I warn you, Peridan, my patience runs thin. I have no tolerance for intolerance."

Gobsmacked. The Gryphon pilot looked to have been dropped from a great height, though if that had been the case, he probably would have shut his mouth to keep the flies from buzzing in.

Susan's irritation inched closer to a true rage fueled by injustice.

"Peridan, I realize that you believe yourself absolutely irresistible to women, but I assure you, that allure does not automatically translate to those of your own sex. Do you waste effort on women with no interest in joining the ranks of your conquests?"

He stared down at the rickety wooden steps and muttered, almost ashamed, "Do I have to answer that, Cousin?"

Susan smacked her palm to her forehead; otherwise she would have smacked him.

"Consider this, you, you … man," she bit out contemptuously, as though he were a lower form of pond scum. "Every male who sways as the Dryads do is one less man against whom you compete for feminine attention!" She let that fundamental numerical fact worked through his conventional, narrow mind. "Are we clear?"

He looked up from his contemplation of the splintered stair and the rakish grin replaced the blush, along with a mocking salute. "Crystal, my Queen."

She turned back to descend the stairs, but not before tossing over her shoulder, "Oh, and Peridan?"

"Yes, Cousin?"

"We might also try simply minding our own business!"

Peter winced in reluctant sympathy with Peridan. If he was reading between the lines correctly, the RAF Pilot had received quite the tongue lashing from his sister. Susan was empathetic, nonjudgmental and sensitive to others, truly Gentle as Aslan named her. She had no patience whatsoever for the absence of those qualities in others.

The Cobbler's rooms in the Annex cellar were cool and dry in the summer heat; sunlight filtered in from windows cut into the ground. Braces of candles and lanterns provided fine reading and writing light. Parchment, paints, pigments, inks, were all stored meticulously, ordered, labeled, cataloged, floor to ceiling on dust free shelves. Other shelves were filled with fine quills and brushes, scrapers, glues, and tools.

The Cobbler was a very precise and most particular forger. But then, he was a Faun, and so a perfectionist.
He was bent over a very large, very clean table, stacks of parchment at his elbow. He was carefully writing on brilliant white parchment, "The Honour Of Your Most Esteemed Presence Is Requested..." The Faun did not look up as they entered the room. "Do not distract me until I finish this line or the answer to whatever you require will be 'No, I do not have the time.'"

Peridan opened his mouth to argue and Susan shoved him with her shoulder. The key to the Cobbler, she had realized was to be polite and to find a project that interested him. He was eccentric, very busy, and very, very skilled. He required management of a different sort than Peridan.

The Faun continued his slow, beautiful writing on the invitation. Completing the line he very methodically set his quill in a tray there obviously for that purpose. He stoppered his ink bottle. Picking the card up gingerly by the edges he gently blew the glistening black ink dry then set the completed invitation on the stack with the others. A far higher stack of blank parchment still remained.

Swiveling now on his stool to face them, the Faun's eyes slid past Peridan to rest on Susan. "What do you need me to do?"

The Cobbler did not waste words. He was far too busy for niceties and too talented to need them.

"We wish you to create an Ettin book."

"The Ettins do not read over much," the Cobbler said with an air of smug superiority, as if conveying a lesson they were too dim to comprehend. "Would not a map serve? I have created those before and they take less time."

"We have something else in mind," Susan told him. "We want an Ettin cookbook."

"A cookbook?" The Faun echoed. "A cookbook..." he repeated, now as a musing, contemplative statement.

"And why should I expend my creative skills on a cookbook for you when I have such pressing matters as artfully preparing hand lettered invitations for Flobber's Residence dinner?"

The Faun was so dryly sardonic it was impossible to tell which demand irritated him more.

Peridan opened his mouth and Susan could see by the gleam in his eye that an insult was in the making. Knocking him off balance with another nudge of her hip, she continued in the conciliatory vein. "We wish for an Ettin cookbook with recipes for eating humans."

Eyebrows rising, a sly grin spread across the Faun's face, revealing a row of sharp, gleaming teeth. "I see." He stared into the middle distance at the brightly colored rows of paints on his shelves, all vibrant reds, blues, and yellows and deepest blacks. "Human is especially sought after for their Autumn Feast, which comes in but three months time. With so few Humans in Narnia, and the North overrun, the Ettins will come South, to fill their cooking pots and ovens. Is that your theory?"

"Yes," Peridan muttered, rubbing his side.

Susan nodded.

"I presume like the documents before it that this cookbook will then find its way accidentally into Calormene hands and so Calormen will come to fear the Ettin threat as we do?"
In their hesitation that followed, the Cobbler waved his had irritably. "Never mind that; it's operational and not my concern. Though, will the cookbook need to withstand anything extraordinary, such as a sea voyage or outside elements?"

He was so alarmingly clever. "No," Susan replied simply. "Nothing like that."

The Cobbler drew a piece of parchment from a near stack closer and folded it in half. "No, he murmured to himself. "Larger I think, for a large and clumsy Ettin hand." Rummaging beneath his desk, he withdrew a large piece of parchment – Susan had never seen one so large. He folded the large piece in half and turned it around in his clever hands. "Yes, this will do."

He set the folded sheet on his table, and pulled a charcoal strip from behind his ear, managing to not leave a smudge anywhere.

"Title?" the Cobbler asked, looking up expectantly.

"The Joy of Giant Cooking?" Peridan finally suggested after a long, impatient pause.

The Faun pursed his lips in mild disapproval. "I would suggest using Human in the title in some lurid way that invites the trusting Calormene to open the book."

"How to Cook and Eat Human?" Susan offered.

"Better," the Faun conceded. As if weighing whether to share his creative genius, the Cobbler finally offered, "You could have a simple title, like Feasts for the Autumn Feast and then have an illustration of a cooking human."

The Faun looked to Susan for confirmation and she nodded. "As you suggested, something lurid and dramatic on the cover."

"Perhaps a Giant cooking a Human over a fire?" Peridan put in.

A sketch was already appearing in broad strokes before their eyes, a malevolent leering face, and a big steaming pot with two children inside it, screaming.

Susan swallowed and nodded. "Yes, Friend, that is what we are looking for here. I brought you a cookbook from the Residence kitchens. I marked recipes I thought we might convert and include."

The Faun put down his charcoal carefully and methodically wiped his hands on a towel at his side. "Excellent. A document is more credible if it relies upon legitimate materials that we then twist just so for our purposes."

He flipped quickly through the pages lingering on where Susan had notations: Man Pies; Man Stew with Peas and Potatoes; Man On A Spit; Jellied Man on Toast; Roast Man with Chestnut Forcemeat.

"Here," Peridan said, pointing to the section on preparing game. "It shows how to skin a squirrel. See the booted foot? You step on one end and pull the hide off."

Fingering the page, the Faun made a small sound of approval and looked at the section that followed on How To Prepare And Heat Food. From his blotter, he removed parchment scraps and delicately placed them between the pages. "I believe instruction on method would be useful as well, so that the reader might appreciate just how carefully the Ettins prepare their Humans for cooking and eating. I could see sections on How to Kill a Human…" He trailed off, skimming other pages.
"The sections on preparing meat would suggest how to prepare a Human for cooking," Susan said, steeling her voice to keep it impassive and un摇. She knew this was a fake, could see it was fake, and still was very disturbed by the brutality so casually discussed.

"Yes, I can see that," the Faun said thoughtfully. "How to debone a chicken – we would use a child for that one. How to tenderize meat with mallets… oh, yes, How to clean and scale a fish. All could easily be contorted for our purposes and converted to use Human as ingredients. It will be quite gruesome."

The Faun turned to a desserts page and tapped the cookbook thoughtfully. "As Man Pies are a traditional part of the Autumn Feast, perhaps they use Human child fat in the preparation of the crust. I will show how to make a Man crust by cutting the fat into the flour and rolling it out with an Ettin rolling pin."

Susan let out a deep breath, very relieved when the Faun closed the cookbook, carefully set it to the side, then turned in his seat. "And, I suppose you wish this yesterday?"

"Yes," Peridan ordered curtly. She thought he was disturbed as well; he was usually sarcastic, not dictatorial. "It's for Chief Sallowpad."

"Of course it is! And these invitations are for Flober's dinner party." The Cobbler deftly shoved a stack of cards across his desk towards them.

"This is in anticipation of the High King's meetings with the Tisroc," Susan said, more softly and sweetly. "We wish to make the argument for Calormen aid in the Lone Islands."

"I understand the cause well enough," the Faun said bitterly. "The Ettins have targeted my kind as well as Humans."

"Then you understand the urgency," Susan replied.

"And we need two copies," Peridan blurted out.

"Of course you do!" the Cobbler replied wearily. "It does occur to me that you do not wish to be peddling a brand new document either. You want these to appear used, I assume?"

"You are quite correct," Susan told him, marveling again at the Faun's cleverness. "Handled, batter-stained..."

"Blood-stained," Peridan injected, but without the usual mocking grim. When it came to work, he was very serious, and this was very troubling work.

"We will need the alchemists, and possibly even the Residence cook staff to help," the Faun mused. "Very well. I see the way forward in this. Three days if all goes well; four if I have a problem. And..." He swept the unaddressed dinner invitations nearly into Susan's hands. "These are for you."

With effort, Susan managed a veneer of calm as they left the chilly Shoemaker. The room itself had been well and warmly lit. The master forger himself though was a very cold, hard man.

She and Tebbitt worked their way through the maze of other rooms of the Annex underground back toward the stair. These were the sort of places not on the public tour of the British Embassy. The machine room included the printing operations, typewriters, and copy machines. The switchboards and teletype machines were in another part of the building. The door was closed but
the stench of the chemical laboratory was unmistakable. Beyond that was the darkroom for photography development and the radio operator support. Further in the bunker, underground, were the muffled cracks and booms of the shooting gallery.

There were other rooms too; Susan had not been in those. At least one surely contained the vast encryption operations – though the most sophisticated part of that operation was probably in New York or even Canada. She had only glimpsed a piece of this business because she had seen its result. She had seen messages to the Colonel in the office without knowing who had sent them, where and when the cryptic and garbled communications had occurred, who had overheard them and how they had been decoded. The Colonel might not know either. The source of communications intelligence, COMMINT, was not discussed.

The Rat and Crow business of Narnia had certainly taught her the fiendish difficulties inherent in listening in on someone else's secret communications. Those on whom you spied were speaking their own language, both literally and possibly figuratively, in that they understood by culture and personal familiarity what they meant and were not interested in seeing that the eavesdropper understood their meaning. The deliberate obfuscation of code added another layer of complexity. An overheard code was translated and deciphered without any context whatsoever. Even something as simple as numbers could be code for something else – she and Edmund had used 67 to mean confusion and kerfuffle. Unambiguous numbers in isolation could be troop counts, casualties after a battle, measurements, heads of sheep, geography points on a map, or money.

"Let's just stop for a chat," Tebbitt whispered suddenly, slowing in the hallway, just as Susan tried speeding up to get beyond these offices. "Maybe she is wearing those red shoes."

"No!" she whispered back. Susan was hoping to avoid the harsh taskmaster, Miss Carré; she had not yet completed her classwork and had missed class. Tebbitt, however, was thoroughly enamored of the French teacher, though intimidated enough to be polite rather than flirtatious.

Unfortunately, whispered evasion was not possible for the woman had the ears of a Hound and caught every flawed vowel and footstep. How could someone so flawless and petite be so terrifying? The teacher marched out into the hallway, perfectly balanced on astonishingly high heels. Susan was not sure how Miss Carré managed to ride a bicycle to the Embassy every day in towering stilettos and very slim skirt. It must be innate to the French character.

(Translated below)

"Vous ne pouvez pas vous attendre à une amélioration de votre français si vous n'assistez pas aux cours, Mrs. Caspian. Votre grammaire est peut-être excellente mais ce n'est pas le cas de votre accent. Soyez là demain."

"Oui, Miss Carré, je serai là," Susan murmured apologetically.

The critique Susan endured about her accent was almost worth it to see the blush creep up Tebbitt's neck as Miss Carré surveyed him for every minute flaw. She clicked her tongue in dismay, doing so without marring her sharp and devastating red lipstick. "British. Men."

The firestorm spun about on heels the size of a nail head, and as hard, and clipped back into her domain.

Tebbitt sighed, frankly admiring Miss Carré retreating backside. "Formidable."

Susan jostled him. "As I humored you, now we shall go see Mr. Sykes."
Tebbitt did not whine over much. He enjoyed the colorful Mr. Sykes as she did.

His name was not really Bill Sykes, of course. Like so many others, like Susan herself, he had a great many names. Rumor was that Intrepid himself had sprung the talented thief from a London gaol and sent him here under a forged Canadian passport. Though space was at a premium in the Annex, no one would share a workroom with the thief as things would always disappear. Susan was glad she did not bring a handbag. Tebbitt carefully removed his wallet to an inside pocket.

"Mr. Sykes?" Susan asked, knocking on the door frame.

The wiry man, gap-toothed, grease-stained, and bald, emerged from behind a rack of tools. He had the dreaded Banham lock in one hand and a tiny tension wrench in the other.

"Ready fer 'nuther go, Mizz?"

"Not with the Banham, no!" Susan replied with a laugh and shaking her head. "Five pins in the cylinder are quite enough for now. I could not possibly manage six!"

Mr. Sykes nodded toward Tebbitt. "Comm'nrd, shud a seen Mizzus Caspian two day past. She'll not bein just any yegg. Gotta a light touch with em fox and fleas; be first rate tea leaf er screwsman."

"Thank you, Mr. Sykes." *I think.* Between the rhyming slang and the thieves' jargon, he was impossible to understand. Tebbitt, for some reason, had an easier time of it.

"Too bad you not doin the bag job, drop'n the shoe, Mizzus Caspian."

Susan hoped Tebbitt would understand and answer for them both; he did. "So the Chief already talked to you about dropping the shoe at the site?"

Mr. Sykes shrugged and made some guttural sound that was like an "aye" or "aargh." "Told 'em Mizzus Caspian for the old cob."

Though Tebbitt laughed, Mr. Sykes looked rather affronted on her behalf. She would love to handle the plant – what was that in rhyming slang she wondered. Pants and ants? Ranting cant? It was, however, impossible. How could she explain to her mother, and her mother to Lord Halifax, that her daughter had been caught planting documents faked by British security into a Nazi safehouse on the Chesapeake Bay? As much as she wished to do so and thought she could, this risk was not to herself alone.

"We shall leave the drop to your capable hands, Mr. Sykes."

From between his fingers, a key flashed and disappeared again. "No crackin leastwise. Got me mushy peas already."

With another laugh (and no handshake), she and Tebbitt exited the thief's room (carefully).

On the climb back up to the hot afternoon, Tebbitt muttered, "I know the Colonel would never let us do the drop." Still, the eager gleam in his eye matched her own feelings. "It would be smashing, though!"

"It would," she agreed wistfully. "Though, not nearly the challenge I would have hoped, as Mr. Sykes already has a key to the place."

Tebbitt laughed again. "Only you, Mrs. Caspian, would regret a bag job as too easy."
Guiding her up the stairs, Susan had to, again, shrug off his supporting hand at her waist. Still, it never slipped downward, as other men certainly had attempted in the past. Tebbitt was, to his credit, more or less adhering to the Colonel's gospel -- always live the cover. She was Mrs. Caspian, his cousin and the wife of his Commander and best friend.

"I am always amazed at the sophistication hiding in that basement," she said.

"I heard the Shoemaker can reproduce every typewriter on Earth. I understand Camp X is even more elaborate."

"Have you been there?" Camp X was the secret BSC training facility in Canada to which the British sent their agents for training.

"No, not as yet anyway. I would like to," Tebbitt said. It was his turn now for the wistfulness of opportunities not yet available. "If I have to sit out the whole War here, I'd at least like to get some of that training."

Susan sighed, understanding completely. "As would I."

The slow climb brought them ever closer to the oppressive heat and damp of the Washington summer. The air was so thick it felt as if thunderstorms were approaching.

"It's troubling really," Tebbitt mused. His thoughtful reflection was unusual enough, Susan turned around on the stair to look at him.

"What's that then?"

He was shadowed and flushed, his fine scars all white against the red and tan running along his face to disappear in the uniform's collar. She, a step above, was taller than he. With her sudden stop, they were unexpectedly and uncomfortably close. They both pushed slightly away from the other, providing a more decorous space between.

"Thinking on what the Shoemaker is making. It could be real, if the Nazis win." Tebbitt visibly shuddered and shook his head.

"Yes, Susan agreed, feeling the same chill as had haunted her in the forger's den. "For a fake, it's all too real."

Peter had ploughed through to the end of the letter, incredulity mounting with every word. The Ettin lust for Human flesh he well recalled was too morbidly horrible to dwell upon at any length.

Susan was describing a horror of an altogether different sort.

Looking up, he expected to, and did, see Edmund standing in the doorway, waiting for him to say something. Peter felt a stab of sympathetic concern that his brother and sister had been enduring this together for almost three months, an ocean apart, and no way to speak to one another save through this strange allegory.

"I don't know what to say, Ed. This is simply unfathomable."

"You need to read to the end of June, Peter." His brother's response was surprising – flat, toneless, emotionless.

"Of course, but I am hard pressed to see how this could possibly be defensible. These are acts
perpetrated upon our own ally, no less."

"It is essential therefore for a prince to have learnt how to be other than good and to use, or not to use, his goodness as necessity requires."

Peter turned the phrase over in his mind and concluded there could only be one source for Edmund's uncomfortable quote. "Machiavelli instructing his Prince."

"From part of a passage summarized, in my view incorrectly, as the end justifies the means."

"Yet, appropriate here."

"Yes," Edmund conceded.

Peter always prided himself on the ability to withhold judgment until the full revealing of the facts. It was a sore trial here and only loyalty to and trust in his brother and sister allowed him to delay that condemnation now.

"So I must read to the end before judging the means?"

"Yes."

"Then I had best keep reading."

Next up, because yes, it's time we look at the same question Peter is pondering. Chapter 9, Ends and Means

(No that is not a miscount. I've got a short outtake coming in the next day or two that Wing Commander Tebbitt and Mrs. Caspian insist upon).

A/N

Tobruk fell on June 21, 1942 while Churchill visited with Roosevelt in Washington, D.C. Autumnia found newsreels of Churchill's visit and observed that Lord Halifax indeed seemed a bit stiff.

The creation and planting of the cookbook closely follows an actual BSC operation from March 1941. More on that in the next chapter. The booted squirrel skinning is, in fact, an illustration from the 1932 version of The Joy of Cooking. Google "joy of cooking squirrel" and you will find it. My 1962 edition still has it. I include the link in my profile.

Many thanks to Caleon, Silver Huntress, and Titpuce86 for the assistance with the French! (Psst, Caleon is going to be on the NFFR AsCast so check it out). The actual exchange is as follows:

"You cannot expect to perfect your French if you miss class, Mrs. Caspian. Your grammar may be flawless but your accent is not. I will expect you tomorrow."

"Yes, Miss Carré, I will," Susan murmured apologetically, resisting the urge to curtsey.

"Bill Sykes" is the thug from Oliver Twist. His language is part Cockney Rhyming Slang and part spy and criminal jargon. I'm glad Tebbitt understands him, because I do not. A short key is below.

Cobbler, shoemaker – forger
Yegg, screwsman – safecracker
Fox and fleas – locks and keys
Tea Leaf – thief
Bag job – break in
Shoe – forged document
Drop, as in dropping the shoe – delivering or planning the "shoe"
Old cob—the job or bag job
Mushy peas – keys
The Shoe That Didn't Fit

The Queen Susan in Tashbaan

Chapter 8, The Shoe That Didn't Fit

As I just established in Chapter 7, Susan has parlayed her Narnian lock picking aptitude, alluded to in Chapter 8 of The Stone Gryphon Part 1, into a real skill. There is a "shoe" (forged document) to be delivered to a Nazi safehouse on the Chesapeake Bay, of which British intelligence is aware and closely monitors. Mrs. Caspian and Wing Commander Tebbitt are not, as written, going to do the "shoe drop," for many excellent and sensible reasons.

The following ensued.

Rthstewart: Alrighty, then on to Ends and Means

Tebbitt: Half a moment, are you really intending to start there?

Mrs. Caspian: Is there a problem?

T: Yes, Rth is not showing how the shoe was dropped in the Chesapeake Bay safehouse. She just writes that it happened and that the Colonel tipped off J. Edgar Hoover.

Mrs.C: Really? Well, with all due respect, Ms. Stewart, is that sensible? The first rule of writing is show, don't tell, and you are telling the reader about the shoe drop, not showing it.

Rth: (Yanking laptop back) Piss off you two. This is mine.

Mrs. C.: No need to get tetchy, Rth. May I call you Rth?

T: (Sitting down, uncomfortably close to Rth, putting an arm around her shoulders) As I see it, after all this talk talk talk, why not a bit of adventure? Your loyal eight readers would like to see some action, surely. I know I would.

Mrs. C: Pay him no mind when he leers like that, Rth. You do not want to provide negative reinforcement.

Rth: You train dogs on the same principle. (Scooting away from Tebbitt who has uncomfortably intimate notions of personal space.) Why does it matter if I don't write the drop? The characters who do the drop aren't important. I don't need to write it at all. It's superfluous.

T: Oh, and you haven't written anything superfluous?

Rth: Shut it, would you?

Mrs. C: This is precisely our point, Rth. Tebbitt and I want to do the drop, and so the characters are important.

T: So you must write it and have us do the bag job.

Rth: You two can't do a bag job! You both are active agents gathering intelligence and Tebbitt is high profile at that. You don't do ops; you aren't lamplighters. Colonel Walker-Smythe would never permit it.
T: I'll take care of him.

Mrs. C and Rth: How?

T: (Winking) I have my ways.

Mrs. C and Rth: Collective eye roll

Mrs. C: You can promise to turn in your TPS reports on time for a month.

Rth: Ewwww.

T: If you do them for me, Mrs. C., then we can both do the bag job and drop the shoe.

Rth: (whispering while Tebbitt plays Missile Command on the computer) What about your mum? Fifteen year old Susan Pevensie would never participate in a bag drop and run that risk.

Mrs. C: No, Susan Pevensie wouldn't. But Mrs. Caspian would.

T: What's that Cuz?

Mrs. C: Nothing, Tebbitt.

Rth: (getting edgy) It doesn't make sense. It's inconsistent with what I just wrote. It would never happen. The shoe drop doesn't fit the story!

T: Rth?

Rth: It's Ms. Stewart to you, young man.

T: I have some truly shocking news for you.

Rth: What? My husband found the files buried in laptop?

T: No. More shocking.

Rth: My assistant found them?

T: More shocking still. This is fan fiction. It is not the Odyssey, Sonnets from the Portuguese, or Pride and Prejudice, and it does not matter a whit if it is not consistent.

Mrs. C: Now, Tebbitt, that is not entirely fair. Rth has valid concerns, misplaced though they may be. Internal consistency is important to her, albeit overly so. Rth, you should think of it as a practicum.

Rth: I've written 250,000 words since February. I'm not sure I need more practice.

T: And none of it is superfluous, of course.

Mrs. C: Tebbitt, if you want another stanza of the Moose Song, could you please try to be helpful?

Rth: Especially since I have to write it.

Mrs. C: Regardless, Rth, what I meant was, writing me and Tebbitt undertaking a bag job and planting the shoe is practice for Part 3 to come.

Rth: Oh. Right. I guess that is an excuse, of a sort.
T: Bugger that. I still think she's going to kill me off and I'll never make it to Part 3.

Rth: Keep it up fly boy and you have an assignation with the business end of a cuckolded husband's shot gun and the bottom of the Potomac River.

T: Right then. Long range planning obviously not my strength. Live for the moment and all that. As I see it, Part 3 is months away. So, write the shoe drop. Maybe five of your eight readers might enjoy it, you want to write it for all your protestations, and it will be a lark for me and Mrs. C. It's just a bit of fun.

Rth: I am not a hedonist.

T: I am.

The debate continued sometime longer until I had to frost Halloween cookies. Tebbitt and Mrs. Caspian further pointed out that this is all pretty unbelievable already, what with having British agents creating a fake document about Nazi schemes for the Americans to find after the British tip off J. Edgar Hoover to the document's location. I've countered that in fact this isn't invention at all, but actually happened. Tebbitt, however, doesn't play fair (neither does Mrs. Caspian, for that matter), and he continues to badger me that all sense aside, it's fan fic, so who cares, and I really want to write it anyway.

It doesn't fit. It doesn't make sense. But, it's fun. Yeah, this is how I ended up with a whole additional chapter in By Royal Decree.

So, an outtake… It didn't happen. Except that I wrote it anyway.

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**The Shoe Drop aka Just A Bit Of Fun**

**The Not-A-Chapter of The Queen Susan in Tashbaan**

Susan hurried to the waiting car, seething with frustration. Waving the go-ahead, Guy started the car as Tebbitt flung the back door open.

"What in blazes took you so long?" Tebbitt cried, scooting over in the seat to make room for her.

"The Shoemaker," Susan gritted out. Tebbitt grabbed the bag she shoved at him; she climbed in and slammed the door. "You would think this map was his child he was seeing off to North Africa."

"Sentimental parting?" Tebbitt quipped, opening the bag to scan the contents.

"He blood..." Susan corrected the oath that almost came out but even in the darkened car, she could see the flash of Tebbitt's grin. Taking a deep breath, she said instead, "He wanted photographs of himself with the map as a keepsake."

Guy snorted in the front. "The Colonel wouldn't like that none."

"Nor I," Susan said huffily.

Tebbitt had pulled a torch from her bag and was shining it on the Shoemaker's handiwork. Settling back in the seat, she looked over his arm at the map – a new vision of the Americas re-apportioned for Nazi control.
Tebbitt whistled appreciatively. "This is beautiful. As good a work as I've ever seen. The Americans are going to have kittens when they see this."

He gingerly rolled the precious map back up and carefully tucked it again into its protective tube. "How long to Annapolis, Guy?"

"Depends on how you and Mrs. Caspian feel about speeding."

"I think not," Susan said firmly.

"Have to agree with you there, Cuz."

"About three hours then," Guy said, pulling out of the Embassy grounds. "We'll be there after midnight, but with plenty of time for the drop."

Tebbitt settled back into the corner of the car. Out of uniform, all in black, he looked like a dockworker. The character of a British officer, never exactly prominent even when he was in uniform, had utterly disappeared.

Noting her study, he returned the scrutiny of her black shirt and trousers with an approving nod. "Black is a good color on you, Mrs. Caspian." He yawned. "Wake me up when we get there."

Susan tried not to be irritated when he curled into the corner and shut his eyes. He was gently snoring before they left Embassy Row. It was sensible – harbor your strength, take your rest when you could. Her too obvious excitement betrayed her as the novice; she could not stop fidgeting in her seat, fiddling with her lock picking tools, and fingering the precious map.

An impatient sigh, faint but heartfelt, escaped.

Guy glanced back at her in the rear view mirror. "Why don't you tell me another story, Mrs. Caspian?"

She glanced over at the sleeping pilot, but Tebbitt seemed well and truly out.

"He won't hear," Guy said dismissively. "'Sides, if he does, it's just a silly children's story, ain't it, Mrs. Caspian?" He winked.

"Very well, Guy." Susan leaned forward and draped her arms over the front seat. "In keeping with the flavor of the evening, allow me to tell you of my younger brother's disastrous first attempt at infiltration of an enemy encampment and how an Owl got him out of a very sticky wicket."

They drove into a darkened, mostly quiet Annapolis. Near the waterfront, they could still hear the din from the dockside pubs. This could be a useful, though hopefully unneeded, distraction.

Guy pulled into an alley. The safehouse was across a park, on the other side of the square, in a strip of anonymous offices, fronting a dull street.

As soon as the car stopped, Tebbitt was suddenly, instantly awake. It was a soldier's reaction, with the body automatically responding to any change. "We're there? What time is it?"

"One thirty," Guy said.

"Thanks, Guy," Tebbitt said through a yawn.

"Our timing is very good; the pubs will be closing in the next hour so that should keep any police
busy over at the docks,” Susan said, collecting her bag and checking its contents one last, nervy time.

She started to open the car door, but then stopped, as she saw Tebbitt rummaging through his pockets. He removed his identification cards from his wallet and handed them to Guy over the front seat.

_Oh, of course._ If caught, their Embassy identification would immediately tie the British to the job. Following Tebbitt’s cue, Susan passed her handbag to Guy, not that she had been planning on bringing it.

"What do you have in your rucksack?” Tebbitt asked as he removed a set of keys and passing those forward to Guy as well.

"The map, the tools, a torch, a little money, gloves."

"Better remove your wedding ring as well, Mrs. Caspian,” Guy said.

"Actually, no, better to leave it on,” Tebbitt countered. "If we need a quick cover, I'm the lover you have on the side and we're meeting for a quick tryst in the park."

Guy started to protest, but Susan interrupted him with an _I’ll handle this_. "Wouldn't I be more likely to remove my ring in those circumstances?"

"Not in my experience, no,” Tebbitt responded. He looked up, swiveled toward her, and put a hand to her cheek, turning her face to the side. "Women leave their earrings at home, but not their wedding rings." With a shrug, his hand fell away.

Susan wasn't wearing earrings.

Were they not sneaking out on a job, with apprehension at least a possibility, Tebbitt would have made some other accompanying leering remark.

Out of habit she patted her braid, but it felt secure. Whether lock picking or handling a bow, loose hair was a liability.

"Here, Mrs. Caspian, this is for you,” Guy said, in turn handing her a card.

Susan held a Canadian identity card up close and read, "Mrs. Jane Ellis." _It had her picture on it._

_Date of Birth: April 2, 1920, Toronto, Province of Ontario, Canada._

Tebbitt flicked his own torch on, shined it on the card and whistled. "The Shoemaker likes you quite a lot. That's first rate work that would cost you a couple of hundred otherwise. I had to pay for mine."

Susan stowed the precious card in the bag as well.

"The Colonel wanted something for you to have in case you have trouble," Guy said. "Which you won't."

"Who are you?” she asked Tebbitt.


With a chosen identity, it could not be a coincidence. It seemed so improbable, until Susan considered Agnes' reading of Tebbitt's cards and his own professed eternal optimism for something
"Of Wimpole Street?" Susan asked, realizing as she did so that she knew nothing of Tebbitt's background. It was as if the War swept that all away.

"Browning was from Camberwell," he replied absently, patting down his pockets. It seemed Tebbitt found something, but frowned and apparently decided to leave it where it was.

Susan did not want to know what it might be, but could guess what it probably was. She bit back the mocking guffaw, supposing it could be part of Mr. Brown's cover with Mrs. Ellis.

"Love Among the Ruins?" she asked instead, guessing that to be his favorite Browning work.

"Certainly not My Last Duchess or Porphyria's Lover," Tebbitt responded. "I'm clean. You?"

"Yes."

She pushed open the door and stepped out, Tebbitt following behind.

"I'll drive over across the square, and park," Guy said. "If I see someone coming, I'll honk, but I may not see it."

"Will you have any trouble, Guy?" Susan asked, leaning in the driver's window. She was worried that he might attract unwanted police attention simply because of his appearance.

"That's what my British Embassy papers are for, Mrs. Ellis. 'Sides, I think the locals know the car by now."

*Jane Ellis, right. A new cover to live.*


Hearing an ominous click, Mrs. Ellis turned back to Brown.

"You have a gun." It was stating the obvious, but it did need to be said.

"Mrs. Ellis, appalling though it is to consider, I am active duty personnel and there is this War going on."

"I am aware of that, Mr. Brown. I question only whether bringing a gun on a simple bag drop is more likely to invite than to prevent trouble."

"If you wanted to go armed, why didn't you say so? Guy?"

"I'm not giving no service revolver to Mrs. Ellis," Guy said stoutly. "It ain't safe for her or the rest of us."

"I thought you'd learn to shoot with Alice at Longlea. I heard you were a first rate shot."

"Shotguns, rifles, clay pigeons, and skeet shooting," Mrs. Ellis' voice hitched fractionally, "Not revolvers at close range." She had not killed since Narnia.

Brown finally understood and nodded, though still abrupt. "I apologize, Mrs. Ellis. I jumped to conclusions a soldier would make."

She appreciated the concern, even as she bristled at it. "I am perfectly capable of defending myself,
but would prefer a knife to do it." *For now.* She would not mention the bow. Guy coughed, probably hiding a laugh, and she knew he had picked up on the irony of the conversation as well.

"Here, Mrs. Ellis," Guy said, handing her a sheathed heavy knife and belt through the car window. "I thought you might want this." She pulled the blade free, inspecting it quickly. By its size and shape, the curved knife was better for tearing than parrying or stabbing, but it would do in a pinch, which *would not arise.* She sheathed the blade and strapped the whole to her waist. It felt strange, in a good way, to settle a knife at her hip again.

When she looked up, she saw that Brown was staring at her. "Yes? Something wrong?"

"You are a woman of many talents, Mrs. Ellis."

He was a military man; of course he would notice the ease with which she handled a knife.

"I am."

Guy snorted and started the car. "Best get going. It's almost two. I'll pick you up here in an hour; fallback is the city dock, hour after that."

Mrs. Ellis let out a deep, cleansing breath. She had never done anything quite like this, but what she had done was close enough.

Brown gestured grandly, as if escorting her to an Embassy ball. "Ready for a bit of fun, Mrs. Ellis?"

Oh yes, Mrs. Ellis very much wanted a bit of fun; Mrs. Caspian was not opposed to it either. She had left Susan Pevensie back in Washington.

It was a short walk across the park and a dark cobblestone square, to the mean little office, wedged in a row of other mean little dock offices. There was a strong tang of salt in the air; they were within a block of the harbor and the city dock. Annapolis had the feel of a village, all red brick, cobblestone, Navy midshipman, and the crabbers and oyster catchers of the Chesapeake Bay watermen. Looking back behind her, and craning her eyes, Mrs. Ellis thought she saw Guy pull the car up behind a tree, under a burnt out lamppost.

With a hand on her arm, Brown guided her around to the back of the building that faced an alley, rather than the street.

"So convenient that the discreet, off street entrance for the Nazis means a discreet, off street entrance for us as well." The sign above the door read, "Chesapeake Export Office." It seemed so innocent.

Mrs. Ellis crouched over the back door lock and a light came on and illuminated the door handle.

"Thank you," she murmured, drawing out her picks and setting her bag down. It was a standard Schlag lock, no surprise, there she supposed. A simple five cylinder pin and tumbler dead bolt. Nothing fancy.

"Can you open it?" Brown asked, but really it was a formality. It had better be just a formality; Mrs. Ellis did not appreciate doubts as to her competency.

"Of course. Please just hold the light while I get the tension wrench in."
She gently inserted the wrench to turn the plug cylinder open just so and heard the soft click as the plug reached the offset position she was looking for. It took three tries to find the right size pick she would use to manipulate the pins.

"You can turn it off now," she hissed. "I don't need the light, just quiet."

Brown was shining the light along the door frame.

"Thought so," he murmured. Reaching up, he teased out something tiny wedged in the frame.

"A splint?" Mrs. Ellis asked, relieved that he had thought of it and annoyed that she had not.

"Yes. Not that it's an issue. We don't care if the Nazis know we were here. Our cousins at the FBI will be here in the morning and they won't know if it's missing."

"Still, best to replace it."

"Yes," Brown agreed, prying a second splint out and pocketing them both. "Don't let me forget."

Letting out a deep breath, Mrs. Ellis flexed her fingers and set to work. This was delicate business and difficult, but she was good at it. Brown had already seen her open locks more complex than this in a few minutes. She figured fifteen minutes before he became impatient.

"If you open it in less than twelve minutes, I buy the drinks," he said, as if reading her mind.

"That's a wager I'll take, Mr. Brown."

With the pick in the keyhole, Mrs. Ellis began lifting the pins, there were five in all, listening and feeling for when the pin fell into position, the top completely into its housing, resting on the shear line and the lower part resting in the plug.

The fourth pin was so loud as it clicked into place, she winced and nearly let loose of the tension wrench.

"Steady there," Brown whispered. "That was three?"

"Four," she breathed.

"Good girl."

She felt but did not hear the fifth pin slide into place. Gently, she rotated the tension wrench and the bolt slide free. A turn of the handle and the door opened.

"I owe you a drink," Brown said softly, clapping her gently enough on the shoulder that she did not topple over. "Well done."

Quickly reassembling her kit, she shoved it all in the bag and scrambled up to join him in the office, shutting and locking the door behind her.

Brown was already roaming the space, training his torch into the corners but there was nothing really to see – a bare desk and chair, a telephone, a map of the Chesapeake on the wall, a coat rack, and a small filing cabinet. The blinds on the window facing the street front were shuttered.

With a dissatisfied grunt, he muttered, "If someone comes, we will have to hide under the desk."

The Colonel had been very clear – there was nothing here they needed to investigate. British
intelligence had known of the place for months and been over it thoroughly. The instructions were simple: open the cabinet; drop the shoe in; leave.

Brown was already at the filing cabinet. He pulled the handle and… nothing.

*Oh no.*

"There wasn't supposed to be a lock, was there?"

"There wasn't anything about one in the report." He shined his torch on to the handle, now sporting a shiny, new lock.

"Mrs. Ellis?" Brown's voice was grim and chilling.

"What?" she whispered.

"Unless I am mistaken, that's a new Banham."

Pulse beating faster, by the light of his torch, she peered more closely; the mark was unmistakable. A Banham. A lock she had only just begun to practice upon. Six cylinders, tiny little grooves in the plug intended to foil the most experienced cracksman – which she was not. *Well, damn.*

Mrs. Ellis surprised herself and Brown by uttering the mild oath aloud.

"We could leave the map in the desk?" Brown asked, hoping but doubtful.

"If there is a locked cabinet, a document that valuable wouldn't be in an unlocked desk." Mrs. Ellis responded.

Brown nodded, looking to her; it was her decision to make.

She made it swiftly. "Let me try it for twenty five minutes. If I cannot see my way through it by then, we will drop the map in the desk. Shine the torch over here for a moment, will you so I may start?"

Mrs. Ellis knelt at the file cabinet and went to work.

She did not know how much time had passed, though it was long enough to swear vigorously but silently at the master locksmiths of Banham Co., London. She thought, from feel alone, that she managed two of the six pins. The third pin seemed marginally easier, though it may have wistful thinking. Brown, to his credit, was an absolute brick, silent and still, letting her do the task that she was more skilled at than he.

It all happened in a sequence too fast for anything but reaction. Faintly, but very clearly, Mrs. Ellis heard the horn of a car, Brown swear, and her own quick intake of breath.

She yanked her pick and wrench out of the file cabinet lock, undoing all her work, and dove beneath the lone desk. There was no other cover. A second later, Brown scrambled under to join her.

*Oh this was just unbelievable.* Settling on her knees, she was sandwiched, with her face plastered into the corner of the desk, Brown behind her. It was all hips, shoulders, elbows, knees and nowhere to put hands that was not hopelessly awkward. Brown winced as her heels jutted somewhere undoubtedly painful.

"Sorry," she murmured.
He shifted, bracing his hands against the desk's underside. "If you would turn slightly," he wheezed. His hand fell to her hip and nudged her to the side.

"Would you mind if I leaned back?" she whispered, her words muffled because her face was shoved up against the desk.

"Not if you don't." She could feel him tilt back; his hand went to her shoulder and then she too tilted back, he supported by the desk, she settling against him.

"You do have the safety on, don't you?" She could feel the cold hardness of the gun jutting her hip.

"No, I thought I would make this more exciting by risking both the hospital and the lock up," Brown whispered, mocking. "But, I … hrmmm…" His hands were wriggling about without anywhere to go except on her body.

"Oh bother that!" she hissed, and drew his left arm around her waist.

"Right then," Brown said, and brought his other hand around, encircling her.

The full import of the bizarre situation hit her full on. Could it be anymore ironically contrived? It was patently absurd and yes, thrilling, too. She felt a giggle rise in her throat.

His clasp about her tightened. "Shhh!" he whispered in her ear. "None of that now." His breath stirred tendrils of hair at her nape and moved hot over her neck.

Neck! Oh not the neck! She gasped at the sensation, the feelings of years past, resurging, suddenly and so very inconveniently. She had discovered her neck to be exquisitely sensitive when she was eighteen and had no reason to believe it would not be so again.

"Do you hear anything?" she whispered, wanting so very much to squirm and knowing that would make just make the whole of this even more difficult for both of them.

"No," Brown said after a moment's tense, listening pause. "It might not have even been Guy."

That query was settled as the beam of a torch filtered through the slatted blinds of the front window. The light danced along the walls, slid over the file cabinet, then moved on.

"Shhh," he said again, breathing the sound on her neck. Whatever mounting concerns her other identities felt, Mrs. Ellis, unfortunately, could not suppress the shudder that ran deep within her, nestled against a skilled and manipulative lover's chest, his arms wrapped possessively about her. It felt marvelous, as wondrous as it had been an age ago.

And of course he would feel it as well, her pressing against him, wanting and not having, seeing and not touching.

"Well now..." He laughed, low, quiet, undoubtedly sensing how her skin rose to meet his waiting lips, how her traitorous body was responding. "Assuming that we do not end up in jail, I should very much like to thank the one responsible for putting us in this extraordinary position."

Alarm leaped up and smothered everything else. "Cousin! That is enough!"

His mouth drew closer, whispering in her ear. "You are mistaken, Mrs. Ellis. It is Mrs. Caspian who is my cousin and wife of my best friend and commander. You, Mrs. Ellis, are stunning in black, have a beautiful neck and gorgeous back that I have been admiring for the last half hour and I am enjoying them pressed against me as much as you are."
Susan reigned in her scattering thoughts. Whatever her body remembered, whatever her mind knew, whatever they both wanted in this absurd, romantic, thrilling, sensual encounter, the blasted passport said Susan Pevensie, Age 15. Mr. Brown did not know that; Tebbitt did not know that; but she did. And that fact brooked no argument.

"Tebbitt…"

"Who's he?"

"Tebbitt!" she whispered more firmly. "No. No. No. No. In another fifteen minutes, assuming we are not caught and thrown in jail, I will be Mrs. Caspian and she says No."

She felt his sigh move through his body and along her sensitive neck. "And Mrs. Ellis? Do you say No as well?"

She did not want to chance the ambiguity of a Yes. "We all say No. And if I must, I shall pull out of here, lie on the floor and take my chances."

"No need for that, Cuz."

In the impossible, ridiculous circumstance, she felt him pull fractionally away from her. They were still wedged together tighter than fish in a tin, but somehow, what had been a moment before very intimate, was now simply very cramped.

She managed to wriggle a hand free and squeezed the arm wrapped around her in gratitude. "Thank you."

"And, if any man ever does not take your No for an answer, let me know, and I shall pummel him senseless."

Her heart twisted for the memory of the one would-be seducer who had not received her No graciously, but instead marched to war, with intent to pillage, kidnap, and rape.

She sucked in a fortifying breath and blast him, he was sensitive enough to perceive her disturbing recollection as well.

"Susan?" The tone was of concern and compassion and was even worse than the intimacy of a moment before.

She squeezed his hand again. "Nothing, I …"

"Well, what have we here," Mr. Brown interrupted. He untangled his hands and managed to bend an elbow toward an envelope taped in the corner of the desk.

"You don't suppose?"

"Check. You can reach it more easily than I."

And, sure enough…

"Well spotted, Mr. Brown." She held up the key teased from the envelope. "It looks to be a shiny new Banham key to a shiny new Banham lock."

The light suddenly returned, shining in from the outside, flickering and flitting, then moved away. Mrs. Ellis thought she heard retreating footsteps but it may have just been her thudding heart.
"A few more minutes," he whispered.

Distantly, Mrs. Ellis thought she heard shouting and lusty, raucous singing. The pubs were closing. Or…

"Did you arrange for a diversion, just in case?"

"Of a sort, nothing elaborate, just some of our boys at the Naval Academy for the summer. I asked them to make a minor nuisance of themselves when the pubs closed."

"You are very clever, Mr. Brown."

"I am," he agreed amiably, and began inching backwards from beneath the desk. She crawled out after him.

It was simple and smooth after that – unlock the file cabinet; file the map in an unmarked folder that contained several other maps; replace the key; ease back out into the alley. The dead bolt was self locking and happily clicked right back into place when she shut the door, so there was no need to even break out the tension wrench.

"The splints!" she whispered.

"Right. Thanks."

Reaching up, he pushed the tiny splints back into the door frame. The very shallow part of Mrs. Ellis' mind allowed herself to appreciate Mr. Brown's attractive silhouette.

He spun back around with a triumphant grin. "If we hurry, we can make the first pick up."

They dashed across the street and park. Guy must have seen them because he was rolling the car forward from where he had parked it. The back door was ajar; Mrs. Ellis dove in to the back seat, Brown was right behind her.

"Gear check," Guy ordered after they turned a corner. "You got everything? Count them picks, Mrs. Ellis."

"Oh I'm sure…"

"Count 'em, Mrs. Ellis. You want to be sure you didn't leave nothing behind."

Brown flicked his torch on and she counted her tools by his offered light. "Everything is here."

"Thanks for the warning, Guy," Brown said, turning off the light. "What was it?"

"Just a regular copper on a round. He headed for the docks. What happened? It seemed like you were in there too long."

"There was a lock on the file cabinet; that slowed us down," Mrs. Ellis explained. She took a deep rattling breath.

"And I owe Mrs. Ellis a drink for cracking the back door," Brown crowed. He rummaged in the seat. "And here it is!"

"A flask?" she responded archly. "I break through a Schlag in less than twelve minutes, get half way through a Banham, and you offer me a flask?"
"Yes?" Brown said, wavering. "You can drink first. It's aged Kentucky bourbon."

"I feel as if I could use a whole bottle, Mr. Brown." She yanked the flask from his hand and downed a burning mouthful.

"Hey! Save some for me!" he cried.

Guy was pulling into a shuttered service station. "There's a callbox there. The Colonel will want the report."

Mr. Brown wagged an admonishing finger at her, as he backed out the door. "You have to share, Mrs. Ellis. Don't drink it all, or there will be trouble. I'll be right back."

By the headlights of the car, Brown jogged to the phone box.

"Guy! My handbag please if you would?"

"Well, sure thing, but…"

"Please!"

He handed her the bag over the seat. Mrs. Ellis quickly switched out the Canadian identity card for Mrs. Susan Caspian.

"Are you alright, Mrs. Ellis?" Guy asked, sounding worried.

"It's Mrs. Caspian," she told him, feeling relief wash over her at the reversion to the other, now more familiar, and steadier persona.

"Then I'll ask again, are you alright Mrs. Caspian? It is the first job and all. You're bound to have jitters."

"I am very well, Guy," she said crisply. "The drop was fine and thank you for your help in seeing that it was a success." Through the car windshield she saw Tebbitt hang up the telephone. "I did realize that Mrs. Ellis enjoys risk more than I do and she's a bit of a tart. I am not going to let her out again for another year or two."

"Maybe three years?" Guy asked, with real feeling.

She laughed.

Tebbitt stuck his head back in the car. "Mrs. Ellis, you didn't drink all my bourbon, did you?"

"Of course not. That would be rude. And, Wing Commander?"

His look sharpened with understanding, just for a moment and then he grinned. "Yes?" Tebbitt asked, sliding into the back seat next to her.

"It's Mrs. Caspian to you, Cousin."

Susan pushed the flask back into his hands as Tebbitt burst into hearty laughter.

"Are we ready, Guy?"

"Don't know about ready, Mrs. Caspian. But, the shoe's dropped and it's time to head home."
A/N

It didn't happen. It's just a bit of fun all around and I learned a few things about Wing Commander Tebbitt.

On to Chapter 9, *Ends and Means*.

Thank you.
"exitus acta probat" (the outcome justifies the deeds)
Ovid, Heroides ii. 85

"The end may justify the means as long as there is something that justifies the end."
Leon Trotsky

"Colonel Walker-Smythe's office, please hold."

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In a break between the incessantly ringing phones, Susan managed to inject, "Gladys, telephones are not the tool of a civil society!"

"Colonel!" Gladys cried from underneath a pile of messages, newspapers, reports, memos, edicts, and a very, very large rosebush, "It's Director Hoover's office on the line!"

"It's about time! Put him through!"

They had been holding all the calls that morning in anticipation of this one.

"Excellent news, Director! Congratulations!" The Colonel's voice boomed. "I shall be right over!"

Guy was already climbing to his feet from his encampment at the coffee table with the LIFE magazines. Susan tossed him the car keys from the tray on her desk.

The wiry Colonel stalked out of his office, grinning around his cigar. Susan thought he moved as a swordsman did – a fencer perhaps – with the same agility and finesse.

"Well, girls," the Colonel said, shrugging into his uniform jacket, "it seems that there were some very hot documents at that safehouse the FBI raided this morning. Our cousins found a map that is causing quite the uproar at the White House."

"Really!" Susan exclaimed. "How extraordinary!"

Gladys managed to maintain the somber face of a professional office girl. She held out a plate and Colonel Walker-Smythe spit his cigar into it and in the exchange took a fistful of the really dire, absolutely-must-read cables and messages.

"What's in here, Gladys?"

"The Eighth Army left a garrison at Tobruk and is retreating toward El Alamein."
"Losses?" he barked.

"Heavy, Sir. I'm trying to keep a tally for you, but if there are fifty tanks left, I would be surprised. They lost the forward airfield as well. Tens of thousands dead or captured, I'm sure."

"Two steps forward, five steps back," he muttered. "Well maybe Churchill will finally replace Ritchie. Lord Halifax's office send over the table assignments for the State Dinner tonight?"

"Not yet, Sir," Susan piped in. She had been badgering Mum about them.

Colonel Walker-Smythe growled alarmingly. "We can't position our people until we know where they are going to seat people and given what we are going to need from the Americans, we cannot leave this to chance."

"I will ask them again, Sir," Susan said.

"I suspect the FBI and Defense will brief Congressional leaders this afternoon on the safehouse raid of this morning," the Colonel said, stuffing the messages into his brief case and stealing a pencil from Gladys' desk. "I want to be well away from there when that happens. Things should be quiet this afternoon until the dinner starts. Get Tebbitt and Lowrey in here by two."

"Oh, and Sir?" Gladys injected, offering a heavy, cream-colored card with gold engraving. "This came from the Congresswoman; another went to the Ambassador's office."

The Colonel grabbed it from Gladys and scanned it, frowning, grinning, and frowning again. He flipped the card back to Gladys. "Mrs. Caspian!"

"Sir?"

"It's your job to see that Tebbitt stays sober. The Congresswoman could make our lives an uglier hell than it already is if this doesn't play right, or worse still, if he offends her again. If Tebbitt is AWOL, he's headed for latrine duty on the Orkneys until the War ends."

"I understand, Sir."

"I know you do," he snarled. "Make sure Tebbitt does! If the Eighth Army can stop Rommel's advance and keep the Nazis from the Suez, they'll have to resupply. Only the Americans could fill an order for 300 Sherman tanks. Between the Congresswoman on the House side and Senator Reynolds, and both of them on Military Affairs Committees, either of those Anglophobes could sink this faster than a U-boat in the Atlantic."

As the Colonel and Guy left, Gladys picked up the ringing phone with a cheery "Thank you and have a nice day!" and hung up. Casually, accidentally, and before it could ring again, she knocked the phone off the hook. The important message had just arrived; the rest could wait. Gladys reasoned that if it was really important, there would be a cable, telegram, or messenger.

"So, Susan, what's next for you after keeping Tebbitt sober? Finding Percy Fawcett?"

"Peter? Any questions?"

Edmund had noticed that his brother was sketching on the back of one of the discarded envelopes.

"Just trying to keep it in my head, and truly not liking the direction this is headed," his brother said, sounding both light and grim.
And if he is disturbed now…

Peter interrupted his musings on the paving properties of good intentions. "The Tarkheena Masikah Susan writes of. She is an MP?"

"Yes. I think she is a Congresswoman, in their lower House of Representatives who sits on the Military Affairs Committee. She loathes Roosevelt and her husband owns a string of magazines and newspapers. The Senate is the upper chamber. Susan refers to both as the War Council."

"The anti-British sentiment, it is truly that strong?"

"If anything, Peter, I would say that her letters do not convey the full of it. I don't think it is as bad as it was before Pearl Harbor, though the Chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee did allege that the British were behind that attack."

"Before reading this, I would have dismissed that out of hand."

"You don't really mean that, Peter."

"No, not really. Not for something of that magnitude, anyway." Peter scribbled something about the War Council. Edmund thought he would burn the lot of it once Peter had read the full tale.

Wandering over to the desk, Edmund scanned the newspapers and clippings he had organized, ready for when Peter reached those points in the narrative. It would be a relief to share it with him. This summer had taken him places he had never been; the newspapers, with their vitriolic editorializing and biased reporting, were far more troubling than any of the censored and indecent books Edmund had read.

Speaking the thought aloud, Edmund said, "Apart from the general, even paranoid, distrust, England does also take a beating in the American press for her repressive colonial policies – there's a certain morbid delight that the War will finally break the back of the British Empire."

"With the Russells, Asim, and Aunt Polly, my own views on our colonial past and present have certainly changed this summer."

Edmund turned back around from the desk hearing the edge still in his brother's voice with the mention of Asim. It was going to take them a whole other summer to get through everything that had happened this summer.

"Ready to join the Quit India movement?" Edmund quipped, keeping to himself the irony of the High King leaning radically left with the pacifist Mohandas Gandhi.

Peter was scanning the letter again, neatly deflecting any further explanation owed like the swordsman he still was. Holding with the analogy, Edmund should have anticipated Peter's counter-thrust.

"In reading how England's treatment of her colonies has so hurt our cause in America, I cannot help but think how very differently we handled dissent in Narnia's territories."

The burden of the unspoken shifted uncomfortably and Edmund felt the sharp edge of hints and unasked questions. He blew out an aggravated breath. There was a scowl, too. Did Peter really have to so personalize this? Now?

"Just say it, would you Peter?" he said wearily. Edmund had never possessed that singular focus and ability to box it all up and put it on the shelf that Peter did. Too many other things had been
reminding him of *it all*, up to and including the stupid *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Eustace's curio cabinet, and even his uncle's own name. It really was all just absurd as he had been skimming the book for a week and been in the Scrubb household with *that name* and those beetles all summer without a thought to it. Peter dancing around the subject was not helping him restore much needed objectivity.

He simply had to soldier through this until the voices that he had heard from behind the Wall of Lilies faded from memory … again.

*Oh, Aslan, was it only yesterday?*

His brother, fortunately, let out a bark of self-deprecating laughter. "I am obviously taking a page out of your book, Ed, if I'm pondering problems that are really not relevant in the slightest."

Edmund let go of his annoyance. Peter did not know where this was going; he did. "Narnia is relevant, Peter. More relevant than we ever possibly could have imagined. I did not understand how relevant until Susan showed me."

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Prince Cor and Peridan breezed in after luncheon reeking of wines, spices and Tarkheena perfume.

Fraxi helped Prince Cor freshen up – how exactly, Queen Susan could not say as she politely averted her gaze.

Peridan stalked over to her desk and held out his hands.

"This is your fault."

"Yes?" Queen Susan asked, calmly alphabetizing the seating charts for the Residence dinner in honor of the High King and the Tisroc. The targets identified for the night had been appropriately seated, for the most part. Sir Flobber's office was awaiting their office's modifications.

"Look at this!" the pilot demanded.

"What is that?" Susan asked, raising her eyes.

He thrust his hands under her nose. "Every time I reached for a glass that wasn't tea or juice, a Crow swooped in and pecked me."

"Imagine that!" She owed the Crows a bucket of Shinys from the Bazaar for their doggedness. "You should be sure to wash well. You never know where those beaks might have been."

He slumped at the corner of her desk and laughed. "Cousin, you are deviously clever."

"And you, my Lord Peridan, are a good soldier to tolerate with such humor my management of your person for the greater good."

Peridan started in surprise. "You said something kind! To me! About me!" Leaning in, uncomfortably close, he asked, "Are you well, Queen Susan? Not feverish are we?"

Susan pushed him firmly away and rescued her seating chart before it slid off the desk as he crowded in. "More than kind, I said something that is true, Cousin."

She was also softening him up for the order she suspected was coming from Sallowpad.

"I would add also that you are clever, but that would only inflate your sense of worth greater than it
already is."

"Oh, we wouldn't want that," he replied with a mocking salute.

Susan rose, bundling the charts up under her arm. "I am going to put these out for the Chief. If you disturb anything on my space, I shall know of it, and next time, the Crows shall not peck merely your hands."

"If you say something else complimentary, I shall restrain myself."

He really was playing into the tasks to come beautifully.

"The Tarkheenas find you very attractive, my Cousin."

"Attractive, clever, and the loyal soldier!" he crowed, stepping to the side so she could get to Sallowpad's office. "You forgot humble!"

Susan set the charts out for Sallowpad's inspection and returned swiftly. Peridan had, to all appearances managed to restrain himself, with a single exception.

"Out of my chair, Peridan!"

Grumbling, he slouched away, snatching her morning edition of *The Trumpeter* crier sheet as he did so.

"This is already old," he said, skimming it then flipping it to the side.

"What was the news this morning and at table?"

Pouring himself some of the cooling tea, the pilot said, "That the Ettin King will soon arrive in the Lone Islands for a triumphant march through Narrowhaven when it and the Just King fall; that the High King will be asking the Tisroc for aid; and of great interest to us, who on the War Council is likely to oppose that aid."

"They do not wish to support Narnia in the north, when that same support might be needed in the Calormen campaign against Telmar?"

"Some very vocal and powerful members certainly say so. I had my ear bent on the subject both at the Club luncheon today and at the gaming table last night." He brushed a finger along his nose. "There was also word today of a well-timed raid upon a secret Ettin location in the heart of Calormen and some very disturbing finds that reveal the Giant King’s sinister designs for the Calormenes."

It was an effort to remain bland, as opposed to cackling with glee "How disturbing that must be for Calormenes who wish to remain aloof of the Ettin war!"

"Very!"

Caws in the hallway and something about "bloody Penguins and Moles" announced Sallowpad's return.

The Raven flew into the office and landed on the coat tree that never held coats, but was excellent for him. "Are you sober?" the Raven snapped. "Because if you are not, I shall blame Queen Susan!"

"That's hardly fair blaming Queen Susan for my drunkenness," Peridan cried.
Not fair, but certainly another potentially effective component in Peridan management. Susan had not considered trying guilt before.

Bardon followed behind, a long suffering expression on his ravaged face.

"Seating here yet?" Sallowpad squawked.

"Yes, Chief," Susan said, catching Bardon's eye over Sallowpad's head. The Raven was in quite the wound up state by her judge. "It is all set up in your office."

"Find Prince Cor and Fraxi!"

Susan returned Bardon's nod and the Gryphon turned back around to seek out the Ash Dryad and the Archenland Prince.

"Everyone in my office after that."

"Why is it that you are not angry at them?" Peridan whined. "I'm here!"

Chief did not deign to answer and hopped into his office in a flurry of feathers.

Prince Cor and Fraxi returned with Bardon a short while later – Fraxi was still blushing a bit green and the Prince was shaking Ash leaves out of his hair.

"In my office! Now!"

"For a Bird, he sounds like a Hound the way he barks," Peridan muttered.

They filed in; not all the "seating" in Sallowpad's office was intended for Birds. Bardon lounged in the doorway, filling up the space.

"First off, the Tisroc's security forces undertook a raid in Zalindreh of a hideaway for Ettin spies. They discovered an Ettin Cookbook that is causing a great deal of concern at the Palace and making some reassess their reluctant and token commitments to Narnia."

The Raven paused dramatically.

"I was told to personally convey the thanks of the High King himself and that of the Tisroc for our role in this assistance to our ally, Calormen."

Prince Cor clapped Peridan on the shoulder; Queen Susan in turn, accepted cordial handshakes from Fraxi and Cor; Peridan kissed her on the cheek with a "Well done, Cuz." Bardon did not shake forelimbs as his talons were very sharp and likely to cause bleeding.

Sallowpad permitted this brief celebration before rushing on, sharp and anxious, lecturing from his perch. "The timing is, unfortunately, excellent. The High King has learned that the Just King will retreat, nearly to Narrowhaven, and hopes to hold the line, pending arrival of reinforcements. As we fortunately have anticipated, the High King will formally ask the Tisroc for those reinforcements. The Tisroc is committed to resupplying Narnia."

"But, the War Council is not," Peridan injected. Susan nudged him with an elbow. Sallowpad did not like Peridan's interruptions.

"Which brings us to tonight's Residence dinner in honor of the High King and the Tisroc and what we still may do to sway the Calormenes and ease the rearming of the Just King. Peridan!" the Raven squawked.
Susan pulled in an anxious breath.

"Yes, Chief?"

"Tonight, you are being paired with Tarkheena Masikah…"

"Absolutely not!" Peridan exploded, leaping from his seat. "I've told you…"

"Shut it," the Raven barked back. "We need her in our nest, we are fortunate she has singled you out, especially now, and that's the end of it. Sit back down!"

The pilot glared furiously at the Raven and looked to stalk out of the room. Susan wondered if Bardon had anticipated this. For Peridan to leave, he would have to jump over the very large Gryphon or ask Bardon to move, rather cramping the drama of a sudden and exciting storming out of the office.

It was Prince Cor, putting a firm hand on his shoulder, who brought the defiant Peridan back to his chair.

The Raven continued, "The High King will be asking the Tisroc for hundreds of Gryphons and War Horses to resupply the Lone Islands campaign. Do any of us think that the Tarkheena will let this go unchallenged when she is one of the leaders for the isolationist cause in the War Council, in all of Calormen?"

No one said anything. The news criers called out her Calormen First rhetoric every day.

"Do I need to explain what could happen if the Tarkheena makes any fuss, or even delays the vote with needless debate in the War Council?"

Chief let the threat hang in ominous silence. It was Bardon who said the unthinkable, in his bland, understated way. "Any delay in rearming the Just King means the Lone Islands fall to the Ettins."

Sheep to feed their army. A port to ship the sheep from. Easy access to supplying the Ettin campaign in the East against Galma, and likely a final victory there. They could finally cross the River Shribble and overrun Narnia and Archenland. The whole of the North would fall under the dark Ettin shadow.

Galma? That was new. Reading along, Peter had been switching out North Africa for Lone Islands, Japan for Telmar, the Suez for Narrowhaven, and tanks and planes for War Horses and Gryphons. A Nazi campaign in the East?

Stalin and the Soviet Union. Galma was the Soviet Union.

"It's the Soviet Union!" Edmund yelled from downstairs

"I know!" Peter hollered back. He glanced further down the page, and seeing Terebinthia, called back, "What about Terebin…"

"India! Kenya Colony! Malaya! British West Indies!"

Susan had obviously run out of geography in the Known Lands surrounding Narnia in trying to collectively designate the many colonies of the British Empire.

So savoring the enormity and complexity of Susan's creation, it took a few moments before Peter was able to push on. Mum and Father had said that Susan should accompany them to America
because she was the pretty one who was rubbish at books. She was not at Oxford studying with the Professor for exams; he was. Peter had often thought, as he struggled blindly through the Latin and Logic, that it was Edmund who should have been there, rather than he. Yet, the sophistication of what Susan was describing belied the very superficial assessments others made of her. Peter found his hackles rising at this chronic undervaluing of his sister. It was an error he had been guilty of himself, occasionally, and one that his brother, to his credit, had never made. Of course, both Edmund and Susan had always had a keen eye for talent.

A woman could be lovely, gentle, and compassionate, and not be weak; a person could be wise, subtle, and clever and yet not pull good marks in Algebra or Latin. He did not necessarily like where he thought this tale was going; still, he was perversely and profoundly proud of his sister for managing it as she was.

The tense silence stretched out until Peridan slumped, reluctant and angry, but ceding to the grim reality of their situation. "I understand, Chief," he said wearily. "Aslan knows I should not complain given what our people are enduring in the Lone Islands."

That was the rub of it and Susan was grateful that he saw it. They did not, could not, know how this might unfold. To the extent every contingency could be addressed, it had to be addressed. It was their duty, to their subjects, to Narnia, to their Kings, to all the Known Lands, really, if the Ettin hate spread unchecked.

Sallowpad stared at Peridan a moment longer, as if expecting the argument to be longer and more heated. With no other outburst coming, the Raven pressed on, as they all had to do.

"Cor, I'm seating you with Tarkheena Lasaraleen. We can't expect her crier sheet, The Daily, to suddenly turn pro-Narnia, but continue to work her and maybe they won't be so bitter about Calormen arming Narnia to save a rabble of savage beasts."

The Prince nodded. "With the rumor already circulating that the Tisroc's security team found the Ettin Cookbook, she is going to be digging for information."

"Everyone will be talking of it, which is all to the good. I have briefed Flobber on it and he may be issuing a statement with the High King later if they can agree on the wording. Our official position is, 'we did warn you.'"

"Do we know if Lasaraleen's husband will be there?" Prince Cor asked.

"It won't matter," Fraxi said briskly. "Just seat Tarkaan Ahoshta at a different table with a pretty Dryad."

Sallowpad consulted the seating chart. Susan was able to add, "Tarkheena Lasaraleen and Tarkaan Ahoshta are already seated separately, Chief. The Ambassador's office put two of the Holly Dryads from Personnel at the table with Tarkaan Ahoshta."

There was a shared round of snickers and guffaws.

"I will make sure the serving staff keep the wine glasses filled at that table," Fraxi said, shedding a few leaves as she quivered with laughter. "Where do you want me, Chief?"

"You will be with the Grand Vizier and Tarkaan Kidrash. It should be a jolly table, they are good friends, and make sure the drinks flow. Look pretty, keep the conversation up, and note everything the Grand Vizier says and who he talks to."
"Something up there, Chief?" Peridan asked, rousing from his sulk and interested in spite of himself.

"The Tisroc won't live forever. The Grand Vizier is next in line and that concerns me, Archenland, and the High King. I'd like to see the Grand Vizier and Tarkaan Kidrash drunk together and learn what we might. This is a longer range strategy we will discuss after we deal with rearming the Lone Islands campaign."

And the crisis after that, and the one after that, never ending.

The Raven turned to her. "Queen Susan, you and I shall be seated together, with Tarkaan Anradin."

She nodded, secretly pleased, as Sallowpad explained, "The Tisroc's security team is not going to permit release of the Ettin Cookbook for fear that it will cause a panic. As inducing panic about the Ettins is the point of this exercise, we will approach Anradin about selling our copy to him."

"And Anradin will publish the Cookbook in The Tattler," Peridan said, interrupting, again.

"And for me, Chief?" Bardon asked, injecting quickly and before Sallowpad could snap at Peridan.

"The same as usual?"

"Yes. Monitor the door and the drive. Note who leaves, with whom, in what state, and what they say. Chat up the other livery, litter bearers, and drivers."

The Raven snapped his beak, the signal the meeting was over. "Get to work everyone. It will be a busy day and a longer night. Fraxi, take the seating charts, make the changes, and get it back over to Flobber's office."

Cor and Peridan filed out, the Prince muttering something consoling to the pilot. Fraxi gathered up the chart and Bardon followed her out the door.

"Mrs. Caspian, stay a moment if you will. Mr. Hill, shut the door please, tell Gladys to hold my calls."

Susan turned back around. "Yes, Colonel?"

"Take your seat."

Colonel Walker-Smythe eased back into his own chair, toying contemplatively with the ever present cigar.

"Tell me, Mrs. Caspian, even at your tender age, do you understand what we are asking of Tebbitt, Captain Lowrey, even Gladys?"

Susan straightened in her seat. "Of course, Sir. I am young, but not naïve."

He whipped his cigar about, brandishing it angrily. "Wrong answer, Mrs. Caspian. I ask you again, do you understand what we are asking of our staff, even at your tender and innocent age?"

Susan took a deep breath, annoyed with herself for failing this simple test. "Colonel, really." She put mild irritation and condescension into her voice. "Of course I understand. I am a married woman, so please spare me your paternalism."

He arched an eyebrow and awarded her an approving nod. "Much better. Always live your cover, Mrs. Caspian."
His fingers tapped a sharp, restless staccato on the desk. "What do you make of Tebbitt's aversion to the Congresswoman?"

She had been thinking on this herself. "He does not like her, to be sure. He is also protesting over much in my opinion. He is flattered by the attention and he very much enjoys the company of glamorous, rich women. I think the resistance is part of his role as the amiable War Hero and drunken town clown."

"He is much smarter than he acts."

"I have noticed that," Susan agreed. "To his credit as well, he dislikes her because of her anti-English views. He knows we need her in our nest and that complaining so smacks of ingratitude given what his own squadron is suffering in North Africa. I will keep an eye on him this evening, but someone as forceful as the Congresswoman is not going to take no for an answer. And if I may be blunt, Sir..."

The Colonel gestured expansively, "Please, Mrs. Caspian."

"Whatever token resistance he puts forth now, a man such as Tebbitt will respond to a beautiful woman who desires him."

He nodded, looking pleased at her analysis. "Well put, Mrs. Caspian. That is the principle of the honey trap – a discussion, by the way, we must leave for another day when we have more time, but which I do want you to understand the principles behind before you leave my instruction. This brings me to my next point."

"Sir?"

"I expect you to dress in a manner that is decorous and respectful of your husband's ill health."

Susan quelled the momentary disappointment of the direct order. She had known she should not march out in an attention-getting posh frock, and had not really intended to do so. Still, she felt a bit regretful.

"Knobby tweeds, Sir? Should I leave the wellies at the flat?"

"Use your judgment. I think you understand what I am looking for."

"I do, Sir." She was his assistant for the evening and should not detract from Gladys or the American socialites courting the British men.

An unpleasant thought struck her. "My mother is also attending. She might wonder about this."

"If you cannot deal with your mother, Mrs. Caspian, you are not the woman I think you are. Blame me, if you must."

She outwardly bristled at the criticism and he frowned, expecting better emotional control from her. Susan let out breath and let go of her pique. She was calling again upon the impassive poise she had worked so hard to perfect in Narnia. "Anything else, Sir?"

"I suppose I should ask if you are morally comfortable with us running rough shod over sacred marital vows made before God and your husband, Seventh Commandment, and all that."

The Colonel spoke so dryly, Susan could not tell if he intended to be mocking. Regardless, it did not matter. "Paternalism aside, Sir, I suggest you and I discuss this again after the Allies win the
War and we have the luxury of asking such questions."

"Fair enough." Again his long and restless fingers tapped his desk with his fingers. Yet, he did not yet dismiss her either. Susan waited.

"I have not mentioned, Mrs. Caspian, but I have a daughter back in England."

"Sir?" Susan was not sure what the Colonel was about here, and so would follow his lead. He always spoke to a purpose.

"She is but fifteen, a sweet young girl."

Ah. Susan wondered if he really did have a fifteen-year-old daughter or if this was merely his oblique way of reminding her that living the cover aside, he was cognizant of her age.

She nodded. "I understand, Sir."

"I would have misgivings about seeing her at an event such as this one tonight, given what must be done. Young, pretty girls are tokens and pawns to the powerful men of this city. Were she to attend, I would want her accompanied by someone whom I trusted to protect her."

While she was warmed by his concern, it was annoying as well. *Live the cover.* "My husband and I do not yet have children, Sir, so it is difficult for me to, as one would say, walk in your shoes. I suspect, though, that you do not give your daughter enough due. She would likely surprise you given the opportunity."

"Thank you for that good advice, Queen Susan," croaked the Raven. "Get out of my office now."

**To Follow, Still More Means**

A/N (why can't I be brief?)

**Historical notes (what I tinkered with)**

Tobruk fell on June 21, 1942 while Churchill visited with Roosevelt in Washington, D.C. The British Eighth Army had perhaps 75 armored vehicles left. Mussolini arrived in Libya for a planned victory march into Cairo; the British were burning the documents at their Cairo headquarters and if the Nazis took the Suez, they would control the Mediterranean, access to oil and have the ability to supply the Eastern front of the War in the Soviet Union.

The BSC planted a fake map (not a Cookbook) detailing Nazi designs on the Americas in a Nazi safehouse in Cuba and President Roosevelt used the document in a speech – however, this event and the speech were in fact in 1941, not 1942.

There are pictures on my LJ (link in profile) to Susan's fashion choices for the State Dinner in Chapter 10.
"exitus acta probat" (the outcome justifies the deeds)  
*Ovid, Heroides ii. 85*

"The end may justify the means as long as there is something that justifies the end."
*Leon Trotsky*

"Mum, you look lovely!"

And she did, with her hair done in the latest pompadour, wearing a willowy, long-waisted gown and glamorous gloves.

Susan tramped down on her regret as Mum pursed her lips in disapproval. "Susan, you are so pretty and usually have such phenomenal sense. Won't you at least put on some lipstick? That dress is so plain. This is a State dinner!"

A horn sounded outside their flat. "There's Mr. Hill, Mum! He's offered us a lift to the Embassy and we should not keep him waiting!"

"But, Susan, dear…"

Susan pushed her Mum out the door, gathered their bags, and locked the door to the flat. She tucked the key in her bag. She had obeyed the Colonel's order in the dress she had chosen, but as a man, she was certain he would not notice her accessories – and they were smashing, by the Lion! She had a terrific little glass and beaded box clutch. And her shoes! They were little, strappy sandals with a platform, adorable bow, and a heel almost as amazing as those Madame Carrè wore. Her demure gloves matched perfectly. She had pinned her hair into a sleek, sophisticated roll and finished off the ensemble with a rope of pearls.

Taking her frowning mother's arm, she guided her down the stairs.

"Susan, it's not too late…"

"Mum! The Little Black Dress is in *Vogue, Lady's Home Journal*, and *McCall's*. It is appropriate, and conservative, and it is what I wish to wear."

"You just look so severe, dear. So much older than you are."

"Well yes, Mum, that is rather the point!"

Peter groaned at the two page discussion of gloves, shoes, hair dos and handbags. He wondered if Rat and Crow had been buried in this nonsense. However, Edmund had not made any of his usual notes, arrows and underlines, so this was all exactly what it purported to be – fashionable drivel in which their sister would, occasionally and unfortunately, indulge.
There was a message hidden here of a different, more taunting, sort. Susan knew precisely what most aggravated their brother and as much energy as Susan could devote to extolling the virtues of women's high heeled shoes and corsets, Edmund could, with equal force, expound upon their evils. Looking more closely, Peter did indeed find the evidence of their little war of wit, words and practical jokes – where Susan had carefully drawn a picture of her amazing shoes for them to admire, Edmund had scribbled a crossbow bolt through them.

Predictably, Peter also found drawn in the margin of the letter the other object of his brother's longstanding ire – a corset. Though it had regrettably been some time since Peter himself had seen them, Edmund had carefully added next to the corset a drawing of what had been in but were now free of the corset. Perhaps, Edmund should be looking to less salacious reading material, or, alternatively, finding a "good," rather than a "nice," girl.

Guy opened the car door for them, winking at Susan as he took in her "costume" for the evening. Susan smiled back.

"Thank you, Mr. Hill," Mum said. She was not nearly as tense about Guy's appearance as she had been. This had led Susan to wonder how Mum might have handled a Narnian banquet with a Faun, a Dryad, and a Badger at table.

"And don't you worry none, Mrs. Pevensie," Guy was saying. "Even if you get called away because of the business with the Ambassador and the Prime Minister, the Colonel and I will make sure Miss Susan gets home safe."

Coming up the drive and into the Embassy with Mum, Susan fully appreciated why the invitations to British events were so coveted. The British Embassy glowed like a jewel on the diplomatic row of Washington. Lights illuminated the drive that was filled with limousines and police cars. Men in uniform and dinner jackets were escorting the elegantly, well-turned out women of the American Capitol.

She had never been to an event with liveried and gloved servants! Even in Narnia… she had to hide the smile at the thought of trying to put a pair of gloves on a Canine or Feline… or a Talking Horse. The inside of the Embassy was shining as the outside was, glittering and twinkling lights, the dinner service laid out immaculately, the 20 piece big band orchestra warming up with light tunes for cocktails, and dancing after dinner. The flowers were astounding, but then, even in war and even with the grounds all dug up, still, the British could garden like no other.

Susan had checked the seating charts and arrangements carefully. Given the expectations for the Ambassador's personal secretary, Mum was in the separate, more secure room with the President and Mrs. Roosevelt, the Prime Minister and the Ambassador and their innumerable staff and aides. With the number of people and what she had seen of the schedule, the whole evening should pass without her seeing her mother at all and if she did, she would be in the company of Colonel Walker-Smythe. She was still bristling a bit over the Colonel's implication that she could not manage this simple sleight of hand. Even knowing he had been harsh precisely to motivate her, she was determined to make this work.

Lord Halifax cooperated brilliantly, demanding the attendance of his personal secretary the moment Mum stepped into the Embassy.

"Don't worry, Mum. I am meeting the Colonel at the bar."

"But Susan, I want you to have fun, and not be…" Her mother turned about sharply to a hovering, fretting assistant and gestured imperiously. "Yes! Tell his Lordship I will join the party in the
library in a moment. Find me a pen and a stenographer's pad, would you? There will be cables to send, so see that the office is opened."

The assistant scampered off.

"You are *so* impressive, Mum!"

Her mother pinked up. "Oh, don't tease, Susan. But I must go. Are you certain?"

"I *am* fine." She gave her Mum a quick hug and a gentle, firm nudge in the direction of the library.

As anticipated, Susan was now alone and relieved. She first visited with the wait staff and bartenders to make the appropriate, grateful arrangements. Those details attended to, she went out to the terrace and under the shimmering lights, treated herself to a champagne cocktail.

Narnians and Calormenes alike parted before the Tarkheena Masikah and her Narnian escort, Gryphon Aerial Corps Pilot Lord Peridan. Queen Susan diplomatically hid the smile, for it looked very much like predators stalking among scattering herd animals.

"Tarkheena, may I re-introduce you to my Cousin and Commander's wife, Queen Susan of Narnia."

Susan returned the complex curtsey of the Calormene.

"How good to see you again, Queen Susan! How fares your husband, Lord Caspian?"

They had only met once before, in the Tarkheena's courtyard, during the woman's drunken luncheon, yet she remembered Susan's invented-on-the-spot husband and that he was combat wounded.

"His recovery is slow, Tarkheena, but progressing. You are kind to ask." Susan dabbed her eyes for effect; Peridan detangled from the Tarkheena's twining, vine-like grasp to administer a brilliantly performed, awkward and perfunctory pat on his "Cousin's" shoulder.

"You dress though as if you are mourning him," the Tarkheena said, raking over Susan's somber appearance with an astute eye and blunt manner.

Susan did have to wonder whether there was anyone in Tashbaan other than Ambassador Flobber who was not formidably sharp. Tarkheena Masikah was ambitious and gifted with a personality so forceful she had pushed her way on to the Tisroc's own War Council. Under other circumstances, Susan would admire her accomplishments. Here, she required handling more careful than that afforded a Porcupine … or a Skunk.

"I am not mourning, though am of course worried and think on him constantly. Out of deference to my husband, I dress accordingly."

"Peridan, would you be the gallant Sir you are and get me another glass please, while I keep your cousin company?" Tarkheena Masikah had a way of making the request seem like an order and one that you were privileged to obey.

"Of course, Tarkheena." Peridan shot her a look of concern but Susan passed an *all's well* hand signal. She had been diplomatically managing prickly and oversized personalities far longer than he.

Continuing, and to further their objectives for the evening, Susan said, "Further, I do feel that
dressing more somberly is appropriate given the dire circumstances of Narnia."

The Tarkheena pursed her lips in a mild frown. "Yes, Narnia suffers greatly, so we hear." Nodding to where the High King was standing amid advisors and sycophants, she continued, "The High King makes certain the Tisroc knows well of that suffering and of Narnia's need."

"The High King is a great leader to have withstood the Ettins for so long." Susan kept her voice bland and factual, as if speaking of shared assumptions. "He is committed to the defense of Narnia and Archenland, thereby assuring that Calormen's northern border remains held by her allies."

The Tisroc was now with the High King, arm over the shoulder of the other, friends and intimates for all to see. It was everyone else who was the problem.

Taking in the vision of solidarity the two leaders projected, Tarkheena Masikah briefly scowled, took a sip of her drink, and schooled her perfectly chiseled face again into polite interest. "You mention he is a great and committed leader, Susan of Narnia. You forget clever. Your High King is very, very clever man. I trust him as much as I trust the Tisroc, which is to say, not at all, and I trust their friendship even less than that."

Susan did not, could not, rise to these provocative statements. Outright argument would accomplish nothing more than alienation they could ill afford. The Tarkheena was not an enemy to be overcome, but a challenge to be gently engaged, shifted, and declawed. More subtle tactics were called for, with an emphasis not upon the benefits to Narnia, but upon the costs to Calormen.

"Even if you do not trust the High King and the Tisroc, how can an alliance with Narnia against the Ettin menace be counter to Calormen?"

Lightly snorting, the Tarkheena murmured, "It is what the High King seeks from that alliance. I do not believe we can trust Narnia with our weapons, given the harm that has been done with her own. We would arm Narnia with our Gryphons and War Horses and see Narnia turn them on its oppressed colonial possessions."

To argue Narnia policy in Terebinthia and the Lone Islands was to entrench the Tarkheena further and Susan would not seek to defend what was in some instances, indefensible. Pulling in her anger, she sent a quick prayer East. Aslan, Guide Me. One usually sought Aslan before and during battle, for luck, and during personal or wider hardship. Still, the Great Lion valued intelligence and wit as much as courage. Susan had asked for his guidance before, and in circumstances as delicate.

"As distasteful as Narnia may be Tarkheena, surely the Ettins are worse overlords. Whatever wrongs of Narnia's past dealings in her territories, they pale when compared to the atrocities of the Ettins at this very moment."

"Yet one may dislike two things at once. Preference for neither is preferable. My duty is to Calormen First."

They both had to swerve to the side, holding drinks high, as a Labour of Moles bumbled through, holding flower pots. A pair of giggling Holly Dryads followed, wine in hand, and scattering berries as they sashayed by.

"Do you believe the Ettins themselves will permit you to maintain such neutrality?" Susan asked, automatically brushing the dropped berries aside with her toe. "They have no more interest in preserving Calormen than Narnia or Archenland. Total conquest is their aim, and obliteration of all life except their own."
It was the first crack in the Tarkheena. "Yes, that Cookbook." She paled, raised a shaky glass to her lips and drained it. "You know of it?"

"I have heard tell of it." Repeating the script on which Sallowpad had instructed, she continued, "What it shows has long been known of in Narnia."

"I saw the horrid thing today, and have never been so unsettled."

Susan trained her expression to appear wan and sad and placed a sympathetic hand on the Tarkheena's arm. "It is of course very distressing, sworn as you are to the protection of the men, women, and children of Calormen. If you will, think of it as a duty owed that we might bear together, as allies."

"Thank you, Susan of Narnia. I appreciate that generosity and gentleness of spirit."

He might have been listening in through some means or another, Peridan's return was so well timed. With a nod and a smile, he deftly relieved the Tarkheena of the glass she had drunk dry, set it on a passing tray borne by a Faun, and handed her a new, brimming glass.

"Thank you, my Lord," the Tarkheena murmured.

"Are you chilled?" Peridan asked, gently adjusting the Tarkheena's light wrap sliding off her bare shoulders.

"Of the subject, yes, Lord Peridan. We were speaking of the Cookbook recovered today."

Peridan nodded gravely. "Ghastly, is it not, to see how Ettins would torture and cook even children?"

Trusting the pilot to pick up her cue, Susan launched the second offensive upon the Tarkheena Masikah's formidable defenses. "Cousin, with all the other news of the day, I had not heard. Do know how your own company has fared in the Lone Islands?"

"Heavy losses," he said mournfully. "Fully three out of four Gryphons thrown out of the sky and broken by the Ettin boulders and war machines. Of the men, I heard most of the company are dead or taken."

Susan shuddered. She did not know if this was true, but it made for an effective tale now, and was more probable than not. "If taken, then we know their fate." Resting a supporting hand on Peridan's shoulder, she said just low enough so that the Tarkheena would hear, "I am so sorry, my Cousin."

"If taken, surely your men will be kept for a prisoner exchange," the Tarkheena cried, moved in spite of herself.

Peridan scoffed at the Tarkheena's question. "Most assuredly not, Lady. Ettins will eat their captives until they obtain younger meat."

"My Cousin was fortunate to escape them," Susan said, leading again.

"What is this?" Tarkheena asked, softly and intrigued.

Peridan blushed so beautifully, his fearsome scars burned white against his flushing face. "It was nothing, Tarkheena."

"Surely not!" Susan objected. "Has my Cousin been so modest, he has not shared the tale?"
The woman's eyes went wide and hungry. She extended her bejeweled hand to Peridan's scarred cheek and caressed the spidery lines with a long fingertip. "Would you tell me of it, my Lord?"

When a woman begins admiring a man's battle scars, the time for Susan's graceful departure arrived. Peridan's eyes flitted only for a moment in her direction then turned completely to the Tarkheena, Susan forgotten. Taking her lingering hand in his, he smiled. "But of course, Tarkheena. You had only to ask."

They both muttered some polite excuses, but Susan was already backing away.

She nearly tripped over a slinking Ocelot, who looked to have been sneaking a fish from Flobber's newly installed pond. "Watch where you are going, you stupid Cat," snapped an irritable voice in the tree overhead.

"Hello Chief," Susan said looking up to see the Raven.

He bobbed his head twice, signaling he had overheard the conversation with Tarkheena Masikah. "Come with me!"

Susan followed the Raven deeper into the gardens on the grounds. The Residence staff had set up small, intimate tables about Flobber's ponds. Softly glowing lanterns hung from graceful trees. The music of Faun flutes and pipes drifted on the warm night air.

Tarkaan Anradin, owner of The Tattler and the worst muckraker in all the Known Lands, was waiting for them at a table. From ten paces she could smell the spicy scent perfuming his curling red beard. He was a vain, clever, and vicious man.

He did not rise to greet them, but merely gestured at the empty chairs.

"Drink?" he asked, sliding a bottle of the Dwarf Lightning across the table.

"No thank you," Susan said firmly, before Chief could interrupt. She needed to establish swiftly that she was not ornamental. Following an inspiration from the Lion himself, she reached across and picked up Anradin's own glass. A single sniff confirmed her suspicion.

"Perhaps you might share your water, my Lord?"

"You are sharp, Queen Susan."

She would not deign to ask how he knew her name. It was his business to know such things.

"Lovely though you are, your fashion sense is deplorable." His leer was bluntly appraising and his manicured, soft fingers lingered on hers as he retrieved his water glass. "I would delight to help you into a gown more befitting your shapely figure."

Sallowpad opened his beak, but Susan had perfected her responses to such conduct years ago. "I admit my priorities have altered with my husband and country both fighting for their lives. Thank you for offering to introduce me to your wife, who might aid me in dressing in the Calormene fashion."

"Lovely and as sharp as broken glass!"

"Enough of this!" Sallowpad barked. "Continue to treat the Queen Susan in so disrespectful a way and she shall teach you better manners at arrow point. Now, are you interested in our copy of the Ettin Cookbook, or are you wasting our time?"
"Oh, I want it, certainly, and no one is willing to share, thus far," the Tarkaan said. "The Tisroc's security forces won't release it, so I am glad you have scruples as flexible as my own."

"And in return?" Susan asked.

"I have nothing on the Grand Vizier for you."

Again, she did not ask how he knew of Sallowpad's interest in the second most powerful man in Calormen, next in line behind the Tisroc; it was Anradin's business to know what was of concern and value to others.

"Lasaraleen and Ahoshta are the ones who hoard the Grand Vizier's skeletons," the Tarkaan said, twirling his mustache. "I like the man, myself."

"That would not stop you from collecting his skeletons," the Raven observed.

"Of course not."

"What do you have for an in kind trade?" Sallowpad pressed.

He stroked his beard contemplatively and the cloying, sweet scent drifted about the table. "Why should I trade you anything? I do not think you could sell something this hot elsewhere."

Sallowpad fluffed his feathers irritably. "We have seen the Cookbook, Tarkaan Anradin. We know it will sell elsewhere; if you will not deal, we and it leave."

More persuasively, Susan added, "This Cookbook is an extraordinary document, my Lord. Only moments ago, Tarkheena Masikah spoke of it as one of the most disturbing things she has yet seen."

"That shrew? Disturbed?"

The Tarkaan's eyes slid downward, and lingered too long upon her breasts. Sallowpad snapped his beak in warning, but the Chief would do well to observe that Susan was well able to handle this wearying behavior. She reached across the table, put a finger at the Tarkaan's chin and tilted his head upwards.

"Eyes on mine," she chided. "A man of your acumen knows that staring at my chest will tell you nothing of whether Narnia deals fairly with you, my Lord. You are fortunate to be speaking with a Human at all. You would never know if a Crow had cheated you until you woke the next day, still drunk, broke, and naked."

He threw back his head and laughed, then had to quickly move his hand out of the way as Sallowpad moved in to peck it.

"This Crow has had enough!" Sallowpad launched himself from the chair back and flew to a nearby tree.

Susan stood and turned away, following Chief's lead.

"Oh very well!" Tarkaan Anradin cried. "I'll deal!"

Still, she waited until Sallowpad flew back to the table.

The smarmy quality in Anradin's manner was replaced with something more reptilian. "I have reports about the Tisroc's General who leads the campaign against Miraz and the Telmarines."
Sallowpad cocked his head to the side, listening carefully and Susan could see his mind calculating the worth of this information. She kept silent. This required the Chief's expertise and he had the better sense than she of what they should receive in this exchange. Instinct told her that defamatory rumor about the Tisroc's General would not be useful to them – Narnia supported the Tisroc. But, like those skeletons Lasaraleen and Ahoshta kept on the Grand Vizier, valuable information might be hoarded and later traded.

"Go on," Sallowpad said.

"I have confirmed reports that the General slapped and kicked a fevered soldier under his command."

Sallowpad shrugged. "It is a matter of military discipline. That is not worth a document detailing Ettin plans to slaughter and eat Calormenes."

"There is more."

The Raven waited.

"The General has a Telmarine mistress."

Sallowpad casually preened his feathers, disinterested.

"She is fifteen years old," Tarkaan Anradin whispered.

Susan managed, with effort, to remain impassive.

"What proof do you have of this?"

"Love letters."

Fools. Never put anything compromising in letters that could be understood by others.

Sallowpad bobbed his head in assent. "That will do, Tarkaan. We will arrange a mutual inspection of documents and if acceptable, make the trade."

From the Residence, a drum sounded, calling the guests to dinner. Tarkaan Anradin stood. Susan did as Sallowpad did – she neither rose nor offered her hand, but nodded graciously. "We will join you at table in a few moments, my Lord."

"I shall introduce you to my wife, Susan of Narnia!"

With another leering wink, he ambled off on a cloud of perfume.

Susan continued sitting, waiting for Colonel Walker-Smythe to speak. The spymaster removed a cigar from his pocket, clamped it between his lips, and leaned back in his chair, watching their muckraker shamble off toward the Embassy.

"Well done, Mrs. Caspian," he finally said. "I have no criticism."

"Thank you, Sir. I appreciate the opportunity to observe you and learn a great deal doing so."

"Really? And I would say the same of you."

She was not going to answer his invitation for further explication and countered instead. "Though,
Sir, may I offer a critique?"

His mouth twitched around the cigar. "Please do so."

"In taking offense on my behalf, you gave him leverage he would not have otherwise had. He knew it irritated you and encouraged him further."

"I agree, Mrs. Caspian, and apologize for my poor control. The reprimands were also far more effective coming from you. So, let that be a lesson to us both, though plainly it was one you already knew, and very well."

"Sir?"

The Colonel rose gracefully to his feet and offered his arm. "I have been doing this a very long time, Mrs. Caspian. I know another professional when I see one."

Susan stood, with poise and confidence of the Queen she was and would always be. "The War has affected us all, Colonel."

"That is your cover story, then?" he asked, smiling through the bushy mustache and cigar.

"It is." She linked her arm with his as the trumpet calling everyone to dinner sounded again.

"Mrs. Caspian, if you believe I am becoming overly protective during dinner, would you please signal that to me?"

"Certainly, Colonel."

The orchestra was taking a break. The Colonel had gone to refresh their drinks, leaving Susan to keep an eye on their muckraker, Drew Pearson. Pearson had switched from water to something far stronger during dinner. Susan steered the gossiping journalist in the general direction of his wife, with the promise to phone him tomorrow about their inspection and exchange of documents.

With the departure of the Prime Minister and his entourage, the party had thinned and those who remained were becoming louder and drunker. As Lord Halifax had left with the Prime Minister, he had summoned Mum as well so that his personal secretary might transcribe the discussions. Susan did not, therefore, have to juggle that complication as well.

"Good evening, Cuz."

Tebbitt materialized in the seat next to hers. He was carrying a lady's wrap.

"And you as well." Flitting her eyes to the stole folded over his arm, she smiled approvingly and asked the obvious, "You are leaving for the evening?"

He nodded curtly and Susan glimpsed the angry set in his jaw before Tebbitt mastered himself. "Guy is bringing the car; the Congresswoman is making her good-byes."

She looked him over but all seemed in order and she resisted the urge to straighten his collar as she might have done to Peter before a particularly loathsome engagement.

"It will be fine," she said, encouraging, trying to avoid the condescension that would only anger him.

"I couldn't even drown my sorrows and deaden the disgust," Tebbitt replied, with a grim smile that
moved across his mobile, expressive face to be replaced by his more customary cheerful countenance. He was playacting again. "Did you have something to do with the fact that the bartender watered my drinks and I never did get a full glass of wine with dinner?"

She smiled in return. "I'm afraid so. I did not wish you to become impaired."

They both nodded politely to a Senator who stumbled by with a hand wrapped around a giggling girl not his wife. *His* drinks had certainly not been diluted.

"I suppose you suffered through most of the consequences on those nights when Caspian and I would go on a bender."

"Precisely, Tebbitt. I know too much drink can ruin the outcome of an otherwise very pleasant evening."

"Well, I did make sure he made it home!"

She laughed. "You did, for which I thank you, Cuz, even if my husband was in no state to receive the welcome he deserved!"

They were such easy lies between them. *Live the cover.* Susan liked Mrs. Caspian quite well. This married woman could do and say things that Susan Pevensie, even Queen Susan the Gentle, could not.

His eyes moved restlessly across the room, taking in the Congresswoman and her circle of admirers. A twitch spasmed in his cheek.

"She is a beautiful woman. It will be fine," she said, leaning in quietly to speak in his ear, just as the orchestra struck up the first notes of a new number.

"Never mind that that she is a battle-axe and her politics are vile," he muttered back.

They were close enough that Susan plucked a long, blond hair from his uniform jacket and flicked some lint away. "Being with you will moderate her views at a time we need it most, Tebbitt."

"Then perhaps you should sleep with her!"

Susan put a hand on his arm, reassuring and sisterly. "See to the lady first, Cousin. Nature will take care of the rest."

He smirked. "So, my married cousin tells me to do my duty then lie back and think of England?"

"You can do better than that, Tebbitt. Lie back and think of three hundred American tanks, ordered, manufactured, delivered and steaming across the Atlantic to North Africa."

Tebbitt threw his head back and laughed. He rose, leaned in, and gave her a peck on the cheek. "Good evening, Cuz. Don't wait up."

She squeezed his hand in return. "Two stanzas of the Moose Song for this duty, Lord Peridan."

"Only two? Three at least!"

Queen Susan watched proudly as her charge sauntered up to the powerful Tarkheena and gently set her wrap upon her shoulders. Tarkheena Masikah sidled up to her man, smiling, sensuous and proprietary. She took Peridan's offered arm and they walked together toward the doors.
Sallowpad flapped over and landed on the chair Peridan had vacated. The Raven cocked his head to the side, looking at her curiously.

Susan nodded. "It will be well," she told the Raven confidently. "All he needed was management."

Three… two… one…

Edmund got to his feet to head up the stairs, just as Peter shouted from the bedroom, "What in blazes!!"

He was getting very good at predicting his brother's reading speed. He stuck his head in the bedroom to see his brother pacing a furrow on the floor, and more livid then he had been in an age or so. Probably since Rabadash, come to think of it. Ironic that.

"Yes she is," Edmund said to his brother, anticipating the outburst and sparing his brother from verbalizing the ugliness.

"And England! We are…"

"Yes, we are," Edmund said.

Peter abruptly spun about, wrath and disgust etched in every movement and feature. "There are some very crude terms for this conduct, brother."

"Yes," Edmund agreed, a bit taken aback. He had not anticipated the complete High King state of righteous fury.

"You need to finish this sequence of letters, Peter, before we can discuss this rationally."

"Rationally?" Peter bit out. "Susan is in the middle of this! Spies are manufacturing lies, prostituting our soldiers, our…"

"Peter!" Edmund had to raise his voice over the rising din and before Peter got going on a true tear. This was really a rare form for him. Peter was bundling his hurt over Asim's betrayal with concern for Susan into a rage against spies generally.

"I do not dispute any of what you say. You need to do what you do so well, take all that emotion, box it up, put it aside, and read to the end."

His brother's eyes narrowed, his face hardening into stone, the cold far worse than the heat. "Tell me, truly. Were you shocked by what Susan has written?"

In his hesitation, Peter's visage grew colder still. "Edmund, we would have never done to our Lord Peridan what is asked of him here."

Edmund managed to not scoff outright at his brother. "It would have never arisen because, to spare him, you would have undertaken such a thing yourself or asked me to do so."

He could see in Peter's face the rapid succession of shock as he remembered, the embarrassment at having forgotten, and the discomfort in recalling those touchy diplomatic situations.

As it nearly always was, Peter's anger was slow to come and quick to fade. "I am sounding quite the hypocrite." Sinking back on to the bed, Peter sighed ruefully. "Susan and I were both dealing with such intrigues within the year."
"And why I tried to use treaties to manage the risks those intrigues posed to our sovereignty."

Peter picked up the letter again. "Please do not tell Susan that this is bringing out all my most smothering and pompous qualities?"

"Not a word." At the door, Edmund turned back, wondering why the most important things men said to one another were always when pretending to be doing something else. "You have been reading of the means, Peter, as uncomfortable as they are. Some of the endgame is already obvious and there is more yet to come."

"So I must continue to read." So stated, it was not really a question.

"Unless you would rather study beetles with Eustace."

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Part 3, Ends, to follow

A/N

Historical notes (what I tinkered with):
As mentioned in Chapter 9, Tobruk fell on June 21, 1942 while Churchill visited with Roosevelt in Washington, D.C.

The BSC planted a fake map (not a Cookbook) detailing Nazi designs on the Americas in a Nazi safehouse in Cuba and President Roosevelt used the document in a speech – however, this event and the speech were in fact in 1941, not 1942. The Congresswoman who subsequently tempered her virulently anti-British views (and voting record) after an affair with a British RAF pilot is recounted in The Irregulars: Roald Dahl and the British Spy Ring in Wartime Washington. While the RAF pilot, Roald Dahl, arrived in Washington the same time Susan did (May 1942), the Congresswoman in fact did not arrive in Washington until after the U.S. mid-term elections in November 1942.

An exchange between Dahl and British Ambassador Lord Halifax about his affair with the Congresswoman is recounted in The Irregulars. I posted it in my LJ. It's spicy but very humorous, and even more so if you imagine that the conversation is between Ambassador Flobber, a Penguin, and Gryphon Aerial Corps Pilot Lord Peridan, with Queen Susan and Sallowpad in attendance. I have taken the liberty of modifying it as to how it might have occurred in The Queen Susan in Tashbaan. There's a little of crude language, and the subject matter of course, but if you've gotten this far, it's no shock. It's in my LJ under "Lie Back And Think of Narnia."
"The end may justify the means as long as there is something that justifies the end."
Leon Trotsky

"Can you rule these creatures kindly and fairly, remembering that they are not slaves like the dumb beasts of the world you were born in but Talking Beasts and free subjects? ... And you wouldn't have favorites either among your own children or among the other creatures or let any hold another under or use it hardly?" Aslan to the Cabby and Nellie, The Magician's Nephew, Chapter XI.

"And all these came in at the Door, on Aslan's right. There were some queer specimens among them. ... But [Eustace] had no time wonder about that sort of thing (and anyway it was no business of his)..." Chapter XIV, The Last Battle,

"Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me." Chapter XV, The Last Battle, Aslan to Emeth a Calormene

Stomp Stomp Stomp "Bloody Hell!"

Stomp Stomp Stomp "God damned Americans!"

Stomp Stomp Stomp "Bloody, God damned Americans!"

Even through the locked door, they could all hear the Colonel's swearing, stomping, and swearing again.

Captain Lowrey and Guy were sitting in chairs reading the magazines. Tebbitt was sacked out on the couch, snoring, and his hat over his eyes. The past week or so with the Congresswoman had been very draining for the Wing Commander. Susan had been hearing far too much of the details, with Tebbitt vacillating wildly between extremes – on the one hand, giddy with the attention, gifts, dining, glamor, and events, and on the other hand, exhausted by the demanding woman's very aggressive appetites. Initially, Tebbitt has proudly boasted of his prowess – a tedious business for Susan, surely. Now, he was just fagged. In fairness, she could not say she preferred the sullen, silent fatigue.

In the late afternoon, it was too warm; the fans were going as hard as they dared. Too much breeze and paper would fly everywhere, a snowstorm in Washington in the first week in July.

Gladys was staring at the phone, willing it to ring. Susan found she had been gazing stupidly at the two week's worth of The New York Times and The London Daily Telegraph and could make no organizational sense of the articles at all.

Gladys snatched the phone before the first ring finished. "Hello!" she squeaked. "I mean, Colonel Walker-Smythe's office, may I help you?"

Colonel Walker-Smythe stuck his head out the door.
Gladys nodded and frantically motioned him back into his office. "Of course, let me put you through." Covering the phone with her hand, she hissed, "It's Secretary Stinson's office! The War Department!"

The Colonel slammed his door but they could hear the scrambling as he bolted back to his desk.

It had been quiet before and now the silence was tense and anxious. The only sounds were the hums of the fans and Tebбит snoring; Susan could not hear the Colonel's words, only that they were being spoken.

"He's hung up," Gladys whispered, watching the blinking red light on her own phone go out.

There was a distinctive pop from the Colonel's office. Lowrey shot out the chair, very much like the cork out of bottle the Colonel had just popped off, and threw open the Colonel's door.

Gladys had glasses ready, of course, and passed them around. The Colonel poured, grinning ear to ear, his cigar clamped in one side of his mouth. Tucking the bottle under his arm, and moving the cigar to his fingers, he raised his glass. "Ladies and gentlemen, a toast, to our Allies, the Americans, and their 300 top-of-the-line Sherman tanks, ordered and now being manufactured in five factories!"

"Five!" Susan exclaimed as Guy whistled. America was simply enormous.

"How long for delivery?" Lowrey injected, trying to shake the Colonel's hand, but bottle, cigar and glasses all seemed to make it impossible.

"Dreadful long time," the Colonel said.

Before they could become downcast, he said, "A month, at most. There will be a convoy leaving New York by the end of July. The War Secretary estimates over 40 million tons of war materiel, tanks, howitzers, tank destroyers, and ammunition, all headed for Port Taufiq at the Suez."

"Chancy crossing, that," Lowrey murmured, taking another long drink.

The Colonel nodded. "One thing at a time, but yes. And even once they make it to Capetown, it's still a long way to the Suez. God willing, it will be there by the end of August."

With a tilt of her head, Susan indicated Tebбит, sleeping through their racket, and held out an empty glass. The Colonel poured and she took the glass over to the prone pilot.

Crouching next to him, Susan tugged his sleeve gently. "Tebбит!"

His eyes flew open; a soldier's reflex. He started and blinked. "Hullo, Mrs. Caspian. You're a damned sight better looking than what I've been waking to lately."

"Flattery will not get you anywhere, Cuz." She handed him the glass. As Tebбит pulled himself up, she joined him on the couch.

"Who says it was flattery?" He stared at the glass of bubbly in his hand. "What is this? Surely you intended it for someone else!"

Lowrey gave the couch a kick with his boot. "Wake up you lug! Have a drink! Cheers!" He loudly clinked glasses with Tebбит, drank his remaining champagne down in a gulp, and handed the glass to the pilot. "Hold that for me, would you?"
The Captain then spun around, grabbed Gladys about the waist and planted a very sound, very thorough, very loud kiss on her lips. Gladys threw her arms around his neck (fortunately her glass was already empty) and Lowrey swung her around.

"So either they are engaged…" Tebbitt said, saluting them with his raised glass, "or the Colonel heard from the War Secretary."

Colonel Walker-Smyth darted around the exuberant couple and clapped Tebbitt on the shoulder. "Well done, Wing Commander.

"If there's any more, I'll take it, Sir, and the bottle it came in." Tebbitt quickly downed his drink, held out his glass and shook the Colonel's hand. "If you would care to distract Mrs. Caspian, I might even manage more than two drinks before glass and bottle mysteriously disappear down a Rabbit hole."

Colonel Walker-Smythe laughed, rare for him, and poured the rest of the bottle into Tebbitt's glass, nearly topping it.

The phone rang. Gladys untangled herself from Lowrey and reached for the phone. "Colonel Walker-Smythe's office."

The secretary frowned. "Just a moment, Congresswoman. Let me see if the Wing Commander is available." She looked up inquiringly, clamping her hand over the receiver.

Tebbitt groaned, dramatically but with real feeling, and sagged against Susan's side. "Not again! Doesn't she ever sleep?"

Susan wanted to laugh, but she did not have the heart to do so. He was muttering No No No into her shoulder, and it was becoming pathetic. Town clown though he was, she did not enjoy seeing her charge so reduced.

The Colonel took in the tableau with a shake of his head, his more customary exasperated look and frown returning. Moving quickly, he crossed over to Gladys in two long strides and took the phone.

"Congresswoman! Walker-Smythe, here." Pause. "Yes, we just got the word ourselves from Secretary Stinson. We are very grateful for your support. Wing Commander Tebbitt will come round to convey our thanks for your assistance." Pause.

Tebbitt stirred against her and wearily straightened, pulling himself together for the next command performance.

"Thank you, Congresswoman, we think so, as well. Unfortunately, it will have to be tomorrow, as I have the Wing Commander on an assignment today. Thank you again. I will give him your message."

Tebbitt looked gobsmacked, gape-mouthed and staring. Susan tipped his drink closer. "Drink up. You are getting a night off." She shot a grateful look at the Colonel for finding a way to accommodate her request.

"Go home!" the Colonel growled, hanging up the phone. "If you so much as set a toe outside your flat, I'll cut it off and send it and you…"

Tebbitt waved his acknowledgment, not quite so weary, but still gray with fatigue. "I know, I
know. I'll be off to the latrines and bedding sheep in Scotland until the War ends."

"Get him out of here, Mr. Hill. You'll need to stay there, to make sure he stays there."

Susan gave Tebbitt a forceful push and wrapped her fingers at his elbow, helping him up. "On your feet, pilot. We are taking you home."

"I finally lure you to my lair, Mrs. Caspian, and I'm too exhausted to enjoy it."

She laughed. "You had better savor that glass, Wing Commander. Or it will be the last you have until you ship out to the Orkneys."

"At least they have Scotch!"

To: All Narnian Residence Personnel
From: Maintenance

Felines, Birds, and Mustelids are warned that they may not eat the fish in the new Ponds!

To: All Narnian Residence Personnel
From: Housekeeping

Will the Crows who stole the silver off the tables from the Residence Dinner please return the items to Housekeeping? The Amnesty will continue for another three days.

To: All Narnian Residence Personnel
From: Personnel

With the High King's departure, dress uniforms are no longer required, particularly with the heat of summer upon us. However, all staff are asked to conform their grooming and uniform to that which is appropriate to a tropical posting. See Narnia Personnel Handbook Section 505(b)(2)(xi)(D) for more information.

To: All Narnian Residence Personnel
From: The Physician

Northern clime Beasts are asked to be especially cautious during these summer months. The local watering holes are available for your use. Anyone suffering apparent heatstroke will be escorted to the Physician for a thorough examination.

To: All Narnian Residence Personnel
From: The Right Honourable Sir Flobber, The Viscount Of Northern Pond, KG OM GCSI GCMG GCIE PC

Sir Flobber's Pond may not be used by off duty personnel.

To: All Narnian Residence Personnel
From: The Right Honourable Sir Flobber, The Viscount Of Northern Pond, KG OM GCSI GCMG GCIE PC
Correction, Sir Flobber’s Pond may not be used by off duty or on duty personnel.

To: All Narnian Residence Personnel
From: The Right Honourable Sir Flobber, The Viscount Of Northern Pond, KG OM GCSI GCMG GCIE PC

Correction, Sir Flobber’s Pond may not be used by anyone except Sir Flobber.

And Sir Flobber's personal guests.

Susan bundled up the memos and sent them directly to the dust bin. Fraxi was humming tunelessly to herself and lightly pruning her rose bush.

"I think you are still greening up a bit, Fraxi," Susan said, now sorting the messages for the morning.

"Cor was able to escape Lasaraleen early so we had a lovely evening!" The Dryad sighed happily. "What about you?"

"I went with Peridan to a dinner at Tarkaan Kidrash's home. I made sure he stayed sober until the Tarkheena made her late and dramatic appearance, and then went with Bardon to visit with his family and other Native Narnians."

There was a flapping of wings and Sallowpad landed awkwardly on her desk. "Kidrash? What news there?"

"More complaining about continuing the Lone Islands campaign when the real risk is Ettinsmoor. Tarkaan Anradin was hoping I would confirm the Tisroc's agreement with Galma to commit Calormene soldiery to an assault on the Northern Marshes that would take the pressure off the Galmans."

"Fools!" snapped Sallowpad.

Having committed fully to aiding Narnia, the Calormenes now felt it their right to dictate the course of a campaign the Narnians knew far better and had been waging far longer. The acrimonious debate centered on whether to follow the advice of the High King or that of Galma. Narnia emphasized first retaking the Lone Islands, securing the Bight of Calormen, and starving the Ettins by cutting off their access to the Islands' port and its ready supply of sheep. Galma and an increasing vocal, vicious group of Calormenes, urged what they perceived as the quicker resolution – sending a force across the River Shribble and reclaiming the Northern Marshes in preparation for a march on Harfang. Whether the Tisroc would listen to the wise experience of the High King or the hysterics of the Calormene isolationists and the radical Galman supporters was anyone's guess.

Dated from the first days of July, this was the last letter in the June series Edmund had insisted he finish first. As Peter read of the controversy concerning whether to secure the Lone Islands and the Bight of Calormen and the opposing pressure by the Galmans and Calormenes to march on the
Northern Marshes, Peter knew immediately of what Susan was writing. She was describing debate that had stretched all summer in the newspapers regarding where to open the second front of the War – whether the Allies should go the "direct" route and invade France, or retake North Africa, secure the Mediterranean and then move through the "soft underbelly" of Nazi-controlled Southern Europe. It was chilling to read of this controversy raging in June and July and know now what Susan and the Allies did not know then – that the catastrophic raid on Dieppe would definitively show the sheer folly of attempting to open a second front in Europe.

The high strung Falcon, Liluye, dove through the window.

"Oh! Oh!" she cried, flapping about. "I have urgent news from Narnia!"

"Really!" Sallowpad barked. "And here I thought it might be dull, ordinary news that was worth sending all this distance!"

Susan raised her arm so the nervous Falcon could land.

In Liluye's own opinion, she never carried anything less than absolutely dire news – she was usually correct, but it was a tiresome business dealing with her self-important hysteria. Susan frequently wanted to just clamp her fingers around the Falcon's beak to silence her complaints.

She quickly removed the note from Liluye's leg, and walked the Bird back to the window. "Our thanks, Liluye," she managed through gritted teeth. "Get some rest and if we need anything for a return, we shall summon you."

Sallowpad was trying to open the message, but his claws and beak were ill-suited to it. Susan deftly unrolled the note so Chief could see it.

It was brief, and not in a format Susan had seen before, and she had seen a great many messages thus far in the office.

Prison opened in Witch's Castle at year end. Ettins are using it to imprison and cook Native Narnians.

Susan stared at the cryptic message, not understanding it. "Chief?" she asked, picking up the cue from the Raven who had gone somberly silent. He glanced toward Fraxi, but the Dryad was busy working on the thank yous from the Residence Dinner. Sallowpad shook his head in an emphatic No.

He wanted her silence? Susan put a finger to her lips and Sallowpad nodded. Bending, he pecked at the note, at the words Native and Narnian, and then looked over at the locked strong box in the corner of the office.

Susan nodded her understanding in return. He wanted something on Native Narnians that was in the strong box and was so perturbed he wished for her to say nothing of it even to Fraxi.

Sallowpad scooped up the message into his beak and flew into his office. Susan plucked the keys from the tray on Fraxi's desk and went over to the strong box.

"Don't forget to put the splints back in!" Fraxi called.

The tiny splints were one of the unobtrusive security measures they used in the office. If someone opened the strong box, the splints in the hinges would fall out, and likely go unnoticed by the would-be thief. It would not prevent a theft or spying, but it might alert the office if a breach had
been attempted. Susan opened the strong box, and rifled through it quickly. She had filed things here before: the Ettin Cookbook; the Darkwool prophecies; the very distasteful information on the Calormene General they had obtained from Tarkaan Anradin; the order and delivery of the Gryphons and War Horses; and the recent strategic discussions among Galma, the Tisroc and High King regarding a planned raid on the Northern Marshes. The very last file was one she had not seen before, a very thin, plain folder marked "Ettins/Native Narnians." She removed the file, closed the strong box, and replaced the splints, returning the keys to the tray.

Something nudge her memory. About Native Narnians. Although the Chief was waiting for the file, Susan made herself stop and think. There had been some other reference recently to Native Narnians in the crier sheets. She was sure of it. It had been within the last week, even. With the excitement and near frantic activity of the Gryphons, War Horses, the High King's visit, the Cookbook, and the Residence Dinner, they had all fallen a bit behind on the news.

Sorting quickly through the crier sheets, she found the entry in The Trumpeter, near the very end. She remembered now why it had caught her eye. The story had been so outlandishly lurid, she had gone right by it, assuming that the Narnians had planted it in the Calormene news, or that it was merely another garbled account of the Ettin Cookbook.

Susan collected the crier sheet and the file and took both to Sallowpad's office. The Raven was studying the map of Narnia on his wall. The land around the Witch's castle had been among the first to fall to the Ettins, believing, as they did, that as Jadis had been part Giantess, this territory was part of their ancestral home.

"Please close the door, Mrs. Caspian," Colonel Walker-Smythe said.

Susan shut the door with her hip, and moved toward his desk, trying to understand the reason for his very grim mood. "Sir? I have the file." She handed it to him, along with the newspapers.

"What's this?"

"Something else that I remembered reading in our clippings in the last week. It was first in the London Daily Telegraph, but The New York Times picked it up as well."

She pointed to the cryptic article, buried deep in the paper. "It's about Poland, Sir. It was so outrageous, I thought it was propaganda we had planted. But, given what was in that cable, I thought you would want to see it."

He studied the clippings, the incredible headlines, the few words that followed. Slowly, Colonel Walker-Smythe shook his head. "The problem with disseminating manufactured propaganda is that people tend disbelieve the real thing when it appears."

Susan stared at him, truly shocked. The outrageous story had seemed too preposterous to even be credible. "We didn't plant it, Sir?"

"No." Frowning, he looked again at the map of Europe. "Chelmno," he said, repeating what was in the top secret cable that had just arrived. "It's in Poland, near Łódź."

Abruptly, Colonel Walker-Smythe crumpled the cable and set it in the tin on his desk. He lit a match and set the scrap of paper afire.

"Sir?"

"You should have never seen this cable, Mrs. Caspian. No communications intelligence in all of
the Allied forces is more secret than how we came by this message. The very fact of its existence, regardless of its content, is a matter of the utmost security."

She watched the scrap with the ambiguous message burn hot orange to gray ash. It had been an overheard Nazi radio communication, collected in December but only now translated and deciphered. Collected somewhere, somehow, by someone. Even the cable's dissemination had been very selective and highly secretive.

Colonel Walker-Smythe picked up the newspaper and scanned it again, frowning. "It has taken us seven months to understand the same information that is now running in the Daily Telegraph."

The moment of clarity that followed was so horrible and painful, Susan would remember it the rest of her life. Her breath caught in her throat and her heart hammered wildly as she finally connected the disparate pieces of information. Bile rose with the horror and she was suddenly and furiously blinking back tears. In a very small voice, Susan managed, "You think the news story is confirming what is in the cable?"

The Colonel's bleak expression answered. "The cable tells us where and what; the news story..."

Here, even the soldier and spymaster had to pause to gather himself; he passed a shaky hand over his eyes.

"The news story tells us who and how many." The Colonel looked back at the map of Nazi-controlled Europe. "And if there is one in Chelmno, the Nazis certainly have others."

_Ah Aslan, no! Not here! Not again!

"Peter? Are you finished with the June letters?"

He was not sure how long he had been sitting on the bed staring at the page in his hand. There was something here. He had seen it in the last parts of Susan's letter, hastily appended, written in a very uncharacteristic scrawl.

_I have also been reading a number of back newspapers for information about home. The London Daily Telegraph is especially helpful as it has many entertaining articles and keeps me from becoming too homesick and completely kavossed about it! Though, reading the papers can be quite sad of course, as they can sometimes remind us of the sorts of things that the Witch, the real Miraz, or the evil Ettins might have really "cooked up" for the Native Narnians if this were anything more than a silly children's story!

To his brother's everlasting despair, Peter had never bothered with the "Rat and Crow" cipher of the Narnian Intelligence Service that Susan and Edmund had devised. "Kavossed" though was one part of the cipher he did remember.

_A large number killed._

Ed had indeed circled the word with arrows back to the London Daily Telegraph. There were question marks next to Ettins and Witch. Real Miraz was underlined.

Peter absently fingered the blotches under Susan's words. He thought they were his sister's tears, spilled almost two month earlier, long since dried.

_Kavossed. A large number killed. What was so remarkable about this above and beyond the thousands dead in North Africa or Dieppe, or Asia?_)
Something buried in The London Daily Telegraph?

An Ettin plan to cook the native Narnians? What the Witch had done? Something that Miraz, not the Empire of Japan, but the real Miraz, had done?

Peter looked up at his brother, who was clutching thumbed, greasy newspaper scraps. "I assume that is every back issue of The London Daily Telegraph you were able to locate in Cambridge?"

Edmund nodded. "Some others as well. First things first, I suppose."

Pushing the letters to the side, Edmund sat next to him on the bed and handed him a Times covering Tobruk and Churchill's visit to America. "This is about a speech President Roosevelt gave."

Peter began reading it:

"I have in my possession a secret map, made in Germany by Hitler's government-by the planners of the new world order. It is a map of South America and a part of Central America as Hitler proposes to reorganize it..."

He stared at his brother in amazement. "I remember this speech! I heard it on the wireless. I saw it on a newsreel!"

"Keep reading, Peter, down toward the bottom."

"I have another document made in Germany by Hitler's government. It is a detailed plan to abolish all existing religions -- Catholic, Protestant, Mohammedan, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish alike."

"The clergy are to be ever liquidated. In the place of the churches of our civilization there is to be set up an international Nazi church, a church which will be served by orators sent out by the Nazi government. And in the place of the Bible, the words of Mein Kampf will be imposed and enforced as Holy Writ. And in the place of the cross of Christ will be put two symbols: the swastika and the naked sword."

Peter stared at his brother, sickened. "You think this is what Susan was writing of? These documents are the Ettin cookbook?"

Edmund nodded. "There is a lot of hysteria in the newspapers afterward, and some allegations that the map is a fake. Roosevelt wouldn't produce it, but it was leaked in one of the Washington scandal sheets."

"Her deal with the Tarkaan."

Edmund nodded.

So the map, the document about religious persecution, the documents the President of the United States had spoken of in a speech to the whole world, they were frauds. And Susan had helped create them and disseminate them.

"This is the reporting in The Times a few days later." He handed him the paper, but Peter could not bring himself to look at more than the headline celebrating the American aid to the British. Lies. It was all lies.

His brother recited from the paper for him. "There is reporting on a massive award to England. Millions of United States dollars are allocated for armaments and war materiel." Edmund swallowed. "You are not making this easy, you know."
"And the Tarkheena?" Peter bit out, thinking of the pandering that his sister had encouraged. "The one Peridan bedded? Any evidence of that?"

"There are several paragraphs devoted to the remarkable turnabout of a Republican Congresswoman from the State of Connecticut on the Armed Forces Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives. She was expected to oppose the aid, and instead spoke unexpectedly…"

"In support of the British," Peter concluded bitterly.

"If you look at the date on Susan's letter, on July 1, she writes that the order went in for the Gryphons and War Horses. There's more about them later, but…"

"It worked, you are saying."

"Yes, Peter, it worked. They…” Edmund hesitated, shook his head and corrected himself. "It is not they, not someone else who did these things. We did them. We lied, we planted fake documents, we seduced an American Congresswoman, and it worked. From Susan's letters, we can assume there are now a couple hundred tanks and planes headed to North Africa for Field Marshall Montgomery."

"But it's all fabricated, Edmund. How…” Peter stopped, seeing his brother's grim, bleak expression.

Kavossed. The native Narnians.

"You don't think it's all lies, do you?"

"No," Edmund replied quietly. "You saw the difference in letter? Something that happened after they got the order for the Gryphons and War Horses?"

"Yes. What does she mean? There's something about kavossing. And the Ettins cooking Native Narnians? Just like the Witch and the real Miraz?"

Edmund handed him the newspaper clippings.

A May 18 article from an inside page of The New York Times: 100,000 Jews machine-gunned by Nazis in the Baltic countries; 100,000 in Poland, and 200,000 in western Russia.

A clipping from June 25, The London Daily Telegraph: The Nazis have exterminated 700,000 Jews in Poland.

A clipping from June 30, The London Daily Telegraph: "More than 1,000,000 Jews killed in Europe."

"Surely these are fakes," Peter said, hating himself for even thinking such a thing, yet also disturbed that he had not noticed these scattered articles before. "The document about Hitler eliminating religions. You think that one was a fake."

"I don't know; it may have been." Edmund hesitated then pushed out, "Or, it may have been a fake with a foundation in truth."

Edmund reached over and took the discarded June letter, the one blotted with Susan's tears. "Queen Susan asks Sallowpad about Ettins murdering the Native Narnians. She has seen the report buried in a crier sheet and she, at first, dismissed it as propaganda. 'Did we not plant these stories, Chief?' And he tells her that they did not. He also tells her about a note in his file of a winter meeting
between the Ettin King and Miraz. I don't know what that means, but I think she is saying that Sallowpad believes it was significant to a Nazi plan to kill Jews."

"Ed, it's impossible! A million dead?" Peter could not wrap his mind around the horror of it. "The scale alone. This is unprecedented. How could such a thing be done?"

"That's what I think the significance is of this new report Sallowpad received from the Falcon about the Witch's castle being turned into a prison camp."

"For POWs, surely."

"No, it's not. Susan writes that it is for Native Narnians, civilians. I think this intelligence report is confirming the news reports smuggled out of occupied Poland that the Nazis have a facility in some overrun part of Europe for killing Jewish civilians."

Peter felt his resistance crumbling in the face of mounting horror. "Edmund, this just can't be possible. The world would rise up in outrage."

Edmund stared at him, and Peter saw in his brother's face the same rising nausea of uncertainty he felt.

"I'm not sure the world would, Peter."

He stared again at the tattered clippings. He had not read the Daily Telegraph that frequently and had missed these entries entirely.

"Look at Roosevelt's speech – Jews are inserted after every other faith, after Hindus and Buddhists, not a significant European population to be sure." Peter heard Edmund's most Just rage, bottled up for almost two months, now unfurling.

"You see the same thing in the newspapers. The New York Times ran stories in July about Nazi religious persecution, but even there it only discusses Jews as if they were afterthought." Edmund was spitting out the words and it was his brother's fury that was more damning than anything else. "Murdered Jews by the hundreds of thousands do not seem important enough to warrant more than a passing mention."

Edmund stared steadily at him, eyes reddening. Peter felt his heart and mind wrench and rebel as the awful depravity of it crept over them. Hitler's vitriol was filled with hatred against Jews. Kristallnacht, the work camps, the transportation camps, the ghettos, the oppression of Jewish Germans, these things had been known, condemned, certainly. Even there though, Peter found the memory uncomfortable. Had the condemnation been loud enough? Strong enough? Frequent enough? Even after Kristallnacht, England had only allowed Jewish children into the country; there had been little support for Jewish adults and a half hearted effort to settle Jews in British Guiana. There was no denying that an undercurrent of anti-Semitism ran deep, even in England.

"Are there other stories about this besides these?" Peter asked.

"Yes. There are some dodgy things in August, suppressed, possibly, a report from a press conference in New York, and more newspaper articles."

For all that Nazi brutality was well-known, the tale Susan wove was on an altogether more ghastly and inconceivable scale. A prison? Solely for... murder? Of civilians, non-combatants? By the tens of thousands? Hundreds of thousands? Millions? Simply because they were Jews? It smacked of the same propaganda the British had themselves planted.
It would be comical, if it were not so ghastly.

And, Peter realized, it had to be true, for Susan of Narnia was bearing witness to it. Confidence in his sister and her clear judgment allowed, no, compelled, Peter to see the awful truth, to believe her more than newspapers, politicians, Rats, and Crows. If Susan believed it, he too, must believe it, as Edmund did.

It was beyond comprehension. Inhuman. Wrong by any law or standard. Utterly indefensible. The Witch had not been human. But Miraz and the Telmarines before him had been men. Jadis and the men of Telmar had been driven to kill, to wipe out a population, without regard to morality, sanctity, worth, right, or being. Twice before, Narnia's Kings and Queens had marked how populations had been brutally targeted for murder simply because they were different.

Queen Susan would not have been blinded by centuries of intolerance and distrust that encouraged her to look the other way with indifference. She carried, they all carried, from Aslan himself, the charge of compassion even to those who thought differently, looked differently, or lived differently. Narnians knew, in small ways and profound ones, those things that bound them one to the other transcended differences of appearance and culture.

"Susan of Narnia would not have let this pass unremarked upon," the High King finally was able to say.

"And, the Gentle Queen would have seen the parallels immediately," the Just King said, "because we have seen it before."

Susan stumbled out of the Colonel's office, every bit of self-control she possessed working to keep her from breaking down right there. She would let the Colonel make her explanation, if any, to Gladys.

Again. The Witch. Miraz. It was happening again. She was seeing it again. All the cautions and warnings the Colonel had delivered rang hollow and meaningless. Again. Murder, again. Over and over, a hundred thousand fold.

Her rage, shock, and horror were almost beyond tears. Almost. Her heart ached for her brothers and sister, for Aslan. There would be no solace, only the certainty that they would not be blinded, or coolly and clinically indifferent.

That's not fair.

The Colonel was horrified as well. Not shocked, perhaps, but not disbelieving either. He had been looking for it, dutifully searching for the evidence, filing it away for the day when someone else might actually care that a million people, likely more, had already been murdered in pursuit of hate. Sinking to a bench overlooking the newly installed ponds, she choked back her sobs, her grief for the dead overflowing and overwhelming. Seeing without comprehending, she blankly watched the construction workers and gardeners toil about in the oppressive, sticky heat.

Warm fur brushing her leg made her look down. She stared into the gentle, upturned face of a huge, orange house cat.

"Aslan," she breathed. He had come to her even when her pleas had been incoherent with grief. The cat jumped into her lap and she buried her face in his soft, spicy fur. "Thank you," she murmured, over and over. "Thank you for hearing me. I know you always hear me, but thank you for coming."

The cat's purring rumbled so loudly, she felt it in her bones, deep to her shattered spirit. Susan
gratefully took the comfort he offered.

The cat rubbed against her, under her hands and arm, and then pricked her lightly with a claw.

"I know," Susan said with heaving sigh and a touch of annoyance. "You are telling me to get on with it. I am trying to be strong. Please be patient with me."

The cat jumped down again, circling her bench, purring his approval, and peering and blinking back along the path Susan taken from the Annex. With one last look over his shoulder, the cat slipped into a thicket of vibrantly blooming hydrangeas. Susan did not try to follow him.

The acrid smell of cigarette smoke drew her attention back to the path and the Shoemaker appeared. Susan realized she did not know his real name.

He pulled up suddenly, undoubtedly noticing her crying.

"Mrs. Caspian," he said with a nod. "Sorry. I'll just be going."

He started to retreat in the direction he had come.

"Wait!" she called, her throat still raw. "I'm sorry, but I don't know your name."

Slowly, he turned back around and deliberately inhaled deeply on his cigarette. "Halpern."

"May I ask you something, Mr. Halpern?"

He shrugged and flicked some ash on to the path.

"When Tebbitt and I met with you about the map, you mentioned the Nazis had targeted your kind too. What did you mean?"

He snorted, as if she was naïve. "Sodomites don't propagate the Aryan race, you know."

"I had thought that was what you meant," Susan responded. Still shaking but no longer weeping, Susan tried blotting her tears on her handkerchief. *I must be quite the sight.*

From his pocket, Mr. Halpern withdrew a pack of cigarettes. "Want a light?"

She shook her head, "No thank you. Would you like to sit down for a moment?"

This snort was more disdainful still. "You sit with a criminal like me? I don't think so, Mrs. Caspian."

He took another angry puff on his cigarette and Susan thought of Trumpkin and the Native Narnians branded as criminals by the Telmarines.

"You need not be rude with me, Mr. Halpern. A simple no thank you would have sufficed." Again she was reminded of what Trumpkin had said, how treating someone as a dumb beast long enough would reduce that person to a dumb beast.

Peering at her through sharp, shrewd eyes, he blew smoke from his nose. "You are a very strange woman, Mrs. Caspian."

"I suppose so," Susan had to admit. "But this is a strange place and I think it attracts us. The Colonel said you were an artist?" she asked.
He nodded and the angry lines hardened in his face. "In Berlin, between the wars."

Susan wondered if Mr. Halpern was Jewish besides; his King's English was flawlessly brittle.

"It's strange to think that Berlin was ever something other than what it is today," she mused aloud, remembering what the Colonel said had likely been plotted there in January.

"You're too young," he said bluntly. "Berlin was an amazing place. Germany, too. There was nothing else like that city and its people in the whole world. Now all anyone knows are the damned Nazis." He trailed off, sullen and resentful.

Who else did the Nazis hate, Susan wondered. The people like Mr. Halpern? Poles? Russians? Romany? Catholics? Those who were blind or crippled? Who else would die? How many more millions?

There were the sounds of firm, quick steps. "Mrs. Caspian?"

"Over here, Colonel!" she called.

Colonel Walker-Smythe came around the path's corner, his face flushed even more florid in the heat and the cigar in his pocket rather than clamped between his teeth. He acknowledged the Shoemaker with a nod. "Mr. Halpern, would you mind leaving us?"

"Fine," the Shoemaker muttered, and slouched away.

The Colonel said nothing until Mr. Halpern was well away. Susan scooted over and he sat silently next to her, staring in the same unseeing way at the gardeners weeding the flower beds.

"Any better?" the Colonel finally asked. Susan accepted the consoling pat between her shoulders he gave her.

"No," she replied, honestly. "More composed, but not better. Helpless, angry, and wanting to do something about this."

"You cannot do anything, Mrs. Caspian." He spoke so emphatically she flinched. "You do understand that, don't you? We must not reveal that we even know of that cable and what was in it."

"Because then the Axis forces might know we knew?" Susan dropped her voice even lower than the whisper in which he spoke.

The Colonel nodded. "And thereby jeopardize our ability to know anything. It is the peril of what we do, Mrs. Caspian. Sometimes, it truly tests us."

"Have you ever been tested like this before, Sir?"

The admission was a very long time coming. "No," he finally said, rubbing his palms on his trousers.

For all the power and trickery and guile and skill, they were only a tiny office in the Annex of the British Embassy, in the middle of a war raging across the world. She glanced over toward the bush and thought she saw the warm golden eyes staring back at her. As you will, Aslan.

"I suppose there is one thing we can do, Sir," Susan said, folding up her handkerchief and putting it back in her pocket.
"We can win the war," he agreed in reply.

Colonel Walker-Smythe proffered a hand, not the courtesy of gentlemen to lady, but such as that offered to a colleague and soldier.

"Thank you, Sir," she said, for more than the offered hand.

Susan rose, took a deep breath and let the competent, clear-eyed, mature mask of Mrs. Caspian settle on her again. "Shall we get back to it then?"

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**Chapter 12, Keep Your Friends Close, and Your Enemies Closer**

Phew. Really long notes to follow, which almost warrant a chapter on their own.

**Where precision and accuracy is especially warranted:**

It is hard to imagine now, knowing what we do, that there was a time when the murder of a million people would pass with very little comment. You have to go back to a time before Federal Express, the Internet, fax machines, Twitter, satellites, and sophisticated electronic surveillance. I have tried to be scrupulously accurate about "what we knew and when" regarding the very slowly growing awareness of the plight of the Jews of Eastern Europe. The references to intelligence circulating in June 1942 that are repeated here come from a 2005 report by the U.S. National Security Agency, *Eavesdropping on Hell, Historical Guide to Western Communications Intelligence and the Holocaust, 1939-1945*. The citations to the public news reports come from the timelines and documents of the Jewish Virtual Library and that site's page "What We Knew and When We Knew It," and worldwar-2 dot net. Links to these sources are on my LJ.

I have spent a fair bit of time reviewing the NSA Report as it discusses at length why the intelligence community and then politicians and military leaders were so very, very slow to comprehend what was occurring. It is both gentle (time lags in encryption, difficulty in understanding cryptic messages, the unprecedented, unreal enormity of the situation) and brutally harsh (general anti-Semitism in England and America, possible anti-Semitism by the codebreakers themselves). Some of those explanations are offered here. In chapter 7, Susan also reflected on the difficulties inherent in dealing with encryption.

From the NSA Report, I learned that the concentration camp in Chelmno, Poland, to which the Jews imprisoned in the Łódź ghetto were eventually sent and gassed, began operation in December 1941. However, the Enigma-coded message about Chelmno was not decrypted at Bletchley Park until June 1942. Later de-encrypted messages would include only the initials or numbers for camps and numbers dead. Based upon a speech Churchill gave, the Nazis also suspected that they were being listened to and understood, and so made it more difficult to eavesdrop on their communications.

That being said, the view of contemporary scholarship is that the Allies should have understood the magnitude of the death camps far earlier than they did. The work camps, transportation camps and oppression were known -- the wholesale collection and murder of civilians was new information. How early the Allies should have appreciated the enormity of the death camps is open to debate and is not answered here. By all accounts, however, June 1942 is very early in the process of the developing awareness of the death camps.

The winter meeting between the Ettin King and the Telmar Ruler refers to the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942 outside Berlin. Top Nazi leaders attended, including Reinhard Heydrich and Adolf Eichmann, with discussion focusing upon implementing a "Final Solution" to the "problem" of European Jews. The total meeting time was less than 90 minutes. Death camp
operations began in earnest thereafter.

**The things I tweaked for the sake of timing but did not invent:**
As mentioned, the BSC planted a fake map purporting to detail Nazi designs on the Americas in a Nazi safehouse in Cuba and President Roosevelt used the document in a speech – however, this event and the speech were in fact in 1941, not 1942. The religious document referred to in the same speech and quoted above may have been a fake planted as well – I did not try to confirm it. For these purposes, it does not matter.

Also, as stated, Tobruk fell on June 21, 1942. Nine days later, on June 30, the order was placed in America for hundreds of Sherman tanks and other war materiel that would eventually be shipped to New York and then sent on to the British Eighth Army in North Africa via the Suez Canal.

My thanks to **Cap Red** for her support and advice as I pieced together the What We Knew parts of this.
Heart and Mind

The Queen Susan in Tashbaan

Chapter 12

Heart and Mind (or, What Lucy Thinks About All Of This)

The High King and Valiant Queen were the very Heart and Soul of Narnia; of the Four they were most attuned to her Song, her gentle moods and seasons, her tempests and breezes. They were Narnia's Friend, Bondmate, Helpmate, Healer, Companion, and Protector. To know the Gentle Queen and the Just King was to learn of another side of Narnia, the cunning of her Crows, the guile of her Foxes and Rats, the subtlety of the Great Cats, and the wisdom of her Centaur sages. They were, together, the Concert of Minds.

Remembrances by Mister J.B. Hoberry, Faun, Head Housekeeper, Cair Paravel, On the Tenth Anniversary Of The Departure of the Four

With Edmund, there was always a project, a passion, or a plan. A mind as restless as his required occupation. At first, that summer as he waited with very well-concealed impatience for the first letters from Susan, it was his thrill of the chase and pursuit of the forbidden, the censored, the banned, the Nazi-burned, and the indecent – in this case, books. Once Susan's first letters arrived, he spent several silent days in the Cambridge libraries with maps of Europe and Africa, American newspapers from the periodicals room, the Marquis Whos' Who In America, the Congressional Directory of the United States, and the Washington Social Register. Then, it was back to D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Karl Marx. Another letter arrived and Edmund returned again to the periodicals, this time focusing on a peculiar set of occult prints and rags.

To Lucy it was obvious that the game was afoot. What game precisely, she was not sure. Still, she knew a Rat and Crow scheme when she saw one and when the time came, Edmund would tell her.

After the digression into astrology, Edmund was back to Chaucer and Huxley. Then, suddenly, it was geography and natural science journals as he began the illusive hunt for Peter's "problem" that wasn't. If he had only bothered to ask before spending days buried in the Proceedings of the Royal Geography Society, she would have told him he was not being sensible at all. Really. Peter outgrew Pretty Girls Make Men Do Stupid Things by age fourteen, the first time. Whatever their brother might feel or think, and he was no more forthcoming than Edmund in this regard, Peter could be counted upon to do nothing idiotic or self-interested where women were concerned.

With the resolution of that not-a-crisis-except-in-Edmund's-mind, they were well into July when the next batch of letters arrived from Susan. Lucy had seen the advantage of correspondence by diplomatic courier – it was reliable. The reliability came at the expense of speed, first to allow for censor review, and then the journey from Washington to London and then from London to Cambridge. Like everything else, the War had upset mail delivery.

Initially it seemed of the usual as Edmund returned to maps, newspapers, directories, and whatnot. Within a day, though, she saw that something deeper and more troubling was at work. The signs were all there and she knew her brother better than he knew himself. To avoid the really spectacular row, she kept Eustace occupied as Edmund teetered on the edge of a real temper and more worrisome still, had arrived at that heightened state of anxiety very quickly. Edmund's rapid decline into irritable distraction, her own long experience observing it, and what Aslan left unsaid, told her that unlike the nonsense with Peter, what troubled Edmund was serious indeed. She
considered saying something, but did not wish to be premature and was consoled that it must not be hazardous to Susan personally – if their sister had been at risk, Edmund would have told her immediately and they would have endeavored to get word to Peter.

Coddling was not in her nature. Being youngest, Lucy took ill to it and so happily ceded the mothering to Susan. But, with Susan gone, it fell to her, to the best she was able. It was not entirely altruistic for Edmund pushed himself harder than she at least could tolerate. So, as he stared, vacant and scowling, into the middle distance, she would slip a piece of bread into his hand. As he poured over Susan's letter, scribbling in the margins, she would put a glass of milk within reach. Without protest, she let her brother work on the floor of her room, when he nodded off she, covered him with a light blanket and she let him sleep as long as was possible.

Re-reading The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes and His Last Bow in anticipation for the disclosures to come, she considered, not for the first time, how similar Edmund and the detective were in their work and personal habits.

She discerned that the Rat and Crow business concerned newspapers. Edmund took to scouring the stands and shops for back issues and for two days, he was a fixture in the periodicals room at the Library. Lucy noticed the scraps beginning to appear in her room; she hoped that he had not removed them from the Library by means of scissors.

Nearly a week into the ordeal, she asked Aslan, "You will tell me when it is time to approach him?"

"No, dearheart. I intend to make you and my King suffer longer still."

Lucy snickered.

"Briony, dear, you will tell Jalur not to fret about Edmund and that I do look after him?" Of a sort.

She could not hear the she-Wolf, her long time Guard and friend, or at least not as she heard Aslan. She would talk, and Briony would listen, and Lucy would feel her friend's responses. She felt the Wolf's assent and Lucy wondered whether Jalur, Edmund's Tiger Guard, heard his King as she heard Briony. She thought not. The closer things of Narnia were to Edmund, the less he dwelt upon them – an approach Lucy did not hold with at all.

Next to Briony she felt the other, warm, loving, and for her alone. "Yes," she said, confirming the query and hugging her pillow more tightly, "I did climb a tree today! And, of course I shall read of Alice's Adventures down the Rabbit Hole! Again."

What matters it how far we go? his scaly friend replied.  
There is another shore, you know, upon the other side.  
the further off from England the nearer is to France-  
Then turn not pale, beloved snail, but come and join the dance.  
Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?  
Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you join the dance?"

It was quite beyond her skill to explain to her listening loved ones the geography of England and France, the sad Mock Turtle, the silly Gryphon, and the intricacies of the Lobster Quadrille, the whiting and the snail. She did try and by the end, the three of them were all giggling – well, Briony would, if she could but while Wolves could smile, they did not laugh.

Usually, in such a happy place, thinking of and reading with her loved ones in Aslan's Country, she would dream of them and of Narnia. She was content, knowing that however long it took to
complete her allotted tasks here, they would all be together again and forever and never parted. It was of what would come in a certain and merry future, not a dwelling upon the temporary partings of the past.

Instead, that night Lucy dreamed of poor Bruin, savage, dumb and shot dead by Trumpkin's arrow. *Treat a Beast as dumb and they become dumb.*

Lucy woke with a start. Sitting up, she looked out her window, Aslan's words still ringing in her head. The moon was full and bright, illuminating the Scrubb's backyard. Edmund was out on the lawn in a pool of light furiously swinging his wooden sword. Lucy slipped out of bed, knowing it was time.

Edmund sensed when she came outside. She saw it in the stiffening in his shoulders, though his back was turned. Lucy let the backdoor shut just loudly enough and settled on the stoop, elbows on her knees, toes wrapped around the hem of her gown.

His weapon was a length of wood, weighted with strips of lead to give it the weight and heft of a shortsword. After that nonsense of not being able to swim when they had returned to Narnia, they had all vowed to maintain their skills, even if it meant waiting for their bodies to grow into them. The mind and body would remember, with practice. So, they trained, even Peter and Susan who were not to return.

Under the shining moon, her brother, the Just King, battled the unseen foe. Sometimes, he was controlled and cautious, other times wild and furious, striking, slashing and probably swearing, though Lucy did not note it. All she heard were the faint sounds of the night, the swish of the sword through summer air, and Edmund's ragged breathing as he fought on.

She recognized the familiar Narnian training drill. Without a live opponent, the exercise was to develop strength and stamina, to continue to fight on when your back and shoulders burned with fatigue and the sword was heavy in your arms. She whispered to those who listened for her that they should tell Sir Leszi, their Swordmaster, that it had taken over a thousand years but His Royal Lazy Arse The King Edmund was finally drilling and very hard.

Susan would have urged Edmund to stop. Their sister would have a towel, a bath drawn, and a cool drink ready. But that was Susan, and such was not what Lucy offered. She noted where her brother's footwork seemed sloppy, where he misstepped as he parried, and how the sword drooped as he became fatigued.

Some time later, minutes or perhaps hours, for that was the point of the exercise, King Edmund advanced upon the enemy with a sequence of well-timed lunges. He thrust the wooden sword precisely between a narrow gap in the bean poles and then slowly withdrew, trailing vines.

Pivoting about, her brother did not bow to her. As was proper, the Just King awarded the Valiant Queen the salute of his Order, two fingers to temple. Lucy stood and returned the gesture, fist over heart, the salute of her own and the High King's Order.

Slowly, he walked to her, breathing hard, a sweaty, exhausted mess, sword hanging limply in his hand. Distantly, in her mind and heart, Lucy perceived an acrid smell of blood, misery, death, and filth.

"It has been a few years since I last saw that version on the *Don't Stop 'Til You Drop* drill," Lucy said.

"Sir Hairy the Horrid would have had me go on until dawn," Edmund replied with a grunt, using
one of his many epithets for their Satyr Swordmaster.

Lucy took the sword from him, hefting it in her hand and pleased that it did not feel as heavy as it had even a month ago. At night she had taken to practicing her knife throwing with Aunt Alberta's cutlery.

Edmund peeled his shirt off and ran it over his face. She had to hide the smile, for it was a Narnian thing, automatically and unconsciously done, scandalizing to proper Englishmen.

"With that qualifier, I spotted only a few errors, and those near the end."

Nodding, Edmund went to the backyard spigot. Turning it on, he drank sparingly then doused his shirt and face in the water that trickled out on to the grass. Lucy picked up her hem so it would not become sodden. Normally, she enjoyed wet grass between her toes, but she did hope to return to bed, eventually.

"Walk or sit?" she asked.

"I am that obvious to you, sister?" Edmund shut off the water and slung the shirt carelessly around his neck, splattering her with droplets. Again, Lucy was reminded of blood.

"Sometimes." He arched an eyebrow. "Usually," Lucy admitted, tucking the sword under her arm.

"The neighbors will think us madder than we already are if they catch us walking about like this," Edmund conceded, tilting his head to the stoop.

Girl in bedclothes with wooden sword; grubby barefoot, sopping wet, half-dressed boy. Yes, rather.

"So..." Edmund drawled, once they were settled on the step. "Perhaps, my dear Watson, you should tell me what you have already deduced from my beastly behavior for which I do most heartily apologize."

"I accept your apology, though would of course prefer that it not be necessary for you to seek my forgiveness." Lucy shifted so that Edmund would not drip upon her. "I re-read the Sherlock Holmes stories about the Naval Treaty and the Bruce-Partington plans to put myself in the proper state of Rat and Crow mind, I'll have you know."

"Oh, Lu, I am sorry," Edmund repeated feelingly.

And he was, Lucy knew that. Rat and Crow was not for her, by choice or inclination. Lucy disliked it in all its many manifestations, even if she recognized its necessity and appreciated its results.

Shrugging, she continued, "I have concluded that your and Peter's mad idea that Father is working for spies is not mad at all. Further, Susan is now tangled in it somehow. And that truly is mad, but the world has gone mad, so it does fit. And besides, it is Susan so even if it is mad, it will make sense in some extraordinary way that smacks of the adroit management that only our sister could ever contrive."

She had to stop for a breath. "I believe that covers it in pertinent part."

"Just so." Edmund took her hand in his, smiling fondly. "It has become so tangled I am not sure where to begin."

Shaking her head, she squeezed his hand in return. "You forget, Edmund, I am not Peter and so do not recommend, nor is it necessary to, begin at the beginning. Tell me the end, enough so that I
may speak to Aslan, listen to him, and learn what I must do."

Taking a deep breath, she could perceive Edmund mustering his thoughts. "As you say, Father is working for spies, in New York. We really know nothing of it. I do not think it of substance."

Into the lingering silence, Lucy prompted with the logical follow on, still unstated, "And Susan?" Edmund was not, by nature, a confiding person.

"Do you remember the term we used to describe the agent in place who coordinated the agents on the ground and in the air and communicated back to Cair? The go-between who held the strings?"

"You and Susan called them Spiders." Lucy managed to say it without hinting too strongly at her distaste.

"By my read, Susan has become a spider for a British agent working in Washington. She is also working for a highly placed intelligence officer or officers at the British Embassy."

Lucy giggled. She could not help it and had to stick a fist in her mouth to keep from continuing and very inappropriately, too. "Don't scowl at me, Edmund. You must admit, it is the sort of sleight of hand only Susan could manage."

Grimacing, Edmund nodded and clasped his hands in front of him. Lucy shifted the sword and set it on the step at their feet. Susan. A spy for British intelligence.

"She is safe?" Lucy asked, more to confirm. "You would have told me right away if something was wrong because if you did not, I should beat you over the head with that sword and then turn your remnants over to Peter for a more thorough thrashing still." She gave the sword a nudge with her foot for emphasis.

"Safe as far as I know," Edmund said.

"And safe as far as you guess, surmise, ponder, think, and speculate?" she pressed. Edmund could be wily and though he would never lie to any of them, she could not match him in this arena of verbal obfuscation. Precision was necessary. "Did I miss any contingency?"

"Believe," Edmund supplied, smiling again.

"Susan is safe as far as you guess, surmise, ponder, think, speculate, or believe?"

"Yes. And, I guess, surmise, ponder, think, speculate, and believe that our sister is accomplishing very important work in furtherance of the Allied cause."

Having inserted herself into such a preposterous position, Lucy would have expected no less from her sister. Susan was incapable of doing anything poorly and could not bear to see a sloppy or indiscreet operation. Disharmony, incompetence, and a job badly done made Susan almost physically ill.

Lucy put her consoling hands over his. "So our sister and father our safe, they are doing good work, yet something troubles you?"

Edmund leaned in close and whispered, "Susan has learned that the Allies have a means of overhearing and deciphering secret Nazi coded communications."

She considered this, both the words and the gravity with which Edmund spoke them. She whispered in return, "And if that was known, the Nazis might change the code or something, so the
Allies would not be able to understand it at all."

He nodded again and looked at her with an expression of such anguish, Lucy gasped.

Later, each of them would be able to recall with painful clarity the exact moment when they learned the full scope of Hitler's hatred, so very like what the Witch and Miraz had done to their beloved Narnians. Lucy clutched Edmund's hand as he shared his awful burden, Susan's review of a communication she should have never seen, Sallowpad's somber revelations, and the confirmation in the newspapers.

Hands entwined, they wept together a little, and talked more of death and war, on the back stoop of a dull row house in Impington in the middle of an English summer night.

Lucy finally nudged her brother. Birds were beginning to sing; dawn was not far away. "Come. Even I can see you will catch your death."

Edmund was stumbling in his weariness and did not seem to notice when Lucy guided him to her own room. He toppled like a tree on to her bed and was asleep in a moment. Quietly, she slid the wooden sword under the bed and with the extra blanket and pillow she kept there, made a nest on the hard floor.

Closing her eyes that would see no more sleep that night, Lucy gave herself over to Aslan. She curled next to him, buried her face in his mane and wept for the million and so many more already dead, and those who would die before the war would end. She accepted gratefully the wisdom he gave, the strength he lent her. She sat in communion with those she loved and let them comfort her aching heart.

Peter needed to be told but Edmund would have to do it when they saw each other.

She called out in her prayers to Susan. *May you be comforted, Sister. Aslan is well pleased. I love you and am proud of you.*

She then pondered what else she might do. Lucy wondered where the nearest synagogue was, if there were any Jewish families in Cambridge, and if they knew more of this situation or if they were as ignorant as the rest of the world seemed to be. She thought how she might learn of the children who came to England in the Kindertransport. She would find copies of those clippings from *The London Daily Telegraph* herself and mail them to Churchill, the Cabinet and their MPs and ask a lot of pointed questions about what they were going to do about it.

Most of all, Lucy considered, even beyond the Nazi blindness, how much hatred had been sown in pursuit of religions purportedly based on love, compassion, and peace. She increasingly disapproved of their family's vicar, Father Donald, a man whose prejudices were far broader than his understanding, with a mind as a narrow as needle, but never so sharp, and who professed knowing a God who was a total stranger to her. It was unfair to so generalize, but to Lucy, the likes of Father Donald were coming to stand for something she disliked mightily and trusted even less. While such persons did not individually cause what was now occurring, neither had they ever done enough to prevent it by her judge, and the intolerance they modeled would certainly be a contributing factor.

*Aslan?*

*Yes, my lioness?*

*(She always giggled when he called her that.)*
I am angry and sad. Are these feelings taking me further from you?

You hear me now, Lucy, as you ever do.

Yes, I suppose.

I think your friends would like to hear of Alice, the croquet game and the flamingo. Would you read it for us?

The chief difficulty Alice found at first was in managing her flamingo: she succeeded in getting its body tucked away, comfortably enough, under her arm, with its legs hanging down, but generally, just as she had got its neck nicely straightened out, and was going to give the hedgehog a blow with its head, it would twist itself round and look up in her face, with such a puzzled expression that she could not help bursting out laughing: and when she had got its head down, and was going to begin again, it was very provoking to find that the hedgehog had unrolled itself, and was in the act of crawling away: besides all this, there was generally a ridge or furrow in the way wherever she wanted to send the hedgehog to, and, as the doubled-up soldiers were always getting up and walking off to other parts of the ground, Alice soon came to the conclusion that it was a very difficult game indeed.

Lucy dozed off dreaming of Hedgehogs and large, very dim, very pink birds carrying messages to Susan in America.

16 July 1942

Dear Su:

Your letters came in pretty quick together, so you must forgive me for the late reply. I have also been busy with all sorts of beastly remedial school work, you know, doing sums, struggling with the basic readers, looking at maps of Africa and trying to remember all our colonies. Mythology has been dreary too, reading about how Gryphons used to keep the gold or were as good as gold for somebody or other in Africa, or was it Asia? Africa, I think. I really think Uncle Harold and Aunt Alberta have a problem, they collect so many newspapers. The advantage though is that with the Daily Telegraph lying about, I can usually manage the crossword and puzzles with the right clues.

So, all is well here, other than my desire to murder Eustace, of course. I have shared the substance of your letters with Lucy and she sends her love. I have not been able to write much of anything of your news to Peter – you know how he is about letters and I understand some of the chaps around the University aren’t above reading his mail and causing all sorts of trouble. So, I shall wait until I see him to tell your tale.

And, of tales, I love the story you are telling me, thank you ever so much. I am trying to imagine what the Just King might say to the Gentle Queen on the matter of talking Rats and talking Crows. (Talking animals! What great invention! Almost as good as Jules Verne or Alice’s Adventures!) I could never think of anything like that.

But, I shall try to write back in the same spirit. First off, the Just King does not like that Lord Peridan at all. The Just King feels sorry for the Gryphon rider, and I think I should wish to like him being that he is a hero of Narnia and all that, but he seems a rather weak character to me. So, make sure the Gentle Queen keeps an eye on him and at arm’s length too.

Bardon, on the other hand sounds to be an absolute brick, the sort you’d really trust at your back. I
cannot believe there would be places in Tashbaan he could not go just because he is a Talking Animal. The Valiant Queen, well, you can imagine her feelings on the subject, and the Just King is outraged at something so stupidly unfair.

As for Sallowpad, he sounds to be really as wily as a Raven, wise as a Centaur, and everything that Lord Peridan is not. For the Gentle Queen, he seems to be a mentor of the sort that maybe she did not even know she desired. The Just King is thoroughly envious that the Gentle Queen has such a teacher and urges her to make the most of the opportunity. The Just King regrets to say that Sallowpad surely outstrips his own knowledge and believes that the Gentle Queen could but profit and grow with such a Raven.

Those Ettins are a ghastly sort, to be sure. The Centaur Darkwool is mighty put out that the Gentle Queen and Lord Peridan are peddling his prophecies like cheap scents in a Tashbaan market. Still, those predictions make for an entertaining read. (I think I forgot to mention, by the by, but Harold and Alberta subscribe to that rot and have all sorts of dodgy astrology lying about. Rubbish it is, thought it amused me that the Calormenes were as gullible as our aunt and uncle).

The Just King was shocked to learn that in addition to the Ettins' well known craving for human flesh, that they are imprisoning Native Narnians in the Witch's old castle and cooking them as well. The Rats and Crows that overheard that bit of news are to be commended; deciphering Ettin is a dicey business and the Giants of the North do not make it easy to be understood.

Were the High King and the Just King to have their druthers, they would immediately launch an assault upon the Witch's former territory to free the Native Narnians. Unfortunately, the castle of Jadis is deep into Ettin controlled lands. Reluctantly, the Just King concurs with Sallowpad and the High King that the better approach is to concentrate upon the securing the Lone Islands and achieving overall victory.

The Just King is very pleased to learn of the Gentle Queen's efforts in that regard and that the much-needed Gryphons and War Horses are to be delivered soon to the Lone Islands. The crossing of the Bight of Calormen will bring that shipment within range of the Ettin fortifications and long range catapults and so it will be a risky proposition. The Just King is confident that the Rats and Crows will continue to serve and that through stealth and by Aslan's grace, the Gryphons and War Horses will arrive in good time.

To that end, the Just King further observes that moving against the Witch's castle might reveal to the Ettins that Rats and Crows are reading their communications. Ettins are not, in the nature, subtle creatures – they are savage giants after all. Still, if they believe that their messages are compromised, they may cease communicating. Other valuable communication flows the same way and it is conceivable that important messages about planned Ettin actions in the Lone Islands and the Bight of Calormen could be jeopardized. With profound regret, but keeping the overall goals of the campaign in mind, the Just King agrees with Sallowpad that Rat and Crow infiltration of Ettin messages must be kept in utter confidence. He exhorts the Gentle Queen to maintain this secrecy and the Just King shall as well.

The Just King knows this is very difficult for all Free Narnians and admits to deep misgivings. He shall pray to Aslan for further guidance.

Based upon his own review of the crier sheets and communications from the High King, the Just King understands there is increasing pressure upon the Tisroc to invade the Northern Marshes in preparation for a direct march upon the Ettin stronghold of Harfang. He urges the Gentle Queen to redouble her efforts to dissuade the Calormenes of so foolhardy an action. The wisdom in the Kings' counsels is that the Free Narnians are still too weak for such an effort and though the
Marsh-wiggles can be counted on for support, such an enterprise appears very premature.

Further, based upon the crier sheets, the Just King concurs with Sallowpad's assessment of the Grand Vizier. Good man though he is, the Grand Vizier stands in line behind the Tisroc and his policies are not friendly to Narnia. Should the Tisroc fall to illness or treachery, it could go ill for Narnia. The Just King looks forward to reading more of the Gentle Queen's efforts in that area.

Last, the Just King thinks the Cookbook was brilliant. It was also horrible and disturbing, especially in light of what has since come to pass regarding the reopening of the Witch's castle as a prison for the murder of Native Narnians. The Just King knows that this unfortunate coincidence – if coincidence it could be called – is deeply troubling to the Gentle Queen. Though the Gentle Queen pursued this scheme all unknowing of how close it was to the truth, the Just King believes he senses Aslan's paws in this matter. Surely the Great Lion of Narnia is guiding his Gentle Queen's steps. By dwelling as she was on the Ettins' known fondness for Human flesh during their Autumn Fests, the Gentle Queen was already remembering the unthinkable and so was able to see more clearly and more quickly what others do not – that the Ettins are surely as savage to the Native Narnians as the real Miraz and Jadis before them. Be comforted at least that the Just King understands of what the Gentle Queen writes. She is in his thoughts and prayers and wishes he were there with her, though surely she needs him not.

So, how's that, Su? It's not as good as the story you are telling and I'm just your younger and really thick schoolboy brother.

With love and overflowing admiration, your brother,

Edmund

A/n

Digressions is us, and what’s another 5,000 words, right?

This Spare Oom chapter borrows freely from the Narnia side of things. Mr. Hoberry and his introduction, the Rats and Crows, the Orders and their salutes, Lucy's romantic past, Satyr Swordmaster Sir Leszi, She-Wolf Briony, Sir Jalur the Tiger, His Royal Lazy Arse's aversion to drilling, and other references and hints build upon By Royal Decree, The Palace Guard and the very short, Black As Rat And Crow, all available at my profile, http://www.fanfiction.net/u/1873140/
"Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer."
Sun-tzu, The Art of War

With the voices in the backyard, Edmund heard Peter and Lucy return. Edmund sat at the kitchen table, poking a sausage and wondering what his brother would eat if he really had turned vegetarian. What was next for the High King? Joining the Quit India movement? Becoming a Communist? Getting a Union Card?

The summer had changed them all, likely Susan and Peter most of all. Edmund stabbed the banger more viciously, trying to stifle his own envy. He had been to Narnia, sailed to World's End, and seen Aslan. He was grateful, awed, thrilled, and felt the Lion's purposes within him. *The way forward is here, not there.* But, forward into what? It seemed his brother and older sister had made enormous strides on that journey while he had mouldered, accomplishing nothing that Aslan expected of them…

A warm, fragrant breath blew past him. It could have been a breeze through the open window, but Edmund knew better. Letting out a deep breath of his own, the ill mood faded, mostly.

*Thank you.*

At Fulbourn Fen, as he slowly mastered his grief, Aslan had told him to be patient and to give his trust when the time came. While he had trained himself to patience, Edmund was not trusting. Memories of voices still too freshly heard from behind the Wall to Aslan's Country pushed themselves upward, carrying for him a taint of something perilously close to regretful might-have-beens. Edmund recalled so clearly Sallowpad's frequent admonishment that the Just King read minds and ill intentions better than hearts. The Raven had lacked the profound sensitivity of the mammals, yet for all that, Sallowpad had been unerringly perceptive. Of all the lessons he had learned from the beloved Raven, this was one he had never truly mastered, though he had had the opportunity for ample instruction and no one else to blame.

*So a test of trust awaits me?*

*I love you, Edmund. There will be no test. There will be a path for you to choose.*

*I shall need your guidance when that time comes.*

*You do not walk alone on this journey, my King. I am always with you, and I through others. We will be there when you need us.*

*You will show me what I am supposed to do?*

*Do you doubt me?*

*No. I doubt myself.*

*I do not.*
Edmund felt the Lion's breath, and then the immediacy of his presence was gone.

"Oi! Eustace! Not like that!" Peter called from outside. "You would cut your own head off!"

Eustace was trying so hard to not be irritable he was driving Edmund spare. He had finally given his cousin the wooden, weighted sword they had hidden all summer under Lucy's bed. While Peter and Lucy went out for a walk to discuss the revelations of Susan's letters and Lucy's actions that summer in light of them, Edmund sent Eustace outside to attack bean poles and wave the sword around until he burned off some of his curiosity. They would have to bring Eustace into their confidence, to a point. Certainly, as a Narnian, Eustace needed to know of the depravities being wrought against the peoples of Europe. Susan's own more shadowy role was for the family alone.

He heard Lucy begin to patiently explain the basic drills – drills Eustace would soon be regretting. The rigor of his sister's instruction was straight from the manual of pain and torture to which their swordmaster, Sir Leszi, had subscribed.

"Were we ever that awful?" Peter asked, coming through the back door.

"I have asked myself the same question and concluded no, because Sir Pointy Sharp Stick would have murdered us in our beds. As for the General, she would have never let us take the field, Monarch or no."

Edmund rose from the table, handing Peter some buttered bread from a plate.

Did the vegetarianism include all animal products? His brother took it, so maybe he was still eating dairy? Cheese? Didn't some vegetarians eat fish?

"So, what is next?"

"July," Edmund replied, now leading the way upstairs.

"July – there was a lot of debate in the papers regarding the Russian pressure on Roosevelt and Churchill to open the second front in Europe," Peter said, following him back to the bedroom. "Which led us to where we were this afternoon."

Peter was referring to the memorial for the dead of Dieppe they had attended. Edmund nodded. "Yes, that is in there, which Susan describes as the whole business of the Galmans pressing for a raid upon the Northern Marshes." He quashed for now mentioning that aspect of this story's direction. It would all be arrived at in good time. "The next series also has them dealing with the Grand Vizier, Vice President Wallace."

"He is a bit odd, isn't he?"

Peter settled on the little bed in the bedroom again and neatly wiped his hands on his handkerchief.

"I stopped trying to collect every diatribe the English papers launch at him. I believe it no understatement that there is no man in America more feared by British politicians than Vice President Wallace."

"And the Tisroc will not be living forever," Peter commented, thumbing the next stack.

"Quite," Edmund agreed, perversely pleased. Peter was learning the key and switching the names out. With that fluency, this would go much faster. "The scenarios are very ill for England. If Roosevelt dies, Wallace becomes President; if Roosevelt chooses not to stand for re-election in two years, Wallace might take his place."
"Do you think Peridan really plays poker with the Vice President of the United States?"

"Oh yes, no doubt there. Next up you'll learn all about that and the excellent instruction the Gentle Queen has received in the fine art of lock picking."

Susan sighed and shuffled more of the dreary paper around. Their file on Roosevelt's deal with Molotov was taking up a lot of space. Tebbitt had learned at Cissy Paterson's party that Roosevelt had promised the Soviets 120,000 men in Europe to relieve the pressure on the Eastern Front. That was quite grandly generous of the American President given that there was no way that many soldiers, in Europe, would be American. Churchill had reluctantly countersigned this communiqué, leaving them with a gaping, Now What? The Americans were too overconfident, and were fools to think that any sort of force could be landed in Europe now.

She bit back a yawn and Guy snorted from where he was dozing on the office couch. "You should let me get you home, Miss Susan."

"There's nothing at home," Susan corrected gently. Mum had had taken the train up to New York with Lord Halifax and would probably manage a visit with Father. She did not have an invitation to any of the minor parties going on and Tebbitt had opted for a poker night at Charles Marsh's home.


Susan shook her head and returned to the filing. "How is Agnes getting on with her new friend?" Susan could not quite refer to an animal, any animal, even a dumb one, as "pet." Aversion to the word, indeed, it was nearly an epithet, was too ingrained. She did not understand how Polly was able to keep pets or, worse still, work in a zoo, even one as naturalistic as Whipsnade.

"Sadie and Earl don't like it much, but no one's gonna say no to Agnes." Guy shifted on the couch and moved his boots across the coffee table. "After all the stories you tell, I'd kinda hoped she'd get a dog or a cat, even a bird."

"Rats are extraordinary creatures, Guy," Susan countered stoutly.

"It's them tails," Guy responded with a shiver.

Susan shrugged. "I will admit to bias. Lady Willa was a very special Rat, even by the very high standards of her own kind." She sighed for the loss of her friend. "Admittedly, Willa really delighted in being the harbinger of doom. She was an excellent spy and very good at maths."

"Maths…" Guy muttered with another disbelieving snort.

"Oh yes. Especially if it involved body counts, or numbers of spears or sails of invading forces. She was even more conspiracy minded than my brother, and was invaluable for intelligence gathering whenever we had to take the field against an enemy. Willa had an extraordinary ear for gossip and could relate it as accurately as a tape recorder."

Willa would have loved wartime Washington. Imagine the ground they could cover with a battalion of Rats as savvy as the head of the Narnian Mischief had been! Cost efficient, as well, for Willa would have worked for in kind pay of cheese and dried meat. She had been very fond of sweets as well.

"Can't say Agnes' rat seems all that smart."

"I'm sure she is …"
The shrill ring of the telephone interrupted. Susan tensed as Guy took the call; at this hour, it would not be "official" business.

"Hello?"

Pause.

"Sure. Where are you?"

Pause.

"We'll be right over." Guy slammed down the phone; Susan was already gathering her things.

"It's Peridan," the Gryphon said. "He needs our help."

They galloped out of the Narnian Residence and were flying above the darkened city of Tashbaan in moments. Bardon pushed hard and they quickly arrived and circled Tarkaan Kidrash's posh home where the great Lords gambled. They espied Peridan nervously pacing on a balcony of an upper floor. Bardon flew down and hovered awkwardly at the stone rail.

"Thank Aslan you're here!" Peridan called softly and urgently motioning them toward him. From the house they could hear men's voices, rough and laughing. "Can you land?"

Beneath her, Bardon's mighty wings labored to hold their position aloft. The balcony looked too narrow to Susan's eye to support the Gryphon.

"No," Bardon said, breathing hard with the effort. "Not with Queen Susan riding."

"Should I jump off?" Susan asked, ready to swing her leg over.

"No!" Peridan cried. "Half a moment!" He darted back inside and came out seconds later with what looked like some sort of satchel.

Looking about frantically, and seeing no other option, Peridan exclaimed, "On three!" and started his swing.

"Don't throw it!" Bardon cried, but Peridan was already counting down, "Three!"

Susan let go of the Gryphon's riding collar. "Pardon me, Bardon, but I'm going to be gripping rather tightly." She held on with her legs and twisted about, trying not to think of what might happen to whatever was in the satchel if it fell three levels to the paving stones below in the darkened courtyard.

"Two!"

She held out her hands, leaning forward, as far as she dared, keeping her eyes on the case Peridan was methodically swinging. Fortunately, there was enough light coming from the house to allow her to see the bag.

On the downbeat to Bardon's wings, Peridan called, "One!" and threw the bag. For a heart stopping moment, Susan teetered dangerously on the Gryphon's back, but on his upstroke, he steadied and the case landed in her hands. She hauled it up and tied it to Bardon's collar.

"What is this?" she demanded.

Peridan glanced behind him as a voice bellowed from within Kidrash's house. "Are you in or out,
"Peridan?"

"I'm in!" he yelled back.

"There's a scroll in there I got a look at!" he hissed. "It's important! Make a copy of it and get back here within the hour or we're all to Tash's hell."

Peridan dashed back inside, his lazy, indolent speech at odds with pace at which he was moving. "Can't a man take a …" Fortunately, he slammed the balcony door so they were spared the completion of his crude commentary.

"To the Residence?" Bardon asked, pulling away from the balcony.

"Yes, please," Susan replied, settling herself securely on his back and trying to examine the case cradled in her lap more closely in the dim light of the overhead stars and half moon.

"Oh bother!" she muttered.

"What?" Bardon asked, catching an updraft and beating powerfully toward the Narnian Residence.

"This case has a lock!"

They were circling above the compound in moments; Susan jumped off before Bardon had even settled, hauling the case with her.

"I have to get my picks! Maybe the safe cracker is still here!"

Susan rushed into their building and pelted down the dark stairway. If the cagey, clever thief was still in his offices, he could open the case in nothing flat. If he was gone, she would have to do it herself. She could do it. Could. Would.

Raucous singing decided the question for her.

Oh Aslan, not the Dragon Song… it was as bad as the Moose Song. Susan ran toward the foul voices, turned a corner and rushed into the thief's work room where a drunken and slurred chorus greeted her amid the ethanol stink of Dwarf Lightning.

A dragon has come to Narnia today.  
We've asked him to leave, but he won't go away.  
He's talked to the High King and they worked out a deal.  
No homes will he burn and no crops will he steal.  

Now there is but one catch, we dislike it a bunch.  
Twice a year he invites a virgin to lunch.  

With a regal, condescending glare, she took in the two Red Dwarfs and the Otter (well that explained the choice of song) at the work table.

The master thief was there as well, slumped over the table, his masked face buried in a bowl. The Raccoon looked to be so far into his cups, he was going to be no help at all with cracking the lock on the satchel.

"Good evening, Sirs!" Susan called.

"Queen Susan!" one of the Dwarfs cried, leaping to his feet. "Our pardon, we…"
"Oi! Piss off, or get pissed!" the Otter squeaked. He squeaked again, more loudly, and in pain when the other Dwarf thwacked him on the side of the head. The Otter snapped his nasty, sharp little teeth in retaliation.

Susan did not have time for this nonsense. Peridan did not have time for it either. She hurried to the Raccoon's side, hoping it was not as it seemed. Unfortunately, their infamous, highly skilled thief was near unconscious with drink. Unlike Otters and Dwarfs, Raccoons were notorious lightweights at the drinking table.

"Shur ding, mizzer, bright 'n breazy," the Raccoon muttered, then rolled over and covered one eye with his normally highly sensitive and dexterous paw.

"Never mind," Susan muttered dismissively. "I shall do it myself."

She wasted no further time with the drunkards, collecting her lock picking tools from their appropriate shelf and dashing again out of the workroom. Behind her, she heard the Dragon's Song chorus pick up again and fade as she ran back up the stairs to the office.

_Do virgins taste better than those who are not?_
_Are they salty, or sweeter, more juicy or what?_
_Do you savor them slowly? Gulp them down on the spot?_
_Do virgins taste better than those who are not?_

Bardon was already waiting for her in the office. "The cracksman?" he asked.

"Drunk. I shall have to open it. Please do not tell me how little time we have."

Susan set the case down on her desk, opened her set of picks and got to work. It looked to be a relatively straightforward lock, nothing as complex as the Dwarf-made ones the Raccoon thief had made her practice upon. Of course, she had not been operating under so short a deadline either and this work required patience and care. Picking a lock could not be rushed.

Gently, she inserted the tension wrench into the lock and turned the plug cylinder open, listening for the click. The lock was very small; she used a very small pick to begin to delicately manipulate the pins. With the pick in the keyhole, she began lifting the pins – there were only four, Aslan be praised, no fancy grooves for catching picks and foiling thieves. She listened and felt for the telltale click when each pin fell into position, the top in its housing, resting on the shear line and the lower part resting in the plug.

The fourth pin slid into place with a soft click. Gently, she rotated the tension wrench and the lock sprang open. Next to her, patient and observing, Bardon sighed. "Well done."

"Thank you." She quickly removed her tools and began rifling through the case. A scrap of parchment wedged into the top made her catch her breath. _Oh my._

"Bardon!"

The Gryphon swung his good eye about, read the paper in her hand and blinked in shock. "The Grand Vizier?"

"This is his case! Peridan stole the Grand Vizier's satchel!"

"We'd best get it back before he leaves Tarkaan Kidrash's gaming table."

"You do have a flair for understatement, Friend."
With a deep breath, Susan sorted through the case, but it seemed innocuous. Packets of seeds, a small portrait of the man's wife, draft resolutions for the War Council they had already seen.

At the bottom, she found their goal. A scroll, entitled, After The Ettin War And Calormen's Role In The Eastern Sea.

She scanned it quickly, with rising alarm and anger. The good news, Calormen did assume they would prevail against the Ettins and Telmar. The bad news, by War's end, Calormen expected to see Narnia in financial ruin, her once dominant place in sea trade overwhelmed by greater Calormene resources, and Narnia's colonies "emancipated" – with Calormen "encouragement" if necessary. This was nothing less than a map to Calormene designs for the future – a future with Narnia poor, marginalized, and subordinate.

The scroll was in the Grand Vizier's own hand, and he was the man but a breath and heartbeat away from the Tisroc, who was not going to live forever.

"Is that what we are looking for?" Guy asked.

"Yes," Susan said, rising and hurrying to the Photostat machine. Their office was fortunate to have one.

Susan carefully took the pictures, front and back, several sets, ignoring how her hands were trembling as they positioned Vice President Wallace's incendiary pamphlet on the screen. It was hot, nerve-wracking, slow work.

"The negatives look clear, Mrs. Caspian," Guy said, inspecting the prints. She trusted him to tell if they had a clean set.

"Good. Thank you, Phone up the Colonel," Susan told Guy. "Get him out of bed. He will want to wake up someone in photography and get these developed. Tell him we will leave the negatives in the safe."

While Guy made the call, Susan carefully reassembled the case and locked it. She put the Photostat negatives in the safe just as Guy was hanging up the telephone.

Guy grabbed the keys and hurried to the door. Susan grabbed the briefcase, following, and they ran back to the car.

They made it to Tebbitt with ten minutes still to spare. The pilot was loitering at the corner outside the house, pacing nervously.

Susan rolled down the window of the car and as Guy cruised slowly by, she tossed the briefcase back to Tebbitt.

"Got it?" Tebbitt asked, as nervy as she had ever seen him.

"Of course!"

"The lock?"

"Not a problem! Go!"

Tebbitt awarded them a mocking salute, then spun about and jogged into the house.

By the time they made it back to the Embassy, the Colonel's car was in the lot, the lights were on
throughout the Annex and there was yelling from the basement as the Colonel harassed the photography unit to convert the Photostat negatives into usable, readable documents. She and Guy waited in the office.

"Coffee at this hour, Guy?" Susan asked, easing into the couch. She would love to remove her shoes and put her legs up. Guy was pouring the dregs from their percolator into a cup.

"Well, I figured that…"

"Drink up, Mr. Hill!" Colonel Walker-Smythe was standing in the office doorway, looking very alert and neatly pressed for a man summoned from his bed not an hour before.

Guy nodded and drained his cup. "I thought as much." Jangling the car keys in his pocket, he took the envelope Colonel Walker-Smythe handed him.

"I'm calling New York now," the Colonel said. "I'll tell them to expect you and that they need to make sure you sleep before they let you drive back here."

Guy nodded. "I'm fine, sir," and hurried out the door.

With the Colonel retreating to his office to make the calls, Susan moved across the office to straighten up and lock the safe. Except… well, that was odd. Searching the floor, she found the two splints they used as a minor security measure – inserted into the hinges of the safe, if they fell out, it meant someone might have opened the safe. In their mad rush, she simply did not remember what she had done with them. *Did I forget to put the splints back in the hinges when we left?*

"Something wrong, Mrs. Caspian?" So deeply trying to reconstruct what precisely she and Guy had done, the Colonel's intruding voice startled her.

"Sorry, Sir. The splints are on the floor. I could not remember if I had replaced them in the hinges when we left to take the case back to Tebbitt."

The Colonel frowned, looking thoughtful. With a grimace, he shook his head, "I had the photographer yammering at me when I came in, so I do not remember if the splints were in the hinges or not. You may have replaced them and they fell out when I opened it the safe."

"That's the thing, Sir. We were in such a rush, I do not remember what I did. We should ask Guy when he calls in. Perhaps he remembers."

"Collectively, that's sloppy work on our part."

"Yes, sir, I...

The Colonel held up a hand, cutting her off. "It's a jointly shared fault, Mrs. Caspian. It also demonstrates both the importance of redundant measures and how catastrophes frequently result not from one large error, but many smaller ones, compounded."

Susan nodded her understanding and replaced the splints in the hinges, reassured of the Colonel's support, but still harboring a nagging concern. It had been just such a small thing that had signaled a far more serious concern at Cair Paravel. Though, in that case, the missing splints had been but one in a series of ill events. Sallowpad had called it *The rule of threes*...

"Thank you, Sir, but I am still not easy about this."

"I do not wish you to be complacent, Mrs. Caspian. Thank you for noticing and speaking up."
Follow up with Hill and then remind everyone of the importance of all security measures in the morning."

He stifled a yawn. "I'll run you by your flat. We both need a few hours. That document is going to cause quite the stir in New York and once they send it on to London, we'll be able to hear Churchill bellowing about it all the way across the Atlantic."

Colonel Walker-Smythe gestured for her to precede him out the door.

"If Roosevelt dies, Wallace is President," Susan mused. "If Roosevelt does not run in '44, I suppose Wallace might be the frontrunner for the Democratic Party."

The Colonel's look was very grim, as he locked the door and pocketed the key. "New York and London are going to want us to dig up more on Wallace after this. With views such as what is in that pamphlet, we won't want him on the Democratic ticket in '44."

"Drew Pearson said he did not have information on Wallace, but that he thought others did." Susan flipped off the hall lights and followed the Colonel down the quiet hall. Mr. Sykes' drunken party in his workroom seemed to have broken up; she did not hear them and wondered if the Colonel had a hand in ending the festivities.

"Yes, and I think we know who has that information and what we might trade in exchange. If the party holding the information can be persuaded to make a trade."

As he closed and locked the outer door, Colonel Walker-Smythe surprised her by turning and addressing her squarely. "I noticed your picks in the office, Mrs. Caspian and of course saw that Mr. Sykes was in no condition to open a door by the knob, much less pick a lock. Did you have a hand in getting that pamphlet, other than running courier?"

Nothing missed his attention. "Yes, Sir," Susan answered levelly. "The Vice President's pamphlet was in his locked briefcase, so I had to pick the lock."

He was too well trained to let much emotion show in his face other than the fatigue they both felt. The Colonel held out his hand and she returned his warm handshake.

"Well done, Mrs. Caspian. You continue to surprise me with talents I would expect to see in a far more experienced woman."

That was, of course, a comment to which it was better if Mrs. Caspian made no reply at all.

Peter found his imagination was failing him. Susan. His sister. The elder and Gentle Queen of Narnia had been party to stealing a document from the Vice President of the United States, and assuring its delivery to Prime Minister Churchill who, by this account, was inspired to "cataclysms of wrath" upon reading it. Tossing the Vice President's purloined briefcase from a balcony to a flying Gryphon made for a thrilling tale, yet, Peter did not think it was embellishment. While not literally, they had certainly figuratively, been airborne, three flights up. The desperation, tension, and anxiety were real even if the specific detail of a hand off by Gryphon was not.

But, really, was it a surprise? Susan had only been outmatched once and that was because she was too noble and in a way too naïve to have resorted to the violence that came far more easily to Rabadash. In Rabadash, she had thought she had found an equal who was not a brother; he was to be a helpmate and co-ruler as clever and subtle as she was, a fitting consort to a powerful, beautiful, and visionary woman. It could have been an extraordinary partnership, a marriage of exemplary strengths, with each tempering the weakness of the other. But, the Calormene prince
had outplayed her. In Narnia, Rabash had shown extraordinary self-control and very carefully concealed his true nature. They had all been deceived, and had been so desperate for an alliance and an ordered succession, they had barely seen the warning signals in time.

Strange that he was thinking on Rabash and that man's immorality. Peter was finding that his admiration for his sister and her deeds done was uncomfortable, to what, exactly? His moral certitude, he supposed. The theft was important, vital to the British national interest, but still, when stripped away of the glamour and excitement, wrong. It might be, was, justified and necessary, and they were at war. A million Jews were already dead and tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians as well. Desperate times, desperate measures. If they did not fight, did not do what needed to be done to win, then these might be the last free decisions they ever made.

He would not judge Susan or his fellow Englishmen here – he was not High King over these decisions. Judgment belonged to Aslan alone and it did seem the Great Lion was guiding Susan here. But, that was her story, not his. These things might be necessary – but necessity did not make them right.

When Guy called in from New York, he unfortunately had no better recollection of the splints in the safe than she had. Susan filed it away, but did not have the opportunity to fret on it over much, for the telephones were very busy. The Colonel had been on with New York all morning, which meant everyone else had to wait.

Eventually, Tebbitt sauntered in predictably late, but looking none the worse the wear.

"Good morning, Mrs. Caspian."

Susan eyed him suspiciously. The earnest greeting was unusually normal. No "Luv" or "Honey." No attempt to steal her pencils or clutter her work space with his coffee, bun, or body.

"Good morning, Wing Commander."

"Gladys still out getting the morning tea?"

"Yes. The Colonel is in his office on the telephone."

Tebbitt edged closer to her desk, and suddenly dropped to a crouch. Susan instinctively drew back.

"Sorry," he muttered, pulling out of her intimate space. "I was wondering about that pamphlet..."

She could have kept him in suspense, but truly, what he had finessed was a nerveless miracle. "As soon as I saw it, we called the Colonel in. He took one look at it and had Guy drive it up to New York last night." She tilted her head. "The Colonel's been on the phone all morning with Intrepid. The Vice President's pamphlet is already on its way to the Prime Minister himself."

Tebbitt flushed a little and steadied himself on the desk. "So I was right? I didn't have much time – I just thought I'd better ring you lot up straight off. It looked to be something that the higher ups would want to see..."

"Oh yes, very much so." Susan dropped her voice a little lower. "You will hear it from the Colonel; I suspect you may hear it from Mr. Stephenson as well."

The pilot rose, letting out a deep shaky breath, before replacing it was a rather silly grin. The flush deepened.
Susan held out her hand. "You did very well, Wing Commander. Congratulations. When you see the Colonel, you will hear that from those whose praise matters rather more than mine."

Tebbitt returned the handshake, but shook his head warningly. "It took all of us, Mrs. Caspian. You were brilliant, and I'll make sure they hear about it."

"Well, Guy is the one who got us there, here, and back in such good time. As you say, it was all of us."

"What about the lock on the case? I was worried about that. Were you able to get Sykes to open it?"

"Unfortunately our expert lock picker and safe cracker was near unconscious on rum. I had to open it myself."

His frank and admiring look was warmly gratifying. "Brilliant, Mrs. Caspian! Absolutely brilliant!" The impish grin should have warned her. Tebbitt leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek. "Captain Caspian is very lucky man!"

Queen Susan was unable to form an appropriately disapproving reply, for at that moment a flock of messenger Birds all swooped in together, trumpeting their hysterical distress, Liluye's cries rising even above the screeching din.

Peridan ducked, throwing his hands up over his head. Susan did not have time to deal with the erratic, flapping Birds for a second later, Prince Cor strode into the office, jubilant.

"Queen Susan! Peridan! Have you heard the news?"

Behind him, Fraxi hovered, her cheerful green hue turned to a waxy, unhappy white.

"The Archenlanders are finally moving! We are marching North to engage the Ettins!"

Peter found Edmund, as before, sitting on the steps, reading his book about "gardening." His brother quickly tucked the book away again. Peter thought there was more going on here than being protective of the book. He suspected his brother was still grieving over whom he had heard at the World's End and the book was somehow part of how he had chosen to ease the loss of those whom he had loved and heard. Not that Edmund would concede such a thing but this was not the first time that books had become a surrogate for the woman with whom Edmund had shared them.

"Archenland is Canada?"

Edmund nodded. "Before she left, it was going to be New York. Based upon what she has written, I believe now she means it to be Canada since so little happens in New York."

"So, she is telling us that Prince Cor is a Canadian, whose unit shipped out North, which is what, Europe?"

"It has to be; if it were Africa, she would have said he was deployed to the Lone Islands."

The prospect of it was sickening, but so likely, as written. "Canadians, in Europe – Susan is writing of the build up to Dieppe, isn't she?"

Again his brother nodded solemnly.

Peter had feared this was coming as soon as he comprehended the reference. Over half of the
Canadian force landing on the French beaches, over 3,000 men, were dead, captured or missing.

"Do they know if he made it out?"

"No. As of Susan's last letter, they had not heard whether he had survived or been captured."

Peter fingered the letter. He and Asim had discussed it … oh Aslan, had it only been yesterday afternoon?

"Peter?"

"Sorry, just thinking about how Dieppe seems to those from our colonies."

Edmund of course had no difficulty following the direction of his thoughts. "You discussed Dieppe with Asim?"

"Of course." Peter had to collect himself, and ran a hand over his face. "He rode in the Arab Revolts and remembers Gallipoli vividly. It was a very personal matter for him and Dieppe was opening old wounds."

It was so personal, Peter felt uncomfortable disclosing to his brother the full of Asim's conflict. Asim was unquestionably loyal to the Allies, to the British he served, and yet also confessed that his commanders may have offered Commonwealth soldiery up as a sort of national sacrifice. Again. Yet, Asim had declined to argue as Peter had that it seemed that those of different color or from different outposts of the British Empire – Indians, Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, Caribbeans – were deemed more expendable than the British men of the Army.

Peter felt a fresh surge of empathy for Asim, and those like him. He knew very well what it was like for Asim to straddle two worlds, England and his Arab, colonial identity, living in both, loyal to both. It was not unlike the separation of Narnia and Spare Oom, High King and school boy, even, he supposed, albeit reluctantly, spy and friend.

Could he honestly say anymore that these worlds, these personas, were so distinct? The Dawn Treader hung in the next room and had appeared in a Muslim's dream. He had told the Professor as much – High King Peter of Narnia and Peter Pevensie were the same person. Amid all the Latin, Greek, and philosophy already fading from memory, Peter supposed this was the greatest lesson of his unusual summer – in Aslan's creation, individuals and worlds were not separate, but layers of an integrated whole, with one part sometimes more ascendant than others.

Was this what Plato had described? He could not remember, which was always the problem – he could comprehend the concrete application but never the theory.

Peter?" Edmund was asking again.

"Nothing. Just thinking about how difficult this was for Asim." And not just Dieppe and the wounds it reopened, Peter now understood. "What is next?"

"By my surmise, Lord Peridan gets too close to an enemy and Susan recalls a Raven's instruction to a Narnian Monarch."

Chapter 14 to follow, "Keep Your Enemies Closer"

In the category of so bizarre it could only be real, the episode described above involving the document in which the Grand Vizier outlines Calormen's post-war designs, which Peridan
"borrows," pitches to another agent for copying and then returns, closely follows an actual event described in The Irregulars. Newsman Charles Marsh showed Roald Dahl an incendiary pamphlet written by Vice President Wallace. Dahl passed the document on to another agent at the British Embassy for quick copying and return before its absence was noted. I excerpt the passage in my Live Journal.

The Dragon Song is adapted from the excellent Lord Gyric of Otershaghe's Bawdy Song Book website, my go-to place for inappropriate song lyrics.

The concept of Susan being attracted to Rabadash in a powerful "Game of Thrones" is one that Ilyria put forth in her Glimpses of Gold (NFFR Award Winner for Most Creative!) and I'm glad to be able to perpetuate that explanation here.
And Your Enemies Closer

The Queen Susan in Tashbaan
Chapter 14 – And Your Enemies Closer

If you are still with me by this point you know it already, but it bears repeating: this is not my children's Narnia! It may not be yours either! Further, references to the Tarot ahead.

Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer.
Sun-tzu, The Art of War

The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.
Carl Jung

"To Lowrey and our Canadian friends booting Nazi arse all the way back to Berlin!" Tebbitt crowed.

Susan inspected her spotty and chipped glass and discretely rubbed the rim on her skirt as Tebbitt poured them all second rounds of dark rum. The Bali Club would house all of them, no cover, plus Guy. The jazz and blues clubs in that part of Washington were one of the places in the city that were not segregated by race. It was not an especially remarkable concession to the Negro since members of Guy's extended family were always playing, dancing, singing, working, or cleaning at the Bali Club.

"To Lowrey," they all chorused. Susan managed to not grimace as she drank. She preferred the American whiskeys or Mexican tequilas to the Caribbean rums that were all so much easier to obtain than the European liquors.

Gladys was managing an unhappy brave face to Lowrey's exuberant enthusiasm, Tebbitt was obviously wistful, and the Colonel was as enigmatically observant as always. Guy was holding up the wall, sticking to Kentucky bourbon and Susan envied him for it.

Colonel Walker-Smythe cleared his throat, raised his glass again, and murmured quietly, "To Convoy AS-4."

"They sailed, Sir?"

"They did, Tebbitt."

Susan knew this already. She had seen the cables. Six ships, carrying 85 million pounds of war materiel had left New York yesterday. Two hundred tanks, howitzers, tank destroyers, and ammunition, all headed for the Suez and the Eighth Army in North Africa.

A frown ghosted across the Colonel's face.

"Something wrong, Sir?" Tebbitt asked, taking an alarming large gulp of his rum. He was "off duty" tonight, but still needlessly worried she would cut him off.

At Tebbitt's perceptive question, the Colonel's eyes flitted to hers. Susan read his unspoken message and said nothing. She and the Colonel had discussed the worrying story told in the cables
of the payload of the SS *Fairport*, the last ship in the convoy to be loaded at New York harbour. Given the rush of the order, the Americans had had to load the ships as the goods came in and did not have time to apportion the cargo. The tanks were the last to arrive, so they were all on one ship, the *Fairport*.

"It's a chancy crossing," the Colonel said with a shrug. "Better than it was now that Admiral King is finally using convoys and this one has a three destroyer escort."

Nazi U-Boats had sunk over 500 ships in the Atlantic since January, many of them along the Eastern coast of America and the Gulf of Mexico. The Nazis called it the "American Shooting Season" – picking off fat, unprotected, easily spotted ducks one after another. The losses were highly secret to avoid revealing to the American public the incompetence of their Admiral in charge of naval operations. Admiral King despised the British, and had refused to use convoys or order simple coastal blackouts. The Americans had lost a tanker in the Gulf of Mexico less than 40 miles from the Louisiana coast in June; the Americans had just sunk a U-boat that day a mere 30 miles off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.

"Still, what are the odds?" Lowrey said jovially. "They'll pound Rommel into the sand!"

"To our American allies!" With that cheery salute, Susan poured the rest of her rum into Gladys’ glass. If there were any more toasts, she was going to have to do it with something more civilized, like Kentucky sipping bourbon.

Amid the revelations of the slaughtered Jews of Europe, the Vice President's purloined pamphlet via a Gryphon aerial toss, and Cor's deployment to Dieppe, Peter had almost forgotten of the Gryphons and War Horses on their way to North Africa, and how Peridan had seduced the congresswoman into providing her support for the rearming of the British Army. There was something, not reassuring exactly but, workmanlike in Susan's letter. Every day, every letter, detailed something new, some other obstacle, some new task. They were holding dozens of strings, juggling dozens of balls. Yet, step by step, hour by hour, the War ground on, the needs continued, the death toll mounted, all oblivious to the contributions of a few people in a Washington office.

But for the nail in the shoe, the World was lost. No one detail was too small that might not matter eventually, a year or a continent away.

The problem with a job well done was that your only reward was a bigger, harder job the next time.

Susan was no longer surprised. After weeks, she knew that some member of Guy's extended family would always be everywhere she went and the Bali Club was no exception. With Charlie's trio (all second and third cousins on the father's side) starting up and Lowrey sweeping Gladys out on to the floor, Susan retreated to the quieter back tables. Agnes was there, holding court, and as she was there, so too was Tebbitt. Like a Hound to the scent, Tebbitt would seek out Agnes who was, as near as Susan could extrapolate the complex familial relations, Guy's second niece four times removed on the mother's side,

"Please, Agnes," Tebbitt was sitting across from her, cajoling, all soft pleading and winsome eyes. "I know this isn't a good place for the cards, but just a few?"

"Hello, Agnes."

Agnes smiled in return. "Hello, Susan."
Susan knew now not to offer a handshake. Whether for deeply held religious strictures, self-defense, or other reasons, Agnes wrapped herself in a cocoon of virginal impenetrability. Agnes did not touch others.

"The reading’s always the same," Guy grumbled, easing himself to a chair at the table and repeating the complaint he made as often as Tebbitt asked Agnes for just a few cards. "If you ever listened to what she said, maybe it'd do you some good."

"Reginald, there are a few cards for you tonight," Agnes countered calmly, spreading a white handkerchief over the grubby cocktail table. Her hands were fine and delicate, strange for a young woman in domestic work.

From her lap she put down in quick succession some of the cards she usually drew for Tebbitt. The changeable Moon was followed by the balancing act of the Two of Pentacles, and tonight, the Page of Swords.

"And so, Reginald, you have some act of deception to come," Agnes said, pointing to the Page of Swords.

"No surprise there!" Tebbitt exclaimed. "All in a day's work!"

The dreamy and idealistic Page of Cups followed.

"Brilliant!" Tebbitt said with so much smug satisfaction, Guy groaned. Tebbitt was always happy when Agnes pulled the Page of Cups – he would be quoting the Romantic and Victorian poets he had read at University the rest of the evening. Susan hoped he found some pretty and appreciative flirt to whom he could recite Browning and Keats. It had been amusing and a little sweet the first few times he had mockingly regaled her with Love Among the Ruins and Ode on a Grecian Urn, but really he was better off quoting romantic poetry to a girl who would act upon it!

In that vein, as she always did for Tebbitt, Agnes withdrew the Lovers and next to that card, she set one of a man standing before seven cups, all brimming with strange, wondrous, and dangerous things.

Tebbitt brightened. "The Seven of Cups! That's a good one, Agnes! Better than the Five of Wands you usually show me!"

"Reginald, I have explained this to you before," Agnes said patiently, "Seeing Swords or the Five of Wands in such close conjunction with the Lovers is usually indicative of conflict and difficulty, not fulfillment."

"But Cups aren't about conflict!"

Agnes narrowed her eyes and Tebbitt subsided. She appreciated interruptions no more than the Colonel did. "In this case, you are correct and it is different, for the Seven of Cups shows choices to come."

"So I shall have my pick of girls!" Tebbitt was nearly gloating.

"No necessarily, Reginald," Agnes corrected. "The Cups may signal, as you say, that there are good and better choices available. It may also mean that these choices are all fictions, that you really have no choice at all, or that the choices that are available have hidden dangers, or that the desirable choice is not worth the cost." Her fingers lingered over the cup with the snake in it.

He shrugged expressively. "I like having options, and that one looks splendid to me! Not like the
Three of Swords or the Five of Cups." With a knowing wink, he pushed away from the table, empty glass in hand. "And speaking of choices, I'm going to avail myself of the options available in here before Mrs. Caspian cuts me off."

Susan did not bother to respond. He could drink himself unconscious, though a drunken stupor would undermine his plans for wooing girls with poetry recitations. A few drinks beyond too many and Tebbitt couldn't keep his rhyming couplets straight. Susan left him to it and slid into his vacated seat as Agnes carefully collected her cards.

"He never listens," Guy complained, sipping his bourbon. "Don't know why you bother, Agnes."

"He hears what he wishes to," Agnes said simply. "In that he is no different than any other." Bending down, she withdrew a neat carpet bag at her feet and set it on the table. "I am glad you are here Susan, for there is someone I wish you to meet."

Susan smiled broadly and from her pocket fished out the peanuts she had picked up at the bar. "I was hoping you would bring her!"

A pointy whiskered head popped out of the bag, and a young, all white rat doe surveyed the table. "Legba," Agnes said, speaking to the rat, "I would like you to meet Susan. She is a very special woman and will appreciate you very much."

Nose twitching in the direction of the proffered nut, the rat scampered out of the bag toward Susan. "Good evening," Susan said, her fingers prickling as the rat's whiskers tickled. "It is a pleasure to meet you, my lady rat."

Legba nibbled on the nut, then more firmly bit into it and pulled it out of Susan's fingers. She retreated to the bag to gnaw on her prize. "I gave it to you, friend. I shall not steal it," Susan chided. "You are lovely indeed and Agnes is fortunate to know you."

"She likes you!" Agnes exclaimed, delighted.

"Well, I like you as well, Legba." Susan could never overcome that bias; she did not want to address any animal in the third person, as if he or she was not even there. "I still don't like her tail!" Guy put in, pushing away from the table to put more distance between himself and the rat. "Shhhh!" Susan scolded, teasing. "That is impolite. Legba will hear you criticize her and she has a perfectly lovely tail."

Agnes was already restlessly moving the cards in her lap. Susan had come to see it almost like a compulsion for Agnes. The Tarot were a means by which Agnes communicated with the rest of her world. Agnes also had learned not to push Susan too far with her interpretations. The cards Susan had so strongly associated with Lambert, the cards of Temperance and the resting Knight of the Four Swords, had reappeared periodically. When they did, she and Agnes had merely acknowledged the cards and moved on. More pleasant, Agnes knew that Susan found the images of Justice, the Knight of Pentacles, and the girl with the lion of the Strength card a comforting reminder of her absent brothers and sister. So, when those cards appeared, Susan would tell Agnes and Guy the stories prompted by those very Narnia-like images. Susan thought Agnes drew those cards frequently and deliberately in order to hear more stories.
Because she always did, out of politeness, Susan asked, "Do you have something to read to me, Agnes?"

In answer, Agnes quickly set down on the white handkerchief a series of cards Susan had often seen. They varied with Agnes' mood, but the overall messages were the same, and similar to those that Tebbitt drew. For this summer of espionage, there might be the inconstant Moon, the Magician, the cunning thief of the Seven of Swords, the balancing act of the Two of Pentacles or the deceptive Page of Swords. Often, Agnes would then muse upon the combination of the Three of Wands and the Six of Swords, the foundation set, the journey already made and the journey yet to come.

Tonight though, Agnes had something else in mind, for she drew two cards Susan had not heard her speak of before.

"The Six of Cups?" Susan asked, studying the image of a charming – boy? young man? – giving a flower-filled cup to a girl. It was almost childlike, with the bright colors and diminutive cherubic images of the girl and boy.

"The Six of Cups is one the few of the Tarot that explicitly references the past. It is a loving look backward. The card next to it is the Four of Wands."

Like the cards of the Knight, Strength, and Justice, Susan did not need Agnes to interpret this card or explain what she thought it meant as applied. The Four Wands stood tall, straight, and upright, rooted in the ground, festooned with and united by a garland. The Four, standing together, framed a castle in the background.

"A good likeness?" Agnes asked very softly, smiling, her fingers tracing the image.

"Very much so," Susan said, smiling in return. "Thank you. It is lovely, especially with the happy retrospective of the Six of Cups."

The contentment shattered with the next card Agnes set on the white handkerchief. Susan gasped and turned away, for the pain stabbing her heart was as poignantly real as that shown in the terrible card. Guy flinched in his seat so suddenly he nearly upset the drink, probably just as well, as Legba was making her way to it.

"Agnes!" Susan protested, deeply disturbed.

The Three of Swords was an awful image – a heart pierced through by three separate swords. After the cheerful and solid unity of the Four Wands and Cair Paravel, this image and what it could connote to an overactive imagination were horrid.

Even Agnes seemed startled. "I apologize, Susan. I don't know where that came from."

Susan was not going to try to divine what Agnes did, why, or how. This was brutal and devoid of the gentle and reflective quality of the cards so far.

"I accept your apology of course, but please put that awful thing away and do not attempt to read it for me," Susan responded firmly, "Ever."

Agnes quickly drew the card back into her lap, frowning and contrite, but Susan would not apologize for being harsh. Agnes could say nothing about the unthinkable image of a heart pierced by three swords that Susan wished to hear under any circumstances.

Legba offered welcome relief from the tension. Nuts consumed, the white rat scrambled across the
table, scattering the remaining cards under her tiny claws.

"Lebga!" Agnes scolded, quickly collecting her precious deck.

Susan would touch neither Agnes nor the cards, but she could scoop up the rat out of harm's way. She stared into the dark eyes and twitching nose. "You are full of tricks, Lady!"

Guy snorted. "You are doing it again, Mrs. Caspian."

"What is that?" Susan asked.

"Sayin she's full 'o tricks. Agnes named her after Papa Legba."

"And who is Papa Legba?" Susan asked, letting the rat nuzzle her hair.

"The Trickster of the Loas," Agnes explained.

"A Trickster!" Susan let the whiskers tickle her face. "How perfect for a rat!"

Indeed, it was from Lady Willa, the chief Rat of the Narnia Mischief, that they had learned of the Trickster god of the Calormenes. Willa had been with them during the treacherous time in Tashbaan and came to know the city very well. Surveillance had been Willa's passion and she had adored the intrigues of Calormen.

"You heard of the Trickster?" Guy asked. "Wouldn't of thought that."

Susan laughed. It was always a little oblique when she and Guy, and now Agnes, spoke of Narnia.

"Well, not Papa Legba. But, I knew the Trickster was worshiped in one place, away in the South. He was a patron to the poor and the slaves, and was always playing tricks on his bloody and brutal older brother. If your donkey brayed in the middle of the night or your war horse went lame, it was said to be the Trickster."

She smiled at the memory for Willa had insisted the Trickster had had a hand in their escape from Tashbaan, though it was not something the Rat had ever been able to explain adequately. *It takes one to know one,* Willa had told her. *And I know what my nose, ears, eyes, and whiskers told me. *Certainly turning Rabadash from ass to man had been Aslan's work, but Willa had argued that the element of public humiliation as he turned from ass back to man had the hallmarks of the Trickster and she could not be dissuaded from the point.

"It was said the Trickster would taunt the great Lords and soldiers who worshipped his blood-letting loving brother and were cruel to his people. Among the poor, it was said that if you offered the Trickster your most precious thing, he would return it three-fold."

"Eshu of the Yoruba is another Trickster associated with the number three," Colonel Walker-Smythe injected, drawing a chair up to their table. "The Trickster is in mythologies all over the world. A common element is that the Trickster shows how the weak can overcome the strong through guile."

Susan hid her unpleasant start. She had not seen the Colonel hovering, though the possibility of being overheard was why she, Guy, and Agnes were careful in public places.

"Like Brer Rabbit," Guy said, pushing his chair over to make room at the table as the Colonel sat. He did not look concerned, so Susan relaxed.
"And that new cartoon character, Bugs Bunny," the Colonel added. "A Trickster if there ever was one." He nodded his greeting, "Good evening, Agnes."

"Hello George. It is good to see you again."

*George? Again?*

"And why are you playing with a rat when you could be dancing with me, cuz?" Susan shied a bit as Tebbitt appeared at her elbow. He really did have very intimate notions of space. It was probably only with conscious effort that he afforded Agnes the personal bubble she required.

"Because I enjoy the company," she responded tartly. Implied was that she enjoyed a rat's company more than his."But, as you asked so very gallantly, yes, Wing Commander, you may stand in for my husband." Charlie's trio had launched into a swing rhythm, it was terrific to dance to, and she wanted to get one good bye dance with Lowrey.

"If you will excuse me?" and taking her cousin's hand, Susan permitted him to escort her out on to the floor.

Colonel George Walker-Smythe watched the odd pair take to the dance floor for the swing. Of course Mrs. Caspian would dance perfectly.

"Well, I'll just go to the bar for a spell," Hill said, not waiting for the request. He collected his drink and drifted out of earshot.

Still, the Colonel waited, as Agnes stroked her rat with one finger, and caressed her beloved cards in her lap with the other hand.

When Hill was well away, he asked, "You stack the deck, don't you, Agnes?"

She snorted at him, as she always did, this renewal of their old argument. "Of course not, George. Do you wish me to read for you?"

"Of course not, Agnes," he mimicked back.

A pair of louts lumbered by. Hazy with drink, they leered at her and winked at him. He affected a dangerous and proprietary look that would keep all but the truly stupid and blind away from her. The protection would evaporate the moment he left.

He truly hated to see Agnes in these environments. He had thought on it long and insofar as Agnes was concerned, knew that his concern crystallized when he had seen her evade clumsy, drunken grasps at a party while juggling drink trays. Agnes' beauty stirred centuries of lusty feudal and slave privilege in men's blood. Her domestic service was only a bare step up from the slavery her family had endured in the British West Indies on the sugar plantations. There was no doubt in his mind that she would, sooner or later, fall to rape and pregnancy as the other women going back generations in her family had, mother to daughter. She was cleverer than those other victims, he thought, hoped. But if she endured where she was, the end would be the same.

He knew what those powerful and worldly men did and how they thought. He had spent his whole adult life studying how they might be lured by women and money to betray their countries.

"Did you look at the College packet I sent over with Guy?"

"I did, thank you, George. The answer remains the same."
"Will you at least consider it?"

"No."

"Agnes, I saw it again this evening in how you analyzed Tebbit and Mrs. Caspian. You have extraordinary talents. With a university degree and training, you would be superb at psychoanalysis." He did wonder why she had picked that awful Three of Swords for Mrs. Caspian, following on the unifying symbols of the Four of Wands. Was Agnes suggesting a possible split in a family he had thought was very close? Or was it a hint of personal romantic loss?

"George, what you call Jungian analysis, I intuit. I cannot learn this or be taught it. I just know it."

He refused to believe Agnes' future was so hopeless a cause and would simply have to persist. He could not protect them all, but some vestige of a father's regret for young girls who could not be young girls motivated him always to try.

Mulling girls and boys too young for what they had to endure, he took a sip of his ginger ale and studied the dance floor. Lowrey and Gladys were inseparable, to be expected, one fulfilling the other, an anima and animus partnership, which if it had been a bit more interesting, he might have analyzed. To his eye, Tebbit and Mrs. Caspian, the more intriguing pair by far, were behaving themselves. He allowed himself a disbelieving shake of his head and heard Agnes utter a bemused and satisfied chuff. Seeing Mrs. Caspian's poise in this more casual, social setting was making him reassess (again) just what her background really was.

"I mentioned before, Mrs. Caspian neatly handled a dodgy bit of business for us."

Agnes nodded and stroked Papa Legba with the tip of her finger. The rat nuzzled her hand.

"And so you are thinking of giving her a greater responsibility?"

"Of course you divined that as well?" He could never quite fully reign in his skepticism. The Tarot undoubtedly was a useful tool in Jungian psychoanalysis. He did not know why it was necessary to ascribe occult sources when the complexity of the human consciousness was a sufficient mystery.

"You are always very interested in her reactions to the cards I read. I can tell you confidently that what is to be learned of Susan is not to be gleaned from your psychology textbooks and research papers."

He laughed, conceding her perceptive point, and that Agnes knew he had tried just that. As he could not pat a shoulder or clasp her hand, he settled for gently stroking Papa Legba.

"How else then might a poor, blind man such as myself glimpse the human mind and soul? By Tarot and crystal gazing? In the Empress and High Priestess of the Major Aracana?"

On this ground, Agnes was comfortable and confident. "Both influence Susan, to be sure, though the Queen of Pentacles is a better fit than the earth mother of the Empress." She rolled a nut toward the rat and again restlessly shuffled her cards in her lap.

"Yes," he agreed, mulling it over. "The fertility of the Great Mother archetype does not suit her so well I think." So it always was – Agnes would speak in terms of the Rider-Waite Tarot and he would speak in the language of the Jungian psychoanalysis taught at University.

As Agnes put a visual to her assessment by setting the Queen of Pentacles down on the table, he asked, "And what of this Queen?"
"Very like the Empress, but not so associated with the creation of life. She is wealthy, often materially and certainly in spirit. She has the gentleness and intuition of the Great Mother, but with the practicality in the material world of the Pentacles suit."

That seemed a sound summation. "The ease with which she has slipped into our office makes me think I see the Trickster archetype in her as well."

"Oh yes, there is a Moon influence, some of the Seven of Swords and the Magician." Those cards followed on top of the Queen of Pentacles. "She could not do what she does, as well as she does, and not have that. She is, as I have cautioned you, an expert at concealment."

"But from where does this expertise come?" he asked, repeating the query he had made so many times before and to which Agnes had made no useful answer. He had overheard most of the earlier conversation and again was none the wiser. It was as if there was a common language among Agnes, Hill, and Mrs. Caspian, and he was the foreigner.

Agnes smiled enigmatically and set out the High Priestess. "She never reveals her secrets in full."

"Mrs. Caspian has revealed more of her secrets to you than to me," he chided.

"You are her Emperor, George. In your language you are her guide and wise man - teacher. Susan would not confide the full to you, not when she so values your knowledge and works so hard for your respect."

"Fair enough." Papa Legba was scampering about the table looking for mischief, so the Colonel picked up the rat for another scratch. "Anything else?"

"Regarding whether she can manage the deceptive task that is ahead?"

"Yes."

With studied patience, Agnes carefully collected her cards again. "Does she meet with a man or a woman?"

He wondered why Agnes thought that mattered. "Woman."

Agnes' eyes flitted to Lowrey and Gladys dancing. He would never tell her what the task was, but was always curious to hear her assessment of a person's suitability for it.

"And you think the woman might respond more favorably to another woman?"

"I wish to preserve the option of trying a woman first and then a man if necessary." There was only one other man he could send in and he knew where that would end. If the Colonel could spare them all that additional misery, he would.

Again, Agnes shuffled through her cards, the Queen of Pentacles on the top. "The Queen of Pentacles is a bridge and under her gentle and practical influence, there is greater trust, loyalty, and reliability. No one else among your staff better demonstrates these qualities in my judgment."

He gently deposited Papa Legba at Agnes' hand. "Thank you, I had come to the same conclusion as well, but appreciate your opinions." Rising, he nodded in the direction of the dance floor. "I shall see to it now."

With a wave in his direction, Hill saw his signal and ambled back over from the bar to assume the protective role at Agnes' table.
On the dance floor, the Colonel tapped Tebbit on the shoulder, intending to cut in, and discovered that his timing was impeccable. Mrs. Caspian was already giving the willing pilot a jocular shove toward a pair of heavily made up, giggling girls at the end of the bar.

"Sonnet 18!" she exhorted.

"Colonel, Mrs. Caspian," Tebbit awarded them both a jaunty salute, "Give me women, wine and snuff, for bless my beard, they aye shall be, my beloved Trinity."

Mrs. Caspian laughed. "I would suggest one of Keats' more romantic works as an alternative." With another gentle nudge, Tebbit sauntered off.

Mrs. Caspian raised her arms to meet his hand and shoulder and the Colonel swung his protégé out on to the floor.

"I received word from the High King today," the Raven told the Queen under the din of the Faun musicians.

"He wishes for more information on the Grand Vizier?"

"Yes. I sent a message to the Tarkheena Lasaraleen asking for a meeting."

Queen Susan nodded her understanding. "Tarkaan Anradin said the Tarkheena and her husband have information on the Grand Vizier that would be very damaging should he make a bid for the Tisroc's throne. So, we offer her the information from Anradin about the Tisroc's general, and receive in exchange the information about the Grand Vizier."

He knew Queen Susan would have no difficulty following this reasoning. She had been with him when they had made the deal with Anradin and had seen the scroll in the Grand Vizier's own hand detailing a future Narnia that was weak and subservient to the greater wealth and resources of Calormen. They needed more information on the Grand Vizier in the event the Tisroc did not live forever.

He bobbed his head in agreement. "We will hold it, wait, and if the Tisroc fails or does not stand for a vote before the War Council, we use it to discredit the Grand Vizier."

He flew to a nearby table and settled on a chair back. The enigmatic Queen, who could wear a Trickster's guise and many others, glided to the next seat, her face furrowed with human concentration.

"Chief, the information we have on the Tisroc's general is very valuable. We need to be sure the Tarkheena offers us something in kind."

"Yes, we do." In his solemn stare, the Queen then perceived what he was asking of her.

She let out a breath of tense air and the authority she carried so well settled upon her. To a Raven's keen sight, it was plain the Queen Susan was no ordinary royal.

"I will do the very best I may, Chief."

"Your best is all I ask."

Peter thumbed the letter, thinking that in one sense he was seeing more in it than even Edmund had. His brother's notations were all about the plotting, the convoys of Gryphons and War Horses,
the general's secrets, and the Trickster of the Calormenes. This was not a surprise, really.

Underscoring the unspoken point, Edmund was sitting at the desk, absorbed in his brown-wrapped book, frowning, fingers lightly tracing the page. As he had all his life, Edmund was, again, missing one element that was developing between the lines. Peter wondered if even Susan had seen it coming.

There was no point in raising his observations with Edmund now. It would have to wait for Susan's return next week and he would discuss it with her then.

Instead, Peter asked about issues Edmund would have considered, "Are you surprised that Susan is receiving so much responsibility?"

"After her performance atop that Gryphon, no. I think Sallowpad has an eye for talent. Susan is pretending to be an adult and is doing so well at it. Sallowpad is conveniently overlooking her actual age. I think she has fooled everyone else." Edmund looked up from his book. "Any reason why you ask?"

"No, not especially. I agree though. I think Susan has tricked everyone in Washington."

Queen Susan slid off Bardon's back at the gracious home of the Tarkheena Lasaraleen and her nominal husband, Tarkaan Ahshota. The pair owned The Daily crier sheet, and none in the known lands was more virulently opposed to the Tisroc and his Narnian ally.

"Do you have the food for her monkeys?" Bardon asked.

"Regrettably."

She had been able to quiz Prince Cor briefly about the "care and feeding of Tarkheena Lasaraleen" and he had told her to be sure to bring treats for the woman's spoiled, obnoxious monkeys – and hope they did not throw it back at you, or other, more vile things.

"How do I look?" she asked the Gryphon.

"Plain."

Sallowpad had told her to dress even more drably than she had to the Residence Dinner. It was very dreary and Queen Susan felt the lack of elegance in her apparel keenly.

Peter once again paged through Susan's lament about her wardrobe and her lack of fabulous accessories for this important assignation. Edmund had annotated the discussion with some very lifelike illustrations and Peter wondered if it was reflecting his brother's speculations regarding Tarkheena Lasaraleen, RAF Pilot Peridan, or perhaps that brown wrapped book he had been reading so very carefully. Between the pages, he found a draft response to the Gentle Queen, purporting to be from the Just King, setting forth in excruciating detail his long thwarted ban on corsets and extending the ban forthwith to high heeled shoes, hats, gloves, stockings, and lipsticks.

A good-looking young man greeted her quietly at the door –she silently thanked Prince Cor for this warning as well. The mirrors lining the richly appointed hallway multiplied Queen Susan and her escort many times over as they walked through the echoing house. The din of the city seemed far away; a fountain tinkled in a courtyard and the smells were not of a hot, crowded city in summer, but of flowers, fruit, and more faintly and less pleasant, monkey.
The Tarkheena was enjoying her baths day, the man slave explained. Susan followed him to the Tarkheena's opulent spa. Warm waters swirled from her private bathing pond; unseen, a player plucked a stringed instrument; servants and slaves, all male, attractive and silent, hovered. The Tarkheena herself was sprawled on a marble slab as her attendant, another man, shirtless and very muscled, rubbed fragrant oils into the lady's bare skin.

Susan ducked her head under a waving palm frond and dodged a nut—she hoped it was a nut—lobbed at her from a chattering spider monkey. Susan retrieved a sugared date from her pocket, carried for this eventuality, and held it out for the wee assailant. The monkey squealed her approval, swung down from the tree, grabbed the date from Susan's fingers, and darted up the rich curtains that hung about the bathing room.

"Queen Susan," the Tarkheena murmured from her dais. "Welcome to my home. May one of my boys get you something?"

Susan found that she liked the proprietary condescension no more when the tables turned and it was a powerful woman referring to her playthings. Whether man or woman, it was demeaning. She shoved the criticism aside. She was not here to critique the Tarkheena's self-publicised hedonism.

"Thank you, no, Tarkheena."

"You are certain? I am enjoying date wine this morning, would you not join me?"

It was rather too early for wine, another point Cor had mentioned. Tarkheena Lasaraleen was astute enough to only conduct business in the mornings because by afternoon, she was drunk.

"Please be seated then." She gestured to a table and chairs.

The lady had pillowed her head on her arms. As Susan took the offered seat, the Tarkheena shifted on her slab, turned her head and looked Susan over. Tarkheena Lasaraleen was, even by the standards of the Calormene nobles, something of an outlier—she was unscrupulous, driven, intelligent, and loathed the Tisroc and all like him with a fiery passion. Purportedly, the only person she hated more in all the Known Lands was the Grand Vizier.

"You dress to obscure rather than accentuate your beauty, Queen Susan. Why is that?"

So scrutinized, Susan was again reminded that it seemed the only person of dim wit in Tashbaan was the Narnian Ambassador, Sir Flobber.

"Respect for my Lord Caspian, Tarkheena, still recuperating these eight weeks. Further, having lived so long in fear of Ettin occupation, I find it uncomfortable to do otherwise. Those who draw attention to themselves in Narnia are more likely to become targets and eaten."

The man working the Tarkheena's backside carelessly flicked the obscuring bath sheet away and with effort, Susan did not avert her gaze at the woman's blatant immodesty. Again, she was grateful for Cor's warnings.

The Tarkheena grunted as her servant began vigorously massaging her legs. In this stark, bright light, there was no obscuring the fundamental fact that Tarkheena Lasaraleen was old. She was slim, she was trim, and she had the very best appearance that wealth could give. But, the young men paid to flatter her, the oils rubbed luxuriously into her skin by strong male hands, the dyes painted in her graying hair, and the heavily applied kohls to her thinning lips and sagging eyes could not hide that essential fact. The Tarkheena was in a losing battle with the inexorable ravages of time. There was no grace here, just ugly clutching to a youth she was at least twenty years well
The lady reached for the pale date wine at her hand and took a hefty sip.

"The Crow sent you with something for me?"

"If you have something for us," Susan replied steadily, keeping a watchful eye on the monkey hovering overhead. She held out another sugared date and the monkey swung down, grabbed the treat, and darted away.

"Prince Cor taught you that, did he?" The Tarkheena sighed indulgently and rolled on to her back at a nudge from her massaging manservant, who continued silently working the Tarkheena's feet and legs. Susan hoped he would not go higher.

"Poor, lovely lamb. Has Cor departed yet?"

"Today, Tarkheena." And a painful goodbye it had been.

"So the Bird sent you instead." She scowled briefly, as if with pain. "Jivra! That's enough for now." Her man immediately stepped away from his ministrations to her bony legs. Lasaraleen enjoyed her men pretty and silent.

The Tarkheena eased herself to sit on the slab, carelessly slinging the sheet partially over her old and glistening body.

"You there, all of you, leave us!" the Tarkheena commanded. She slid off the marble and trailing her bath sheet, sat at the table opposite Susan.

Susan wondered what conceit operated that made the Tarkheena not even bother with a simple robe. Was Lasaraleen hoping to disconcert her? Was she so deluded that she believed the flattery she heard? Or, having boasted of taking so many lovers, so brashly and openly for so many years, did she simply not care?

A key dangled from a bangle on her skinny wrists. She turned to a small locked box on the table to open it. The monkey swooped down, chattering.

"Hello, my love," the Tarkheena cooed. The monkey barred her teeth, and Susan hurriedly offered the horrid little beast another date. The monkey shrieked and clambered away again.

Tarkheena Lasaraleen opened the lock box and withdrew a thick stack of parchment. Susan, in turn, withdrew from her own bag the scrolls they had obtained from Tarkaan Anradin.

"The Bird said you have information on one of the generals of the Tisroc – may he die tomorrow."

"Yes. We have letters he exchanged with his mistress, a Telmarine girl, barely sixteen."

Susan proffered the letters for the Tarkheena's inspection.

"That does look like his own handwriting," she conceded, sipping her wine again. She carefully, and swiftly inspected each document, nodding her head with satisfaction.

The Tarkheena's smile turned vicious and smug. "Excellent. He is quite the favorite of the Tisroc and may have political aspirations of his own. This should put the match on his pyre nicely. What else?"
Susan moved the relevant parchment to the top for the Tarkheena to review. "We have a report, attested to, that the General slapped and kicked a perilously ill soldier."

"So, he is corrupting maidens and beating his own men. Better and better." Her eyes glinting with malice, she added, "The General could be destroyed over these."

Susan quickly gathered up the documents. The Colonel had instructed her to give the Tarkheena a taste of the accusations, just long enough for her to assess the documents, but not enough for her to memorize them.

"And you, Tarkheena?" Susan asked. "What are these documents worth to you?"

Lasaraleen leaned back in her chair; with her bath sheet dangling off her shoulder, it exposed a sagging breast. Susan steeled herself and was not going to be put off by these parlour tricks. She knew herself how to use appearance to create impressions and turn advantage; her dour dressing was just such an example of this manipulation.

Lasaraleen suddenly bent again to her little chest and withdrew an enormous, brilliant blue diamond set with white stones. Susan recognized it immediately – the Desire.

"Pretty thing, isn't it?" Lasaraleen said with vain titter. "You have heard of it, of course. Everyone has, the Desire."

She undid the clasp and settled it around her own wrinkling neck. "No one else may touch it. Bad luck, death, madness to those that do."

With her motions and manipulations, the sheet slid off her torso completely to pool about her waist.

Tarkheena Lasaraleen placed her hand over the Desire, and the mocking tone was replaced with something steely hard. "The Tisroc, the Grand Vizier and their ilk would have the Tarkaans and Tarkheenas divide up their hard earned possessions and share them. With the poor," she bit out like an epithet.

"Understand this, Queen Susan," she hissed. "This is mine. I earned it and I will not share it. Let the Trickster damn the Grand Vizier and all who fly with him if they try to take it or anything else away from me."

"Of course," Susan murmured politely, wondering where this was going. It was not a rant; the Tarkheena was instructing.

"As vilely corrupt and profligate as the Grand Vizier is, the Galmans are worse."

"Soviet Union!" Edmund suddenly spouted from his vantage at the desk. Peter was so startled by the unexpected outburst, he nearly spit out the glass of water he was drinking.

"Yes, Edmund," he said patiently. "I was able to discern that a tirade against Galma and the confiscation of personal wealth by the State for redistribution for the greater good are references to the liberal politics of President Roosevelt, the even more liberal politics of Vice President Wallace, and American hatred of communism, Stalin and the Soviet Union."

"You heard the Grand Vizier visited Galma, yes?"
Susan nodded. "Of course. His tour of the communes was reported extensively in the crier sheets."

At this mention, Lasaraleen snarled. Bright spots appeared on her face, obscuring the red blush already painted there.

"Those happy, smiling communes were a complete fabrication, Susan of Narnia. It was all a clever fraud erected to fool the Grand Vizier in a scheme worthy of the Trickster himself."

It was an effort to keep herself poised and collected. This state visit had been meticulously planned and widely discussed. Susan's incredulity must have shown.

Smugly, the Tarkheena took another hearty sip of her sweet wine. "The Grand Vizier was so thick he believed what the Galmans told him without checking basic facts."

"And those facts are?"

The Tarkheena nodded approvingly. "Would that the Grand Vizier had your acumen, Queen Susan."

The Tarkheena sorted through a thick stack of parchment and spread out a series of gruesome sketches, statements and letters written in broken and despairing hands. The Tarkheena pointed out a particularly heart wrenching drawing, painstakingly rendered. Having seen what a clever forger could cobble together, the documents could be as fraudulent as what had been shown to the Grand Vizier. Susan thought these were legitimate, or at least real enough to pass for authentic.

"Might I take a sample page or two for our expert to review?" she asked.

The Tarkheena shrugged. "Fine. What your expert will tell you is that based upon those documents, those communes of cheerful volunteers the Grand Vizier saw are really labor camps manned by slaves who were driven from their homes, their property confiscated for the greater good of Galma."

Susan scanned the stack quickly and withdrew two drawings and two purported eyewitness statements.

The Tarkheena busied herself with organizing the remaining material and neatly stowing it in her lock box again. "The Grand Vizier is the most dangerous sort of man – he professes virtue, he has many, many ideas, the power to act upon them, and he is gullible and guileless to the point of utter stupidity. The Galman King is evil, the Grand Vizier thinks he is Tash reborn, and he would sell every last Calormene for a sack of seed and the promise of a new world order and think he got the better deal."

Pressing the point, Queen Susan asked, "Why would you sell this information to the Narnians? This is powerful material, so why not keep the exclusive for your own crier sheet?"

The Tarkheena made a disapproving tut sound. "You were doing so well, young Susan."

She bristled at the condescension but held her temper. "Enlighten me then, Tarkheena."

Lasaraleen shrugged. "More than one outlet for a bad story is not a bad thing you know. We would leak these stories to our friends in the Tisroc's opposition. However, they have their own skeletons and bedbugs, and if they compromise to protect themselves, the Grand Vizier's stupidity might not see the light."

"Narnia is your failsafe, then."
"Our ally," she whispered, fiercely, leaning forward to clasp Susan hand. The Desire swung pendulously between her shriveling breasts – a macabre image in bright daylight. "If Narnia does not fear the Grand Vizier, then you are fools. He would cut off Calormen support for Narnia in a moment, and watch your monarchy fall without a single regret."

"Neither the High King nor Chief Sallowpad are fools, Tarkheena," Susan responded icily, withdrawing her hand from Lasaraleen's clasp.

The woman laughed an annoying titter and the Desire quivered on her throat.

"She's even worse than the real Tarkheena Lasaraleen," Edmund said from his desk, once again displaying the uncanny knack for discerning Peter's reading speed. "If it is who I think it is, she and her husband own one of the most anti-Roosevelt rags in America."

"That comes through clearly," Peter said, skimming Susan's bizarre code again. The British were doing deals to gather information on Vice President Wallace. The business with Galma was probably some foreign trip taken to the Soviet Union. Regardless, the implication was that British were saving the information as a squirrel stowed nuts, for possible use later.

They were going further even then gathering intelligence about an ally. The British were, it seemed, concerned enough about an American politician to consider interfering in the political processes that would keep him in power.

Had Edmund and Susan ever interfered so in another country's affairs?

Should he ask? Edmund had said he would not lie to his brother and High King. That meant, though, that Peter needed to be very cautious in what he did ask.

Peter's answer came in what Edmund had said of Aslan's instruction to them. The way forward was here, not in Narnia. Narnia was important and to be cherished always, but what they had accomplished there was most important as a tool and lesson for moving ahead here.

Susan had done her duty as she had been trained to do and Peter was proud of her. While uncomfortable reading, these things were undertaken in defense against far greater evils. If the Nazis won, this business would not matter a whit. If the Allies won, eventually they would all be able to withdraw from this unseemliness. Susan was coming home next week, to those who loved her, and would thankfully be leaving this ugliness behind.

Colonel George Walker-Smythe had been drumming his desk absently, waiting. The appointment had been at ten o'clock. Mrs. Caspian would have been punctual and would not have lingered. At quarter past eleven, he heard the phone ring and a moment later, Gladys called out, in a voice still raw from crying, "It's Susan, Sir. Line Two."

"Mrs. Caspian?"

"Colonel."

"Any difficulties?"

"What she offered was, in my judgment, very good. We can discuss it at the office, and I am bringing back some samples for the Shoemaker to review. Assuming he confirms their authenticity, I recommend we accept her terms."
Even over the telephone, he could hear her reined-in fury. Mrs. Caspian's emotional control was superb, but could be even better.

"Excellent. Well done, though I expected no less from you. What is the problem, then?"

He heard her silent dismay that she had betrayed herself, however infinitesimal it was. She did it so very rarely and given that the deal itself had gone well, that meant only the one thing. What he did not expect was her swift, angry counter.

"She will only agree to the exchange if Tebbitt brings the documents. Tonight."

Well, that was that then. "Yes," he said, blandly.

Her voice was soft, gentle, and all the more devastating for it. "You knew, didn't you, Sir? You knew she would want Tebbitt with Lowrey gone. That was why you sent me."

If Mrs. Caspian was to advance, she needed to learn what it really meant to be a runner and babysitter in this dodgy business. She held the leash and sent others out to do the work. Still, so dignified a person deserved his truth and she had discerned it already regardless. "I had hoped she might be less likely to make the demand if I sent you, yes."

"It didn't work," Mrs. Caspian bit out.

"That was always the possibility," the Colonel conceded. It had been the likely outcome, actually, but preventing it had been worth the effort.

He caught some muffled discussion with Hill. He waited, though he had observed that Mrs. Caspian was as skilled at waiting as he was. She was not one who could be prodded to hasty or injudicious action. He heard his own phone ring and Gladys pick it up.

"Mrs. Caspian?"

"Sir?"

"Thank you for reporting in. I look forward to receiving your full assessment. I shall ask Gladys to track down Tebbitt and I will give him the order myself that he is to make the delivery."

He felt, rather than heard, her sigh of relief. "Thank you, Sir. I could not do it."

"It is my duty to give the order and his to follow it, Mrs. Caspian. Your duty is to provide the motivation so that he follows the order."

There was a pause, and then he heard a welcome firmness return to Mrs. Caspian's voice. "I understand, Sir."

The Teacher wondered if perhaps that had been the wrong instruction to give to his Student.

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Chapter 15 to follow,
Folly

A special thanks to Anastigmat whose ideas on Agnes’ Tarot reading I am now finally able to use in full. Miniver and Hever had given me the idea of exploring Jung, and so here we have another effort, by another person, to get to the mystery of a Friend of Narnia via some less conventional means.
I've noticed an increase in my "anonymous" reviewers. Thank you! If you want to have more of a conversation, I've enabled anonymous posting on my Live Journal as well. Links are in my profile.

Hearing from you all, anonymous, and known, helps me enormously and I am very grateful to those who take the time to comment.

Links to the Trickster and pictures of the Tarot cards, in particular the pivotal Four of Wands and Three of Swords, are in my LJ.

Longish notes are in my Live Journal because I couldn't possibly make this stuff up. To summarize, I've mashed several real life events together and tweaked them, hence the reliance upon the Narnia conceit for that aspect of the story. The events described above are based upon the following:

**Vice President Henry Wallace was a thorn in the side of the British and they were very, very concerned that he might become President if President Roosevelt died in office or did not stand for re-election on the Democratic ticket in the November 1944 election. In May 1944, Wallace visited the Soviet Union, toured Siberia and came away extolling the happy places he had been, unaware that the trip and his tours of the labor camps had been sanitized and doctored. Further, Wallace was known to be an adherent of the Soviet author, philosopher, painter and reputed occultist, Nicholas Roerich. The extent to which the British had a hand in having Wallace removed from the 1944 Democratic ticket to be replaced by Harry Truman is unclear, but the suggestion is made in *The Irregulars* and elsewhere.

**The Tarkheena Lasaraleen is based very loosely upon newspaper woman Cissy Patterson, who owned *The Washington Times Herald*. Mrs. Patterson was an isolationist and an opponent of the Roosevelt Administration. During a dinner party, Mrs. Patterson was purportedly caught *in flagrante delicto* on the floor of a bathroom with the husband of her close friend, Alice Roosevelt Longworth (daughter of former President Theodore Roosevelt). Mrs. Patterson was a notorious braggart about her sexual escapades. Another socialite, Evalyn Walsh McLean, not Mrs. Patterson, actually owned the Hope Diamond.

**Mrs. Patterson son –in-law was Drew Pearson, the muckraking Tarkaan Anradin of the story. Pearson was responsible for reporting that General George S. Patton's slapped the ill soldier Charles Kuhl, nearly ending Patton's career. Pearson also threatened to publish love letters between General Douglas MacArthur and MacArthur's 16 year old Filipino lover, Isabel Rosario Cooper.
Going, going, gone. But first, we take a look back. This does assume some passing familiarity with By Royal Decree.

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
South and North,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
As the sky
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force
- Gold, of course.
Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best.

Final lines of Love Among the Ruins, by Robert Browning

High King Peter knew it was uncharitable to wish himself somewhere else. It was both the weather and the topic. Windows open at both ends of his large, airy study would at least have admitted the late Spring air from one side and the sea from the other. In deference to the woman struggling to muster her considerable wit, the windows were shut. It was not stuffy, exactly, but simply not as pleasant as it would have otherwise been.

As to the subject, it was of interest to his subjects and so was of concern to him. The chief difficulty was that with the absence of the Queen Susan for so many weeks, all those many concerns had landed in his lap. Still recuperating from the latest western border skirmish and chair-ridden, he had not been able to deflect some of the petitions on to Edmund or Lucy. So here he sat. Peter shifted his bandaged and elevated leg on the cushion, wished for some willow bark pain reliever, and attended politely to the adviser speaking to him.

"So..." she began and then came to (another) stammering stop.

The Hound next to the financial adviser to the country of Narnia sighed, her flexible lips moving with a soft, canine pfffbt sound. "Perhaps as you rehearsed it, Banker Morgan? Though you could certainly dispense with the introductions as the High King and his Guard all know who you are."

Peter schooled his face to what he hoped was gentle encouragement rather than a tiresome frown. "You were going to give me recommendations on the investment of some of our treasury in a Calormene silver mine?" he prompted, more patiently than he felt. His leg was beginning to throb, though more annoying than truly painful.

"Yes, though no, it's really a capital infusion on very favorable terms." Banker Morgan blurted out.

Banker Morgan of the House of Linch, Narrowhaven, Lone Islands – a woman with nearly as many titles in her name as he had – tended to speak in fits and starts when addressing humans.
Conversing with her compared to speaking to a Tiger, Wolverine or some other solitary animal and was best done through leading questions.

He began the rote. "This is in response to a petition by Master Duffle and his Red Dwarf kin."

Banker Mogan nodded earnestly.

Peter continued, "The Dwarfs request the assistance of their Monarchs in initiating trade with a Calormene silver mine in the Lagour Mountains, whose fine output they have seen in Archenland. They wish to obtain a greater quantity for use in their smithies?"

"Yes, Sir."

They had given up correcting her misuse of titles.

"And I asked for your assessment of this mine venture?"

"Yes, Sir," Banker Morgan repeated mechanically, but confidently.

Beehn, his faster of foot but slower of mind Cheetah Guard, yawned pointedly. His brother, Fooh, faster in intellect, swatted his inattentive brother.

"And that assessment is now complete and you have a recommendation?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Banker Morgan?"

"Sir?"

"Mrs. Furner would throw me to the tender mercies of our prickly physician if I move my leg unnecessarily. Would you please put your reports down in front of me so that I might review what you recommend as you speak on it?"

So far, Banker Morgan had been standing and fidgeting, despite his asking her to sit twice and Jina the Hound pressing her nose to her charge's backside. The Hound's social skills were far superior to those of the woman whom she guarded.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, startling. "Yes, I suppose I can do that for your convenience."

Jina sighed pointedly, again, and gave Banker Morgan another shove with her nose.

Banker Morgan quickly gathered up her meticulously prepared notes, spreadsheets, ledgers, reports, forecasts, and assessments. Peter wished Edmund or Susan were there to help guide her through this oral report. Susan, however, was only newly returned from her own diplomatic foray and had not followed this mining venture.

As for Edmund, they had determined from the very beginning, some two years ago, that any policy recommendation Banker Morgan made was best accomplished without Edmund's attendance. It was not that anyone questioned King Edmund's impartiality where Banker Morgan was concerned – far from it. Rather, when Banker Morgan and King Edmund discussed financial or legalistic matters, the atmosphere became very intense for innocent bystanders. They went on forever. They vociferously argued impenetrable nuances of textual interpretation. If they were not arguing – and actually come think on it, often when they were – another, unspoken agenda would arise between them that was too intimate for others to long endure comfortably. When, with a great heaving sigh,
Jina and Edmund's Tiger Guard, Jalur, both very accustomed to these peculiar ways, rose and left the vicinity, everyone else knew to follow.

Banker Morgan spread the relevant documents out on his desk.

"Thank you. Please continue your summary."

"Here is the report from Lucy, Queen Lucy," she said hurriedly, "and the intelligence and surveillance report by Lady Willa and Harah the Crow Hen."

He had already read Lucy's perceptive, if rambling, observations. The report of the Murder and Mischief had been dictated and signed with Willa's Rat paw print and Harah's toe claw mark.

"Lucy's report includes the requests of the Argeentam Mine for certain equipment which would allow them to increase capacity to meet the buying needs of the Red Dwarf clan.…"

Seeing a burgeoning digression on the relative merits of mining equipment acquisition, Peter redirected Banker Morgan's attention to where he wished it to be. "And your recommendation is?"

"Well, I crunched the numbers several different ways using different sets of assumptions based upon…"

A Calormene poet could recite a prodigious lay to every Tisroc (Who Would Not Live Forever, Thank Aslan) going all the way back to Tash the Irritable and it would take less time than Banker Morgan's passionate financial reportings. She was famously poor at judging what her audience wished to know, so she erred on the side of exhaustive over-inclusion. He was interested in the bottom line, literally, and that indicated this was a sound use of some treasury funds, barring a catastrophic volcanic eruption. Shifting his painful leg on the pillow, Peter glanced at Jina.

The Hound, of course, immediately sensed his discomfort and nudged her charge again. "Lady Morgan, your recommendation?" The Hound caught her High King's tiny, approving nod. "Now?"

At last, Banker Morgan delivered the confident, insightful summation that, for all the many quirks, made her a valuable adviser. "I recommend the capital infusion option three, as set out on page twelve, fourth paragraph."

Peter immediately turned to that page and saw that he had circled the same recommendation.

"Very good, I concur." It was an interruption, but he saw no reason to debate for argument's sake – he was not Edmund. Now, to address the last issues and they might resolve the whole of it by tea. "What of the slavery practiced in the South? No Narnian money may be used in such an endeavor." On this point, Peter was implacable.

Banker Morgan stuttered to a stop. She moved the paper about and pointed to the relevant part the reports. "Lucy, Willa, and Harah said they didn't see any."

"Yes, I know," Peter said patiently. "I read it as well. But what is your judgment, Banker Morgan?"

"They opened up their books to me, Sir. Unless they are total fabrication, not borne out by the other reports by the way, this operation is not run like a slave business. The business model under which it operates is totally different…"

Peter held up a silencing hand to forestall another lengthy and fascinating digression that would have sent Edmund into raptures of longing and argument. Jina had to shove Banker Morgan again to assure she saw his request.
"I am prepared to authorize the …"

"Capital infusion," she supplied, interrupting.

"Lady Morgan!" the Hound chided.

"Sorry, Sir," she muttered. Peter avoided laughing at her discomfiture. It was no wonder the Crows of the Murder admired Banker Morgan when her manners so closely approximated theirs.

"I am prepared to authorize the capital infusion on the condition We monitor the mine to confirm that they remain slavery-free. Write it into the agreements, obtain what oversight is necessary, and know that We understand a lower return will result. Narnia will not be party to slavery and if We must make an example of this silver mine to our other trading partners should they violate the agreement, we shall."

Peter was pleased he uttered all those instructions and royal We's without interruption. "Thank you, Banker Morgan. Anything else?" He could not put Banker Morgan at ease any more than he could teach a goat to fly. Still, he did try.

"No, I thought that would be your answer. I do have one other matter, though…"

The High King, the Magnificent, brave and noble, appointed by Aslan, and all that other rot, privately recoiled, dreading what his Banker would raise next. Before he could express his dismay at the prospect of another lecture by one so spectacularly ill-suited to deliver it, Jina broke in with a blessed reprieve.

"The Queen Susan comes, High King, with her Guard."

Fooh growled, having been usurped in his prerogative by one of the most sensitive Hounds in Narnia.

"Excellent!" Banker Morgan exclaimed with depressing enthusiasm. "Since you both are here, we can discuss it at the same time!"

As she continued to stand at the desk, Jina trotted over to the door. "Lady Morgan, would you open the door for the Queen Susan? She has willow bark tea for the High King."

"Oh! Certainly. I'm sorry." Banker Morgan hurried to the door and threw it open.

Lambert, the He-Wolf Guard, preceded his Queen into the study, nodding to all, and silently joined Fooh and Bevhn against the far wall. The Cheetahs pulled into themselves, giving the Wolf a wide berth. Lambert tolerated no nonsense from them, though Fooh had been trying to copy some of the Wolf's sober mannerisms.

Susan followed behind Lambert, carrying herself a tray with his medicine. She was looking far better than she had when their caravan had ridden in but the day before. They had endured a long trip to Telmar and with the Spring storms, a still longer and muddier trip back.

"Banker Morgan," Susan said with a gracious nod of greeting. Her greeting to him was more forceful. "Do not dare get up to help me, brother," Susan scolded, setting the tray down in a clear corner of the desk not covered in Banker Morgan's reports and other parchment.

"This is for you to drink. All of it." Susan placed the warm cup in his hands and his aching knee sighed for the relief to come with the infusion.
Only after Susan had set down the tray did Lady Morgan realize she could move to assist. She moved back to the desk then stared at what had already been accomplished.

"And what is it you wished to discuss with us, Banker Morgan?" Susan asked politely, settling herself in a chair across from him.

They both knew of course what their adviser wished to address. Peter braced himself for the discomfort to come. Banker Morgan was very well meaning, but on this subject she was as tactless as a Crow and had wretched judgment.

"I wanted to tell you that when I was back in Narrowhaven, I went through our own accounts and have identified promising marital prospects for each of you."

"I see," Susan said, temporizing. Her eyes flitting to his and she asked silently, Will you handle this, or should I?

Peter took another draught of the willow bark, thinking that though the leg pain was beginning to ease, he must now manage pain of an altogether different sort. "We thank you for your assistance, Banker Morgan, but the Queen Susan and I both decline your advice in this matter."

"Oh," she responded, already pulling another stack of neat parchment from her piles and continuing as if she had not heard him. "Well, perhaps I should just go over a few of them with you. There are some excellent marriageable individuals, and the House of Linch is most eager to see Narnia stabilize the succession…"

"Thank you, Banker Morgan, but to repeat, while the High King and I both understand very well the concerns you pose, we prefer our own judgment in matters of marriage and succession, not those of our Bankers."

For Susan, it was shockingly blunt. Banker Morgan however, had been pestering them with absolutely wretched "prospects" for the better part of two years and simply would not leave off.

"Perhaps Queen Lucy is more receptive to your suggestions?" Peter put in. Lucy got on very well with Banker Morgan and could handle this sort of thing quite effectively on her own.

Banker Morgan hung her head and muttered something unintelligible.

"My King and Queen, Lady Morgan is saying that she did approach Queen Lucy." Jina was a most loyal and diplomatic Hound.

The person she guarded was as loyal but less diplomatic. "Lucy chased me out of the room with a knife," Banker Morgan blurted. "And Briony said she would bite me if I raised it again."

Peter could easily imagine Briony, Lucy's She-Wolf Guard, making, though never actually carrying out, such a threat.

Out of the corner of his eye, Peter saw the impassive Lambert twitch his tail in approval at his mate's warning.

"I suggest that you approach King Edmund with your list of marital prospects," Susan suggested so dryly Peter nearly choked on his tea.

Jina whined a little then re-gained her control. Lambert's tail thumped once, very softly on the ground. Fooh perked his ears with interest, whiskers forward and Beehn actually woke up.
Taking the hint, Jina began pushing the Banker's documents on his desk with her nose. Peter joined the effort and began stacking her precious papers in earnest.

"Perhaps our brother would also like to review your recommendations on the Calormene mine?" Peter added.

"Oh, yes, I'm sure he would! I want his thoughts on the representations and warranties in the capitalization agreement…" Banker Morgan mumbled something indistinctly. They had found that dangling the prospect of reviewing complex documents with Edmund was the surest way to remove Banker Morgan from the scene.

Gathering her papers with the same alacrity at which her mind worked, Banker Morgan sped out of the room with barely a courtesy.

The door shut and Peter waited, watching his sister's dancing eyes. She was watching Lambert and the moment the Wolf nodded his they are away, signal, they both let go the merry laughter mightily suppressed.

Susan rose from her seat to kiss him on both cheeks. Judging the placement of his tea to be inconvenient and the pillow for his leg too far to one side, she quickly adjusted both to her (and his) satisfaction.

Peter laughed again and returned welcome. "You sent our brother's lover to convince him to take a mate from a list she made?"

"They shall both enjoy the process immensely," Susan responded smartly, pulling her chair closer to his. "Settling upon Banker Morgan's finder's fee for the mate she is to locate and Edmund is to woo shall require weeks of intensive negotiations. It could occupy them to Harvest."

Sitting back, he felt more comfortably at ease than before. "Thank you, as always, Susan, for your adroit handling. Why does everything go more smoothly upon your return?"

"Because, Peter, I have a hand in everything that occurs between our walls," she responded, smiling. "The tea will not aid your leg sitting in that cup. Drink it all."

"It is feeling better already, I…"s

"Pain slows healing, so drink."

"Yes, sister," the High King responded meekly.

She gave a little nod of satisfaction. Her eyes wandered over his desk and the piles that had accumulated in her absence. "This morning I went through most of the important business."

"Births, deaths, skirmishes, offers, and rescissions?"

"And the Crows' attempts to drive Cook to an early grave."

"Not the only miscreants, to be sure," Peter told her. "The complaints of the Otters at the Bathing Pond pile so high they could sink a galleon under their weight. I have half a mind to give Jalur Our Royal Clemency if he eats one as deterrent for the others."

Sir Jalur was Edmund's Tiger Guard and his fondness for harassing the Otters was a poorly kept secret of which they feigned ignorance.
"I saw also that Edmund will ride out to investigate the problems reported in the nesting grounds at the Glasswater, and I understand you intended to accept Banker Morgan's recommendation regarding the Calormene mine?"

He nodded. "It was a blessedly short briefing for all the excellent preparation she put into it."

Susan smiled warmly and rose from her seat. Crossing to the windows, she threw them open to admit the Narnia Spring. "That is so much better. It is lovely to be home though it seems you missed me not at all!"

"Never!" Peter cried fervently. He gestured helplessly at the parchment piles, now stirring in the breeze. "When I am in the midst of these things without you, they seem to consume every moment. Yet, as so summarized just now they seem nothing at all."

"No one is knighted for domestic management, by my judge," Susan replied. "For the heroics reported to have occurred in my absence I will need to give Mr. Hoberry, Mrs. Furner, and Cook a few days off – consecutively!" she amended quickly, hearing his alarmed gasp. "Not all at once!"

Were the Cair Paravel domestic staff leadership to all be absent on the same day, surely the castle would sink into the sea by sunset.

He gestured again to her seat, saying more soberly, "If you will, I should tell you of the Council meeting of two days ago. Come to think, that is probably what put Banker Morgan in the mind to address, again, our collective failure regarding establishing a succession beyond ourselves and a regency."

Susan's lips set in a thin, disapproving line and Lambert shifted as Fooh and Beehn growled their discontent.

"Cease with the self-condemnation, brother. I will not hear it."

"You should have heard the meeting, Susan." He turned in his chair, "Enough, you two!" for Fooh and Beehn's complaining had intensified.

"Begging your pardon, High King," Fooh replied with deeper growl, "But the Dryad's suggestion was wrong and should have never been put forth."

"I heard some garbled account," Susan admitted, turning from the windows. "It seemed so incredible I did not account it as true."

"Even the rumor of it could not be more shocking than the reality." Peter shook his head, his ears still ringing from the shouts. He thanked Aslan again that no weapons were ever permitted in the Council Room and that the Good Beasts in attendance had controlled their outrage. Those with claws and teeth needed no armaments to inflict fatal wounds.

"The Birch Elder stated that as Trees pollinate indiscriminately and may even self-pollinate, he proposed that Narnia's Monarchs do the same amongst ourselves to end this uncertainty in Narnia regarding our succession."

Lambert's growl joined with Fooh and Beehn's own grumbling chorus. Susan's eyes rose in confusion. She then sank into her chair in shock as comprehension dawned.

He nodded, confirming the unspoken. "Indeed. Edmund and Lucy were there as well. We were, as you are now, all three too stunned at first to even respond."
"And then?" Susan managed weakly.

"A near riot erupted at Council. For the offence, Master Roblang threatened to chop the Dryad Elder down to bits, the General intended to pick him up in her talons, fly him to sea and drop him there, and Mr. Hoberry actually suggested that Cook poison him. An argument broke out when a Matriarch criticized our grazing Beasts for their obsession with genealogy when it is more peaceable to drive all males from the herd at maturity, and Master Pliny calmed everyone with a gruesome account of how inbreeding results in deformity and madness."

Peter leaned back in his chair with a slight squeak of well-oiled joinery.

Susan shook her head, a sad smile now pulling at her lips. "Well, Friends, we must make allowances that Dryads do not propagate as mammals or birds do and so to them it is a reasonable proposition." She was speaking pointedly to Fooh and Beeln who were still quivering with outrage. "I am relieved though that we shall not hear the matter raised again."

"So that is the sum of our news here, though you will find more as you reacquaint yourself." He gestured carelessly at the piles still awaiting them both. "And what of you, Susan? I have read the dispatches. Your preliminary negotiations with Telmar exceeded our every hope."

Susan permitted a very modest smile, though she was pleased with her results. They all were. "As you say, Peter, the terms are advantageous to us and to them. It is a good foundation for going forward."

Oddly, she broke off, averting her gaze from his and sighing slightly as if recalling something forgotten during the drudgery of overland travel.

Her mild countenance gave little clue, but Peter knew his sister very well and what troubled her was plain enough to him.

"Lambert?" Peter asked, for the Wolf would give a quick and accurate count.

"High King?"

"How many declarations of undying love did Narnia's Gentle Queen receive?"

"Six," Lambert replied. Susan colored, casting her eyes downward now.

"How many propositions did my sister receive?"

"I lost count of the men, High King," the Wolf replied apologetically. "Four women."

That might have been a record.

"And the poetry, lays, and songs?"

"Sufficient to fill a trunk."

He had discomfited his sister and so Peter leaned forward even with a twinge of his knee and supporting pillow. Taking her hands gently in one of his, with the other he tilted her troubled face up so that he might see her more clearly. "And none touched your mind and heart, Susan?"

He had thought he already knew the answer. It was no; it was always no. But, this time, Lambert growled his discontent.

Peter felt his own brows rise at this extraordinary revelation by the Wolf.
"Yes! Thank you, my Good Guard!" Susan said, pulling away from his scrutiny with exasperation.

So it was not only that someone had caught Susan's attention, but that her Guard disapproved of him. This was unprecedented.

Peter considered this. There had been no hint of romance during the weeks she had been with the delegation in Telmar. Her missives had been in Rat and Crow and Edmund had had to translate them before Peter would, or could, read them. It was, therefore, a subtle thing. As Susan pretended to inspect the parchment stack on his desk, Peter cataloged who had been singled out for special attention in his sister's carefully worded dispatches.

One man had appeared with greater frequency. Implicit in Susan's reports was the delight of finding an unexpectedly full-witted ally, a regard for the advice she had received, and an appreciation of the respect that man had afforded her. Another glance at Lambert's stiff-tailed disapproval settled the matter.

"Should I be writing to the Tisroc and extending an invitation for his eldest son and heir to visit Narnia?" Peter asked blandly.

Susan threw up her hands in frustration. "How do you manage this, Peter? Am I so transparent to the greater world?"

With Lambert's objecting growl, Peter thought the retort already half made. "Only to me, and Lucy sometimes, though she sees things very differently." So immobilized, he could only hold out a supportive hand.

Susan clasped his hands in return and knelt by him. He did not like to see how troubled she was.

"Will you tell me of it, Susan? What happened that did not make it into your coded letters?"

"Oh, it is too long a tale, Peter. Not now, and most of it is very dull."

"Dull?" Peter echoed, disbelieving.

"Dull," Lambert affirmed.

"So I need not ride out in defense of your honor and virtue, sister?"

Susan gave him a mock swat. "Lambert and I have that well in hand."

Restless, itself an oddity in a woman who took pride in her steady composure, Susan stood and paced between the opened windows. "Prince Rabadash treated me with great respect and civility. He listened more than he spoke, comprehended the strategic advantages our Good Beasts afforded during the negotiations and helped me use them to greatest effect. He perceived immediately that I was no mere titular head of the Narnia delegation. In fairness, half the credit for our favorable terms must go to him."

Peter knew he was taking Lambert's part in this and shared the Wolf's deep skepticism. Susan would not disagree with her Guard's judgment lightly. It must have made for an interesting and tetchy time. At first opportunity, he would delve into their Rat and Crow intelligence on Rabadash and interview Lady Willa and Sallowpad, who had also accompanied the delegation to Telmar.

"And so, of those proposals, propositions, poetry, and songs, how many must be accounted to Prince Rabadash of Calormen?"
"None," Susan said, with a trace of smugness.

"None?" It was impossible.

"None," Susan repeated. "No odes to my porcelain skin. No paeans to lips, eyes, and figure."

This was truly shocking. The bad poetry composed in the Gentle Queen's honor had kindled many bonfires over the years.

"No promises of gems and furs and castles and countries?" Peter asked, truly not believing what he had heard.

"Not a one, for all that Calormen's wealth eclipses our own."

Susan whirled about, shaking a finger. "I know what you would say, Lambert. But after years of enduring empty flattery, Rabadash is the only man who ever thought of appealing to something other than my vanity!"

In his sonorous voice, Lambert voiced the concern Peter now felt as well, "And that subtle manipulation, High King, is why I so deeply distrust Prince Rabadash of Calormen."

"It is no wonder Peridan fled," Bardon muttered as they left Tarkaan Kidrash's home. "Tarkheena Lasaraleen is horrible."

Queen Susan did not disagree, of course. "How awful was the yelling?"

"You could have heard it in Archenland," the Gryphon said with a heavy sigh. He ducked his shoulder and Susan climbed aboard.

"I noticed the broken door."

"That happened when Peridan stormed out after Sallowpad threatened to send him in a wrapped package to Harfang for the Ettin Autumn Feast."

"A constructive discussion, then." Susan settled the satchel with the precious documents against her side and gripped his collar as Bardon launched into the air. Peridan had left the office so angry he had forgotten the documents to be exchanged with Tarkheena Lasaraleen. She did not think he would completely abandon his duty, but he was doing a good imitation of the dereliction. She did not find that threats worked with Peridan, but only made him more stubborn.

"The waterfront pubs, next?"

"Yes, Bardon please."

Fortunately, the Gryphon had an eagle's vision even in the fading light of dusk and on their approach toward the river, he suddenly banked sharply.

"There he is," Bardon called. "By the pool."

They circled down, Peridan paying their flapping arrival no mind whatsoever. Bardon landed lightly and Susan slid off the Gryphon's back.

"Mrs. Caspian, what are you up to?" Guy asked as she shut the car door.

"I am going to talk to Tebbitt. Please wait here."
"I should go with you, Miss Susan." Susan was sure Guy's change to her real name was a deliberate warning. "There's nuthin you're gonna be able to do for him. There's nuthin you should be doin."

"Of course not, Guy." She leaned into his car window. "It will be fine but, please, stay in the car." Susan spoke very firmly.

Tebbitt was lying on the grass at the edge of the Reflecting Pool, the monuments of America's short, gossipy history shining back from the surface of the water. Hands behind his head, his trousers were rolled up, boots off, and he was dangling one foot in the pool.

He turned to look at her approach but said nothing. Susan slipped her own shoes off and sat down next to him. She had to hitch her skirt up a bit to manage it; these stupid slim, fabric saving fashions made sitting on the ground awkward.

Tebbitt watched her maneuvering but made no comment upon it. He returned to staring up at the darkening sky.

"Come to collect me for my assignation?" he finally said.

"Yes."

"I don't want to go."

There were a dozen different things that might be said. Susan chose the honest one, for now. "Of course you don't. She is a dreadful woman and more than twice your age."

"So why am I doing this?" It was rhetorical, but she answered anyway.

"Because we need what she has, what her husband has. We need to make the trade and while you could try to do the deal without sleeping with her, I suspect that is not going to work."

"Refusing her will just make her angry." His voice turned harsh and angry. "And yes, I know, we cannot afford that."

Tebbitt pulled his dangling foot from the pool to the grass. He sighed but made no further effort to move on.

"Don't you find that stalling the inevitable makes it worse?" Susan asked.

"No, not especially. And this time, lying back and thinking of 250 tanks on their way to the Suez is not going to get the job done."

Yet, this was procrastination and token protest for Tebbitt would, grudgingly, do what had to be done. He was a loyal man, not to lovers but to his friends, to his country, to God and King. He would soldier on. As would they all.

"We do what we must," Susan said. A simple statement, but one she believed nonetheless.

"Would you?" he asked.

His was a straightforward question that deserved an answer either in a single word or a book.

"Yes," she replied without hesitation.

What she had done to protect Narnia was not so very different, Susan had come to realize. It was only with Rabadash that she had been outmatched and nearly undone to their collective ruin. As
recently as with Caspian, she would have joined with him and, in fact, had intended to do so. She had seen it as a politically expedient union of old Narnia and Telmar that would secure the future of the newly made country. Her cover was the King’s own name – a sort of ironic penance for the nominal pain she had caused him in her miscalculation of Aslan’s intent.

Tebbitt turned his head and looked at her, searching. "You mean that, don't you? You really would."

"Of course. I could not ask you to do what I would not, Tebbitt. It is nothing but words, but I do understand, I do not judge you and in fact admire you for it." She found herself hesitating for it brought her so very close to the secrets, but he was entitled to hear at least the honest truth behind them. "I have done similar things myself and would do so again."

She, regrettably, had his full attention there. With a turn of his head, he studied her silently. "Truly?"

Susan nodded. He would not know of which country she spoke when she explained, "I only wish I had been able to do more than even I did." Perhaps to England she would be able to give what she had not been able to give to Narnia.

Tebbitt broke away from his study of her to stare again up into the sky.

"Lowrey told me he would imagine he was with Gladys. Made it more bearable, he said, knowing he was getting out of there as soon as he could and that his girl was waiting for him."

"Yes, I can see that. It was a duty, like any other, and he looked to whatever other sources he needed for the motivation to get the job done."

The Colonel's words echoed in her head – what Tebbitt's duty was, and hers. She wondered if Gladys had seen it as her duty. She thought not, though it might have started that way, at first. Gladys loved Lowrey, now on his way to England and the shores of France.

Tebbitt blew out another resigned sigh and she did not need the Tarot to know what he was thinking. Agnes had told him it was always lovers and no love. He had embraced that interpretation, but perhaps found it hollow now. In another circumstance, another setting, this might have been more of his tedious flirtation. Tonight, it was simple honesty borne of self-disgust and bone weary fatigue.

He was toying with blades of grass now, twirling them idly between his sensitive fingers. His hands were lovely, long and fine, appropriate for the pilot he was, or a musician, or a lover. Susan thought Tebbitt would play women as though they were instruments, finely, skillfully, and probably a bit ruthlessly as well. He would sate his own ego on the passions to which he drove his lovers.

Susan let out a deep breath of her own, resolved. It was not a good decision, but was not a bad one either. She had been here before, another life, another place, another age, another man, but the same woman.

She titled toward him, propping up on a hand. "Allow me to provide your missing motivation."

His eyes were closed, so her hair brushing his face was the only fair warning as she leaned over and kissed him.

Tebbitt stiffened, mouth opening in surprise, which pleased Susan very much. Exploiting his shock and indecision, she closed the scant distance between them quickly and deliberately, sliding her
hands to his shoulders, certain he would not resist what he really wanted.

Trapping his head between her hands, and she deepened the kiss, not gentle, but demanding, insistent, taking from him and offering herself in return. She smiled against his mouth as his arms slowly encircled her, pulling her willingly, eagerly down and closer. Now, she remembered how a pliant body and soft sounds encouraged the caresses she desired of a lover.

It was wonderful, wondrous, as heady and glorious as it had been on different grass, by different water, on a flat world, where a different moon and singing stars wheeled overhead. Susan had worried about this, even discussed it obliquely with the others. Would this be just one more thing that was less magical here than in Narnia? Would it really be as sordid as ignorant school girls whispered it to be? She happily sighed her relief, relishing the feel of a lover on her mouth, in her hands, under her body, the music of his breath on her throat, his needful whispers in her ear. She wanted this so much, wanted him so much, her body demanded an intimate completion it had missed for an age.

With joyous abandonment of a Narnian, Susan gave herself over to this man, stretching across him, wanton and wanting, burning into him the impression of her body, her lips, her skin, and her desire. This searing memory would carry him through the next hours with an old, bitter, and jaded woman. She let him, willed him to touch and press, stroke, and feel, her body molding to his on the dry grass by marbled monuments and a pool of refracted light.

One of his hands was smoothing the light cotton skirt clinging to her body, bunching it in his clever fingers, and pulling her hips eagerly into his. His other hand deliberately caressed her side, searching out the rise for softer, firmer flesh. She had but to shift, a fraction only, for more, more for him, more for her. It would be so easy and feel so wonderful to have those skilled hands on her warming skin.

But, Susan knew as only a woman who had loved would know, when it would be too far, too much, too hard. At the precise second before that point, Susan pulled away, releasing his mouth, and rolled away to lean again on her side. His fingers trailed and lingered, teasing circles on her bare knee, caressing the length of her arm, ghosting her neck, sliding about to where fabric and flesh met.

"Well, that's a sight better than what I was expecting, Mrs. Caspian."

Fingers wrapping firmly around the back of her neck, he pulled her down again, this kiss more desperate as he fought the inevitable. She permitted the hot and needy plundering then whispered, "No" into his mouth.

"A private room, then," he whispered, his hands and cajoling voice promising exquisite pleasure to come. "We will pick this up again at the Mayflower."

It was not a question, but a confident statement and offer. His smile was indolent and knowing, his touch wandering and bold. Trapping his eagerly seeking, skilled hands in a chaste hold, again, she repeated, "No."

Her refusal was unmistakable, and she withdrew, finally, gently, and cleanly.

With a groaning sigh, Tebbitt flopped back into the grass."So, you are just a tease," he muttered. "Priming me for what's to come."

"Yes," Susan admitted. "And I can continue to do so in the car on the way to her flat if that will help."
"That's ugly, Susan."

"No, Reg, it isn't. What we might feel or want isn't ugly. It's the War that is ugly and our duty that comes first."

But, that was a lie, because the War and duty were not the reason for her refusal. She could not give to him nor take from him the pleasure that might be shared because she was trapped with the ridiculous passport. To permit this any further would be to his ruin and hers. Flexible morality aside, if Tebbitt knew that she was but fifteen, he would be appalled. She would lose the trust of the Colonel. Her body wanted, but her mind and ethic were stronger and no fleeting gratification was worth the cost.

Susan slid away out of reach and picked up her shoes. Tebbitt pulled himself up to sit. "Gladys and Lowrey have managed it without a dust up."

"It's different. You can see that."

"I suppose," he muttered grudgingly. Tebbitt grabbed a boot and stared at it as though it was a distasteful thing. "I was too angry to hear what the Colonel said. Is what we are getting truly worth this?"

She reached out with a hand, placing it on his knee, and regretted the intimate touch as he flinched. She should not tease unless she meant to do so. "I cannot tell you if it is worth it because we cannot see how we might use the information or when." It took her a moment to translate the oath to something that did not sound utterly mad. "But, I swear to you, in my name, in the name of our God, our Country, and our King, that I know of nothing else as valuable as what you will gain tonight."

Even translated, the ringing affirmation sounded overly formal to her ears. Tebbitt grinned, though it was weak and ironic. "You have quite the regal way about you at times, my Lady."

"I do indeed, my Lord Tebbitt." Susan had to catch herself and remember to not say "Peridan." Edmund would receive only an abbreviated version of the night's events and she wished that it was Peter who would be reading her letter. Peter would know instinctively what had occurred and would know what to say in return to ease her heart.

Susan stood and slipped her shoes back on. "Boots on, pilot."

With another resigned sigh, Tebbitt very slowly began his own efforts. She waited. Painstakingly tying his second boot, he finally asked, "Did you mean what you said, about the drive to her flat?"

"Yes, if it will help, though discreetly, please." She tilted her head toward Guy waiting in the front seat of the car.

She climbed into the backseat again, silencing Guy's protests with a quick shake of her head. "He's coming without threats so leave it be."

Tebbitt stuck his head in the car, folding his in after her. "Guy, if you have a razor, I'll just slit my wrists, you can take me to the hospital, and we'll leave Mrs. Caspian to this mess."

"I'm not lettin you near a sharp object, Wing Commander," Guy grumbled, starting the car.

Tebbitt slumped into the corner of the car and shot her a despairing look of invitation. Susan sidled up next to him.
On that bizarre drive, Susan kept up a stilted, rambling conversation with Guy, about the traffic, the weather, Agnes, Legba the rat, and how she did not like Brussels sprouts and visiting the Smithsonian Zoo.

In the back seat, a silent, desperate game played out. She wrapped her foot around Tebbitt's ankle and sat with her thigh aligned against and pressed into his. From behind the obscuring front seat, she caressed his wrist with her fingertips, searching out where his cuff ended to stroke the sensitive skin there. Even so small a thing made the hair prickle on his arm and his breathing quicken. For a man of Tebbitt's passions, she knew teasing play would not be enough and when it was not, when he silently asked her for more, Susan did what little she could to ease his way into the dreaded assignation to come. He never looked at her, nor spoke a word, though his rising strain was palpable to Susan's sensitive fingers.

If Guy noticed, he pretended not to see, though he did drive faster than usual, and took turns hard, so that they both pitched about in the back seat. They pulled on to the elegant street and before Guy even fully stopped the car, Tebbitt grabbed the envelope, threw open the door and lurched out, the tension rolling off him in nervy waves.

"Mrs. Caspian? A private word?"

"Now that's…" Guy started.

"Of course, Tebbitt. I will be back in a moment, Guy."

She climbed out after Tebbitt and let him guide her to the back of the car, his fingers gentle and firm around her arm. Even in the near dark, she could see he was flushed and ragged.

"Did you maybe change your mind? About afterward?" His voice was roughened, his control slipping like the precious envelope tucked under his arm that documented the follies of Generals.

With a steadying breath, Susan shook her head. "If you want to meet me and Guy for a drink, yes, or…"

"That's not enough, Susan. Not this time." Tebbitt looked up at the grand, lit house behind them, framed by yawning statuary and potted begonias. Knowing what awaited him, desperation and anxiety were etched in his expressive face. He focused upon her, his look pleading and resigned. "Just this once? Please?"

His humility and abject need, and her desire for him, could shatter her resolve. In another life, she would have done this gladly, giving as he gave to her, as a Queen and a woman. Here, though they were by the boot of a Ford, outside a powerful old woman's home, with an envelope of life-ruining secrets to be exchanged while millions were dead and dying. Narnia was so far away, it might as well have been the children's fairy tale of which a school girl had written to a little brother. Narnia had prepared her for this and for these terrible tasks, but this was not Narnia.

"No."

Tebbitt stiffened with anger at her flat rejection. Stuffing the envelope back under his arm, he spun around and galloped up the front steps. She heard some muttered and foul oath as he rang the bell. Susan quickly ducked around to the far side of the car and dove into the back seat as Guy eased the car forward, further down the street.

Silently they watched as the door opened. Light spilled out from the entry and revealed a glittering woman. Susan thought she caught the scent of heavy French perfume wafting from across the
street. At the door, man and woman crowded together, eager, close, hands already seeking in intimate ways. The door slammed shut and a moment later, the light winked out.

Guy leaned over the front seat, his sour expression a very loud reprimand.

Susan brushed it off and settled herself in the seat. "I know what I am doing, Guy. You have nothing to worry about. It will be fine."

"Sure, Mrs. Caspian," Guy muttered unhappily. "You keep tellin' yourselves that and maybe one of us will believe it."

Susan did not want to concede how truly tense she was that morning. There had been no word from Tebbitt, which was, she supposed, a good thing. After arguing with Guy for an hour, she had walked the few blocks home to the flat and spent a restless night waiting for telephone calls that never came. Mum did not come home until after ten, so Susan channeled her concern for Tebbitt into over-solicitous mothering for her weary mother. She ran a bubble bath, mixed a rum tonic, fed her a cheese sandwich, tucked her mother into bed and waited for the telephone.

Guy called early in the morning to say that he had loitered outside the house for several hours, but when Tebbitt didn't emerge, had finally left. Which meant… what exactly? So, Susan and her mother argued about who should not go to work because the other was too exhausted. The argument ended with them both going in thirty minutes late.

Gladys was hopeless. She had forgotten half the newspapers when she went out to get the morning tea, kept misdirecting the calls and was staring moodily at the rose bush Lowrey had given her. Susan sent her out to collect the morning memos and disseminate the ones from their office. Gladys had not returned and was probably roaming the half finished gardens.

Mid-morning, Colonel Walker-Smythe emerged from his office. He had been obsessively checking the progress of Convoy AS-4, which had, at its last reported position, been on a southeast heading and had cleared Bermuda. No U-boats had successfully sunk a ship in a convoy though they were still very active. Two had been sunk off the coast of Cape Hatteras in the last week and AS-4 had passed within a few hundred miles of that location.

"Let me know when Tebbitt checks in," the Colonel said. "Send him in if…"

He trailed with an unaccustomed uncertainty. She nodded, "I will, Sir."

It was nearly noon when the office door swung open with a dramatic bang. Tebbitt strode in, still in the uniform from last night, frayed, unshaven and stone sober.

Tebbitt thrust his head in the Colonel's office and shouted, "If there's a next time, go fuck her yourself!"

Spinning about, careless with anger, Tebbitt flung an envelope on to her desk. It landed with a heavy thud. "It's all there. If it comes to light, Vice President Wallace would be run out of his own party."

A thousand things might be said, but all would just make it worse. "Thank you," Susan managed, almost choking on the words.

"I'm going out now and I'm going to drink myself blind." He leaned over her desk; this invasion of space was twisted and furious. "And you cannot stop me."
She managed to shake her head. "No, of course not." As he turned away for the door, Susan found her voice again. Softly, as gently as she could, she called to his retreating back, "Tebbitt!"

He stiffened and slowly turned back around. His "Mrs. Caspian?" was cold and hard.

"Would you like some company?"

There was a twitch of anger in his jaw and his eyes hardened. "Not yours."

Tebbitt turned on his heel and strode out.

With a deep, shaking breath, Susan looked up from her misery. Colonel Walker-Smythe stood in his doorway, watching her closely. With the calm she could muster, Susan picked up the envelope Tebbitt had flung away and handed it to the Colonel. "Sir, this is what Tebbitt brought in."

"Thank you, Mrs. Caspian."

With a deep breath, Susan found her crumbling resolve. "Sir?"

He was not chewing on his cigar and it somehow made her insubordination that followed easier. "We cannot ask that of Tebbitt again."

Calmly lifting the seal on the envelope and deftly sliding a finger under the flap, the Colonel repeated calmly, "We?"


"You are a civilian, Mrs. Caspian. You are not under my command, as Wing Commander Tebbitt is, nor in the employ of His Majesty's government as Gladys is. If you do not wish to participate in our affairs, you need not."

Colonel Walker-Smythe paused, and before she could thank him, he continued, with a quiet condemnation, "Before rendering such judgment of our work, I would ask you to think very hard about those death camps and what the Nazis are doing to the men, women, and children imprisoned there."

Susan felt the embarrassed flush rising in her cheeks. She had chided the Colonel at the beginning of the summer for trying to protect and here she was asking for it. "You are right, of course, Sir. I will save my opinions until we have the luxury of asking such questions."

"I am glad you see it that way, Mrs. Caspian and I accept your apology. Ring up Mr. Hill, if you would and ask him to see that Tebbitt gets home tonight. He'll probably go down to the waterfront. If it eases your mind and will make your management of Tebbitt easier going forward, go with Mr. Hill."

Tucking the envelope under his arm, the Colonel retreated to his office and shut the door.

Gladys returned with a lunch from the Commissary that she stirred but did not eat, finally dumping the whole of it in the bin and occupying herself with idly plucking wilted flowers from her rose bush.

Things happening in synchrony were, Susan had come to understand, never good news. The telex started clicking, then one phone rang, and then another. Gladys snapped out of her melancholy, gestured for Susan to get the incoming cable, deftly took both calls, decided which was the more important, and called, "Colonel! It's Secretary Stinson's office!"
"Put him through!"

The U.S. Cabinet War Secretary? Susan glanced at Gladys, now holding and answering three more calls and craning her neck for an anxious look at the telex.

Susan watched the text slowly type itself out.

Convoy AS-4 hit. 15.43 hours, 27.10N, 64.33W, SS Fairport sunk. 0 casualties; 123 crew rescued SS Kearny. AS-4 continues to Suez

And so it was that Queen Susan had the unhappy task of informing Sallowpad that the one galleon most valuable to the whole of the Narnian effort in the Lone Islands, the sole tall ship carrying the Gryphons, War Horses, and the hopes of the Free Narnians, had been attacked and brought down by Ettin catapults during the crossing of the Bight of Calormen.

Peter's hands shook as he read Susan's frantic, impassioned scrawl. The single ship carrying the tanks and other war materiel so critical to the Allied campaign in North Africa and stopping the Nazi march to the Suez and the oil fields, had been sunk by a U-boat in the Atlantic crossing.

They had seduced an American congresswoman, fabricated news stories, and forged documents used by the President of the United States.

It had all been for nothing.

Susan stared at the cable. Torpedoed, the one ship in all the Atlantic carrying all the tanks bound for the Eighth Army – a shipment their office had been instrumental in obtaining and overseeing. They had known all 250 tanks had been aboard the Fairport; she had seen the cables, given them to the Colonel, filed them. The precious tanks were now at the bottom of the Atlantic. Without them, the Eighth Army was crippled, and the Suez and the oil fields of the Middle East lost.

The Rule of Threes, Sallowpad, the real Sallowpad, had called it. One, the misplaced splints from the safe. Now, two, the sinking of the Fairport. And if there was a third…

Chapter 16 to follow,

The Rule of Threes

The six ships of Convoy AS-4, loaded with nearly 85 million pounds of war materiel, sailed on July 13, 1942 from New York for the Persian Gulf intended to replenish the British Eighth Army of North Africa. Three destroyers traveled as escort. Unfortunately, in these days before container ships, the ships were loaded as the materiel arrived at the port and the tanks were the last to arrive. All 250 tanks were loaded on the SS Fairport. On July 16, just south of Bermuda, a lone German submarine, U-161, fired 4 torpedoes. Two torpedoes struck the Fairport, causing her to sink within 10 minutes. The remaining ships continued on to Capetown and the Suez.

Tanks, you ask. TANKS? Rth is talking about TANKS when there is KISSING? Over 300,000 words and she finally writes kissing! Real kissing and none of that mere hand holding stuff from BRD. Mashing, snogging, lip on lip, body crushing make out session kissing. And it's Susan doing the kissing and not with Caspian, Peter, or Rabadash? I will be talking about this a bit in my LJ, so join in the conversation if you feel so inclined.

Special kudos to Ilysia for her vision of Susan and Rabadash in Glimpses of Gold which continues
to inspire my interpretation here. I greatly appreciate her perspective that Susan's interest in Rabadash was part of a game of thrones that Susan lost. I am pleased to expand a little upon how two such powerful characters might come together.
The return to consciousness was never the gradual waking he would wish. It was abrupt and harsh, done with a start, as to a clanging gong or a shrill whistle.

In summer's heat, and mid-time of the day,  
To rest my limbs upon a bed I lay;  
One window shut, the other open stood,  
Which gave such light as twinkles in a wood,  
Like twilight glimpse at setting of the sun,  
Or night being past, and yet not day begun.

Time for covert reconnaissance. Foul taste and pounding head meant truly excessive alcohol consumption. I'm horizontal. He shifted slightly but revealed nothing, still silently assessing the situation lest he be in hostile territory and behind enemy lines. I'm in my own bed, still in uniform.

Tebbitt exhaled. Alone. He was blessedly alone so no need for pretenses of caring, consideration, and compliments to the woman of the house.

O magic sleep! O comfortable bird,  
That broodest o'er the troubled sea of the mind …

Though there was a strange chemical smell mingling with the usual odors of alcohol, summer heat, and unwashed self.

Tebbitt rolled over and threw an arm over his head, knowing even as he did so it was half-hearted. He was awake and denying the march to day, trying to block the painful light. Light? His room Were full of pestilent light.

Not twinkle glimpse at setting sun, nor night past, nor day not yet begun. Light. There should not be light breaking through yon window. There was never light on his bed before. Someone had opened the damned curtain.

But with the light came a Heaven's scent. Such morning incense from the fields of May... Coffee -- the gods' own nectar.

But might I of Jove's nectar sup  
I would not change for thine.

He pried upon a gummy eye.

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
On the nightstand, he saw a glass of water, two aspirin, and a glass of orange juice.

He might have had the foresight to assemble those things before passing out, but he would not have had the coordination. Guy Hill probably brought him home and seen to these first steps of his restorative. Hill also made a great pot of coffee.

The chemical smell identified itself. There was a can of opened paint and a brush next to it, with red splashed carelessly and luridly in the room's corner like a grisly battlefield scene.

With a pathetic groan, Tebbitt reached for the aspirin and water and pulled back in alarm for the combat memory. Rationality caught up a second later. It was not blood staining his hands, but more of the red paint. There was sure to be a good story behind. He just wished he remembered what it was. Grimacing, he downed aspirin, water, and juice. Some modicum of humanity restored and pleased that the room was not spinning, he lurched out of bed to face the first momentous decision of the day.

Coffee first or shower?

The stench of alcohol and smoke had not erased the reek of the harpy that still hung about him.

Shower first. He stumbled to the washroom.

_Give me women, wine and snuff, for bless my beard, they aye shall be, my beloved Trinity._

Rubbing his face, there was too much beard for only a day's growth, even two. It must have been quite the binge. So what had happened in the interim? Perhaps the War had ended? Perhaps he'd be able to find good European liquor again. Perhaps he'd be able to sleep with some woman who was not fifteen years his senior and hiding her age behind…

With a deep shudder of distaste he banished the thought.

_How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!
The world forgetting, by the world forgot. Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!_

A sorry sight greeted him in the washroom mirror. More of that bloody red paint stained his shirt, trousers, and cuffs. With a grunt of self-disgust, he stripped the whole of it off; the uniform was all for the dustbin. There was no way paint came out. It was worse than blood. If he flirted up Shirley the Rhinoceros over in procurement, maybe offering her some chocolates, she would requisition a new uniform for him. She was a cow, but reliable when the right levers were applied and never demanded more than a saucy wink and an insincere compliment on her new hair style.

Tebbitt stared at his hand holding the safety razor – no shakes, so that was good. Lathering up and bringing the razor to his cheek, the prospect of going back to that harridan with the toy poodles and diamonds would make him slit his own throat.

Next time, that vulture Walker-Smythe could bloody lie back and think of England because he sure as hell wasn't going to do it. With all the women he was supposed to seduce or be seduced by, why weren't any even born in the same decade as he?

_You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,
Or wounded in a mentionable place.
You worship decorations; you believe
That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace._

His hand was starting shake. Just forget it, man. It's done.
Thy oaths I quit, thy memory resign;
Forget, renounce me, hate whate’er was mine.
Fair eyes, and tempting looks (which yet I view!)
Long lov’d, ador’d ideas, all adieu!

The methodical care shaving required was steadying – a blade on one's neck would do that. He always had to be especially careful around the shrapnel scars. Going too quickly, not minding what he was doing, and he'd look like he'd been crawling under barbed wire face first. The mirror's reflection improved with each smooth upward stroke of the razor. The bloodshot eyes would fade with the shower and the heavenly nectar waiting in the kitchen.

Had I a man's fair form, then might my sighs
Be echoed swiftly through that ivory shell
Thine ear, and find thy gentle heart; so well
Would passion arm me for the enterprize:
But ah! I am no knight whose foeman dies;

No, not a Knight here. Not even on the front lines or in the air. Mired instead in the effing swamp, attending tea parties and gossip.

Poor Lowrey and the rest of the Canadians in his unit. They all knew where the boys were headed. No one he'd spoken to at the Embassy had had anything good to say about the whole ludicrous plan. Landing in France was ridiculous. The American memory was too short to remember Dunkirk. Everyone was too excited that a Commonwealth nation was actually seeing combat. More incredible still, there would be Americans, in Europe; it had only taken them three years to get there while British men died all over the Continent and Africa.

This whole second front in Europe business was to placate Stalin and satisfy Roosevelt's commitment to the Soviets. With the American rags all clamoring for action in Europe, he supposed a calculated disaster might shut them up and let the Brits concentrate on Africa. But at what cost? Lowrey's life and all the others? Probably.

And still, between the shadow and the blinding flame,
The brave despair of men flings onward, ever the same
As in those doom-lit years that wait them, and have been...
And life is just the picture dancing on a screen.

The razor fell into the sink with a clatter. He flipped the fan on and cracked the window, but humidity in or out wasn't going to make a difference. Leave it to the Americans. Militarily, they were still babes, but they did have brilliant plumbing and their showers were heavenly.

The cataract of the cliff of heaven fell blinding off the brink
As if it would wash the stars away as suds go down a sink,
The seven heavens came roaring down for the throats of hell to drink,
And Noah he cocked his eye and said, "It looks like rain, I think,
The water has drowned the Matterhorn as deep as a Mendip mine,
But I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into the wine."

The paint was insidious stuff.

Out damned spot, out I say. …
All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.

Perhaps. But, soap, hot water, and scrubbing would rid him of the worst of it. The reek of an
ignominious duty done was more difficult to scour away than the red staining his hands. That too would fade, eventually.

Still, scalded and sanitized, the worst of it was washed away. Snagging a towel, it was time to follow the Heaven scent of Jove's own nectar, sweet morning incense. There was coffee in the kitchen and by the smell some ambrosia as well.

"Coffee's brilliant! Thanks, Hill," he called out, swinging open the bedroom door with one hand and adjusting the towel with the other.

Unfortunately, the voice that spoke from the chair in the cramped sitting room wasn't Guy Hill.

"Good morning, Tebbitt," Mrs. Caspian said. She glanced up from her newspaper, stuttered to a stop, and looked back down. "Oh!"

The towel slipping demanded some action on his part other than paralysis. In the very short span of time that followed, Tebbitt wanted to curse Susan for coldly bringing him to a brink and chucking him off the precipice, throw himself at her feet like a petitioner before a Queen and beg forgiveness, retreat to his room and bolt out the window, or drag her to his bed and shag her senseless.

If, hot from war, I seek thy love,
Darest thou turn aside?
Darest thou, then, my fire reprove,
By scorn, and maddening pride?

If he was able to recite Bronte in his head regardless of the content and context, something around options two and three was likely the most rational.

"Right then!" he called, hitching the towel more firmly and banishing the alternatives. "Dressing first! Though..." he trailed off with a need more desperate even than modesty (which he had little of) or sex (which he never got enough of with a comely partner regardless).

"Coffee?" he whinged. Mrs. Caspian's office coffee was even better than Hill's.

"Of course," she said calmly, eyes downcast, determinedly studying her newspaper, turning it from above the fold to below. "I just made it. There is something to eat as well. Best hurry. Guy and the Colonel will be picking us up in about an hour."

That took climbing out the bedroom window off the list as well as shagging even if she had been the tease only one .. errr… two nights…?

"What day is it?"

"Thursday," she replied blandly, still looking down.

Three days ago, then.

Tebbitt crossed over to the kitchen, not looking at her, but feeling it when her eyes began following. Mrs. Caspian didn't touch, at least not much, but she did look. When she did so, there was no blushing and she looked with the same care and attention to detail she afforded everything else. Let her look then, and know what opportunity she had squandered.

"Three days was quite the bender."
"Yes," she said. "It was."

"I had cause," he countered calmly reaching for a cup, taking his time to do so. He would not apologize, given what had driven him to it.

"Yes," Mrs. Caspian agreed, meeting his tone as evenly. "You did have cause, Tebbit."

Her acknowledgment was a soothing balm, oil on rough water. In pouring the coffee she had made and seeing the neat plate of sandwiches by the pot, he also saw her plea for normalcy and forgiveness.

The coffee he sipped was stinging hot, but his anger had cooled somewhere after the third pub and Hill never leaving off about it. There was their cover that, despite the fissures, still had to hold for them both to do what needed to be done. Mrs. Caspian was returning to England in a few weeks. She shared a flat with her mother who knew nothing of what they were really about. All this Hill had argued into an ever thicker haze of smoke and rum to the tune of a pounding jazz riff.

What he had not told Hill was his certainty that for all those very good arguments, it was something else holding back the tide of passion Mrs. Caspian kept so well banked. She had managed her mother all summer; she could have finessed an affair as well. He saw it in the seductive arch of her exposed neck hidden behind the fall of luscious hair, in the sinuous line of her chiseled leg displayed just so, and how, with one long pull of a back zipper, she would shimmy out of that plain dress that clung perfectly to every curving rise and dip of her body.

She had wanted as much as he, and still had rejected him. Damned if he knew why, but there had to be a good reason for it. He trusted her judgment that far. He didn't like it, but he could not, in fairness, stay angry about it.

Turning about, he caught her staring. Mrs. Caspian was not the sort to look away when she was caught.

"Are we Pax, then?"

"Pax."

_and seven more loves in my bed_  
_Crown with wine my mournful head,_  
_Pitying and forgiving all_  
_Thy transgressions great and small._  

He grabbed the sandwich plate and ambled back to his room to dress. Juggling coffee and plate he was in no position to prevent the towel from sliding to the floor in the hallway. Pity that.

_But the expression of a well-made man appears not only in his face,_  
_It is in his limbs and joints also, it is curiously in the joints of his hips and wrists,_  

_It is in his walk, the carriage of his neck, the flex of his waist and knees, dress does not hide him,_  
_The strong sweet quality he has strikes through the cotton and broadcloth,_  
_To see him pass conveys as much as the best poem, perhaps more,_  
_You linger to see his back, and the back of his neck and shoulder-side._

Let Mrs. Caspian linger at his retreating back all she wanted. From the muted noise behind him, it sounded as if Mrs. Caspian had her own regrets as well and he had no problem with her dwelling
upon them. Turnabout was fair play. Tebbitt kicked the towel into the bedroom and shoved the door close with his foot.

As Hill pulled the car up to the kerb, the Colonel was relieved to see Tebbitt and Mrs. Caspian standing together without the telltale tension between them. With Lowrey gone and Gladys still in such a state, he needed the rest of his staff cooperative and not distracted. The War did not stop for personal crises.

Hill muttered a, "that's better," under his breath, seeing the improvement as well.

"It is indeed. And thank you, Mr. Hill, for your assistance in brokering the cease fire."

True to his role of seeing all, saying nothing, and denying everything, Hill just shrugged. "Don't know what you mean, Colonel."

Mrs. Caspian slid into the back seat next to him. Tebbitt took the front, clutching the Washington Post papers Mrs. Caspian had provided for his briefing in advance of their meeting at the American War Department.

"Morning, Sir," Tebbitt said, spirits very high. "Thank you for letting me come today."

It was a bribe and a reward. After suffering through what he had, Mrs. Caspian had convincingly argued Tebbitt deserved some task that was meatier and more respectable.

"Your contacts and back channels are very valuable, Tebbitt," the Colonel told him instead.

"They have just started moving the War Department over to Virginia, so we will get to see their new Pentagon office," Mrs. Caspian put in. In a voice that sounded, to his suspicious ear unnaturally bland, she added, "Mr. Hill, will we be going across the Dumbarton Bridge?"

"It's on the way, Mrs. Caspian," Hill said.

They were both looking ahead far too eagerly and the Colonel discerned there was something occurring of which he would probably need to pretend utter ignorance.

As the Dumbarton Bridge loomed closer, Hill whistled and Mrs. Caspian gave a little, faked gasp of surprise.

Tebbitt looked up from his perusal of the newspapers and the latest vitriolic heartburn appearing in Drew Pearson's Washington Merry-Go-Round. The muckraker had been making everyone's life hell and they needed Tebbitt to rein him in.

"What?" Tebbitt asked, looking around. "What's wrong?"

Mrs. Caspian tapped Tebbitt on the shoulder over the front seat and pointed. "The statue of the bronzed buffalo on the Bridge. Someone painted it last night."

Hill guffawed. "Just a part of it. See?"

As they drove over the Bridge, the Colonel saw lurid red paint staining the statue's underside. It made for an impressive display as it was a very well-endowed bull male buffalo, his ample endowment now painted bright red.

For his part, a slow blush was creeping over Tebbitt's face as he stared out the window. Hill was driving slowly to make sure he got a good look.
"How very creative," Mrs. Caspian murmured, eyes flashing with amusement. "Wouldn't you say, Wing Commander?"

"Very," Tebbitt managed to choke out.

In the end, the Colonel decided it was useful for Tebbitt to see that attending meetings with American War Department under secretaries involved far less glamour and far more berating than he might have otherwise expected. Tebbitt was on his left, at the table. It bothered him to relegate Mrs. Caspian to the back corner with the other office girls but she did collect useful contacts there in the same way that Hill gathered information from every driver and livery service in Washington. He had discovered that Mrs. Caspian did a terrific impression of shorthand using a personal code that was faster, accurate, and not decipherable.

Today's beating was courtesy of a florid under secretary from the Navy who was fond of salty language. "Damned sloppy of you all losing to a U-boat the one goddamned ship you needed the most!"

Tebbitt shifted in his seat, but kept his mouth shut. None of them would remind the Americans that the reason so many ships had been lost in the last six months to Nazi U-boats was because their American Admiral King was a fool.

"Thank you again for so quickly replenishing the order," the Colonel responded instead, placating and diverting the prickly man. "With General Eisenhower now overseeing Operation Torch and the planned retaking of North Africa, those tanks will be vital to the eastern part of the operation. We understand the SS Seatrain is standing ready in New York to leave for the Suez as soon as the tanks are manufactured and delivered."

From the back, an oily, non-uniformed young man leaned forward over the table. He was from their foreign office, the State department and reported to Secretary Hull. The Colonel hadn't caught his name in the quick introductions and would rely on Mrs. Caspian to tell him after the meeting.

"Secretary of State Hull personally asked me to attend this meeting, Colonel, to express his grave concerns regarding your security." His voice turned icy. "Secretary Hull does not appreciate reading his private correspondence to Ambassador Halifax in the Washington Post."

That was Tebbitt's cue. "We are concerned as well and I will be following up with Mr. Pearson about his sources as I have a good working relationship with him."

"If you don't want to generate more opposition in the Congress, you might see what you can do about his reporting on your bloody oppressive policies in India as well," the under secretary spit out. "You all are leaking like a sieve over there!"

There was an angry twitch in Tebbitt's jaw, but to his credit, the pilot held his temper. "Of course, Sir." His counter-stroke was brilliant and answered for all, with a further credit to Mrs. Caspian for the quick briefing she had provided. "I did read today in the Merry Go-Round about some extravagant wedding gifts Mr. Hopkins and his bride received. Would you like me to take that up with Mr. Pearson as well?"

Harry Hopkins was Roosevelt's number one Brain Trust man, the President's most trusted adviser and his personal friend. If Drew Pearson was skewering Hopkins, it would be a huge concern to President Roosevelt.

"Lies," the naval under secretary muttered. "It's ridiculous."
Secretary Hull's greasy minion was more calculating. "If you might speak to Mr. Pearson about that matter as well, Wing Commander Tebbitt, the President would be grateful."

On that high note of American gratitude, it was time to end the meeting. The Colonel hustled them out before Tebbitt's temper got the better of him and they might be forced to regain ground earned and then lost in an angry outburst.

Guy made a point of driving over the Dumbarton Bridge again and Tebbitt sank lower in the seat. The Colonel pretended to not notice the pilot's discomfort and the amusement of Mrs. Caspian and Hill. They dropped Tebbitt off at the Mayflower where he could begin his search for the muckraking Pearson in the Men's Bar. Guy then drove toward Massachusetts Avenue for the return to the Embassy, thankfully not taking another detour by the defaced buffalo.

Usually, Mrs. Caspian could be counted on to keep a conversation. Now, with Tebbitt gone and no buffalo to remark upon, she was staring at the window, picking at a finger on her glove.

"You're awful quiet, Mrs. Caspian," Guy finally said into the billowing silence.

She smiled apologetically. "I apologize. I was just thinking about the crows I saw roosting on the Pentagon."

He did not recall any crows, but Guy seemed to understand of what she was speaking. He nodded, slowly turning the car on the circle. "Sneaky things, them crows."

"And clever as well," Mrs. Caspian said.

With that enigmatic statement, she turned in her seat. "Colonel, if your calendar is free, might I have a few words when we return?"

So, from crows to a private conversation? The two were surely linked in her mind, though not in his.

"Of course, Mrs. Caspian, you know I value your insights."

With a nod of satisfaction, she launched into some gay discussion with Guy about Agnes, Legba the rat, and some other rat named Willa who sounded inordinately intelligent for a rodent.

The Colonel leaned back in the seat, studying his protégé, as a spy would, without seeming to do so. As Mrs. Caspian's talents came into clearer focus during the weeks in his office, he had actually gone so far as to check with Passport Control and birth records. The papers, the official records, said Susan Pevensie was, in fact, fifteen. She was an unremarkable, middle class school girl who was, save for languages, rubbish at books. It made so little sense, he wondered if the woman in his office was some impostor for the real Susan Pevensie. But the mother was unquestionably the mother, the father was in New York and the possibility of an elaborate switch made even less sense.

With a sigh of feigned weariness, he shut his eyes and listened to the conversation, knowing with every word and inflection he heard that she was not a fifteen year old school girl.

He was an old spy, a man who had studied the human condition inside and out for over thirty years across four continents and the British Empire. He had taught recruitment, profiling and interrogation techniques at Sarratt and Camp X. He had written the manual, such as it was, on how to turn an agent and feed him back to the other side, the fine, treacherous art of the double cross.

Never had he seen such a confounding contradiction as that posed by Mrs. Caspian.
Paper could lie – they had experts in how to accomplish it. It was and had been his business to see and train others in how to spot the very type of lie Susan Pevensie lived.

Susan Pevensie was thirty, give or take a year by his judge. She possessed management and organizational skills a Wall Street company would have paid a fortune for. She moved more confidently among great and influential people than even thirty years lived could have provided. The skill denoted not just age, but considerable experience in dealing with the powerful, reading them, and manipulating them. Her observations were keen, her nerves of steel, and her compassion boundless. Most tellingly, she bore herself as a woman of authority, who was accustomed to advising and receiving advice, and who expected compliance when she spoke. Did she not even notice how crowds parted in her wake when she passed?

She was a superb liar.

He was certain she had seen combat. Fifteen year old Susan Pevensie had seen people die and buried them. The ease with which she managed Tebbitt and other men left no doubt – she had had at least one lover, though not, he thought, a husband. Although he had not seen it, he did not doubt that she could play the temptress as easily as she played the aloof Queen.

He had thought at first she was a natural and highly skilled actress. She could certainly play parts where called upon to do so. But that did not explain the substance behind the woman playing the role and the experience it denoted.

Agnes had seen it and teased him for it. He had pulled out his old textbooks and papers by Freud and Jung, trying to get an angle on this old consciousness in a young body. Jung had come the closest. Perhaps she had taped into some great archetypal consciousness? No one archetype fit her – as he and Agnes had debated, there was plenty of the Trickster to Tebbitt's Fool. What Agnes described in Tarot terms as the Pentacles influence, he had seen as worldly, real life experience – refinement, confidence, accomplishment, and self-reliance.

But to have unified these elements so completely, so young? How? When?

When psychoanalysis and Agnes' interpretative Tarot failed, he had tried applying the principles of logic drilled into him at University, the scientific method of Ockham and the methods of Holmes. The problem was he could not devise even an improbable or impossible theorem to test. Hard science and the softer analysis of psychology could describe what he saw but they could not explain why.

With increasing frustration, he wondered if his answers would have to come from Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, Lewis Carroll, and the Communion of Saints. As he slipped into the untestable realm of faith and the fantastical, he saw the mystery was solvable only with additional data that had to come from the woman herself. And that, as Agnes had clearly said, would not be forthcoming for the High Priestess within Susan Pevensie kept her own counsel.

While he was peripherally aware that they had pulled into the Embassy, still he started from his musings as Guy swung the passenger side door open. Mrs. Caspian was already out of the car.

They climbed the stairs to the office where Gladys manned the phones, no longer crying at every moment but still desperately unhappy. He wished there was something positive to say. Lowrey and others were headed to southern England to train and then would sail across the Channel into the death trap that was Operation Jubilee.

"Anything burning down, Gladys?" he asked, shucking off his jacket to the coat tree and taking from her offered tray his cigar and his messages.
"No, Sir. There were five calls from the Ambassador demanding updates on your efforts to plug the leaks to the newspapers."

The only urgency there was to prevent further public ridicule of his Lordship the Ambassador. Somehow, everyone in his office had taken to referring to Lord Halifax as "The Penguin" and he had considered launching an investigation of his own to determine its source. He later thought the better of it – plausible deniability and all that.

Far worse than the Ambassador's humiliation was that leaks about British oppression in India really could not be any more ill-timed. The Americans were giving them another 250 Sherman tanks to replace those now resting 500 miles from Bermuda on the Atlantic sea floor. The caustic naval under secretary was correct that lurid headlines of an Empire's brutality in India would not win them Congressional support and made President's Roosevelt's unwavering support for Churchill more difficult to maintain. They owed it to themselves and to their allies to halt the unfavorable and confidential information flooding from the British Embassy.

Tebbitt's contact with Pearson was a start toward discerning where the muckraker was getting his inside information.

"Mrs. Caspian! In my office!"

She followed him in, shutting the door with a hip. He settled in his chair with a creak of oiled leather, flipped on his fan, gestured for her to take a seat, and waited for Mrs. Caspian's next, masterful lie.

She paused, mustering her thoughts and preparing her lie. "Sir, something has been troubling me."

He toyed with the cigar between his fingers. He could not actually remember when he had last smoked one. Chewing it was a nervous habit. "If it is troubling to you, Mrs. Caspian, it should probably be troubling to me."

"It started with the splints from the safe that I found on the floor."

She was referring to the night she, Tebbitt, and Hill had borrowed the contents of the Vice President's briefcase, copied it, and returned it without anyone being the wiser. The splints, always inserted in the hinges of the office safe to alert them if someone had broken into it, had fallen to the floor; no one of them could remember the precise sequence of events that nervy night. One of them might have forgotten to remove or replace the splints after accessing the safe.

"It could have been an error," he said.

She nodded. "I do not disagree." Mrs. Caspian then pushed on with her analysis. "But, the splints were followed by the sinking of the SS Fairport, Sir. And now we have these embarrassing leaks. Can we really complacently call this chain of ill events simply bad luck or coincidence? Should we not at least consider if it might be something else?"

"These leaks?" Peter asked, shuffling again through the July letters. "The gems of the Grand Vizier's third wife and Sir Flobber's brutality in the Lone Islands? Did you find what she was really writing of?"
Edmund gestured to some newspaper scraps. "I found stories during that period about a parure of emeralds as a wedding gift to the wife of a member of Roosevelt's Brain Trust and leaks in Lord Halifax's office about India."

His brother studied the postscript Susan had hastily appended right before mailing. "According to this, the tanks left Tashbaan for North Africa at the end of July?"

"Yes. It looks as if she posted it on July 29." Edmund crossed the room and sat on the bed opposite Peter, rubbing his hands along his legs. He had already asked Eustace to kip out on the floor of Lucy's room for the night. They would take turns, he supposed, until their parents returned next week. There would need to be a trip to Oxford as well, he thought. But, that was for tomorrow.

"So what is next?" Peter asked. Even as he spoke it, Edmund could see his brother calculating the span of days needed for censor review and an Atlantic voyage for each of Susan's precious letters.

"That is the end, the last letter I received. We now return to where we began, with Asim coming to see me last week."

Peter passed a hand over his face and, as Edmund had seen so very many times before, his brother put aside his weariness and concerns to attend with the singular focus that made him such an effective leader. He leaned forward, hands clasped in front of him, in mimicry of Edmund's own posture, one adopted from years of conferences on camp stools, wooden chairs, tree stumps, and boulders.

"Tell me, Edmund. Tell me what my friend the spy told you of the adventures of Queen Susan in Tashbaan."

To follow, Chapter 17, Moles In The Garden

The end draws near as we return to the beginning, Chapter 3, Later, wherein the Muslim spy who dreams of The Dawn Treader visits a boy who is really a King.

Tebbitt's stream of consciousness poetry includes: Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare; Song To Celia by Ben Jonson; Eloisa to Abelard by Alexander Pope; Elegy V by Ovid; I Sing The Body Electric by Walt Whitman; Endymion, Fairy Sonnet, Women, Wine and Snuff, and Ode to a Nightingale by John Keats; Picture Show and Glory of Women by Siegfried Sassoon; Wine and Water by G. K. Chesterton; Passion by Charlotte Bronte; and My spectre around me night and day by William Blake.

The parure of emeralds (not) given to Harry Hopkins' new bride, the leaks about British oppression in India, and the painting of a buffalo's private parts are all taken directly from The Irregulars, though I've fiddled with the timing. Links and discussion will be in my LJ.
Moles in the Garden, Part 1

The Queen Susan in Tashbaan
Chapter 17, Moles in the Garden, Part 1

"I reached in experience the nirvana which is unborn, unrivalled, secure from attachment, undecaying and unstained. This condition is indeed reached by me which is deep, difficult to see, difficult to understand, tranquil, excellent, beyond the reach of mere logic, subtle, and to be realized only by the wise."

Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)

"Second to the right, and straight on till morning." That, Peter had told Wendy, was the way to the Neverland; but even birds, carrying maps and consulting them at windy corners, could not have sighted it with these instructions. Peter, you see, just said anything that came into his head.

J.M. Barrie, Peter and Wendy

"In the civilized countries I believe there are no witches left, nor wizards, nor sorceresses, nor magicians. But, you see, the Land of Oz has never been civilized, for we are cut off from all the rest of the world. Therefore we still have witches and wizards amongst us."

L. Frank Baum, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

Richard Russell was trying to be irritable, but really did not have the wherewithal to manage it. He hated the hospital. It was a pointless exercise. He knew what was wrong with him, there was no cure, it would only become worse over time, and his wife was the only one who seemed unable to grasp the futility and inevitability of it all. He should have never married her. Now, they were both trapped and if he pushed too hard, Mary would declare him incompetent even sooner than otherwise, with no chance of that divorce. He would be hers until the coroner removed his decayed body from Russell Hall in a pine box.

He should have stayed with Wangari in the Kenya Colony and not returned to England. She would have cared for him, he would have been with their children and grandchildren, and when the time had come, she would not have stopped him from deliberately staggering out into the bush and putting his life into God's hands.

Or paws, as Peter would have said, with a knowing smile he would share with Kirke and Polly.

He turned the pages of his field book, studying the scratchings with something close to delight and feeling more content that he would have expected. It had been a good day and it was pleasant to have everyone coming to him. He and Polly had made good progress on the Castor fiber project. Kirke had come by with a cigar, a flask of whiskey, and a journal article on Egyptian embalming and mummification techniques which had been suitably grisly and thoroughly enjoyable. Peter had shared fascinating ideas on equine eyesight and told him amusing stories about the lengths eagle and beaver females would go to defend their bonded mates from encroaching females. Richard was trying to envision a beaver seductress, a smiling effort to be sure. Peter had called her a "Jezebel" and Richard still was not certain if the boy had been speaking metaphorically or literally.

With summer evening falling, it had seemed stuffy in his little, sterile prison, so Richard got up to open the window. It was so easy he wondered if he might be asleep and dreaming that he did so. Still, the breeze felt real. He saw the lumbering shape of a mole on the grass below. Peter was ambivalent about moles and said they were secretive and could, if you were not careful, undermine the ground on which you stood. There were two rabbits dancing in the shadow of the tree.
Dancing? Did rabbits dance?

He was sitting in bed, not sure how he had returned there, when the cat came through the window. He – with such size and bearing he could only be a male cat – was very large and orange, with liquid golden eyes. He sat on the sill and wrapped his tail around the body.

"You should go," Richard told the cat, nevertheless glad for the company. "That pretty nurse lusting for Peter will see you and toss you back out the window."

"She is gone for the evening," the cat said. "And I will have left before Digory and Polly arrive."

"Mary and Asim were going to come," Richard said, feeling peeved at the change of plan that no one told him of.

"They will, but must first take Peter to the train station."

The irritation grew. "He promised to come tomorrow to talk about owls! He said nothing of going anywhere."

The cat flicked his tail. "My King has abandoned his promise to you without explanation."

Richard considered this statement which could be very offensive, but was not. He was not sure how he knew that the cat was speaking of Peter. "An emergency must have arisen, or something Peter felt was very important," Richard concluded.

"Yes," the cat confirmed. "My King will visit you next week."

Belatedly, Richard thought he should acknowledge the obvious. "You are talking. I am talking to a cat. Am I hallucinating?"

"Does this feel as a dream?"

To Richard, the whole conversation, the breeze through the window, the calls of the larks in the dusk, the scents from the hospital garden, and the gold in the cat's eyes seemed more real than his most lucid waking moments.

"No," he told the cat. "Though perhaps I have lost my mind even sooner than I had feared?"

"No," the cat said. "Some of my children are calling to me this evening. I have come to be closer to them, and so came to you."

"I thought cats never came when called."

The cat flicked an ear backwards, as if listening to unheard sounds. "I always come; it is people who do not know how to ask."

"A point well taken!" Richard said with a laugh. "Though, I was not calling to you."

"You were thinking of walking into the wilds and giving yourself into my paws."

"You weren't supposed to hear that!"

The cat was unflappably unconcerned at Richard's consternation. "I hear everything, Richard," he said, as though stating something childishly simple.
"If so, then you've heard me ask this before. Would you save us all the misery to come? Could you end it here for me, now?"

The cat leaped, no small distance, from the sill to the bed, purring just as Petunia, Polly's short-haired, had done earlier that day.

"My son, you know all the many answers to that old question. I am sorry for all of you for what is to come, but you do not see all ends."

Richard dashed the tears of frustration away, certain that would be the answer but hoping however irrationally for something else. The cat rubbed his head under Richard's arm and his hand fell to gently stroke the offered, arching back. The cat's fur was not as soft as Richard had thought it would be. It felt a little coarser and older but was very fragrant. To him, cats had always smelled of fish, or in the case of the great cats, blood, dust, and heat. This cat smelled of summer and rain.

"Well if bad things happen to good people, might the converse be true? I am bad person, so shouldn't good things happen to me?"

The cat purred more loudly. "For all your failings, Richard, how could I not love a son who loves this creation as well as you do?"

"Flattery," Richard said with a disgusted snort. "You are clever."

"I am," the cat agreed amiably.

"Omniscient, too."

"But I am not omnipotent when my children are closed to my voice and will. And so, as I was here, I personally wished to thank you for your efforts with my King."

Richard picked at his coverlet. He did not think scratching the cat under the chin would be appropriate.

"Yes, so you call Peter. He does have quite the regal bearing, doesn't he?" Richard sighed, feeling the frustration of earlier rise again. "I hate to see it. He shall be miserable as he disappoints everyone." A thought occurred to him and he turned crafty. "If you grant me miraculous healing, I could continue my efforts to steer him differently."

The cat swatted him lightly and the rumble was more a growl. "Do not bargain with me, Richard. Or make light of this."

He sighed again. "Very well. I apologize. But please tell me if it will be well. Will Peter find his way, and learn what you want him to do?"

"That is his story, not yours, Richard."

This was absurd, in Richard's opinion, and he had no qualms arguing the point. "That's not accurate at all. Our stories have joined and, as I have been pushing him to change course all summer, I am interested in the outcome. I do not wish for my last coherent act to be a failure."

The cat growled, more with frustration than anger. "You are incorrigible, Richard."

Feeling he was making progress, Richard pressed his case again. "It would make falling into dementia easier knowing that Peter will turn out for the best."
"Guilt," the cat mused. "How ironic."

"Don't change the subject," Richard countered.

"I will admit to you that I would have preferred if our efforts had been successful now." The cat jumped back to the sill, purring again. "It would, as you say, have prevented my King much disappointment that is to come. But, efforts begun here will not be in vain, my most difficult son."

Now Richard grumbled. "So you are saying it shall be in your time, not mine, or maybe even Peter's."

The cat flicked his tail, and Richard took that as a yes. "Polly and Digory are coming, so I shall leave."

"They will be disappointed they missed you."

"I am with them. They know that."

As the cat turned to leave, Richard saw his golden eyes flash in the starlight. "It occurs to me, cat, that your eyes are not terribly cat-like."

"They are," the cat said, looking back over his shoulder and blinking slowly. "I am a true Beast. You are thinking of the wrong cat my clever, loving son."

As the cat leaped out of the window, Richard gasped for the painful moment of clarity that pierced through the fog of his mind. In a few moments the insight would be gone, so he quickly jotted the words down in his field book.

Listening for it, he could hear Polly and Kirke in the hallway, the frantic scrambling of Simon's nails on the hospital's cold floor, and Petunia's mewling. They were making quite the racket and burst into his room with no warning at all.

"Don't you ever knock!" he thundered at the intruders.

"Simon!" Polly snapped. "Whatever has gotten into you?" The normally very well-mannered spaniel was pulling Polly off her feet in his eagerness.

Kirke was juggling the carpet bag with Petunia as if it was filled with hot bricks and venomous snakes, for Petunia was yowling with impatience.

"I am opening the bag!" Kirke called, just as Polly let go of the leash with an exasperated, "Simon, are you mad?"

Cat and dog scrambled toward the open window, Simon darting around the bed and Petunia jumping out of the bag, on to the bed, and over. Simon launched up on to his hind legs, put his front paws on the sill and looked eagerly outside, his stump tail wagging so fast he looked fit to burst from his skin. Petunia walked back and forth on the sill, mewling softly and questing, tail in the air.

"You just missed him," Richard told cat and dog.

Kirke set the bag down with a thump and collapsed into a chair. "Daft," he muttered. "Both of them." With a deep breath and more like himself, he said, "Mary and Asim will be along shortly."

"Simon! Heel!" Polly snapped, and with a tug of the retrieved leash, the spaniel reluctantly left the
window. With a final questioning meow, Petunia turned away from the window. Polly scooped her up and dumped the cat on his bed. "They had to drop Peter at the railway station. He has had to go off unexpectedly to see his brother and sister in Cambridge."

Richard smiled secretly to himself, for he already knew their news and even more besides.

"You said we just missed someone?" Kirke asked stretching out his legs with a sigh and nudging the carpet bag with his foot.

"Yes," Richard told them, delighting in springing a little surprise. "There was a cat here. He asked me to convey his regards to the two of you."

Polly and Kirke both stiffened and gasped identically, same moment, same expression, same sound. Richard felt a momentary irritation that he had been too obtuse for too many years not to have seen it before. The mystical accord between Polly and Kirke had always been there. When had it happened, he wondered. When had they gone to the same place as Peter? Whatever it was? Wherever it was? To a place with cats that talked and beaver seductresses?

"Cat?" Polly asked.

Kirke just stared – which was wiser as he was a terrible liar.

"Yes." Really his glee in this was juvenile. "And now, before Mary and Asim get here, I want you to tell me a story the cat put me in a mind to hear."

"Story?" Polly repeated with a frantic look at her paling friend frozen to his chair. Kirke had still not done anything except stare in shock. In another moment, he would be polishing his spectacles and searching his pockets for aspirin powder.

"Stop sounding like a bloody parrot," Richard snapped. He looked down at the words he had written in the book. Already, their connection to the golden eyes of the great cats of Africa was fading from his mind. He tapped the book page and shoved it toward Kirke. "After seeing the cat, I want to hear the creation story of yours, about that lion on your wardrobe and how all those animals came into being."

Asim bin Kalil felt an accustomed and unpleasant impatience. He wanted nothing more than a cup of tea and time with Kwong Lee, Lin Kun, and Mr. Patel. With his perceptive friends, to the tune of late summer raindrops and the chime of a hall clock, he wanted to dissect the telegram from the remarkable liar, Edmund Pevensie, to his brother, Peter Pevensie, who was really a King.

Instead, there was a late, leisurely, communal meal in the kitchen of Russell Hall, the four of them clustered around the big, rough table, with Polly, Mary, and a fragrant vegetable curry. Lee had opened a bottle of wine, but no one was drinking it. In other times, Asim would have been at his ease, enjoying the sounds of friends and rain, the light of candles reflecting off copper pots hanging from an engineer's clever contraptions, the odors of pungent spices mingling with the scent of herbs and tilled soil that drifted in over the open top half of the kitchen door.

By common, unspoken agreement, they were conversing on things other than the peculiar events of the afternoon. Polly and Mr. Patel were exchanging notes about the beaver project. Mary and Kun were discussing something involving vegetables and rumors smuggled out of (or perhaps food smuggled into) Japanese-occupied Hong Kong, but Asim's Cantonese was worse even than Kun's English.

Lee sat next to him, watching everything, saying nothing, and anticipating every need before the
needful person even knew of it.

He sighed and took another sip of tea wondering what undercurrents Lee and Kun were observing this evening. Mary had worked herself into a very odd state, and Lee and Kun both understood her better than he. Mary had been apart from Richard before – this most recent trip to Africa had been more than a month – yet she had taken as ill to Richard's hospitalization as he had. Peter Pevsnee annoyed her, not so much the man (Asim could not think of him as a boy and so did not), as everyone else's reaction to him and her not unfounded perception that he generated secrets to which she was not privy. She was sensitive enough to see, but not so wise as to understand.

A predicament he peculiarly found himself in now. I have been among Europeans too long. Their linear ways and thinking were narrowing his own. Answers to, no, he chided himself, the illumination of, the accumulating mysteries were not to be found in conventional and Western thinking. It was why he so craved a quiet discussion with Kun, Lee, and Mr. Patel.

Asim had positioned himself so that he would only look upon Polly and her vibrant light with effort. An afternoon with Peter, an evening with Polly and Digory both, then finally Polly alone and his inner eye was fatigued. It did also seem that Polly was more effusively golden than usual. For what reason, he could not fathom, save that it must be related to the telegram.

As the conversation swelled louder, Lee said quietly at his side, "A strange day, it seems?"

"Very," he agreed with a grunt.

"I had hoped that Peter and Digory would come here tonight." She pursed her lips in mild disapproval at his inadequate management. "I made up rooms on the guest floor for them and cooked chicken for Digory."

He shook his head. "I know you all wished to meet Peter; I desired your observations. Unfortunately, the telegram came, he was off to Oxford barely an hour later, and so the opportunity to extend the invitation never even arose."

"Yes, about that mysterious telegram that sent Peter dashing away? You, Mary, and Polly all spoke of it."

He discreetly patted a pocket and she nodded, understanding that he would say nothing until Mary and Polly left.

"And Richard?" Lee asked.

"When Mary and I came to his room this evening, after seeing Peter off at the station, Richard was with Polly and Digory and in very good spirits."

Lee broke off from her searching study of Polly and Mary to stare at him, disbelieving.

"Truly," he confirmed.

"Richard is always better around Polly," Lee said quietly.

It had been one more odd thing in an exceedingly odd day. Asim had had the impression of intruding upon something extraordinary and private when he and Mary had finally made their way to Richard's hospital room. Polly had been sitting on Richard's hospital bed, holding his hand; Simon curled up next to her. Digory, reclining in a chair, had stretched his long legs out and propped them on a bed corner, Petunia in his lap, the cat purring so loudly they could hear her in the hall. The window was flung open.
The three had all been laughing, not with humor, exactly, but joy. Relaxed and radiant, it was a beautiful picture. With his and Mary's entrance, the fair spell broke and it all just seemed to be a sterile hospital room with too many people and pets.

At the far end of the table, Mr. Patel laughed, a wheezing, gleeful sound. Polly's laugh was like bells. Asim followed Lee's own look, down the table. As Mr. Patel wagged his head and waved his arms about, Polly's eyes shined with a luminous enthusiasm in the low kitchen light that mingled with the bright light within her. Long ago they had all agreed that in these intimate settings, Polly was a very beautiful woman for all that she was older than any save Richard. Like the light itself, her singular beauty came not from without, but from within. Polly was a very contented woman and there was a powerful grace in everything she did.

Evidently some sign she had been waiting for occurred and Lee got up from her seat. In a choreographed dance, Kun rose a moment behind his wife to clear the tea cups and settle them in the soapy dishwashing basin.

Mr. Patel leaped to his feet and gallantly helped Polly from her chair. He was as smitten with her as Richard had always been.

"Which room on the guest floor, Lee?" Polly asked, shooing Petunia from Mary's lap. The cat, any cat, really, always made a point of sitting on Mary when in her company. It drove Mary spare.

"I have not made up a room there yet, Polly, I apologize."

Asim did not understand, for Lee had said there were rooms already made up for Peter and Digory, so why not use one of them? But, the housekeeper always had her confounding reasons and in such matters no one ever questioned her decisions.

Both Mary and Polly made appropriately comforting assurances.

Lee smiled her gratitude. She was a better liar even than Edmund Pevensie. "I will set up the spare room at the end of the family hall – that would be easiest I think."

Again, Mary and Polly made appropriately supportive noises.

Mary linked her arm through Polly's. "Let's have a drink in the drawing room. You promised me stories about Richard."

As a logistics and supply officer, Asim would have expected difficulty with that many people and livestock trying to move anywhere without a Sergeant barking orders. But, five people, cat and dog, all left the kitchen in an orderly way with discussions of the bedding Kun would arrange, a bottle of gin for the drawing room that Lee would fetch, and Polly's bag to the spare room at the end of the hall on the floor with the family's rooms. The only disagreement was over who would take Simon and Petunia out for the evening constitutional; Mr. Patel won that duty.

Alone with the drip of the faucet, Asim rose and placed his own cup in the dish basin. He had tried to assist with dish washing once. Lee had smacked him with a ladle, Mr. Patel had laughed at his ineptitude, and Kun, with silent censure, had redone everything once his back was turned. When one ate meals from tins, roasted it on camp spits, baked it in pits lined with stones, and scoured dishes in sand, the modern English kitchen was too foreign to an old campaigner and desert man.

He returned to his seat, withdrew the telegram, and spread it on the table.

Lu, Eust & I been to N. Saw Casp. Saw A. Lu/me no go back. Ed. And, Peter's response: Am coming 2night. A. is here 2.
He heard footsteps, Lee's light, mincing steps, and Kun's measured ones, then the sounds of the door opening and closing and Simon's claws on the wood floors.

Kun returned silently to the dishes; Mr. Patel fetched his tin cup and partially smoked cigarette from the sideboard and sat at the far end of the table, his accustomed place when he smoked. Lee calmly went over to the flue that opened into the kitchen just as Mary's voice drifted down from the drawing room above, "Petunia, can you not find some other lap in this house!"

Polly's laughter was silenced as Lee gently shut the flue door. She took her own place at the table and drew the telegram closer. The others clustered around her, Mr. Patel leaning in, arm outstretched with cigarette dangling from his fingers as far away from Lee as possible.

"The younger brother who sent the telegram is Edmund," Asim explained. "The youngest sister is Lucy and their cousin is Eustace, who is, even by the account of Peter, Digory, and Polly, a dreadful boy."

Kun looked over his wife's shoulder and read it silently, his lips moving across the lines. With a nod of satisfaction, he returned to the dishes.

"Been to N?" Lee asked to no one in particular. "Saw A? Saw Casp?"

Mr. Patel sat back, thoughtfully tapping his cigarette against the tin cup. "Polly and Digory were there? They saw this too?"

"Yes," Asim told him. "To answer your next question, it is my belief they understood this cryptic message precisely as Peter did."

"So, Polly and Digory know of A and N and Casp as well." Lee picked up the slip and studied the side with Peter's handwritten message Mary had conveyed to the telegraph office. "Peter has beautiful handwriting. I have noticed this on his thank you notes."

"I shall add that to the list of Peter's mysteries," Mr. Patel said dryly.

"You should also add that Peter took command of the situation and that Digory and Polly allowed him to do so. They were very deferential."

Mr. Patel stared and Lee's mouthed formed an "o" of surprise. At the sink, Kun quietly doused a saucer, listening intently.

The way that Peter had assumed control and presumed that everyone would follow his orders had been remarkable. That they all did so automatically, without protest or comment, was also singular. Asim had recognized Peter's authority of command and found he unconsciously obeyed it by virtue of habit alone; Peter's dictatorial manner had certainly put Mary's back up.

"A could be anyone I suppose," Lee said, returning to the telegram. "It is strange that Peter writes of A being here as well."

"As if A is one who is everywhere," Mr. Patel commented thoughtfully. "Do you believe they refer to Allah?"

"It occurred to me," Asim replied. "Except that they are not Muslim, so why not refer to God by the name they use?" God, Lord, Jehovah, Yahweh. Adonai was possible, though not especially likely. "And Edmund writes that they saw A."

"True," Lee mused. "And he writes they have been to N and presumably seen A and Casp there. So,
"Nothingham, Newmarket, Newcastle, North End, Newton, Newton Abbott," Mr. Patel rattled off through a smoky haze. He traveled the country extensively on consultancy jobs. "Or…” he trailed off, with a knowing look at Lee.

She took a breath and completed his thought. "If they, like Peter, are nearing liberation from samsara, N might be Nirvana."

Nirvana. Moksha. Samadhi. The ultimate goal of life's journey for some people of faith. It could be a perfect union with God; perfect detachment from worldly desires, transcendental happiness.

Kun abruptly dumped the dregs of the dishwashing basin into the sink with an uncharacteristic clatter. Wiping his hands on his apron and shaking his head in disagreement, he walked out of the kitchen, in the direction of the main hall.

Mr. Patel arched an inquiring eyebrow at Lee and she shrugged. "He has had an idea for a few weeks now and is probably going to the Library."

"Can he get into the Library with all the fossils?"

They were, as the saying goes, up to their necks in several tonnes of plaster blocks encasing fossilized bone and rock collected from all over the world. Mary had happily agreed to store them for the British Museum for the duration of the war. Her eyes and ambition and the tonnage involved were quite a bit larger than the actual capacity of Russell Hall. They had plaster blocks all over the main floor of the house – the dining room, ballroom, and library, and in the barn. Moving them had been an engineering feat surely equal to construction of the Pyramids of Giza for Mr. Patel and the 20 local farmers and tradesmen drafted in the effort. Mary cooed over the plaster blocks like a mother with a newborn – a score of newborns weighing hundreds of pounds each.

"What he wants is in Mary's bookcase, so yes," Lee said with a tolerant smile. Mary had, of course, insisted that the shelves in the Library with her books remain unobstructed by relics of the Mesozoic Era encased in plaster.

Kun returned a moment later, carrying three books tucked his arm and brushing white dust off his apron. He set the books on the table with a triumphant look.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
*Peter and Wendy (The Adventures of Peter Pan)*
*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

"I suppose Neverland or Oz is no less probable than Nirvana," Lee said, idly flipping the pages of *Alice's Adventures*. Kun returned to the sink to begin drying the dishes with the air of one who has solved a great mystery.

"The telegram speaks of Peter's brother and sister not going back to N." Mr. Patel took a long pull of his cigarette and blew a wreath of smoke into the air. "This sounds more of a journey, such as to Wonderland, and not the attainment of Nirvana."

"We would know more if we could meet Peter." Lee accompanied this peevish complaint with another glare for his failure to kidnap Peter and wrangle him to Russell Hall for her inspection.

Mr. Patel added, "And, if we could also meet Peter's brother and sister, if Asim could see them all, we might see more of their story." He exhaled another cloud and Lee irritably waved the air about her to blow the accumulating cigarette smoke away.
"We won't see anything through that smoke! Surely there is no smoking in Nirvana!"

"Not yours," Mr. Patel teased, "but certainly in mine!"

"But it is freedom from want!" Lee cried.

"And transcendent happiness," Mr. Patel replied with another deep puff.

Lee was always testy when Mr. Patel smoked in her kitchen. Asim found himself drifting from their tart, and usually good-natured, theological discussion.

There was more he wished to tell them about Peter's family. He was not just Asim bin Kalil, but also Major Abdullah ibn Abbas ibn Muhammad al-Masri. Major al-Masri had met Edmund and knew that like his brother, he shined with God's light and was no simple English boy.

Moreover, Major al-Masri had seen a letter from their sister, Susan, studied it, and deduced from it and the intelligence he had gathered in the last week that she was no simple English school girl, either. Miss Susan Pevensie and Mrs. Susan Caspian of the British Embassy, Washington, were the same person. She had been running a BSC agent, had helped finesse the theft of a document from Vice President Wallace, and had earned the trust and confidence of Colonel George Walker-Smythe, one of the oldest hands in their shady business. Major al-Masri would have dismissed it all as too incredible to be believed. But, having already met the brothers, if the sister had half the talent, he would have done precisely as Walker-Smythe had evidently done and snatched her up. Both of his avatars wanted very much to have a long discussion with Colonel Walker-Smythe.

He had nearly memorized Susan's letter, but comparing it to the telegrams would have to wait until he returned to his sparse room. He had locked the letter in his own safe and it had taken a great deal of wearying self control to wait until later came to review it again in light of the day's telegrams.

He wanted to share Susan's letter, here in this warm, glowing kitchen, with Lee, Kun, and Mr. Patel. But that could not be for the letter contained their government's secrets he was under orders to destroy, though precisely when had not been very clear. Major al-Masri, at Asim's urging, had decided to wait until later to destroy the precious letter.

As to his friends, Asim and Major al-Masri both had long since reconciled with all he had to hide and leave unsaid. With Lee, Kun, and Mr. Patel, he harboured a small personal regret for he would have valued their insight and broad thinking. But, he felt no remorse.

Peter, though, was another matter. Concealing from Peter what he knew of Susan and that he had met Edmund had been as difficult as any secret he had kept in decades. Today, as he and Peter had discussed El Alamein, Dieppe, Monty, and the retaking of North Africa that he knew and Peter assumed was coming, Asim had felt disquietude. It was so unusual, it had taken some time to recognize the untoward feelings as guilt.

He looked up, startled, for he had been so lost in his regrets, the argument and speculation around him had ground to a halt.

"Asim?" Mr. Patel asked.

"Are you well?" Lee added.

It was Kun though who perceived the deepest. How he did this, Asim had never divined. For not the first time he wondered just how clearly this quiet Chinese man heard the Mother of the Prophet Isa and the other holy women and men to whom he prayed.
"Father is spy." Kun softly spoke the words with the same care with which he was drying the
dainty Wedgewood teacup.

"Oh," Lee said into the long silence that followed. She pushed the telegram back toward him. "You
should have said something."

"He couldn't," Mr. Patel retorted. He gently extinguished the butt of his cigarette into the tin cup,
saving every precious bit of it. "Get yourself upstairs, friend, and leave us to the gossip."

Asim nodded his grateful thanks and tucking the precious telegram back into his robes, left the
kitchen. He did not open the flue in his room to hear the conversations below.

It was with relief when he was finally able to spread out on his bare desk the beautifully written
letter of Miss Susan Pevensie to her brother Edmund, Impington, Cambridge, and set the curious
telegrams between Edmund and Peter Pevensie next to it.

Dear Edmund:

I hope you are safe and sound as I am. As we enter our final days, it has become quite upside
down, inside out, and backwards. For all that, I am very happy, content, and have so very much
enjoyed my last few, joyous days here in Washington.

Asim stopped there, reading the sentences in light of what was later in the letter, what he had
observed of Edmund, and what he had learned of Susan. Forget that the author and receiver are
children. They are sophisticated, clever, family members, old far beyond their stated years, and
know each other very well. Assume, as would be said in the parlance, that these two spies know
each other's tradecraft and handwriting.

So analyzed, it leaped out at him immediately. The first sentence signaled that she was well. The
second sentence, upside down, inside out, and backwards was followed by happy, content, enjoyed,
joyous. Susan Pevensie was writing one thing and cluing its opposite. She was warning her brother
that something was seriously amiss but that nevertheless she was safe.

Though A. is with me, I long to be with you, Peter, and Lucy so much now.

Asim read that line, tracing it with his finger. A. is with me…

He had assumed A was a person, a friend, a pet, a thing, a simple abbreviation for something
innocuous.

Now, with telegram and letter side by side, he read again Edmund's message to his brother. Lu,
Eust & I been to N. Saw Casp. Saw A. Lu/me no go back. Ed.

And, Peter's response: Am coming 2night. A. is here 2.

A.

They all knew who A was. A was part of a shared language. A was in N and Edmund, Lucy, and
Eustace saw A there. A was in America with Susan. And, A was here in England with Peter; surely
A was with Polly and Digory as well.

A.

Allahu Akbar – God is Great.
He continued reading; Susan had not wasted effort on trivialities. Instead, likely due to her perturbed state, she began writing immediately of events so singular that they could not be hidden in this clever cipher.

*I think I will just move straight off to the continuation of The Queen Susan in Tashbaan for I have come up with a new twist on the tale that is very exciting but sad too! My dear little brother, I hope you enjoy reading this silly story as much I have enjoyed writing it!*

*The day began well for Queen Susan and her friends for the High King of Narnia had ordered an occasion with feasting, drink and dance. The Talking Beasts and Good Beings of Narnia were celebrating the Just King's successful campaign in the Lone Islands against the Evil Ettin Giants.*

*Narnia.* Narnia was a place with Talking Beasts and Good Beings and a High King and a Just King, and a Queen Susan.

*Lu, Eust & I been to N. Lu/me no go back.*

*N.*

Though it would have answered as Lee and Mr. Patel had speculated, *N* was not Nirvana, if Edmund and Lucy were not to go back.

*Nor was N* Neverland, Wonderland, Faerie, Camelot, or Oz as Kun thought.

*N* was *Narnia*.

Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace had "*been to N.*" As Susan had written the letter, it might have been dismissed as a silly children's story among siblings. However, the letter, the telegrams and the individuals themselves told a far different story when taken together. It if was an illusion, it was a shared one and he could not believe it. Susan and Peter had also been to *N*, though not this time; this was how they were all able to speak of it so easily. More telling still, Digory and Polly had understood the import of the telegram; they may have been to *N* as well. What Narnia was and where and how, well, as Holmes would say, there was insufficient data. But to these friends and family, Narnia was a place one went to and came back from.

With that, it was time for the *isha'a*, the *ṣalāt* of the evening recited after the red thread had disappeared from the horizon. Asim returned the papers to his safe, rearmed the safe with his signature trip wire, and prepared for prayer.

He performed the ritual ablation. He hoped to see a dream, but did not ask. It was always enough to recall with humility God's presence, guidance, and mercy.

*Allahu Akbar* – God is Great.

And so it was, when prayers were done and sleep began, that God did show him a dream, though it was Petunia and Simon who woke him to it. Cat and dog were sitting under his open window, whining and meowing, both quivering with excitement.

"*You have heard,*" said the shining golden cat sitting in his window, "*that when a door shuts, a window opens.*"

"*I have,*" Asim replied.

"*You must open the window.*"
He did not wish to argue, but Asim saw a flaw in the command. "My window is already open."

"I do not speak of your windows, my son."

"So, I am to be a…" He stumbled for the word in this dream haze of ambiguity, "your tool?"

The cat considered this. "Perhaps. Tool, guide, shield, friend, teacher, and prod, you are many things, my versatile son."

"I live to serve."

The cat turned, as if to leave, then swiveled his head back around. "You should ask, for it will be some years before we meet as this again."

Of course the cat would know what was in his heart and so challenged now he must answer for his want. "Forgive me, for you say the way forward is through the window, but still, I would wish to know what is behind the closed door."

The golden cat grumbled. "Richard asked nearly the same. He argued with me."

"He would," Asim said, smiling even in the gravity of the moment.

"It feeds your weakness," the cat said. "You know now that seeing is not understanding."

"Yes." Asim resisted the urge to plead his case, as Richard undoubtedly had. "In this, understanding will likely always be incomplete."

"If not understanding, then what is it that you seek, my wandering son?"

For thousands of miles, across sand and sea, he had shadowed Mary because where she went, those he sought came. They did not seek her; they appeared, just because. And so he had finally followed Mary here, to a rambling great house in Oxfordshire, and found a brilliant, eccentric Professor, an amateur zookeeper, a King in boy's clothing, his sister who was a Spy, and his younger brother, a man for whom the light had come only at a cost surely extracted by darkness. Asim had wanted a revelation. But, wanting was not enough. He was not yet wise enough for such enlightenment.

"I seek companions on my own journey."

"Well answered," the cat said. "Look back, behind the closed door, down, out. You may learn more of another story that as Richard, in fairness, reminded me, is entwined with your own."

Asim turned around and indeed his bedroom door was open, pushed ajar by cat and dog. At first, he saw only to the gloomy hallway beyond.

The hall grew steadily lighter, until it was brilliantly, shockingly white. The ship of his dreams sailed into his vision, the green ship with a dragon prow, gliding across a sea of lilies. A purple sail unfurled from the masthead of Peter's silver sword. On the gold hilt a great white bird perched. At the rail as before, the sleek, clever rat and the cunning crow – surely Susan and Edmund it now seemed. A black dragon was curled about the base of the mast.

I do not know you, Asim told the dragon.

You shall, the dragon said, opening one eye, a curl of smoke rising from his nostril like the tail from Mr. Patel's cigarette.

On the foredeck, again he saw the girl, now blonder, older, and browner, and with a lion, not a
lamb. They looked upon him and their gaze pierced his heart. She held out her hands to him, beckoning in welcome, but he could not withstand the fire that poured from the girl and the lion. It was too hot, too dazzling. He blinked back blinding tears and fell to his knees, shins barking on hard wood floor. Prostrate, he thanked God who is Great for the vision he had not the wit to understand. When Later came and understanding with it, that would be a blessing beyond hope and dream. For now, this gift was enough.

Then it was dawn and time for morning prayer, fajr.

To be followed by Chapter 18, Moles in the Garden, Part 2

Dear Edmund:

I hope you are safe and sound as I am. As we enter our final days, it has become quite upside down, inside out, and backwards. For all that, I am very happy, content, and have so very much enjoyed my last few, joyous days here in Washington.

I think I will just move straight off to the continuation of The Queen Susan in Tashbaan for I have come up with a new twist on the tale that is very exciting but sad too! My dear little brother, I hope you enjoy reading this silly story as much I have enjoyed writing it!

The day began well for Queen Susan and her friends for the High King of Narnia had ordered an occasion with drink and dance. The Talking Beasts and Good Beings of Narnia were celebrating the Just King’s successful campaign in the Lone Islands against the Evil Ettin Giants. A flotilla of Gryphons and War Horses were proceeding there with all possible haste. The merry Narnians did not know how grave matters truly were.
"So what is next?" Peter asked. Even as he spoke it, Edmund could see his brother calculating the span of days needed for censor review and an Atlantic voyage for each of Susan's precious letters.

"That is the end, the last letter I received. We now return to where we began, with Asim coming to see me last week."

Peter passed a hand over his face and, as Edmund had seen so very many times before, his brother put aside his weariness and concerns to attend with the singular focus that made him such an effective leader. He leaned forward, hands clasped in front of him, in mimicry of Edmund's own posture, one adopted from years of conferences on camp stools, wooden chairs, tree stumps, and boulders.

"Tell me, Edmund. Tell me what my friend the spy told you of the adventures of Queen Susan in Tashbaan."

"You must forgive me if I sound too rehearsed; I have had months to think on this," Edmund admitted, feeling sheepish for it.

"The miracle of a long sea voyage and Narnia time did give you too much time to dwell on this."

"Indeed." Edmund felt the tension palpably ease with this return to something like normalcy – the habit and privilege of confiding in Peter. He had wanted to tell Peter of these things for a week, and for months, to the World's End, and back. No listener was better than his brother.

"I had been concerned that someone would be clever enough to catch on to our ruse, especially as the tenor became so serious." Edmund hesitated even to mention again the sunken ship and the smuggled out report of the Nazi death camp. Peter nodded, signaling he understood both what Edmund meant, and what he did not wish to repeat.

"I was not, therefore, completely surprised when I came out of the bookseller's on Trinity Street, saw a jeep, and then a man in uniform hop out and start following me."

He waited for that fact to settle in Peter's mind. "And that man was Asim?"

"Yes."

"How did he know who you were?"
"I had wondered," and Edmund's voiced hiked higher in anticipation of hearing the long wished for answer, "if Asim might have seen a photograph, or that you had described me?"

"Not that I know of," Peter responded slowly, dashing Edmund's hope for a simple explanation. Eventually, he continued, "Richard always reminds me that Asim is a spy, and so we should be surprised at neither his resources nor his resourcefulness."

"Granted, I did not know who it was at first. I was thinking of a thousand things, how to ditch Eustace, getting my cover straight, and trying to watch who was following us in shop windows as we went up the street. I did know straight off he was of a much different ilk than your typical Tommy Atkins. Asim cuts quite an alarming figure in uniform."

"You should see him in robes when he starts picking his teeth with a knife. He terrifies the Trils to death."

"Trils?"

Peter waved him off with an impatient gesture. "Not now; it is just another part of the summer that did not make it into the letters."

For not the first time, Edmund wondered what else Peter had left out of his letters. It was going to take them a whole other summer to get through everything that had happened this summer.

"Once we picked up our shadow, I figured the gig was up, and darted into the first pub I spotted, dragging Eustace with me, squawking all the way. I got a good look at the Major as he went by the window and a longer look still when he came in. That was when I wondered if it might be Asim. There cannot be that many Arabs in dress uniform and while it was a hefty chance, I could see how it might have come about as well."

Edmund paused as Peter frowned in concentration and worked through the puzzle.

"Richard even told me as pointedly as he dared that Father was likely involved in some dodgy business."

"Really?" Edmund's opinion of Dr. Russell rose even higher. "You did not write of that!"

"Well, no," his brother responded, with a deprecating snort. "Any more than you wrote of Susan. The point, brother mine, is that if Richard suspected, Asim likely knew. He might have sought to confirm it or has some connection to Father of which we know nothing."

Peter had no interest in or natural inclination for Rat and Crow business; that did not mean he did not understand it, as Edmund was forcibly reminded with his brother's perspicacious observation.

Edmund nodded and, here he paused, staring at his hands clasped in front of him. It was so foolish, but the feelings had been real; Lucy had noted them and Peter would certainly see them as well. "I had hoped all summer I might meet Asim based upon your letters. And then, when I realized it was he…"

"It was both a shock and a disappointment," Peter finished what he found so hard to say himself.

"Yes."

Peter reached across the divide separating the two beds on which they were sitting and clasped his arm. "We will need to go down to Oxford next week for a host of reasons, not the least of which is that I need to return his knife, and Mary's pack, see Richard, and collect my things at the
Professor's. We should introduce Eustace to Polly and the Professor as well. I think we should all go and you might meet Asim as I have come to know him.

As expected, Peter had bundled up his anger at Asim's silence, put it to the side, and even over as little time as a few hours, his anger had cooled and objectivity had returned. For many sound reasons Peter had felt betrayed, even if he did not now wholly blame the man for his omissions. He might never trust Asim as he had which, all things considered, was probably not a bad thing. Peter would, however, forgive his friend.

Edmund returned the supportive gesture, placing his hand over his brother's and grateful for what Peter perceived without it having to be said.

"So, to continue," he began again as they both settled back into their respective perches. "I chased Eustace off and asked the Major to introduce himself. He owned up to knowing you and corrected my German, which really is atrocious."

The incredulous expression on Peter's face was one Edmund wished the Narnian stonesmiths had been able to capture. "You spoke in German?"

"Ja!"

"In a pub in Cambridge?"

"Ja!"

"To a Muslim major in the British service?"

"Ja! And really Peter, it is not the fault of the German language that Nazis speak it!"

Peter threw a ball of scrap paper at him and Edmund batted it away in the general direction of the dustbin. Despite the solemnity for what was to come, Edmund found himself grinning for the memory of it. "It was rather odd. Even, dare I say it, Narnian, if that makes any sense?"

His brother smiled warmly in return. Of course Peter understood, for he had been enjoying these sorts of interactions all summer. It might seem bizarre to be reminded of Narnia, but the feel was very similar – an engaging conversation with another who thought differently, looked differently, and had vastly different background and personal experience. Amid all the differences to be celebrated, it was equally rewarding to find the commonality.

"It was so frustrating. It could have been such a smashing time and instead I was holding my breath, waiting for the incendiary to detonate and, of course, increasingly frantic for Susan. Asim and I exchanged some double edged banter, where in retrospect I probably revealed too much, and then he showed me Susan's letter. He did, by the by, say very plainly that he was ordered to deal with me gently and discreetly."

Really, could they but shake their heads in astonished awe at their sister's adroit management? "So, Susan knew you would be approached, and was trying to communicate that she was well."

"That is how I saw it," Edmund agreed. "Now, understand that I was only able to read it once, Peter, though I…"

"That is enough, my brother." Peter's legendary, miraculous patience, had finally worn thin. "No more delays. Tell me of Susan."

With a deep breath, Edmund began, just as he had practiced it.
Dear Edmund:

I hope you are safe and sound as I am. As we enter our final days, it has become quite upside down, inside out, and backwards. For all that, I am very happy, content, and have so very much enjoyed my last few, joyous days here in Washington.

I think I will just move straight off to the continuation of The Queen Susan in Tashbaan for I have come up with a new twist on the tale that is very exciting but sad too! My dear little brother, I hope you enjoy reading this silly story as much I have enjoyed writing it!

The day began well for Queen Susan and her friends for the High King of Narnia had ordered an occasion with drink and dance. The Talking Beasts and Good Beings of Narnia were celebrating the Just King’s successful campaign in the Lone Islands against the Evil Ettin Giants. A flotilla of Gryphons and War Horses were proceeding there with all possible haste. The merry Narnians did not know how grave matters truly were.

Come, old friend! sit down and listen!
From the pitcher, placed between us,
How the waters laugh and glisten
In the head of old Silenus!

Tebbitt skipped the next verse about bloated, drunken, old Silenus; he never liked it much. He raised a glass to his fellow Fauns with youthful Bacchus follow, Ivy crowns that brow supernal, As the forehead of Apollo, And possessing youth eternal – until cut short by a Japanese kamikaze or a Nazi bullet.

"Oi! Tebbitt! Drink up, man!" That was Fleming shouting. He was a clever chap, very well-connected, good with words. The Navy man did have a habit of spinning really spectacular ruses that, operationally, would never, ever fly. He was always proposing to crash land planes into the Channel, not realizing they, unlike ships, would sink.

Being nothing but obliging, Tebbitt sipped, but did not down, his glass. In the Embassy’s cellar bar, the watered drinks were (almost) free and everyone was in celebratory mood. If he drank enough of the piss, he might even acquire a taste for the dark Caribbean rums.

Round about him, fair Bacchantes,
Bearing cymbals, flutes, and thyrses,
Wild from Naxian groves, or Zante’s
Vineyards, sing delirious verses.

Mrs. Caspian and the comely Bacchantes in her company certainly were fair. He toasted the ladies, noting which pretty secretaries glanced back and might be wild from Naxian groves at the party’s end.

Thus he won, through all the nations,
Bloodless victories, and the farmer
Bore, as trophies and oblations,
Vines for banners, ploughs for armor.

Bloodless victories, to be sure, thought not with ploughs and vines; more like paper, gossip, seductions, and now, most recently, interminable meetings. He told himself it was an improvement.
"Any word from Lowrey?" Fleming asked.

"No word is good word." Tebbitt repeated the adage. If a man was dead or missing, one heard of it.

"Speaking of Generals who don't know their arse from a foxhole, take a look at this." Fleming pulled out a scrap of paper and shoved it across the bar table. "The Auk sent this to his senior commanders, whining that your average British target for Nazi guns would rather be in Rommel's Afrika Korps than under his sorry excuse for a command."

"PS -- I am not jealous of Rommel," Tebbitt read aloud C-in-C Auchinleck's pathetic postscript to a memo exhorting his own men to stop worshipping the Nazi Desert Fox. He flipped the note back to Fleming.

_Teirs was not to make reply,
Teirs was not to reason why,
Teirs was but to do and die:

"And our men follow this fool?" he murmured in disgust. Even here in the Commissary pub, with Walker-Smythe and the other senior command at the far end of the bar and everyone else in their cups or on the way there, it didn't do to disparage the Commander of Allied forces in North Africa.

"Not for long, I hear," Fleming responded, equally low, tucking the memo away in his pocket. He raised his glass, "Here's to change a coming."

"Best damned news I've heard," Tebbitt replied. When it came to internal gossip, Fleming was the man to go to and reportedly very close to Intrepid himself. "Cheers!"

Fleming was suddenly scrambling to his feet, which meant a fair Bacchante or senior officer approached from behind. Either way, best to follow his well-mannered lead. _Eton, don't you know, my good man._

"Lieutenant, Tebbitt, good evening."

Tebbitt turned about and put up a steadying hand in case Fleming fell over his own feet in the effort to pull out a chair for Mrs. Caspian. Guy Hill was looming over her shoulder.

"Hullo, Cuz, Mr. Hill!"

Her eyes slid over Fleming kindly, but dismissively. It was astounding how she could dash a man's hopes with nothing more than a look that was perfectly polite and promised absolutely nothing at evening's end.

"Please do not get up on my account." Her timing was off a bit as they were standing already.

"Tebbitt, I wanted to tell you that Guy and I are going to the Bali."

That was tempting, though he would have to pay for his own drinks. "Is Charlie playing?"

"Yeah," Guy affirmed. "Agnes said she'd come by; some others too." To Susan, Guy said, "I'll just go and get the keys from the office for the car, Mizz Caspian."

Unlike her polite nod to Fleming, Mrs. Caspian's smile for Guy was brilliant. "Thank you, Guy. I will meet you there."

He, at least, received an inquiring arched eyebrow. "And so, Tebbitt, will you take your chances here or there?" With an inclusive glance, she now pulled Fleming in as well. "Lieutenant, you are
welcome to join us."

Casting an eye over at the fair Bacchanates in the corner still ensconced decided it. They shined a little less brightly without Mrs. Caspian in their midst. There would be a veritable bevy of them at the Bali.

Tebbitt fished a bill out of his pocket and set it on the table. "Fleming? You coming?"

"Thanks, no. I rather like the odds here if you are leaving, Tebbitt." He also undoubtedly saw that there was no hope of advancement with Mrs. Caspian. With a tip of his cap, the Lieutenant ambled off toward the bar.

_Let us drink and be merry, dance, joke, and rejoice,
With claret and sherry, theorbo and voice!
The changeable world to our joy is unjust,
All treasure's uncertain,
Then down with your dust!
In frolics dispose your pounds, shillings, and pence,
For we shall be nothing a hundred years hence._

They climbed the stairs up and out into the compound. It was still early enough there wouldn't be a queue to get in at the Bali, though the doorman let them go round the back through the alley.

"I see you prevailed upon Shirley to requisition a new uniform," Mrs. Caspian said, as they walked along the new garden path the workmen had set between the main Embassy and the Annex.

"There was no way that red paint was going to come out." He had even made an effort at it. It had been a perfectly good uniform and he was disgusted at the waste.

"Paint is worse than blood," she agreed.

"Fortunately, the Rhinoceros is easy enough to work with if you know how to ask." Shirley in procurement was nothing if not obliging. A little kindness went a long way with her. She would have given him new boots besides, if he'd needed them. Tebbitt had managed to scrub the paint off the soles.

"She did enjoy the chocolates, so well played there." A hint of slyness crept into her well-mannered tone. "I have heard there are some scandalous memoranda circulating regarding the painted buffalo."

"There are and written on the personal stationery of His Lordship, Ambassador Penguin." He did feel it necessary to disclaim any culpability in this one. "I had nothing to do with it, so you know. The Colonel would ship me to the Orkneys if he caught me stealing internal correspondence and forging signatures." Fleming had undoubtedly been involved and some of the other chaps. It had the stamp of their reckless, and lewd, humor.

"But you have seen them," she pressed.

"Mrs. Caspian, this interest is unseemly," he chided, with a jocular bump to her arm. "I assure you this correspondence is shocking to a woman of your delicate sensibilities." In fact, it was hilarious, making truly vulgar comparisons between His Lordship and the painted buffalo's considerable personal endowment.

"I am a married woman," she retorted with sharp humor.
"Yes, you certainly are," Tebbitt countered in kind. That had, in fact, been one of the puzzling things about her. Mrs. Caspian and her downed RAF pilot husband were fictions, but living the cover aside, Tebbitt was certain that she had a more intimate history that was very real. Yet, she never spoke of anyone back home except her brothers and sister. He had not probed, but he knew Susan Caspian née Pevensie had had at least one man in her life, perhaps a fiancé now dead on the sands of Tunisia or in the jungles of Asia.

The car was still in the parking stall. Guy was probably making some calls before they left. At the Annex door, Tebbitt held the door for her. "Did I hear you right with Gladys? You are leaving soon?"

"Yes, in just over two weeks."

He caught a hint of something wistful in her tone. "Eager to go and yet you want to stay?"

Her hands trailed along the banister as they climbed the steps. "That describes my ambivalence very well. We have done good work this summer."

From the hall, Tebbitt heard a murmuring voice behind the office door; Mrs. Caspian pushed it open. "Guy? Are you…"

The crack of gunshots split her sentence.

The action was instinctive. With a swallowed oath, Tebbitt dropped to the floor, pulling Susan down with him. In those heart stopping moments that happen too fast and take forever to pass, Tebbitt heard the sound he had never thought he would hear in Washington, the unmistakable, horrible, heavy thud of a body falling to the ground.

"Guy!" Susan cried, squirming away from him as a terrible groan filled the room.

Tebbitt pulled his head up, taking in the scene's carnage.

Fuck.

A man, wearing workman's coveralls, holding the gun. Trembling hand.


The office safe. Open.

A thief. A spy. A gardener?

Guy just beyond them on the floor, three bullets to the chest from the sound of the discharge. Very close range.

Fuck.

Susan edged away, crawling toward Guy.

"Stay where you are!" the man shouted, waving the gun. The way he was quivering in panic an accident was more likely than anything intentional, which made it even more harrowing. This was a ghastly mistake by an amateur, not a professional.

Susan somehow saw it as well. She rose up on her knees, contemptuous. "Don't be a fool," she snapped. "I'm going to try to stop the bleeding or you will be adding murder to theft and espionage."
"It's too late for that!"

Guy groaned again, proving he was at least still breathing.

"You are a doctor as well as an incompetent spy?" Susan said acidly, stumbling forward. "Tebbitt, get my coat off the rack so I can use it on Guy." She put her hand on Gladys' desk, as if struggling to rise from the floor and, with her darting glance, he realized what she intended.

Tebbitt looked the man in the eye, drawing his attention. "I am going to stand up and get her coat. He nodded toward the stand. "It is right there."

"Slowly." the swine squeaked. He carelessly pointed the gun and Tebbitt flinched. The man was terrifying in his ineptitude.

Playing the meek hostage, Tebbitt carefully climbed to his feet, hands out. He tracked the gun as it nervously wove between him and Susan. As Susan stood, positioned at the corner of the desk, Tebbitt turned toward the coat rack – another distraction. "It's her coat, you see," he said, lifting if off the hook and holding it up. "There's nothing…"

In mid sentence, he whipped the coat toward the gun, just as Susan grabbed with both hands the rim of the potted rose bush on the desk and swung it up and around. The obscuring coat and the clay pot hit at the same instant. Susan's aim was true and the pot smacked the man on the side of the head. It exploded with the force of her blow, spraying dirt and shards. The man staggered.

There were two shattering cracks; but Susan didn't go down and Tebbitt didn't feel the tear he had felt before when hard bullets meet soft flesh.

Tebbitt threw himself at the spy, tackling him to the ground and there was a sickening crunch and jolt as the man's head connected with the desk on the way down. The gun skittered away. With a satisfying sting, Tebbitt's fists connected with the man's jaw, once, twice, and the spy sagged beneath him.

A deed of dreadful note.

"Call the switchboard!" he yelled at Susan. Dimly he saw Gladys' letter opener clatter to the desk as Susan yanked the telephone receiver from its cradle. Had she intended to stab the man with a paper knife?

"Get the Colonel, MPs, an ambulance!"

Tebbitt barely heard her frantic call. He flipped the man on to his stomach, grabbed Susan's abused coat, tore a sleeve and tied his hands.

The phone slammed down; Susan scrambled over to where Guy had fallen.

Tebbitt tore another strip from the coat, the ripping sound seeming more awful as it mingled with Guy's gasps and Susan's murmured assurances. He bound the man's legs, savagely tight, pleased with the little grunts of pain he caused. The man had a bloody gash on the side of the head; unfortunately it didn't look fatal.

Satisfied, he slowly stood, keeping the dog under his foot, and felt the battle rush seep away.

Susan was kneeling next to Guy, her hands pressed to his chest. She was to her elbows already in red.
But, this was not paint.

Susan looked up, eyes brimming with tears. She shook her head, knowing as he knew, as Guy himself surely knew.

Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

"Miss Susan," the big man rasped, "Iz sorry I never heard more stories."

Tebbitt saw her reach down, take Guy's hand in hers and grip it so tightly the blood dripped down their clasped arms.

"That's just as well, Guy. You shall hear them directly from my friends soon enough."

"Talking animals, who'd a thought," he stammered, eyes darting about, losing their focus. Even through Guy's dark skin, Tebbitt could see the color beneath fading as his life poured out.

"You will have a hero's welcome, Friend. Cook will make you the most disgusting dishes imaginable," Susan replied.

As Guy faded, the woman kneeling next to him grew. Tebbitt found he was blinking back furious tears as he bore witness to this death. Another death. It was no more Susan's first deathbed than it was his.

"Chittlins..." Guy coughed, blood now dribbling out of his mouth as it seeped from his chest.

"Share em with your wolf friend."

"Yes, that's right, Lambert loves chittlins. You shall be great friends, I know it, Guy. Tell him how much I miss him." Tebbitt heard her voice break, and then Susan mastered herself and pressed on, fierce and strong. "When you see him, tell Lambert my promise, that I shall see him again."

"I'll tell him, Miz Susan; I tell 'em all that you're comin but first got things to do..." His words were lost in a spasm of pain and sputtering blood.

"Then go to them, my friend. They and so many others are waiting for you. You can hear them now, can't you?"

Guy nodded weakly, eyes looking somewhere else, as his soul and life drained away.

Susan bent down and kissed Guy on the forehead, heedless of the gore. "I say good bye to you only for a little while. Go to Him and to a better place, with our blessings and love."

Guy wheezed a final, rattling breath, his shredded chest stilled, and he was gone.

But death replied: 'I choose him.' So he went,

And there was silence in the summer night;
Silence and safety; and the veils of sleep.
Then, far away, the thudding of the guns.

The gardener stirred feebly and Tebbitt could not contain the boiling rage of futility. He savagely kicked the animal in the side, wishing he could feel the snap of ribs and tearing of soft tissue. He would beat this son of a bitch to death to save the Crown the cost of a noose. The too-late shouts thundered through the building.
"Up here," he bellowed. Only the fact that Susan was there kept him from pummeling the fucking swine to a filthy pulp. She'd seen enough blood; damn it, they all had.

Susan was still at Guy's side, murmuring whispered prayers. She wiped her bloody hands on her skirt, and gently closed the dead man's eyes, arranging his arms over his darkly soaked chest.

The Colonel roared into the office with two MPs and Tebbitt sagged with relief.

Walker-Smythe saw it all in an instant– the groaning gardener under Tebbitt's boot, Susan, covered in blood at her vigil next to a peacefully posed corpse, the broken flower pot and dirt, the gun on the floor, the opened safe. The red rose petals scattered like an offering over all.

"You two," the Colonel barked at the MPs. "Take him, lock him up!"

There were more shouts and lights flashing outside the window; the entire embassy was coming. Tebbitt drew away once the MPs hauled the man to his feet.

"Tebbitt! Over here, man!"

The Colonel's sharp order cleared the battle haze settling over his vision; with the bastard hanging between the MPs, Tebbitt realized he was already raising a fist to smash the murderer back into hell.

The Colonel was helping Susan rise. "Are you injured?"

Tebbitt pulled away, focusing on Susan and the Colonel, trying to ignore the sadistic pleasure he would feel in causing pain to this thing who stood in for all the good men he'd seen die.

She was shrugging off the Colonel's supporting arm. "No. I am..." Susan's wavered, for how could she say she was fine? Before his eyes, as she had so many times before, she straightened and pulled herself up and together. "I am not injured," she replied with more calm than should have been possible.

The Colonel's eyes darted over her and Susan jutted her chin a little more regally; there was a tremor beneath her veneer and she was only going to be able to maintain this façade for so long.

"Quickly then." The Colonel spit out the words as if they were machine gun fire. "Guy came to get the car keys, surprised the man, there was a fight, Guy was shot, and Tebbitt you came into the middle of it and subdued him?"

Tebbitt nodded.

More shouts and stomps. The whole fucking bloody army would pour into the office, too late to save anything.

The Colonel put a hand on her shoulder and Susan jerked her head up; she had been staring at Guy's body and absently wiping her hands on her blouse. "You need to leave, Susan. You shouldn't be involved in the inquiry. Do you understand?"

Her eyes narrowed and Tebbitt had the sense of something passing between the two of them. Susan nodded and spared a longing look at Guy. "I must inform his family."

"Susan!" the Colonel exclaimed. "You need to leave. This is not your place. Let us do our jobs." The urgency in his voice rose and he jerked his head toward the door. "Tebbitt, please take Susan
home. Stay there until I bring her mother, then you will need to come back here."

The car keys, Guy's keys, were still in the tray on the desk. The Colonel was shrugging out of his uniform jacket, laying it over Susan's shoulders. Tebbit threw one arm around her and grabbed the keys with his other hand. Together, they stumbled out the door and down the back stair as the ambulance wailed into the compound.

The bumbling complaints of Harold and Alberta were just audible through the walls. His Aunt and Uncle had made a very late night of it, and as they had all summer, left their son to his own devices.

Peter was staring out the window, and awful as it was, Edmund finally allowed a sliver of relief that he had shared all there was to know with his brother. Only with all the secrets told did he now feel just how much of a burden it had been to keep these things from Peter until they could be told in person. Later had finally come and he was very glad of it.

"Bardon is dead?" his brother finally whispered.

Edmund nodded, feeling the lump rise again in his throat. "I tried to stall on reading the letter as long as I could." He wiped a shaking hand across his face. "I think it was one of the gardeners or workers at the Embassy. In the story she had been calling them moles."

"A Mole," Peter repeated with a grimace, choking on the irony of it.

"She described him as a dangerous and vicious mole in the pay of the Ettins who was trying to break into their office to steal Sallowpad's secrets. Bardon, Susan and Peridan came into the office and surprised the spy. There was a struggle and Bardon died."

Peter turned away from the window, and came to the desk from where Edmund had told the tale. His brother's hand settled on his shoulder and Edmund felt the easing that comes with a pain now shared.

"And you had to sit in a pub, with Asim watching as you read this horror, and pretend it was just a children's story?"

"Yes. I was worried to death for Susan."

Peter's hand spasmed on his shoulder. "But she wasn't hurt, or…"

His brother frowned, working through it all just as Edmund had in the pub.

Edmund finished the thought. "I did ask Asim. I couldn't help it, and had to risk exposing us because I had to know."

Peter nodded reflexively, but sympathetically. "Of course you did; don't blame yourself for that."

It should not have mattered, for he had asked without regard to the consequences, but Peter's absolution did ease the nagging guilt. Edmund had learned an important lesson – and not one that Narnia had ever taught – he could not live a cover story so deeply as to pretend disinterest when his sister was at risk. "Asim said that if something had happened to her we would have heard and I would think that is true."

"She was able to write and send the letter as well." Peter crossed back to the bed and began collecting the letters strewn there. "And Lucy?"
Edmund permitted himself a smile. "She would have had my head if I had kept anything from her about Susan's safety and in fact exhorted a very tight promise from me at swordpoint a month ago."

"But she told you to save the details for me?"

"Just so." Edmund gathered the letters and clippings on the desk, adding them to the stack Peter gave him. He felt regret but there was no alternative. It was appropriate, fitting, and their duty. It was what Susan would wish.

The bedroom door swung open. Lucy stood in the doorway, there by what prompting Edmund could only guess at. "It is time then my brothers?"

Peter took this all, first questioning, then solemn as he too perceived what they still must do.

"The Valiant Queen and I agreed to wait until you joined us," the Just King told his brother.

"Yes, thank you." The High King opened his arms wide to encompass them and gestured to the door. "Come then, my brother and sister, so that we may lament and farewell Bardon, Friend to Our Sister, the Gentle Queen."

Susan's hands were shaking so hard Tebbitt finally had to take the keys and open the door to her flat himself. He was not much better, but he managed the lock after only two tries. Fortunately, there were no prying neighbors to whom it was necessary to explain the blood. Susan was a mess.

"Shower," he ordered, guiding her in and tossing the keys on the sideboard. He kicked the door shut with a foot, hoping he would not leave a bloody mark.

She nodded. "Of course. I do not wish to make a mess for the staff. Mrs. Furner puts up with so much."

Staff?

Susan was oddly composed. No hysterics, no crying, though she was deathly pale and looked really ill. It confused him. A man was dead, she was covered in his blood, and Susan seemed inexplicably calm. He kept expecting the shock to wear off and the bubbling hysteria to erupt, but she remained eerily collected, as if washing a man's blood off was an accustomed experience.

A hand at her waist he guided her into the washroom, propriety be damned. Glancing behind, it did not seem she had tracked blood into the flat on her heels. Susan slipped her shoes off and he dumped them in the dustbin.

Tebbitt tried blocking her view of the mirror so Susan would not see herself. It was ghastly, all shades of ghostly white skin, black hair, and red everywhere.

"Just get in," he told her. Susan was staring stupidly at the shower, as if it was something she had not seen before. "Strip down behind the curtain and hand me your clothes. I'll soak them."

"Not in hot water," she said sharply. "Mrs. Furner always uses cold water and spit, though not on silks of course." Susan giggled. "They would stain. Woolens were always best for battle, when you could choose your ground, of course."

He was dumfounded, trying to sort through her bizarre statement. Deciding it was indecipherable, he tried a different tactic. "Susan, you would not wish to make a bigger mess for the staff and Mrs. Furner, would you? Please get in the shower."
"Thank you, Peridan. You are right of course. We cause them all quite enough trouble."

_Peridan?_

Tebbitt pulled back the curtain and started the tap. He had to jostle her, for Susan was now staring at her reflection. She raised a hand to where the blood had dried on her cheekbone and tinged the wispy hair framing her face to a dull ochre. "Goodness," she murmured, "this is worse than that ambush with the minotaurs. Peter took a dreadful wound there. Do you remember?"

Peter was the brother, but not in the military, that he recalled. _Minotaurs? Was that some unit?_

"Susan, you do not wish your mother to see you like this!"

She stared at him. "My mother? She is not here."

Gently, he turned her around, away from the dreadful visage, pushed her into the shower and drew the curtain.

*I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.*

He filled the basin with (cold) water as Susan began slinging her things out from the shower. He caught a strangled sob and then another of her strange, detached comments. "This is better than bathing in what you wash off."

The blood from her clothes swam in the sink, tainting it all. Guy's blood. Tebbitt drained the sink and filled it again for Susan was right. They wished to wash away the blood, not bathe in it.

*Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?
No, this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine,
making the green one red.*

He made the fortunate error of looking in the mirror and quickly washed up himself. It was all too fearsome a reflection, Guy's blood, the spy's blood, his own from where he had banged his knuckles somewhere, all mingled on his face, hands, and shirt.

*That mirror
Can test each mortal when unaware;
Yea, that strange mirror
May catch his last thoughts,
whole life foul or fair, Glassing it -- where?*

Quickly, he repeated the soaking, draining and rinsing, dumped Susan's clothes into the dustbin with her shoes, wiped everything down, and tossed the towel in as well. Susan and her mother should not have their washroom looking like the murder scene that was in the office.

The shower stopped and he heard another stifled sob. Tebbitt pushed a towel at her from behind the curtain. Bitterly, he recalled that only a few days earlier the roles had been reversed. It had been towels, showers, and flats, but paint instead of blood, and reconciliation, not sundering.

On the door hung a dressing gown, crisp and white. He handed it to Susan, averting his gaze, as she pushed aside the curtain to slip into it.
"Thank you," she said quietly, her eyes moving restlessly over the wiped down ceramics and the wet clothes and towel stuffed in the bin. He took her hand and helped her out of the shower.

"I think…" she trailed off softly and moved by him to the cabinet. Her hand was shaking so badly Tebbitt retrieved the medicine for her, a small pharmacist's bottle of Nembutal.

"Are you certain?" he asked. In his experience, sleeping pills just made it harder to wake from the nightmares.

She nodded and removed one pill, downing it quickly. Tebbitt pocketed the bottle.

He followed her into the bedroom she shared with her mother, two narrow beds, side by side, with neat white covers.

"Please stay until I fall asleep."

Without the clothes, cosmetics, heels, and hair done just so, Susan seemed so small. The strength and fire were still within her, but banked and held in a vessel that seemed too diminutive for the power it contained.

Susan curled up on her bed, hugging a pillow, back turned away from him. He sat the far end, the edge sagging, but she made no complaint.

"Lucy could have saved him," Susan said into the darkness.

Lucy was the younger sister.

"No, Susan, I don't think so."

She was so quiet, he thought she might have fallen asleep. When she spoke, he heard the effect of the drug in her voice, slow and heavy. "I must write Edmund; you will find a bird to take the message tomorrow, Peridan?"

He felt stupid and dishonest, but said quietly, "Of course."

"I knew something was amiss. I had even called them moles. And he was there all along, burrowing in, unnoticed, hearing everything, just like before." He heard her sniff away tears and when she spoke again, her voice was angry. "Another dead, because I am a fool."

She was rambling. This was nonsense. "Susan, it is not your fault."

"Stop imitating Edmund," she retorted. "It becomes neither of you."

It was the drug and she was not reacting well to it. Tebbitt reached over and gently placed his hand on her side. "Can you sleep now?"

She sniffed and nodded. When her breathing slowed and her body sagged in sleep, Tebbitt quietly got up and left the room.

Then save me, or the passed day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes,--
Save me from curious Conscience, that still lords
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;
Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,
And seal the hushed Casket of my Soul.

---
The Colonel held the door open for Mrs. Pevensie and waved off the Ambassador's driver. Once Tebbitt had spirited Susan away, he had seen to the removal of Hill's body, directed the MPs to begin the clean up, sent Gladys to start making the calls to New York and the cables to London, and found Mrs. Pevensie still typing his Lordship's memorandum. The Ambassador had graciously lent his car and driver to bring them round to Mrs. Pevensie's flat; he rather more reluctantly parted with his executive secretary.

Susan's mother had maintained her calm at the Embassy but once in the car, her fear was palpable though he had assured her repeatedly that Susan had not been injured.

For all that, Mrs. Pevensie was bolting up the stairs to her flat and he took the steps two at a time to keep up with her.

She threw upon the door. Tebbitt was standing in the alcove, a disheveled, nervy mess, gesturing for quiet.

"Susan is she…" Mrs. Pevensie was holding her side, breathing hard.

"She is not injured," Tebbitt said, very gently. "She fell asleep a few minutes ago." He removed a medicine bottle from a pocket and handed it to Mrs. Pevensie. "She took one of these and nodded straight off."

Mrs. Pevensie sighed and sagged with relief. "Thank you, Wing Commander, for seeing her safely home. It is just awful. That poor man."

"It is a terrible shock," the Colonel said. Disgraceful, appalling, and horrible. How long had it been going on, he wondered. What had been compromised? To whom?

"Susan was very fond of Mr. Hill. How was she, Wing Commander?"

She did not seem to notice Tebbitt's hesitation; the Colonel did.

"She was calm, Ma'am. Not nervous or hysterical, but upset of course."

"Susan is not given to hysterics."

Tebbitt nodded. "Certainly not, Mrs. Pevensie. She mostly spoke of her brothers and sister."

"Yes, we are all missing each other very much. She certainly has been writing to them often enough."

Tebbitt turned and reached for the car keys. "She mentioned Mrs. Furner and Mr. Peridan, as well."

Mrs. Pevensie made an exasperated sort of sound and threw up her hands, though it seemed more in humor than irritation. "More mysterious mentions of people I do not know! I do not suppose you know these individuals?"

Tebbitt smiled. "No, Ma'am. I probably misunderstood or it was effects of the sleeping pill."

"I wish that were true, Wing Commander, but my children relish speaking in ambiguity."

The Colonel cleared his throat. "It is time we were leaving, Mrs. Pevensie." He needed to inform Hill's family and Tebbitt still had an interview with the investigating MP.

"Of course, Colonel. I apologize for keeping you both."
"We will call tomorrow. Please let me know if we can do anything for you and Miss Pevensie."

He took the keys from Tebbitt as they walked down the steps from the flat. The pilot was near dead on his feet and should not be behind the wheel. "You did well, Tebbitt. Thank you."

The pilot slumped into the front seat of the car. "It wasn't enough to save Guy, damn it." His voice turned hot. "Anything from that Nazi dog?"

"We don't even know if he is a Nazi," the Colonel said. "I'll handle the interrogation myself. We need to try to determine how long he was there and what, if anything he compromised."

Interrogation, done properly, was a long and careful process. He hoped he would be given the latitude to do it properly and not be rushed by fools who thought it better to get bad information hard, rough, and fast, than good information slowly and gently.

"He struck me as an amateur, Sir. He was scared to death. He only hit Guy because he couldn't miss him."

"We'll go over it all with MPs, Tebbitt. Just leave Miss Pevensie out of it. She has no official presence here and we do not wish to embarrass the Ambassador and his executive assistant."

"I understand. And, Colonel, Sir, I should go with you when you inform Guy's family."

It was a generous gesture and he was glad to accept it.

"Very well, Tebbitt. I do not believe the MPs will keep you long. We may go after that."

"We were going to meet them at the Bali tonight. They should still be there."

Tebbitt fell into a moody silence and the Colonel turned the car from Massachusetts Avenue into the Embassy.

The Colonel pulled into a parking space – though not the one where Hill had always curbed the car.

Tebbitt was staring out the front window at the Annex, and so the Colonel waited too. Given time, Tebbitt would fill the quiet with his concern. He blurted, "She should get some credit, Sir. Miss Pevensie kept her head and was there with Guy at the end. It was a damn fine effort."

"Was it she who threw the flower pot?"

"Yes, Sir." Still, Tebbitt made no move to leave the car.

"I will speak to her, Wing Commander and make sure she knows our gratitude." The Colonel waited until the pilot found the words he was searching for.

"It was very strange, Sir. I do not think she has ever worked a hospital or been on the lines, but she was as good as any chaplain I have ever seen."

The Colonel was no longer surprised about any of Miss Pevensie's hidden talents. He had assumed she had seen combat and had therefore seen men die as well. It was interesting that Tebbitt had observed the quality within her that he had assumed she possessed.

"Anything else, Wing Commander?"

Tebbitt frowned. "It may have been the drug and the shock, Sir, but she was talking of things that made no sense. She called the spy a mole and blamed herself for not catching him because she said
she had seen this before."

Miss Pevensie had warned him only a few days before of the Rule of Threes. She had been correct, of course, though how a fifteen year old girl had been astute enough to collect the disparate clues and draw the conclusion she had defied reasonable explanation.

"Of course she is not to blame," the Colonel said instead. "Did she say anything else?"

"She mentioned battles with minotaurs, scolded me about removing blood properly and said woolens were better combat dress, called me Peridan, and it was worry about Mrs. Furner, not her mother, that finally got her into the shower. She was very calm and I swear, Sir, she sounded completely rational. Her mother says it is all mysterious, but it sounded very real to me."

He let out a deep breath. "And she said she needed to write to her brother about it all." Tebbitt cast him a sideways glance. "I thought you should know that, Sir. The last part especially."

They stood together in the Scrubb's backyard, a Queen in her nightdress and two Kings in patchy trousers and rolled up shirtsleeves. Edmund set their sister's precious, treasonous letters in a metal pail on the lawn.

The sound of Lucy striking the match seemed overloud in the pre-dawn stillness. "Peter, you will begin?"

Their brother nodded. "Then, Lucy, will you please speak the lament of the living and after that, Edmund?"

"Of course," Edmund responded automatically. The part that would follow Lucy's lament was his province alone. "Peter, if you will conclude?" If Susan had been there, she would have taken either the beginning lament or the farewell.

The light flared in Lucy's hands. "Then let us begin."

She dropped the match into the letter-filled pail. The tiny flicker spread, licking the paper, first to a smolder, then to flame. As the smoke began to rise, Peter spoke.

"Aslan, King of All, First and Last, your humble servants gather here to lament and farewell our friend, Bardon. Aslan, whose mercy is beyond measure, accept our prayers on behalf of your son, Bardon, grant him an entrance into your Country that he might join in fellowship with those already there. Grant that we may someday stand together with them in unity."

Peter then spoke the lament for the dead. "Brother Bardon, we thank you for your friendship with our sister, Susan. We thank Aslan for your life and our greatest regret is that we did not know you so well as Susan. May you be blessed with the love and care you have given our sister, and so to us. Aslan, we thank you for the gift of our brother Bardon's life. We regret his loss for our sake but rejoice that Bardon is with you."

Lucy's softer voice spoke to those left behind. "Aslan, King of All, First and Last, you know the pain and loss of death. Your humble servant asks that you watch over those who mourn the death of their beloved Bardon. Comfort them and let them hear the comfort that you offer. May your love for all your sons and daughters become the foundation of their hope that love never fails. Bardon shall forever be held dear in their hearts."

The letters curled and flickered in the fire. With the rising smoke stinging his eyes, Edmund recited the duty of his office, the lament for the traitor. "Aslan, King of All, First and Last, we remember
tonight he who took Bardon from us. Help us to understand the hatred and desperation that made
him strike down our friend. Help us to love and not to hate, guide us that we do not usurp your role
and that we might deal with him fairly, according to your will and design. May he who took
Bardon from us find you and be healed."

Peter stepped forward so that they might together send off their sister's friend, and so their friend,
their farewells rising with the smoke, carried to Aslan's own Country, as on Gryphon's wings.

"We bid you farewell, Bardon. Do not let our tears keep you from your journey home. Go your
way to Aslan's Paws, to His Country, at the edge between this world and the next." The words
rolled from Peter as they had of old, solemn, majestic, and magnificent.

"Friends, who have gone before us, welcome our fallen brother to the place we all must go in
fellowship and joy."

Clasping hands, they raised their arms together. The smoke spiraled up in thin wispy curls, taking
their prayers with it. "Farewell, Friend."

On the garden wall a Cat with golden eyes listened and heard and purred his approval.

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**Chapter 19 to follow, The Queen Susan in Tashbaan**

The term "mole" was first used in the *History of the Reign of King Henry VII* (1626) by Sir Francis
Bacon. The term entered popular use in the novels of John le Carré. Colonel Walker-Smythe owes
his first name and methods to the protagonist of that series, George Smiley.

Tebbitt's poetry quotes include Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Thomas
Jordan, Siegfried Sasson, Thomas Hardy, John Keats, and William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*
sprinkled throughout.

Thanks so much to all of you who read and review, and those of you who come out of lurkdom to
share your thoughts. I am so appreciative of your support.
All women are naturally born espionage agents.
Eddie Cantor

No one keeps a secret so well as a child.
Victor Hugo

Soldiers have many faults, but they have one redeeming merit; they are never worshippers of force. Soldiers more than any other men are taught severely and systematically that might is not right. The fact is obvious. The might is in the hundred men who obey. The right... is in the one man who commands them.
G.K. Chesterton

Master Roblang stared at the parchment in front of him and rubbed his hands against the late winter chill. Four lost. He would need to shuffle the patrols to account for the dead and for a time remove from the duty roster those who were closest to those who had passed. They would also have to adjust for the reduction in their ranks as well. The General would want his recommendations in the morning and they would then present the plan to the High King.

There was a pounding, his door banged open with the kick of a cloven hoof, and Sir Leszi, the Sword Master, sauntered in, swinging a skin that by odor was liquid Lightning.

"Roblang!" the Satyr barked. "It's the night after a battle! Why aren't you with something softer than that bench your arse is on?"

With a weary sigh, he carefully set the quill down, not wanting to smear his work of the last hour. "Must Satyrs always be so base?"

"I've just won a wager with the Murder. I knew you'd still be working, and not eating, drinking, mating, or sleeping, as any other normal mortal."

"Our needs do not rest, even if the Army does. So state your business, then go back to it and leave me alone."

Leszi snorted. "For someone who understands the Beasts so well, are you really so thick as to Humans?"

It was impossible to tell with Leszi what was jest and what was serious business. "And the point to your needling?"

With an exaggerated sigh, the Satyr leaned over his table, reeking still of blood, now mingled with liquor and a slight green scent from whatever Dryad or four Leszi had woken from a winter's nap to lie with. Satyrs were a lusty lot.
"The High King's led his first real battle…"

"And what was Beruna?"

"Without Aslan," Leszi continued. "And had the first deaths under his sole command. Dwarf heart be made of stone, but I know better. The High King is replaying every decision tonight and regretting each one." He twirled the skin carelessly. "We should pay him a soldier's visit."

For all his callous and crude talk, the Satyr was probably right. Roblang was disturbed he had not considered it himself. The High King was not a year from winning his spurs. He'd not even reached his full growth and was still spurting out of armor every few months. For one so young, High King Peter had done very, very well. None had found fault with him. The High King, however, did not give to himself the charity he awarded others and drove himself more relentlessly than even Leszi could countenance.

"So your remedy is to ply him with that Lighting?" Roblang gestured to the dangling skin.

Leszi shrugged. "It will serve. Better, yet, I'd send one of those eager Nymphs to his rooms if I thought he knew what to do with her, but…"

Roblang slammed his fist on the table, nearly upsetting the inkwell. "You go too far, Leszi! That is enough!" The audacity was galling.

"Well, since you are up, Roblang, come with me, hold my lead rope, and we two soldiers may dance attendance upon our High King? I shall get him drunk, and you can teach him to swear like a Black Dwarf."

Roblang was, in fact, on his feet now and that had certainly been the reason for the Satyr's provocative behavior from the start.

And maddening as it always was, Leszi had been right. They found the High King in his study with the Queen Susan. Brother and sister were sitting opposite one another, a heavy tome on the table between them, Pliny's Animalia and Botanica.

Even to Roblang's own poor perception, the High King was pinched and worried, near grey with anxiety; he wondered what a Canine or Feline would have sensed. Queen Susan sighed in open relief as she took in their arrival with a glance, her reddened, tired eyes lingering on the wineskin hanging at Leszi's side.

"And here I was about to send for both of you," Queen Susan said, rising from her seat. "Peter, as you will not listen to me, perhaps you will listen to your wiser advisors."

The High King scowled. "Four lives are not on your head, Susan!"

"No," the Gentle Queen agreed, "they are not. But they are not on your head either, Peter." Her hand rested on her brother's shoulder for a moment. She then turned to them with a slight nod.

"Masters, thank you for coming. I need to write to Edmund and Lucy and bring them home. Master Roblang, tomorrow, may we speak about all that is to come?"

"At your pleasure, Queen Susan," he replied, not surprised that it was she who was taking responsibility for working through the rituals of Narnian death. In all, Roblang thought it was a good thing, even if the individual losses were painful. As with how they had begun to rediscover normal, whole lives, how to mourn and celebrate proper death was one more aspect of their collective culture slowly being reclaimed from Jadis. This first true Winter had been hard, with the fear that it would never end. But they all felt Spring coming.
Queen Susan left, shutting the door firmly behind her.

High King Peter gestured for them to take seats. It was courtesy he and Queen Susan always remembered. King Edmund tended to forget and leave his audiences standing assuming they would say something if they wished to sit; Queen Lucy would bounce up and with a laugh pull everyone down to join her in the grass.

"You are here to tell me 'huzzah' and 'well done,' and all that," the High King said, his tone indicating wholly unwarranted self-reproach.

Seeing how right it had been to come, Roblang took the indicated seat. Leszi trotted to a shelf for clay mugs and carelessly smacked them on the table before the High King with a noisy clatter. The Satyr yanked the stopper from the skin with his teeth and splashed the pungent Lightning into the mugs.

The Satyr spit out the stopper and it skittered across the table and on to the flagstones, landing near the low burning hearth. The Satyr Sword Master was known to spit for distance. He slumped into a chair and shoved the mug toward the High King's unmoving hand. "Huzzah, well done, and all that. Drink."

"So I will forget?" the High King said, his reproach so mild and his censure so profound Roblang flinched.

"Drinking to forget?" the Satyr countered, as icily. "Bad policy, Sire. I do not recommend it and it is disrespectful to those who gave their lives." He raised his cup. "To our dead who are home."

It had been so long, Roblang was shocked for a moment to stillness. Had he ever heard the words of the ancient salute spoken in this, their proper place and time? He choked out the response, "Until we meet again in Aslan's Own Country."

Leszi prodded the High King – gently. "And now you say, 'Do not let our grief keep you from your journey home.'"

There was an angry twitch in his jaw and through clenched teeth, the High King repeated, "Do not let our grief keep you from your journey home."

"Now we drink."

The burn of Lightning was like nothing else – vile until at least the third glass. Distilled by Dwarfs from fruit and bulbs, it was a drink only for the most hardy and the most brazen. Satyrs adored it; Fauns were too refined for it. The High King choked and sputtered but, to his credit, did not spit it out.

Roblang raised his glass again to his High King. "You led as a King and fought as a soldier today. It was an honour to stand in your van, Sire."

Leszi banged the table with his hand, setting it rocking. "Well said! To your victory, High King. And to Narnia!"

The High King's knuckles whitened on his mug. "I shall not drink to my own foolishness."

"I saw no such foolishness, High King. Are you telling me I am mistaken?" Leszi's accusation was as cold and hard as his sword.

The anger always so tightly controlled surged and the High King lashed out at his Sword Master.
"Four in my Army died, Leszi. Under my authority. Following my orders."

Leszi wagged an insolent finger at the King. "You are Sovereign, not General. You take counsel, you set policy and objectives, and you direct your subordinates to carry them out. The General gives the orders."

"Do not be so dismissive, Leszi!" the High King barked. "I am charged with protecting all my subjects and now they are dead!"

Roblang put a calming hand on the High King's arm and shot a would you be quiet glare at Leszi. Provocation was not the way here. "You carry Aslan's charge to protect your subjects, High King, including those who cannot defend themselves. That means those who can, must go to War. Every Beast and Being marches out for you, for Narnia, and for Aslan. When we do, there will be death. We all know that. None would have it any other way."

The rebellion died and the High King sagged with fatigue and sorrow. He fingered his cup. "We have seen enough death; I did not want anyone else to die."

"And begrudge them their well earned rest in Aslan's Own Country?" Leszi said with a scoffing laugh. "That's neither your place, nor your right. If Aslan calls someone home, are you going to stop the Lion from doing so?"

"But I am responsible for them and now they are dead!"

"Yes," Roblang began cautiously, feeling his way through this. He wondered if maybe death was different in Spare Oom. He did not see how Narnians going on to Aslan's Country was a dereliction of the High King's duty – unless he was intentionally or through stupidity causing needless death, which was not true here. What had been suffered that day were simple combat casualties – sad, yes, but also inevitable.

Leszi, as was his way, cut through it with a knife. "All those things are true, and still your subjects will die, High King. We are mortal. It's what we do."

"But my mistakes should not contribute to it!"

Leszi scoffed outright. "I told you – we saw no mistakes and frankly we know this business better than you do, Sire." The Satyr shifted in his seat and took another deep draught of his drink. "Regardless, you could do everything correctly, never err, which by the way, would be a first, and still we die."

The High King looked over to him. Roblang splashed more Lightning into his King's cup. "Sir Leszi speaks the difficult truth, High King. Together, you have assembled experienced advisors, you listen to them…"

"Which is in itself a miracle straight from Aslan!" Leszi injected, swilling more Lightning.

Roblang raised his glass. "Aye, it is. You make sound decisions, Sire, even for one so young. Continue as you have, and as this action showed, outright mistakes will be few. But, whether you err or not, whether we err or not, we all die, and some sooner than others. If you cannot accept that, you cannot lead and the Army cannot follow."

"Drink up!" Sir Leszi commanded.

And the High King did, obeying the order with the same alacrity with which he followed the Sword Master's relentless training drills.
Leszi grinned as the High King began coughing, though not as badly as before.

"By the third, you won't even taste it! By the fourth, you'll enjoy it!"

"I will be blind!" the High King said through a grimace.

Leszi shoved Pliny's *Animalia and Botanica* to the side, showing the authoritative text enough respect to not spill Lightning on it. "You were reading that for the farewells to come?"

The High King nodded. "We have been to funerals before, of course. Our own world was at War and men were dying by the thousands." He picked at the corner of his sleeve, face creasing in an uncertain frown. "We were wondering how it is different at a Narnia funeral."

"Well, the word for one," Leszi said with a belch.

"What word?"

"Funeral." The Satyr shrugged. "Sounds like one thing for everyone. It's all different here, of course." He pushed the book further away. "Roblang, this is your expertise."

The High King's inquisitive look and question were nearly an order. It was part of his leadership – to be able to convey his wishes so economically, with few words, or even none at all. Roblang gestured to the *Animalia and Botanica* still on the table. "Each Beast and Being of Narnia lives differently. And so, each Beast and Being of Narnia dies differently."

Grumbling, Leszi said, "We all know where we're going, but typical Narnians, we can't agree on how we get there."

The High King almost laughed at Leszi's wry, and accurate, characterization. Roblang noted how the tension eased as the High King took another sip. He mirrored the gesture and saw Leszi do the same.

"So every funeral is different?"

Roblang nodded, instinctively disliking the term *funeral* as Leszi did. "There are some commonalities. Bodies of Birds and Gryphons, creatures of the air, are burned, with the smoke and ash spread on the winds."

"Canines as well," Leszi said.

This time the High King took another sip of the Lightning and held his own cup out for the fill. "And the Felines?"

"When the time comes and a solitary Beast, like a Cat or a Bear, hears Aslan's call, he or she usually goes off alone. They die as they lived."

"We would bury our dead," the High King said thoughtfully. "In a wooden box. Do any Narnians do that?"

"Waste of good wood," Leszi muttered, stretching his hooves up on another chair. "Dryads wouldn't like that one bit."

"Herd Beasts usually give themselves over the grass they grazed. Woodland Beasts and Centaurs prefer burials."

"Centaur farewells are a bloody bore," Leszi injected. "Good drink and food afterwards, though."
"Farewells? Is that the Narnia word for funeral?"

"It is, High King. We mourn the dead, to a point, but the overall ceremony is one of farewell as we wish the dead a good journey to Aslan and his Country."

The King took another deep draught and made a face. "This is vile but does improve with the repetition. What is it?"

"Dwarf Lightning," Roblang told him. "Best or worst liquor in all the Known Lands, depending on one's perspective."

"Speaking of, Dwarfs rest on rock, since that's what their heads and hearts are made of," Leszi put in.

This time Roblang let the liquor and the occasion answer. He laughed. "True enough, though Red only. No one but the Black Dwarfs themselves know how they see their kin on their way."

"And Dryads die when their Trees do, and the Tree returns to the soil?"

Roblang nodded. Before a warm fire, with warm liquor coursing through him, death seemed very far away and benign.

"What of Satyrs and Fauns, Leszi?" the High King asked.

"Our bodies are returned to our mothers, the Dryads, who offer them to Pan. After that..." Leszi responded with an enigmatic smile. "After that, no one knows. It is a great mystery." The Satyr paused and took another deep drink. "Can't say that I see much of the point of it all. It's not as I'll be there to enjoy the after party. I'm already in Aslan's Country, so what anyone else does is nothing to me."

"You can be sure we will all be there waving good bye," Roblang retorted.

"True," Leszi replied. "Everyone in attendance will want to confirm I'm dead." He drained his glass. "Now, High King, there is one area in which your leadership is decidedly lacking, and I was embarrassed to stand beside you."

The High King leaned back in his chair, cradling the drink, and raised an eyebrow. "Do tell, Sword Master, that I might not shame you in the future."

"Tash's balls, it's your cursing, Sire. All this Great Scott and By Jove. You swear like your mother's listening."

"Master Roblang? Your opinion?"

Roblang took another sip, warming to the subject. "On the battlefield, Sire? Curse like a soldier, or not at all."

The High King, of his own, leaned forward and splashed more Lightning into their cups. "In this, as in all things, I am your student, my Friends."

"Lieutenant Fleming, Colonel!" Gladys called. "Should I tell him you are out?"

"No!" he bellowed back. "I'll take it." He thought of leaping from his chair and slamming the door for privacy so he could grill the man over the telephone. But, sense and hard won patience prevailed.
"Walker-Smythe here," he barked at the man.

"Lieutenant Fleming, Sir," the nervous voice said. "The letter you asked about, Sir. It's here."

If Gladys noticed that he left the office with his cigar and without his jacket and hat, she did not say anything other than calling to his retreating back, "The car leaves at one o'clock for Guy's funeral!"

The censors charged with reading all the Embassy personnel's mail were marooned in an ignominious basement office of the main Embassy. It was too damned hot to be running around the grounds, but he had spent 10 years in India and another 20 before that on the Malaya Peninsula and in Kenya Colony. He did not wilt in a little heat.

The Colonel had asked Fleming to be on the lookout for the letter from Susan Pevensie to Edmund Pevensie. He had gone to Fleming first; he was one of Intrepid's handpicked boys and usually kept conveniently too busy for the censor job. Reviewing private correspondence was dull, but good intelligence work often was, and there was nothing wrong with having a bright young man cool his heels every now and then to learn that it wasn't all about top secret training at Camp X and wild plans for schemes to sink planes in the Channel to trap Nazis.

He was glad for the inside angle regardless – it was best to keep this inquiry in the "family" and if this was going where he suspected it was, he would have to report up the BSC chain. He wanted to keep Lord Halifax and his Lordship's executive secretary out of it.

There was a lot of wearying saluting in the censor office and he waved the two other men down who were hovering about next to Fleming. Buried in the cellar as it was, the room was cool. The pin ups, paper airplanes, and children's model battleships dangling from light fixtures made it look like every junior's hideaway he had ever seen – there were some conspicuously empty spaces on the walls, making him think there had been some quick re-decorating in anticipation of his arrival to remove the saucier pictures. There wasn't anywhere to sit, so he just leaned against Fleming's desk.

Fleming was looking smug for all the attention. He handed over the letter. It had already been opened and bore the office's stamps. Of course it was opened. Fleming was a spy and even if it was not strictly necessary, since the letter was being turned over to command, he had opened and read it on principle.

"Here it is, Sir. We have been clearing ones just like it all summer. It's nothing like a code or anything of that sort."

The Colonel refrained from pulling the letter immediately to read it, concealing his impatience. He knew Susan had been writing frequently to her brother. He needed to know what these boys knew about the other letters. "So, what is it then? Dull complaints upon the weather from a sister to her brother?"

"Some of that, certainly, Sir, but that's not the gist. She's written a story, The Queen Susan in Tashbaan. It's like something right of Lewis Carroll or the Wizard of Oz. Come to think of it, there is even a talking lion and dwarfs, and witches, just like in the film."

"Ripping good yard," one too eager voice injected from across the room. "And I still say that Queen Susan fancies Lord Peridan."

Peridan? Tebbitt had mentioned that name in the car.

"And I've got a dollar that says she's got better sense than hanging off that lout," said another
lieutenant, one desk over.

Fleming looked a little exasperated. "She has been writing the story all summer, Sir. That's how they know of it," he finished with a tilt of his head.

"You owe me a pint, Fleming," one of the other men with a laugh. "I told you Sallowpad would find a way to get those Gryphons and War Horses passed the Ettin catapults in the Bight of Calormen. None too soon, too."

There was too much intelligence coming in at once. He had to slow down and take this piece by piece. "Ettins?"

With the ribbing of his cohorts, Fleming's attempt to show he was the disinterested analyst were failing. He was as invested in the tale as they were. "The Ettins are one of the villains of the piece, Sir. They are Giants who have overrun Narnia and eat humans.

"And Narnia is?"

"Like Oz, Sir. Or Wonderland. If the Ettins are the villains, the Narnians are the heroes. Queen Susan, the talking animals, mythical creatures, and the others are all Narnians. They are in league with the Calormenes away South, who are rich and a bit like Americans, if I do say. She is working for a chap named Sallowpad, with a Gryphon named Bardon, and Lord Peridan."

"A Gryphon?" He was trying to remember what they were.

"Big flying Lions, Sir, with the head of an eagle. They guarded gold and date from the Persian Empire, I think."

"They dance the Lobster Quadrille!" injected the other Lieutenant.

"Oi, you prat! You see Gryphons in Christian symbology. Beatrice rides one."

"I tell you there is a Gryphon in Alice's Adventures!"

Yes, this would be the after-effects of the classics curriculum. With both Dante and Carroll in the mix, the speakers were Oxford men.

The Colonel found his own head swimming with the information. This was not what he had expected, though in truth, he'd not fully considered what to expect.

"This Sallowpad, who is he?"

"A bird."

"Raven!" came another injection from Fleming's eager officemate. "Like in the Tower, never shall England fall and all that. Sallowpad is right clever, but ruthless. He and Peridan fight something awful."

Fleming cleared his throat and looked pointedly at his two fellow censors who were now discussing whether the Gryphons would arrive in time for the Lone Island campaign and whether the Narnians had rats and crows inside someplace called Harfang.

Something remembered nudged his consciousness.

"Rats and crows?" he asked Fleming, thinking of Susan's fondness for rats and her mention of crows roosting on the Pentagon that he had not noticed.
The man shrugged. "Spies, Sir. There are talking rats and crows who spy for the Narnians. One of them, Willa, is a very tricky rat. I would hire her myself. If she were real," he amended quickly.

Susan had mentioned Willa before as well.

Fleming shifted a little nervously and again glanced over at the other two men who were still arguing about rats, crows, and the Lone Islands. "Something you want to say, Fleming?"

"Well, see, Sir, it's like this. We're not stupid men here and I did think some of it was a mite odd. Peridan is a flier, though on a Gryphon, and a bit of a drunk, there's a pretty Dryad and she's courting a Prince from a Northern ally. If you take my meaning?"

"I understand," he said carefully, considering the connections Fleming was making.

Fleming continued, "Also, as the man said, this Sallowpad is a very clever bird and it's a dodgy tale."

"Dodgy you say, yet going to her schoolboy brother."

Fleming nodded. "Precisely, Sir. But then, just when I'd think, well, maybe there is something here, it just goes off odd, or on to wild fancy."

"Such as?"

"Queen Susan picks locks, Sir. She learns the trade from a raccoon."

He kept his face interested and skeptical. "I say, that does sound far-fetched, doesn't it?" Except he'd heard from Sykes himself that Mrs. Caspian had a deft hand with the pick and had been a decent cracksman even before arriving at the Embassy. She had broken into the Vice President's briefcase.

"Also, Sir, Queen Susan is a Narnian in the story and she writes of Bardon and the other Narnians as being her people – those are the talking animals and dwarfs, fauns, and the like. Quite the rabble and there are no Narnian humans about except for herself and Lord Peridan. But, if this is a cipher, that would make Guy Hill the Gryphon and she has been writing that she is one of his kind."

"His kind?"

"Negroes, Sir. It just did not square up, to my mind."

But it did square up, completely. It would not be obvious to an outsider like Fleming, but he had seen it himself, as recently as at Guy Hill's wake the night before and in her genuine friendship with Agnes, Hill, and their family. Susan embraced Hill's extended family as her own without a hint of misgiving or prejudice. The "Whites Only" signs in Washington establishments had infuriated her; he remembered vividly her outrage that second day in the office. Her visceral reaction to the intelligence regarding Chelmno death camp for Polish Jews undoubtedly stemmed from the same emotional source.

"Also, Sir, there was this really odd bit in the middle about an Ettin Cookbook."

He really was doing all the parroting here, but Fleming was being glibly helpful and all he needed was encouragement. "A cookbook? What were they doing with a cookbook?"

"Queen Susan and Lord Peridan created a fake Cookbook on how Ettins eat humans and Sallowpad plants it in an Ettin safehouse for the Calormenes to find. It causes panic among the
Calormenes when they learn they are on the Ettin menu."

He was going to have consider this issue further. It certainly had echoes to the map they had invented and planted earlier in the summer. It seemed a lifetime ago. Very few people knew the origins of that business. This was the problem with intelligence operations; one's own hand was so secret, even to your own side, the other hand didn't know what was occurring. The censors would have needed facts they did not have to even suspect something was amiss in the letters. Phrasing it as she had made it seem preposterous and fantastical, unless you knew how preposterous and fantastical the reality was.

With his encouraging look, Fleming continued. "After the Cookbook, it got even stranger when Queen Susan and Sallowpad find out through the rat, Lady Willa, that there is a prison in a Witch's castle deep in Ettin-controlled Narnia. The Ettins are cooking and eating the Narnians. It was confused there, but I really could not match it up with anything we knew of. It all seemed pure invention."

Unless Lady Willa was a spy within Nazi-controlled Poland, the Native Narnians were Jews, and the Witch's castle was in Chelmno.

"So you let them pass."

"Yes, Sir."

"Did you see any of her brother's letters coming in?"

"No, Sir, and we wouldn't under the protocols."

"You say this has been going on all summer. Did anyone keep copies of her letters?"

"Oh no, Sir." Fleming discreetly scrawled on a scratch paper, And no one would own to it now.

The Colonel nodded his understanding as Fleming scribbled over the words with a pen, wadded up the paper and tossed it into his burn bag.

"I admit this last letter," Fleming tapped the envelope in his hand, "made me uneasy and that's because I know about the other night."

Again, Fleming was being oblique. Not many people in the Embassy knew the full details of what had occurred last week. Even fewer knew that Susan Caspian neé Pevensie had been in the office when Guy Hill died.

"Even then, knowing what I do, I'm not sure if it is anything more than a ripping good story that does incorporate some elements that are a bit indiscreet. The reason I say so is that again, there are bits that seem similar, but it is also obviously part of some bigger, fantastical story that has no basis in anything of concern to us here."

"For example?"

"In the letter, after the Gryphon, Bardon dies at the hands, or paws, I should say of a mole, Queen Susan goes off on a tear to the Just King about how she should have foreseen it because there was a mole in the garden just like before."

"Before? Before what?" In his perplexity, the Colonel was speaking aloud. Yet, Susan had, according to Tebbitt, said the same thing.
The Lieutenant shrugged again. "No idea, but you see my point. Maybe the death is real, but everything else around it is obviously pure invention." He thoughtfully tapped his pencil on the pad. "If it’s a cipher, Sir, we should sign them both for cryptology training."

"Both?"

"The sister and her brother. Because if she wrote it as a code, he understood it, and it's bloody brilliant."

An intriguing thought. Was the whole family like this? The mother and father both had seemed pleasant and bright, but not remarkable in the way that their eldest daughter was.

"Thank you, Fleming. One last question. Is there a penguin in the story?"

There were strangled guffaws in the room and Fleming scowled at the other two men. "There is, Sir. Ambassador Flobber, the Narnian representative to Calormen. He is a joke."

Joke or not, the Colonel had now determined why his Lordship, Ambassador Halifax, former Viceroy to India, Foreign Affairs Secretary to Prime Minister Chamberlain, Lord President of the Council, Leader of the House of Lords, was referred to in the lower ranks at the British Embassy to America as "the Penguin."

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And so, Queen Susan bears culpability for the death of Bardon. Had she been more attentive and less enamored of the glamour of Tashbaan, she would have given greater thought to the Moles toiling away all summer at the Narnia Residence. It was surely no coincidence; Just King and Gentle Queen both know the Rule of Threes better than that. Aslan was shouting to her, but she did not hear him. Now a Good Beast, as noble as any who ever flew for Narnia during her Golden Age or since, is dead. Queen Susan recalls the Just King's wise instruction to be cautious in coming to Tashbaan so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Queen Susan sought to remedy her past failures, to make reparation for her foolishness and gullibility. Yet, the past has repeated itself again, two fold, both in her failure to see the Mole when all the ills were there for the watchful eye to see, and in making mistakes as foolish as those of her first time in Tashbaan. She wishes she had attended more closely to Aslan's voice and to the advice of the Just King. If she had, Bardon would still live.

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To follow, The Queen Susan in Tashbaan, Part 2
In which there are funerals and a long expected confrontation.

Thanks to Ilysia who first supposed what Centaur burial and mourning rituals might be in Singing Paeans of the Stars.

Master Roblang, the Red Dwarf Arms Master and Sir Leszi the Satyr Sword Master have made several appearances – in The Palace Guard
http://www.fanfiction.net/s/5148735/1/The_Palace_Guard and by reference a few times in this story. This flashback occurs before the creation of the Palace Guard.
The Queen Susan in Tashbaan

Chapter 20, The Queen Susan in Tashbaan, Part 2

*When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language.*

John Donne

*While we are mourning the loss of our friend, others are rejoicing to meet him behind the veil.*

John Taylor

The processional began as a wedding ceremony, with a parade of little girls carrying flowers, coals to Newcastle as it were, for the Metropolitan Church was drenched with waterfalls of flowers in vibrant colors of orange, yellow, and pink. Their perfume hung heavy in the August heat. There was a triumphant blast of trumpets, piano and organ and by the Colonel Walker-Smythe's judge, over 500 people stood and began to sing in one jubilant voice.

He glanced down at his program, *Services for Guy W. Hill*. The Processional was *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, a Negro spiritual likely not found in the Church of England Book of Common Prayer and English Hymnal. As the coffin and its bearers slowly traveled down the long church aisle on a white runner, every voice was indeed lifted. With the singing, the mourners raised their arms and eyes, bodies swaying and feet stomping. Handheld fans swished the warm, flower-scented air about the Church.

* Lift every voice and sing,  
* 'Til earth and heaven ring,  
* Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  

*Let our rejoicing rise High as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on 'til victory is won.*

Next to him, Mrs. Caspian was whispering to her mother who the dozens of people were in the processional and their relation to Guy Hill. In fair imitation of the immaculately turned out singing women in white and black, Mrs. Caspian had her arms up as well, swaying and clapping in time with the music.

Tebbitt picked it up on the first refrain, but then the man was musical with a fine tenor. The Colonel just mouthed the words; no need to inflict his caws on everyone. The apt comparison amused him, given that Mrs. Caspian's letter was buried in his inner pocket. He had not had time to even read it through before hurrying to get to the funeral.

They sang through all three verses three times before everyone was in the church, and the pall bearers, august men of immense dignity, had gently and with a very experienced hand nestled Hill's open coffin in a river of flowers at the front of the church. Hill's frozen face stared out at them; on his hands were white gloves. It was interesting just how many cultures used white garments in
their spiritual ceremonies. For some white signified birth, peace, and joining, for others, death.

By the final chorus, walls were shaking and the flowers were quivering with the music and voices. *The vicar? Parson? Pastor,* he decided, was bedecked in glorious vestments of white, black, gold and purple.

The music died away, but the voices did not. Applause and approving murmurs from the women in the congregation continued to roll through the church. To his further surprise, the choir of men and women assembled themselves behind the coffin and the Pastor, on the altar. Now that he was looking for it, he was surprised that there was no choir loft in the church.

The Pastor began in a beautiful, powerful voice. "Good afternoon and thank you family and friends for joining us today to speak of our brother Guy. We gather to put our arms around one another and..."

Before he could finish – *What was it here? Welcome? Prologue? Collect? Invocation?* – while the Pastor was still speaking, voices throughout the crowded church injected their religious commentary of "Amens," "Alleluias," and "Praise Bes." It was not unlike the responsorials in the Catholic, COE and some other traditions, except that these were spontaneous utterances. He had never heard such a thing before and it was Pentecostal in execution.

At his side, Tebbitt cast him a confused glance, frowning, for it seemed very rude to so interrupt the Pastor. Mrs. Caspian alone seemed sanguine. He heard Mrs. Pevensie whisper to her daughter, "What are they doing?" as a woman two rows in front of them called out, "Amen!"

Mrs. Caspian shushed her mother. Tebbitt craned his neck over to listen as she whispered, "It is a participatory remembrance."

"They talk through the whole service?" Mrs. Pevensie asked.

Her daughter smiled through her tears, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief. "It is lovely, isn't it?"

The invocation continued with running, approving commentary from the congregation and a faint musical piano accompaniment.

"Let yourselves not be troubled, for our Brother Guy has thrown off the shackles of this sinful world and he rests now in the bosom of Jesus. We gather with broken hearts to do our grief work..."

With the pillow pulled over her head and buried under a mountain of coverlets, Lucy did not know that anyone had entered her room until she felt cold fingers tweak her toe.

She yelped and bolted upright, throwing off bedcovers. "Susan!"

In the flickering light of the candle lamp, her sister looked as she felt, as they all felt – a drawn and haggard ruin. Susan was still in her working clothes from the day before, and it was now hours past moonrise. Lucy had not changed either; the tears from her frantic flight by Gryphon to the Glasswater could probably not be repaired and there the blood stains had surely set by now. They were all too thrown over in their grief at the horrifying news that their beloved Hound had died, horribly and suddenly, from snake bite taken at Glasswater.

Susan had a wine skin dangling from her shoulder and two earthen mugs. She sniffed back tears and managed, "The Tower Library is quieter. I thought we might go there."

The to escape was unspoken but audible even over the dreadful wailing echoing throughout Cair
Paravel that night.

Lucy thrashed out of the bed. "Of course."

She looped an arm in her sister's and took the lamp. Together they trudged out of the monarch's wing and up the stairs to the topmost level, their way lit by the occasional flickering wall sconce. With the whole Castle grieving, refreshing the torches was one more neglected duty.

Automatically, Lucy registered that Hunfrid, the great Bear of the Night Guard, lumbered after them. Lucy did not see Otieno or the elderly Wrasse. The other Night Guards were probably with Edmund and Peter. She longed again for Briony, her own Guard, but she had sent the Wolf to join the other Canines. That was her place this night. The she-Wolf would want to be with her own kind and Lucy would not begrudge them that support.

Susan's Guard was also missing. "Lambert finally left to join the other Canines?"

Susan's smile was thin and mirthless. "I had to order him but yes he finally went." Her sister paused and a howling of Wolf voices rose above the other cries, one sweet and mellow, and the other low and sonorous.

Lucy flinched and felt tears spring again to her eyes as her sister stifled sob. Surely those voices belonged to Briony and Lambert.

They hurried down the dim hall to the Library, going more by feel and habit than sight.

Lucy pushed open the door, calling, "Edmund?" for her brother might have also sought refuge here.

"Last I heard, he was still with the Pack," Susan replied. With their Lead Bitch so suddenly dead, the Palace Pack was devastated and demanding her comforting scent. The duty had fallen specifically to Edmund for Jina had died in his arms.

Susan shut the door behind them; Hunfrid would keep watch in the hall.

"And Peter?"

"He was with the Pack, but might have gone to the Cave to be with the other Canines, or maybe went to the Tree to see Dalia." Dalia had been the High King's Cheetah Guard, retired these two years past in favor of her sons. Peter still sought out Dalia during times of crisis.

With no ceremony, Susan slumped to the Library floor. Lucy set the lamp on a desk and collapsed next to her sister.

Susan's hands were shaking so much she could not manipulate the stopper on the skin and finally tossed it aside with a cry of frustration. "I didn't really want to drink it anyway. It was just an excuse to come up here."

Lucy took Susan's hands in her own and they huddled together. It was uncomfortable but the cries of mourning were quieter up this high. Lucy felt Susan's tears dampening her own shoulder and wiped her own nose on a sleeve.

"I do not even have a handkerchief," Susan mumbled into her shoulder.

"Nor do I," Lucy responded, holding her sister tighter.
"You never do, Lucy."

"Any word from the General and her Wing?"

"No, though the Lone Islands ship had not even cleared the horizon when they set off. I'm sure they will find her and fetch her back." Susan paused, and then spoke so softly Lucy knew it was because she did not wish for Hunfrid to hear the words, "Do you think she will come?"

Lucy hugged her doubting sister closer. Susan had only just returned from Telmar and had not been with them these last months. "I know Morgan seems odd and awkward, but she loves Narnia and Edmund. She will not deny us now. She and Jina were together for three years! She will understand the Pack's need."

Susan nodded into her shoulder. "Master Roblang said he thought the Pack and other Canines will keen to sunrise but will wait for Morgan's return, even if it means not lighting the cairn at dawn. They will want to …"

Susan's words were lost in quiet sobs and with her throat tightening unbearably, Lucy could not speak either. It did not matter. They both knew. As the beloved Hound Bitch's closest companion, the Palace Pack wanted Lady Morgan to light her pyre. Morgan would not want the public recognition, but Lucy could not believe she would spurn it either when the needs of the Pack were so great.

Even in the upmost Tower, still they could hear the wailing of the Hounds, the howls of the Wolves, the yaps of the Foxes and the cries of every other Canine of Cair Paravel. Their voices rose up to the night sky now as the smoke from the pyre would rise in the morning. The Canine keen sank into the bone, rang in the ears, drained the spirit and filled the senses with the noise of unbearable loss. The very stones of Cair Paravel groaned with the awful sounds as all mourned the passing into Aslan's Country of Jina, Lady Hound and Lead Bitch of the Palace Pack.

Consulting the lengthy programme again, George thumbed through its pages and counted the number of remembrances to be shared, songs to be sung, and prayers to be said. Considering the multitude gathered in the church, George settled in, figuring they were in for a long afternoon. Mrs. Caspian had said that one reason for the delay in the service for over a week was to assure that distant family members could make their way to Washington for the funeral – a custom not practiced in Islam and Judaism he knew. Having taken the trouble to make the trip, the friends and family of Guy Hill would take their time in church.

In the car coming over, Mrs. Caspian had explained that in this community, they called it Transitioning. He had observed funerals, cremations, burials, and rituals of the dead on three continents and in at least eight different spiritual traditions. He would now add American Negro Protestant to the mix as he listened to the very hopeful "going home" for Guy Hill.

Edmund had been warned but really this was taking a very long time. He now understood what Master Roblang had meant about wearing the broken-in rather than the new boots to a Centaur burial. Surely, the standing around the burial mound was much easier on four legs, than two. To his embarrassment, Edmund found himself nodding off; only seeing a Centauress Filly dozing against her mother during the interminable chanting of her Great-Grandsire's life had kept him from doing so. The Filly's flanks were twitching and he wondered if the festive ribbons braided in her tail hairs hurt.

His nose itched, scenting the roasting meats and foodstuffs being prepared. Roblang had said that a
Centaur farewell feast was not to be missed, though he did caution against Humans trying to keep up with the drinking. The Centaurs, it was said, would drink their wine from buckets on such an occasion. Edmund thought that sounded rather good fun. Perhaps the second bucket went down easier than the first?

The Fauns and Dwarfs had been practicing the merry drumming and piping all week for the complex dances of a Centaur burial. Again, Roblang had said the dancing was best observed early in the proceedings, before the participants had downed too many bucketfuls. One needed presence of mind to dodge the darting bodies and flashing hooves. It promised to be a joyous and rowdy celebratory affair of a great, aged Centaur's final gallop into Aslan's Country.

Another spadeful of dirt on the burial mound, another chant. Great-Grandsire Horace the Elder had lived a very, very long life.

Edmund wished they were not recounting every day of it.

To George's surprise, Agnes joined two older, very dignified women in the front of the church. "Sadie and Ludie," Tebbitt muttered. The trio all wore elegant black and white, gloves, and hats festooned with ribbons and rolled satin flowers. He would not have thought Agnes bold enough to sing in public, but the girl seemed to draw her support from the two women who flanked her. As the pastor began to speak (again), the women softly crooned.

"I say to you, friends of Guy, weep no more, for he's only gone on, he's only gone on."

_Swing low, sweet chariot_
_Come for to carry me home._

"One day, God was looking down on this earth and his almighty eye fell on our brother. And God looked at that good, decent, loving, brave man, and said,' I want brother Guy with me now, for he has earned his just reward.' God said, 'brother Guy has labored in my vineyard. He has carried my burdens.'"

_I looked over Jordan and what did I see_
_Come for to carry me home_

So from his golden throne, God commanded Death, all silent and pale, "Bring me our brother Guy." So Death went down, in his black robes and on his black horse. Death galloped away, here, among us, down the streets of Washington, but he didn't make no sound."

_A band of angels coming after me_
_Come for to carry me home_

"And we all turned away at the Angel of Death, but our Guy, he look looked ole Death in the face and knew that he was going home and he lifted up his arms and said, 'Take me home, Death, take me home.' And Death took him away, took him away he did, galloping away, but not making no sound, on his black horse."

_If you get there before I do_
_Come for to carry me home_

"And Death took our brother Guy up like a child on a pony and took him home. And Saint Peter threw open the gates as they galloped in, and the silver trumpets blared, and the angels sang a song of welcome. And old Death set Guy down into the loving arms of Jesus who said, take your rest, brother Guy, for you have labored long for my father. Take your rest."
Tell all my friends I'm coming to
Coming for to carry me home

"So, friends, weep no more. For our brother is home, glorious, as bright as a star, at God's own
table, and having a mighty feast. I say, weep no more! For our brother is home!"

Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home.

At the Tree's entrance, Susan relieved the unspoken anxiety of everyone in the vicinity. To
Lambert, she said, "You need not join me, Friend. It would be restful neither for you nor for the
Felines inside."

Lambert curled his lip over a canine tooth in disapproval. "I concede, but grudgingly, that the
Felines within will protect you adequately."

"Do you wish to see Wrasse?" Susan asked.

"Before we leave, I shall," Lambert said soberly. "She wishes to see you alone now."

Susan entered the Tree, greeting the Cats she saw, and asking the Cheetah, Chase, to guard the hall
to Wrasse's quarters. It was not necessary, but Lambert would scold and fret unless she did so.

At the swinging door to the Panther's quarters, she hesitated. The door was closed for privacy,
but… She knocked, and then pushed the door open, calling softly, "Wrasse? It is I, Queen Susan,
as you asked."

The Panther was curled in a soft fur, eyes half closed, breath coming in uneven gasps. Susan
moved slowly, waiting for Wrasse to catch her scent. The Cat finally did, raising her whitened
muzzle up, nose twitching. Her glassy eyes were milky and unseeing.

"Queen Susan," the old Panther said. "Forgive me but I will not rise. Would you sit beside me?"
Wrasse's voice was thick and harsh.

"Of course, Friend." She spoke even if the Panther could not hear and sat on the cushioned floor
next to the Great Cat.

Wrasse inhaled deeply and sighed. "Thank you for coming, Queen Susan. I cannot see or hear you,
but I know that you are here."

Susan set her hand on Wrasse's shoulder, reinforcing her familiar scent with touch in the Panther's
silent, dark world.

"The only voice I hear now is Aslan's," the Great Cat said. "I will follow him soon."

Susan nodded, though Wrasse would not know it. "You go with our blessings and prayers, my
Friend. Do not tarry here on our account. You have earned your rest."

"I ask that you release me from your service so that I might go without impediment to Aslan."

Wrasse was not an individual Palace Guard, as Lambert was, but she had guarded them all from the
very beginning since before Beruna. Susan could not imagine saying these things to Lambert as she
surely must someday – Wolves, even Talking Wolves, did not live as long as Humans. They had
known for some time that this day was coming for dear Wrasse.
"The Guard's Oath follows us all into Aslan's Country, my good Cat. It endures to the end of Narnia herself. But I do release you, for now, so that you may make your last journey to Him."

Susan placed her hands on either side of Wrasse's head, bent over, and kissed the Panther's brow. "Go with our thanks, Friend Wrasse, into the fellowship of those who wait for you."

Wrasse sighed and Susan heard a death rattle in the Panther's chest. "Thank you, my Queen."

That night, Susan sat with Lucy in a window seat in the Palace that looked out from a tower toward the paths that led to the Tree. They curled up in blankets and watched in a silent vigil.

Some time in the hours before dawn, Susan saw a black shape, just darker than the Trees and the ebbing night, hobble out from the path to the Tree. She pointed and Lucy nodded. The Trees opened to admit the shape then closed again.

She had no doubt but that it was Wrasse using her last energy to leave the Tree so that she might die as a Great Cat lived, alone.

Overloud in the stillness, Lucy suddenly whispered, "Aslan is come!" Her sister always knew when the Great Lion was near. There was a sigh from the Trees, a scented breeze, and a glimmer of light in the dark Wood.

Aslan had come himself to see a great loyal Cat home. There was another fluttering sigh on the wind and then, Susan knew, Wrasse was gone from this world.

The windows of the Hall next to the church were thrown open and the fans were set to high. Tables groaning under the weight of food were set along a long wall. It had been an interesting study. George had not fully appreciated the mix of cultures that had contributed to this community. The curries were British Empire by way India and the West Indies. The okra, sweet potatoes, and rice were classic West African, brought to the Americas with the slave trade, he supposed. The poor man's meats – offal, shrimp, catfish, and ham hocks were American, Southern slave. The heavily seasoned greens were a combination of all three cultures.

He had searched the table for dumplings – most the world cuisines had a variation of them – a potato, wheat, or other outer package encasing some combination of meat, cheeses, or vegetables. He had bitten into one promising specimen but it was only fried, seasoned corn all the way through. Mrs. Caspian had said it was called a hushpuppy which led to speculation as to its derivation – probably a food shared by man and dog alike.

The cold sweet tea was disgusting and he handed his glass to an elegant, grateful grandmother, and opted for the lemonade instead.

Tebbitt had joined Charlie, his trio and their bottle of Wild Turkey for a breezy, impromptu jazz session outside in the courtyard. The winds, brass and drum mingled with the food

George circled the room again, exchanging words with some of Hill's family, the cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews. He sincerely thanked the Pastor for an outstanding and inspirational service. The drivers of the uniformed Washington livery services were in a corner and he made a point of speaking to the men. Hill had been on excellent terms with that group and this was a hole in their operation that would not be easily plugged.

He was not uncomfortable with funerals, exactly. He was a Colonel and had been in service the whole of his adult life – death came with the uniforms and he knew the rituals, the polite words, the hands on the shoulders.
Tebbitt knew the routines as well – how many of his own had he buried and mourned? Dozens, probably.

As for Mrs. Caspian, there were no surprises, really. She had been distraught the night of Guy's death. But, within a day, the familiar, competent mask, the cover of Susan Caspian, had slid back into place and she handled the Embassy's contributions and support to the grieving family gently and efficiently. Here, she knew every name, listened to every person, and compassionately embraced the mourners in that very un-British convention known as the American hug. The different rituals had not thrown her; the foods, the music, the length, the heat, the noise, had all been managed effortlessly. She simply floated through it as though she had done this hundreds of times before. She probably had. Curiously, she had not lost any family members in the War. He had checked.

On his circuit, he had to work through a cluster of women shrieking with laughter. "Tell Miss Mae about Guy and Cook in Heaven, Miss Susan!" Sadie was saying, wiping her eyes with tears of mingled happiness and grief.

Mrs. Caspian smiled graciously. "Well, Miss Mae, it's like this. I have it on good authority that heaven has simply not been complete for my good friend Cook. She has been running about with a ladle demanding that everyone take just one taste of her chittlins." She threw up her hands in mock despair. "And no one wants one more taste!"

"It's the salt," Sadie said knowingly. "She's not saltin 'em enough."

Mrs. Caspian nodded gravely. "I suspect that is indeed the problem, Miss Sadie. They are certainly not as fine as your own." She sipped her own sweet tea, and continued her story with the skill of a street performer. "I am happy to report that heaven is, with Guy's arrival, a more peaceful place. Cook will make her chittlins, which she adores, Guy will eat them, which he adores, and no one else will have to taste them!"

The women all laughed and Miss Mae (whoever she was related to) hugged Susan.

George would lay odds that Mrs. Caspian's middle class London family home did not include a Cook who prepared pig intestine, and never had. He set the glass of lemonade down on a tray leading to the noisy kitchen and made for the exit. The mysterious letter was burning a hole in his inner pocket. It was time to get to the bottom of this.

Brilliant. Terrifying. Caustic. One of the greatest fighters in Narnia's history. And one of her greatest teachers. All just so many empty words. Trying to compose his feelings and muster his thoughts for the bonfire, Peter returned again and again to a simple fact. The man he was today, the King and the warrior, owed an enormous debt to his Sword Master of fifteen years. Now, Sir Leszi was dead at an Ettin's hand and Peter did not feel equal to the task of lamenting and farwelling the Satyr.

It did not help that Leszi would have beaten him about the head with cudgel for his sentimentality now. There would have been an inordinate quantity of Lightning liquor consumed and profanity involving a god of the Calormene pantheon and that god's (or goddess') anatomy.

Returning from the Northern border dispute with the body of his Sword Master on a bier, he had come home to Cair Paravel far too late to do anything about Rabashash's betrayal and the Siege of Anvard. His heartfelt congratulations and gratitude to Lune had been sent. The private, conciliatory, and impenetrable message from the Tisroc still sat unanswered and Peter intended to let the man stew in anxiety for another ten-day or so.
Peter's move to the study to work on the Lament for Leszi was a temporary strategic withdrawal. He loved his family and missed them all when campaigns took him away for months at a time. Yet, the day to day dramas did sometimes make him long for a simpler time on the road where the difficulties were less intractable – the thrown shoe on the horse, rain, the arrow whistling through the air aimed at your head.

Things were so peculiar, Peter had begun to wonder if all the Human women of Cair Paravel had taken leave of their senses at the same time. This was not wholly fair to Morgan as she was always slightly off course as a matter of course. She had not been close to Leszi, but since Jina's death two years ago, farewells had never been easy for her.

Susan continued to wallow in her guilt of Calormen and Peter was anxiously awaiting the moment when her self-loathing would give way to the far more appropriate and productive rage. Angry Susan was a much more agreeable woman than guilty, reproachful Susan.

Within a month of the Anvard siege, his youngest sister was in love, and she and Aidan were planning their bonding ceremonies. Then, Lucy threatened to send Aidan and his Mischief of numerous and very young relations back to Archenland and announced she intended to move to a cave in the Western Wild and dance with Fauns for the rest of her life. Fortunately, Mrs. Beaver had seemed to sort it out and everything was, for the moment, back on schedule.

Peter heard voices outside his office door and looked up from the notes that refused to order themselves into coherent remarks about so complex a being as Leszi. His Cheetah guard was dozing in a patch of summer sunlight.

"Beehn? Shouldn't you be telling me who is at the door?"

The Cheetah yawned. "Fooh is talking to Queen Susan. Lambert is there, too, and if they all come in, there won't be enough space in the sun."

Lambert, Susan's Wolf Guard, was very commanding and did have a way of crowding out other large carnivores.

"Come in, Susan!" Peter called, knowing Wolf and Cheetah would hear, even if his sister did not.

The door swung open, Susan at its threshold.

"Beehn, you may now guard the door in Fooh's place," Peter told the Cheetah. Beehn had a tendency to let Fooh do the thinking for both of them.

With grumbling complaint, Beehn slouched out of the door, Susan turning against the wall to let the Cheetah pass. "Do not get too settled," she said to Fooh who was hurrying to the sunny spot his brother had abandoned. "Peter, I apologize for disturbing you, but your presence is required in the garden."

"I am attempting to …" He wordlessly gestured to the scraps on his desk.

"I know, which is why you are needed in the garden."

"Oh?"

"Cyrus." Susan paused. "Again."

He sighed. Cyrus was Leszi's young son, supposedly. Female offspring between Satyr and Dryad were Dryads themselves and nurtured in the mother's Grove, Orchard, or Wood. Male offspring,
such as Cyrus, were Satyrs and raised communally by the Satyroi and their elders, the Seilenoi. Cyrus appeared in the likeness of a grandsire of Leszi's line, one of the five Aslan originally sang into being, so the story went – actual, verifiable facts, where Satyrs were concerned, were always sketchy at best. So Leszi had claimed the boy as his own – whether or not he actually was Leszi's son was immaterial.

"Cyrus does seem to be having difficulty with the transition," Peter said. "Has he changed his mind about returning Leszi's body to the Trees?" That had been the crisis of two days ago.

"No. He seems to have accepted what the Satyroi have told him – that Pan needs the body to remake a Satyr in Leszi's likeness." Susan pinched the bridge of her nose. She mustered her thoughts and opened her tired eyes. "Today, he learned that Edmund will be offering the lament for the Ettin who killed Leszi. Cyrus has taken ill to the suggestion and climbed a tree."

"Not a Dryad?"

"Unfortunately, no. At Aidan's sensible suggestion, Lucy has climbed the tree to keep Cyrus company. Aidan is tossing food up to them."

Peter was more relieved by this news than anything he heard in a month. If Lucy was in a tree, normalcy was returning to Cair Paravel.

"Well, if Aidan stops feeding them, Cyrus will get hungry and come down on his own," Peter said this with some misgiving, as he did not wish to contradict the far more experienced Aidan where care and feeding of young were concerned.

A smile creased her worn face. "Indeed. And were it anywhere else, we could leave Lucy and Aidan to resolve it. But, Cyrus is in the kitchen garden, and this means everyone else is in the kitchen garden as well..."

Which meant Cook. Susan nodded as Peter comprehended the problem.

"And if Cook becomes upset on the afternoon before Leszi's bonfire..."

"We will all be eating pig intestine tonight," Peter finished.

Cook had direct ways of making her displeasure known. If lobbing cabbages at those who trespassed in her garden was not sufficient deterrent (and it usually was not for the Cats would bat the vegetables about and the Canines, being omnivores, would eat them), menu escalation and retaliation were the next steps. Indigestion and foul breath invariably followed.

"I have no objection to pig offal as a dining option this evening," Lambert put in.

Susan snorted. "Well you and the Dwarfs would not, my Friend, but everyone else would!"

"Which would mean more for us," Lambert countered.

Fooh growled a little. "It is impolite to argue with your Monarch," he said smugly to Lambert, sounding quite superior.

Peter felt his mouth twitch; Susan's reddened eyes were dancing with unexpressed laughter as well. That Fooh would deign to criticize Lambert was both very daring and very amusing.

Lambert had, however, long ago mastered the art of polite condescension. The hair around his ruff did not even rise. He merely stared down the Cheetah, with a perfect mimicry of Susan's single
raised eyebrow.

So it was the abashed Fooh whose hair rose. With typical Cat haughtiness (and probably a little embarrassment), he turned his back on the Wolf and settled in the sun with perfect nonchalance. All things considered, it was a well played counter, expressing both that the Wolf was beneath a response and that he did not fear him, even instinctively. It was a classic mannerism of Edmund's Tiger Guard, Jalur, whom Fooh had been assiduously studying.

"Still, I believe we have a few moments before our dinner is truly threatened. Would you sit, Susan, for a little while?"

Peter held out a hand, waiting. With the wary stiffness of a Cat, Susan did take a seat. Susan had not yet been willing to tell him the full tale of her time in Tashbaan. It had come out in bits and pieces, through Edmund, Tumnus, and Lady Willa, the Rat.

"Susan," he began, but she cut him off, already knowing of what he would speak.

"You will say that I look ill, am not sleeping properly, and that Rabadash is not worth the emotional effort I expend upon him."

"It had occurred to me, yes," Peter admitted. "I do not begrudge you your grief, of course, but this wasting is diminishing you."

"Grief," she muttered. "I do not grieve for Rabadash."

"I was not referring to Rabadash," Peter said, heartened at least that she was speaking as opposed sullenly silent.

Susan scowled. "I have heard tell that it somehow is not my fault that Narnia stole from Tashbaan in the dead of night like a common thief, that there was armed assault upon Narnia's ally, and that all told near one hundred Calormenes, Archenlanders, and Narnians died."

Lambert and Fooh both growled at Susan's harsh self-accusation. Peter knew that Lambert himself felt responsibility for permitting Susan to go to Tashbaan without him. He also knew that thus far, gentle support and attentiveness had not aided Susan in her bitter isolation.

So, Peter took a lesson from Sir Leszi. He reached for the blown glass decanter upon his desk and splashed a fingerfull of Lightning into two earthen cups.

Susan wrinkled her nose. "You know I cannot abide that poison."

"It is not for you, but for Leszi. He would spank us both with the flat of his sword if we drank to his journey home with anything less than Lightning."

Her mouth twitched into a smile. Of the four of them, Susan had suffered the least under Leszi's tutelage, for sword and knives had been his weapons of choice, but not hers. On the other paw, Susan had been the one to nurse their bruised and battered bodies after rounds with the Sword Master in the Training Yard.

Peter raised his glass. "To Leszi, who is home."

"Until we meet again in Aslan's Own Country."

"Do not let our grief keep you from your journey home," Peter intoned, concluding the formal toast. They both drank and he relished the burn as the Lightning went down.
Susan grimaced, but managed a sip.

"Before you came, I was considering how disgusted Leszi would be with me for my sentimentality." Peter gestured to his abortive attempts at prose. "He would certainly abuse me for expressing any regret at his passing to Aslan. He did not seek death, but he did not fear it at all."

She peered at him over the rim of her cup, eyes narrowed. "You are trying to discuss indirectly what I will not speak of directly, Peter."

"I cannot help you, Susan, if you refuse me and it," Peter said wearily, setting down his glass. "If you had sought this out of vainglory, I might fault you. But you are no more responsible than I am when one of our belligerents to the North or West chose to make an example of Narnia."

Her face tightened with anger at his deliberately didactic, slightly condescending tone and Peter was heartened – it was a better reaction than self-loathing and tears. So encouraged, he pressed on.

"As for Calormen, our spies have warned us for years that the good overtures and productive trade relations notwithstanding, the Tisroc believed our barbarians lands of the North were an irritant to be scratched out of existence. He will not risk another attack upon us in his lifetime and the Calormene command failures will take years to resolve. I would never say that loss of life is worth any benefit achieved, but given what that country values, we have earned a respect that could only have been gained by victory over them in battle."

"Your speech is completed then?" Susan asked dryly, setting her otherwise untouched cup on the desk.

"Oh there is rather more. Your sullen silence has given me ample opportunity to rehearse. I intended further to pompously instruct that if you insist upon bearing responsibility for things so far beyond your ken, could you please also accept what is due for returning his lost son to our ally, and how Rabadash's disgrace means a vast improvement in the quality of the suitors who come wooing."

"No more suitors, Peter!" she spat out. "No further talk of marriage prospects! It is hopeless!"

Rage was so much better for all that she expressed it so rarely. "Of course there will be no further discussion of it for you," Peter assured her. "I merely thank you on my poor behalf."

He held out a hand and drew his angry, exhausted sister into a warm embrace. "Most of all, will you please ask for help? If not for yourself, for the sake of those who love you?"

"No one can help me through this, Peter."

"He will growl at you for saying so."

"Oh!" Susan exclaimed, burying her head at his shoulder. "How do you stand me? I am such a fool!"

Susan pulled away with a deep breath. Peter did not hear what she uttered, but a moment later Beethn, still outside the door, gave a loud cry; Lambert and Fooh both shot forward. There was pushing and jostling and the door flew open with a bang. Canine and Felines yipped and mewed their joy.

Aslan strode into the room, warm, golden, brilliant and kind. Peter scrambled up, bowing to the Lion. Susan hung back, hiding behind him.
"You are not so old that you may not greet me as you always have, Susan."

With a dry sob, Susan stumbled forward and threw her arms around the Lion of Narnia. "I am so sorry," she murmured, over and over. "They are all dead, Aslan. Nearly a hundred! On my account! Because of me!"

As Peter had predicted, Aslan growled. The Lion would mete out accountability where it was due; he would also correct those who assumed more than their right or duty.

The Lion gently nosed the woman whose face was buried in his mane. "Susan, you take upon yourself that which belongs to me. You have burdens enough without taking mine as well. It is your gentle nature to take responsibility for all, but you presume too much and in so doing harm what it is in your power to affect."

Susan sniffed and pulled her head up, though her hands stayed buried in the Lion's mane. She did not dispute or argue with him. How could she?

"Walk with me, my Queen."

Peter supposed Aslan made himself smaller to go in and out the door. Whatever space he was in, the Lion filled it. Fooh, Beehn, and Lambert were all crammed at the office door, jostling to be closer to Aslan. They had to fall back to let Aslan and Susan out of the room.

"Peter, you should come as well," the Lion said. "Cyrus is in need of you in the kitchen garden. I have forestalled Cook for the moment. Your quick action however is required for there are some forces over which even I have poor control and Cook is one of them."

Peter laughed. "I shall and thank you." He would very much wish to know of Leszi, but could see no way to ask of it. Peter would have bet his crown to a Crow that the Satyr was, as the saying goes, making life a Tash's Hell for everyone else in Aslan's Country.

The Guards fell in behind Susan and Aslan and Peter followed the tails, waving and wagging like jubilant banners.

At the stair down, Aslan turned his around and Peter felt his humbling scrutiny. "High King, do all my children have fur, leaves, horns, or feathers?"

The peculiar question made Peter attend closely as he trailed the Lion and Susan down the stairs. "No, Aslan," he replied dutifully staring at his own hands.

"Remember that, Peter. My children are more varied than you might expect, and your charge therefore all the broader."

They parted at the Palace front doors, Aslan, Susan and Lambert taking the path down to the sea and Peter off to the kitchen garden to see what he could do to coax a grieving boy out of a tree.

Chapter 22, The Queen Susan in Tashbaan, Part 3, to follow

FYI, this sequence includes references to Aidan and she who must not be named, Banker Morgan of the House of Linch. Morgan is in in By Royal Decree and its in-progress sequel, Harold and Morgan: Not a Romance, available at http://www.fanfiction.net/s/5711916/1/Harold_and_Morgan_Not_A_Romance Aidan, the lover of Queen Lucy, is discussed in Part 1 of The Stone Gryphon and in Black As Rat And Crow, available
Songs included *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, words by James Weldon Johnson, music by John Rosamond Johnson and *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, by Wallis Willis. Other sources include the entrance processional, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, performed by the Metropolitan Baptist Church and Wintley Phipps' famous performance of *Amazing Grace* at Carnegie Hall. The Death galloping on a black horse remarks here are inspired from a eulogy by Dr. Phipps.

A special thanks to *Ilysia*, from whom I borrowed the idea of a bored Centaur Filly at the overlong burial and the festivities that followed.
**The Queen Susan In Tashbaan, Part 3**

*The Queen Susan in Tashbaan*

*Chapter 21, The Queen Susan in Tashbaan, Part 3*

*Spies cannot be usefully employed without a certain intuitive sagacity… They cannot be properly managed without benevolence and straightforwardness.*

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

*Espionage, for the most part, involves finding a person who knows something or has something that you can induce them secretly to give to you. That almost always involves a betrayal of trust.*

Aldrich Ames, CIA Intelligence Officer and Soviet Mole

*Develop a few vices, especially abroad, so that with luck, you can be compromised and blackmailed. If you cannot manage a vice or two, just be foolish. If you can't be foolish, be incautious…. Accept favours from officials. When they ask for some harmless service in exchange for good money, accept at once.*

MI-5 Pamphlet, *How To Become A Soviet Spy In Six Easy Steps*

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The late afternoon thunderstorm had rolled in, violently dousing the simmering city of Washington and then moving out. The sudden storms were like a glass of cold water dumped on to a hot skillet; rain sizzled as it hit the pavement.

Susan ignored the drips from the trees and eaves overhead. Standing in the Embassy compound, next to Gladys and between the Colonel and Tebbitt, she crossed her arms over her front and watched as Guy's murderer was shoved into a military van under heavy Canadian Army and MP guard.

It was strange to be handing off an accused to someone else. It reminded her of what Aslan had permitted Caspian to do in sending the rebellious Telmarines away. Shrugging the responsibility on to others had never been an option for them in the aftermath of Jadis and beyond. Traitors, murderers, criminals, and Moles had been their charge and it was always hoped that they died in battle. It was so strange that the mustering of the case, the defence, the judgment, and the punishment were not part of her jointly shared responsibility.

Tebbitt stood next to her, still taut with rage. The Colonel had had to make loud and creative threats before he would consent to let any of them witness this departure. It was ironic, really. Susan felt Tebbitt was handling it less well than she, yet he had continued to be overly solicitous. She was weary to death of his deferential kindness.

The Colonel was better – he expected her to be composed and so she was. It was not easy; death never was. Susan, however, knew how to show the competent face, make the appropriate and supportive gestures, manage the details, and permit one's deeper grief in private. She knew she had been badly rattled by the actual event but most of the night was lost in the haze of the sleeping pills. She could not very well explain to Tebbitt, the Colonel, or her mother that what had horrified her had been the shock of the death here, rather than the horror of death itself. She had been to her elbows and knees in blood before. She was sick of death, but did not turn from it.

Nor could she explain that even worse than the death, was her raging sense of blame. She had known something was amiss, had seen it before, and still, she had not been able to stop it. Those here could not help her with this, for to explain why she felt such guilt was impossible. Peter's
admonishments and exhortations played over in her head at night, and it helped, a little, but she needed to hear the words from her brother here and now, not through the filter of Narnian memory. She felt Aslan's comforting presence, or thought she did, anyway. She had hoped, forlornly, for a carefully written letter from Edmund and oblique words of support and encouragement from Lucy. Logically, though, there would not be time for letters to clear censors and make the ocean voyage.

So, as she watched the transfer, Susan smothered her own nagging sense of failure for what had brought the prisoner and Guy to this ghastly, wholly avoidable end. The prisoner was a young man, weedy thin, face tanned from work in the gardens all summer. He was dressed in baggy fatigues. The chains on his wrists and ankles clanked as he shuffled and stumbled. He crawled awkwardly into the van with a helpful shove from a burly Sergeant. Two MPs climbed into the rear of the van with the prisoner and a third locked them in with a heavy padlock and a jangling of keys.

The Colonel had not shared even a single detail of his interrogation. The senior officer in charge of the prisoner's transfer to an army base near Ottawa, a crisp Major not yet wilting in the steamy heat, saluted the Colonel. The Colonel handed over his file and returned the salute.

The Major climbed in the truck and they watched as it pulled out of the Embassy guard gate. They all verbalized the same thought at the same moment.

"Drinks, in my office."

"Might we have a drink, Sir?"

"This calls for a drink."

"Sir, should I get out the drinks?"

The Colonel had already set out the glasses and his decanter with the good Bourbon on his desk. They were in a new office on the third floor. It was neater, brighter, larger, and had no ugly blood stains on the carpet. It also had that blessed innovation in office comfort known as a window air conditioning unit.

"To Guy Hill," the Colonel said, glass upraised.

*Until we meet again in Aslan's Own Country, my Friend. Do not let our grief keep you from your journey home.*

Susan returned the salute and sipped the American whiskey. It was far more pleasant than the Lightning Peter and some of the other Narnians had favored and more palatable than the rums so common in America now.

Into the *who will go first* pause, it was Tebbitt who finally asked, "Why Canada, Sir?"

The Colonel eased into his squeaky chair, cradling his drink in one hand and toying with his cigar in the other.

"Because our prisoner's papers identify him as Michael Ribin, Vancouver, British Colombia, more lately of New York, and Ottawa. He appears to be a Canadian citizen."

"So the Nazi swine will be cooked by the British, rather than the Americans?"

"Tebbitt! Don't be foul!" Gladys protested, taking the secretarial seat near the Colonel's desk. Susan sat on the divan.
"The Embassy is British soil; he is and Guy Hill was a Commonwealth citizen; British military law applies, though it's the lawyers who will work out the details," the Colonel said. "Insofar as the death is concerned, it is not really for the American authorities at all."

Tebbitt immediately followed up on what was the concern. "Have you been able to trace his network, how long he's been here, what he's been after?" He slouched onto the divan next to her and stretched out his legs.

Susan felt a pang. There was so much more room in the new office and without Guy and Lowrey it was positively spacious.

"Taking the last first, no, I don't know what he was after and he has been on the Embassy grounds since May. We do not know how long he has had access to this office which was, by the by, likely not from a key stolen from a drunken Mr. Sykes."

"I am relieved to hear that," Susan said. She had heard that Sykes had been aggressively questioned.

"In your final week here you shall not be deprived of your lock picking instructor, Mrs. Caspian," the Colonel replied, raising his glass in her direction. "As for his handler, his network, and so forth, I have nothing thus far, save that I do not believe Mr. Ribin was recruited by the Nazis, which is, in fact, quite a significant supposition."

They all stared, silent and shocked. Tebbitt recovered first. "But who, then? Why?"

The Colonel leaned back again in his chair, staring at his cigar. Susan nudged Tebbitt with her elbow to keep quiet to allow the Colonel time to choose his words.

He finally said slowly, "These are excellent questions, Tebbitt, which Mr. Ribin has not enlightened me upon. By my judge, however, he does not fit the profile of the Nazi turncoat."

And the Colonel would know what the profile was, what the levers were that would turn a man or women to traitor and then turn the agent back again to the other side, the treacherous double cross. MICE – Money, Ideology, Coercion, Ego – these were the four drivers the Colonel had taught her. They were very similar to what she and Edmund had devised, though she wished they had thought to name as Mice the devices by which they had influenced Narnia spies – Willa, a Rat, would have felt very superior.

"I won't bore you with the details of the interrogation, which may be summarized as still too early to know anything, but suffice to say that the typical ties to Nazi sympathizers are utterly absent in Mr. Ribin's case."

"But he is a spy?" Tebbitt pressed, leaning forward eagerly. "You must have found something incriminating."

"Oh yes. In his personal effects we found more cash, American, than a construction worker should have," the Colonel said. "And there is a very interesting document which tells us rather more than the man himself ever could."

The Colonel set his drink down and teased out from his breast pocket a single small sheet of paper. Gladys snagged it first, studied it then shrugged and handed it to Susan. It made no more sense to her. Tebbitt was hovering at her shoulder, as eager as a Hound on a scent. Typeset on plain sheet of paper were eight columns of six letter groupings:

YRRBDG LYVZAS HOMMCI KUYMXG HHDBC1 ZYKWQV ACQIVL VKTVEU
Tebbitt whistled. "An OTP?"

"So it would seem," the Colonel said.

"Which is?" Susan asked pointedly, "apart from obviously being an encryption device?" She did not wish them to think her thick, but really, there was no reason at all why she would know their colloquialisms and acronyms.

The Colonel answered. "It is a page from what is known as a 'One Time Pad' system. The pad provides a random key that is used to encrypt text. Somewhere in the world will be another person with this identical page which will allow the recipient to break the code and decrypt the message."

"In theory, the encoded message will be impossible to break without the key," Tebbitt said thoughtfully, gently tugging the page from her hands to study it more carefully.

"If the key is kept secret and the pads not reused, there is nothing theoretical about it," the Colonel said. "Text encrypted using an OTP is unbreakable without the key."

Tebbitt handed the precious page back to the Colonel who studied its inscrutable letters again.

"So who is using this system of encryption if not the Nazis?" Susan asked.

"The Japanese?" Tebbitt said.

"Yes, that is a possibility, though we have not found any ties to Japan, either." The Colonel thoughtfully fingered the page. "I think the Soviet Union seems to fit the meager facts as we know them."

Gladys swallowed a hiccupping gasp. "Our allies?"

They had been covering Soviet-related gossip all summer – the promises Roosevelt had made to Molotov to open a Second Front in Europe, the stiff British opposition to that plan, and their grudging acquiescence that was resulting in the on-again, off-again Operation Jubilee planned for Dieppe. Surely Stalin knew what had been whispered among the British for months – that perhaps it would not be such a bad thing if the Nazis and Soviets drove each other to ruin. There were many things that had passed through their office that would be interesting to their Soviet ally.

As so often happened, Tebbitt spoke aloud what she had been thinking. "The Second Front," he said simply to the Colonel.

The Colonel nodded. "It is a possibility. Stalin would have certainly been worried about whether the Americans would hold to their troop commitment in Europe and whether we would finesse a double cross or deliberately sabotage Operation Jubilee. It is not my area, but I assume that the Americans are intercepting Soviet cables. If they are not, they should be. I will pass a copy of this along to the Army's Signal Intelligence unit."

Susan supposed he would send the sheet on to Intrepid in New York and from there it would go to the mysterious codebreakers in England.

"It's unsettling," Tebbitt mused, "to think the Soviets might be building networks here. And if in America…"
"Absolutely," the Colonel agreed, returning his cigar to his mouth. "We are fools to think otherwise. Stalin would undoubtedly view the British as a far richer espionage target. The Americans did not even have a foreign intelligence service to infiltrate until a month ago, as it is unsporting for gentlemen to read one another's mail."

They all laughed at his paraphrase of Treasury Secretary Stinson's admonition, famous in espionage circles.

"It would not have to be the OSS," Susan injected, again thinking of the Narnia experience. "Even aside from military targets, spies could infiltrate the diplomatic corps, industry, weapons research, the American Treasury Department, the Congress, even the White House."

The Colonel frowned, though whether in disagreement or for some other reason was left undetermined, for the phone rang. Gladys sprang from her seat to the phone on his desk.

"Colonel Walker-Smythe's office." Gladys cupped one hand over the receiver. "It's New York, Sir."

The Colonel nodded.

"One moment, Sir, Colonel Walker-Smythe is available."

Tebbitt pulled himself out of the divan, wincing a little. His back would hurt him after rain storms. Susan rose as Tebbitt did, knowing this was their cue.

The Colonel took the phone and waved them out of the office, "Walker-Smythe here!"

"Whenever he is in an expansive mood, New York calls and cuts him off," Tebbitt said, holding the door for her and Gladys.

"It is magic how they know that," Gladys agreed.

The Colonel sorted through the dispatches, one by one, making notes for briefing Tebbitt and Mrs. Caspian, and remembering that she was leaving in barely a week. With his staffing decimated, New York had said they would be sending more help, assuming they had anyone to send.

The Japanese had set up a puppet government in Burma. The American Marines were in the thick of it on Guadalcanal, and trying to build an airfield to get reinforcements in before the Japanese did. The Americans were being deceived by Vichy France, again. Churchill had visited the Eighth Army at El Alamein and (finally) decided to replace Auchinleck; unfortunately his replacement, General Gott, had been shot down on his way to Cairo. Which left Monty. The Colonel was still undecided in his views on Eisenhower being appointed CINC of the joint allied force planning the retaking of North Africa. He seemed competent as an administrator and logician, but it was the British who knew that part of the world, not the Americans. He hoped this was not Colonial bias on his part.

In the midst of the dispatches and cables, he vaguely heard Gladys and Tebbitt say their good evenings to Mrs. Caspian. Tebbitt had some event and had coaxed Gladys to join him with plans to meet Mrs. Caspian later. Mrs. Caspian would stay in the office as long as he did, or until her mother left, whichever came first.

He filed the dispatches away. With the others gone, it was time to finally address Mrs. Caspian and her remarkable letter to her brother. He withdrew it from the same pocket where he had, appropriately, been stowing the OTP sheet taken from Ribin's flat.
As he had read and re-read the treasonous letter to Edmund Pevensie, the Colonel appreciated anew that Susan Caspian had a knack with ciphers. The letter relied upon the same principles of idiosyncratic, highly personalized cryptography as her fake shorthand and was constructed as carefully. There were layers of meaning buried in the letter he could but guess at. The bloody censors had missed it because they were looking for mysterious number/letter sequences such as those encrypted with the OTP method. They had never thought to look at a code as allegorical metaphor. It was an addition to the training manual he would have to make himself. He would use her letter as an example of the form.

Some parts of the allegory were easy to follow as he had been living it, though he had had to consult a reference text at the library for what some of the creatures were. He could identify certain characters and places readily: Sallowpad, Bardon, Peridan, Fraxi, Prince Cor, the Lone Islands, Galma, Tashbaan, the Native Narnians, the Ettins and Telmarines, the High King, the Just King, the Tisroc, the Grand Vizier. Other parts, though, were fiendishly obscure. In this, he saw what Fleming had spoken of; part of the brilliance of the method was its verisimilitude – it truly did read like a thrilling adventure tale by Verne, Baum, or Carroll. It felt like a work of original fiction.

Sprinkled liberally throughout the letter were references to things wholly outside their real world of wartime Washington that did not fit the cipher at all – the frequently invoked deity, Aslan, the malevolent Witch, Jadis, a murderous tyrant of Shakespearean proportions named Miraz, and others referred to lovingly by name. With these references, there were hints of backstory so familiar, they needed no elaboration. The gryphon General, a female no less, certainly had no counterpart here. Wolves, cheetahs, and tigers acted as bodyguards. Willa and Sallowpad seemed to be characters both in and outside the tale. He saw a joke about bad food and Cook and recalled Mrs. Caspian's story at Hill's funeral.

The phone rang, interrupting his perusal, and Mrs. Caspian picked it up before he did. "Sir!" she called a few moments later. "It is Secretary Hull's office. They are sending something over and want to meet with you about it tomorrow."

"Fine! See to it!" It was not necessary to consult his appointments. Mrs. Caspian had his calendar and would set the time and adjust his other engagements appropriately to accommodate the American Secretary of State.

He returned to his study of the letter and the part that truly had stymied him. As sophisticated as Mrs. Caspian was, however old she actually was and however old she pretended to be, he could not fathom her self-condemnation.

And so, Queen Susan bears culpability for the death of Bardon. Had she been more attentive and less enamored of the glamour of Tashbaan, she would have given greater thought to the Moles toiling away all summer at the Narnia Residence. It was surely no coincidence; Just King and Gentle Queen both know the Rule of Threes better than that. Aslan was shouting to her to attend, but she did not hear him. Now a Good Beast, as noble as any who ever flew for Narnia during her Golden Age or since, is dead. Queen Susan recalls the Just King's wise instruction to be cautious in coming to Tashbaan so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Queen Susan sought to remedy her past failures, to make reparation for her foolishness and gullibility. Yet, the past has repeated itself again, two fold, both in her failure to see the Mole when all the ills were there for the watchful eye to see, and in making mistakes as foolish as those of her first time in Tashbaan. She wishes she had attended more closely to Aslan's voice and to the advice of the Just King. If she had, Bardon might still live.

She does not see hearts as the Valiant Queen; she does not see minds as the Just King does; the Gentle Queen does not see the view from the great height as the High King does. She never sees
until it is too late.

The Colonel could think of nothing so severe in the middle class life of an English school girl that would warrant such profound self-censure. If Queen Susan the Gentle was indeed a projection of Susan Pevensie, and surely they had to be one and the same, she felt deeply culpable for failing to prevent Hill's death because of some events in her past. Tebbit had reported the same thing. Even though he had long observed how at ease Mrs. Caspian was in and around powerful people, assuming responsibility for Hill's murder bespoke some past role for a fifteen year old girl in the business of nations, war, politics, death, deception, and espionage.

Of all the peculiarities of the letter, this made the least sense to him.

So that, my dear brother, is likely the final chapter of The Queen Susan in Tashbaan until we are able to pick up the story again upon my return. I am, as you can imagine, very much torn. There is so much to see and to do here. Washington is an excellent place for adventures! Of greatest value, I have made many good friends who appreciate me for what I truly am. As you know so well, I also dislike leaving tasks undone.

However, I miss you all terribly, my heart, soul, and mind. I have stood on my own, as I have not done in many an age. For this opportunity and lesson, I am grateful to Aslan, as Queen Susan would say. For all my many failings, I pray that he is pleased with the work of his servant.

I shall not write of our travel arrangements – the censors will delete them out to be sure! Mother and Father have cabled our aunt and uncle with the information. Until then, his blessings and mine upon you and Lucy.

Your loving sister,

Susan

Hearing the sounds of the messenger in the anteroom, the Colonel carefully set a file folder over the letter, covering it up for when Mrs. Caspian would come into his office. He leaned back in his chair, barely cognizant of the nervous chewing on the cigar end and contemplated his strategy. This had to be dealt with but he believed it easily manageable – trip her up, shame her a bit, and dispatch someone to bully the younger brother into silence. He did wonder if Mrs. Caspian had ever been caught before. This would be good practice for her in the role of the one being interrogated.

With the quick clip of heels, Mrs. Caspian strode into his office, envelope marked with the stamps of the American Department of State tucked under one arm and her stenographer's pad and pen in the other hand.

Mrs. Caspian handed him the envelope and at his gesture took the secretarial seat at the desk's edge.

In the envelope there was a copy of a cable and a hand written note about it being contrary to the policy of Secretary Hull and Undersecretary Welles to pass along private messages. But then, this was the same government who believed it unscrupulous to read other people's mail – a scruple the British certainly did not have.

Quickly scanning the report from the American Vice Consul in Geneva, he could see why Hull and Welles wished to speak to him about it. The report of a Nazis plan to exterminate European Jews was not new given what he and Mrs. Caspian had already discerned from the Bletchley Park cable about a death camp in Chelmno and the newspaper accounts being smuggled out of Poland. The
Vice Consul's report was corroborating what the British already suspected. The how – prussic acid – was new information and inwardly he shuddered. It was monstrous but no longer surprising. They had to win the war or they would all be dead, and with them every Jew in Nazi-occupied Europe. He could guess what the State Department's view was – don't pass along private messages indeed. How else did one gain communications intelligence? It would be typical of them to ignore the message given the method by which it was received.

Mrs. Caspian shifted in her seat. He put the cable to the side and from her upturned eyebrow he could see she was surprised he did not immediately share it with her. He wished to do so – he owed her that courtesy given that she had helped him put the Chelmno pieces together. First, however, they had to address her imprudent letter. Mrs. Caspian was very, very good, but she had not mastered him, yet. She still needed more miles and more years however they were measured and lived in her odd, non-linear life.

She was looking at him expectantly, hand poised over the stenographer's pad, waiting.

"Where did you learn the trick of silence, Mrs. Caspian?"

She made a silent ahh and pushed her pen into the coils of the steno pad. With such a beginning, it would not be the typical workaday dictation. She settled elegantly into the hard little secretarial chair. "I knew someone who always maintained that given a silence, most people have the desire to fill it. The trick is knowing the impulse exists and training yourself to patience in its place."

"I have during this summer often speculated as to the identity of those prior mentors of yours, Mrs. Caspian."

"Surely not a productive exercise, Sir."

"Indeed, not. Which is why I find this so instructive." He slid the obscuring folder away and held up the letter to her brother for her to see. "I wonder if you learned your skills from Sallowpad?"

Not even in the moments after Hill's death or when they sat on the bench together and discussed mass murder in Poland had he seen her so unguarded. He pressed the advantage. "Given what is in this report we just obtained from Secretary Hull, I further wonder what I would receive if I asked you to retrieve the file on the Ettins' plans to murder Native Narnians."

The moment passed, stretching from strategically useful to uncomfortable, guilty silence, for now she knew that he had not only seen the letter, but had understood it as well.

"Now, Mrs. Caspian," he chided crisply. "You have been under my exclusive tutelage for weeks. I have trusted you and now accuse you of putting our secrets into a cipher and writing home about them!"

He brandished the letter, goading her to uncertainty and defensiveness, raising his voice. "Don't just sit there like an empty headed Tarkheena! Defend yourself!"

Come on girl, he urged silently. You have been found out. You anticipated this might happen. I have told what to do when your cover is blown. Where's your script? Where's the story you have prepared for this eventuality?

And with a breath that was a little too deep, her cover snapped back into place and her spine stiffened with scorn.

"Sir, with all due respect, you are both wrong and overreacting. My letter is nothing more than a silly children's story to my young brother. There is nothing secret or improper about it at all."
"Mrs. Caspian, do not insult my intelligence! The assertion that this is, as you say, a silly children's story strains credulity. You are writing of someone dying under circumstances that closely resemble what occurred in this office barely two weeks ago. I cannot believe it. I do not believe it."

She pitched her voice to just the perfect bit of patience that was almost, but not quite, condescending. "Sir, traditional fairy tales are very grim..." Mrs. Caspian paused and savored the pun on Grimm's tales. "They involve cutting off feet, cooking and eating children, and dancing to your death. This is no more harsh than the typical."

"But telling the story of a tragic death to a school boy?"

"We are at War. Whether in children's stories or in real life, death is not uncommon at all."

She shrugged, perfectly nonchalant, as if all that was at issue was a fairy tale and not the revelation of secrets that if reported in the American papers could fracture their political support.

"And really Sir, I am writing about Talking Animals. It might as well be Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, with the, I remind you, often repeated phrase, 'Off with her head!'" Her look was superior and she continued, "Moreover, even if I were writing of the things we have done here, which I am not, why would I wish my thirteen year old school boy brother to learn of them? It is most inappropriate!"

"However you characterize it, Mrs. Caspian, this letter is capable of alternative and questionable interpretations that must not be bandied about. If Director Hoover and his lobby knew how we were manipulating Americans, they would boot us all back to Canada."

More than indiscretions in a letter back to England, it was the political ramifications in America that had concerned him and he needed Mrs. Caspian to appreciate the consequences of a misstep. There had not been a foreign intelligence service in America since 1929; Roosevelt had created the Office of Strategic Services only last month over the vociferous objection of his own FBI Director. The OSS head, Wild Bill Donovan, was in bed with the British, Director Hoover was not, and the two were embroiled in a bitter turf battle. Stories that British spies were manipulating United States policies, planting fake documents and stories, and sleeping with Congresswomen to further British political ends would cripple their ability to operate in America and damage the OSS as well.

The stubborn condescension of a woman living her cover was replaced with a more thoughtful expression. "I understand the source of your unease, Sir, particularly if someone were to insist upon misconstruing a simple letter to a school boy." Mrs. Caspian conceded his concern while admitting nothing. "I apologize if this wholly innocent letter caused you some anxiety."

"I accept your apology, Mrs. Caspian. The question remaining is what I do about this letter. I should probably inform the Ambassador, your mother, and Mr. Stephenson that you have divulged His Majesty's secrets in personal correspondence to a thirteen year old school boy."

Mrs. Caspian raised her chin, her cheeks flushing a little. "It was a story to a child, Sir. Nothing more. There is no need to involve any one else. It has certainly gone no further than my brother."

"I agree with you about keeping this limited," he admitted and saw her relax at the prospect of not having to explain her indiscretion to others. "However, while you now better appreciate the risks of
such ambiguous correspondence, I am uncomfortable with these secrets also residing with a school boy. Someone must speak to your brother and impress upon him the importance for silence on everything you have communicated in this Narnia story."

Her eyes widened with a sudden anxiety. It was those emotional reactions she would need to learn to better control. "Sir, I will see Edmund in less than two weeks! I could explain to him then. There is no need to send someone!"

This was interesting and he wanted to string it out a little longer. Using her brother, he was coercing greater honesty from her than he had ever seen before. Money and Ideology did not affect Mrs. Caspian. Ego did, to an extent, for she responded to those who afforded her respect. He had just discovered that Coercion, by exerting pressure on her family, was a very effective lever for moving Mrs. Caspian.

"Undoubtedly you could obtain your brother's silence, Mrs. Caspian. But not with the gravitas the circumstances warrant."

She tried again. "Edmund is very young. I would not wish for him to become alarmed."

"Alarmed that you have been caught and your cipher found out? Alarmed that you might have been actually injured in the events described in the letter?"

"Nonsense! He knows this was all a story!" Mrs. Caspian scoffed. "But, it would be very alarming for some Major or Colonel to come out of the blue and threaten him with violations of the Official Secrets Act."

He was not concerned at all by a little alarm. It was warranted to assure both that her brother did not babble indiscriminately and that she did not make this mistake again.

"I will not have a great deal of control over this, Mrs. Caspian. I do agree it is better that this be handled quietly."

"But then surely having me deliver the message would be the most discreet way to handle it."

Her persuasion was such that it almost moved him. Almost. Her dissembling was maddeningly superb and he could but wonder at the brother's reaction when a Colonel or Major did show up at the Cambridge door. Did Edmund Pevensie believe these letters were merely an engaging story? How much had he actually comprehended of what his sister had so cleverly written?

He opened his mouth to respond and abruptly shut it as the realization hit him like an incendiary. He ran a hand across his face and glanced down at the letter again, considering anew not just who had had written this cryptological masterpiece but to whom it was intended. Blind. I have been blinded by official paper.

"Tell me something, Mrs. Caspian, to satisfy my curiosity. Speaking hypothetically and assuming this is not simply a highly imaginative, slightly incautious story, why have you sent letters about our dodgy business to your younger brother?"

She smiled enigmatically. "I really do not see what one could expect to gain from the views of a thirteen year old schoolboy, Sir. This was for entertainment, nothing more."

He pressed harder, now seeing it in a whole new, additional light, and underscoring in his mind the critical importance of having the right man button down Edmund Pevensie.

"But hypothetically?"
"Hypothetically?" Susan pursed her lips, her gaze so appraising and sophisticated, he, who had studied her so closely for two months, was taken aback. "I find personally that my brother is old beyond his years. He also knows me very well and could, if called upon to do so, advise me."

And there it was. Laid bare and as candid an admission as he had ever received from her. He had realized that Susan Caspian née Pevensie was not fifteen. And so neither was her younger brother thirteen.

The Colonel tipped forward in his chair, twiddling with his cigar, mind working furiously. He had to proceed very carefully. If he were not in such awe of how they had all been played, he would be furious and lock Susan Caspian and her brother, and possibly the rest of the family in the brig until the War ended. If this had been a simple children's story written to a school boy, handling it would be straightforward. He had intended to test her interrogation skills, threaten them both, and be done with it. But, coercion was not the proper tool here at all. Sticks applied inappropriately would backfire spectacularly. _Ego_. A cleverly couched, subtle appeal to _Ego_ was called for.

He picked through his words. "Would your brother, hypothetically, share your aptitude for, this business – what would you call it in the story?"

"Rat and Crow, Sir."

"Would your brother have a similar aptitude for Rat and Crow?"

"My younger brother, most certainly, Sir. I believe Edmund has a natural affinity for Rat and Crow even more pronounced than my own." She paused and now that they finally understood one another, he more easily divined the source of her grave consideration.

"And your older brother, he will be eligible for service next year, won't he? What of his aptitude?"

"I will not deign to speak for Peter."

There was a peculiar ringing quality in her voice when she spoke – slightly old fashioned, a hint of the regal, and said with the familiarity of a statement she had been called upon to make before.

He responded in kind, for the prospect of another Pevensie or two in his short-staffed office was too enticing. "I would not impute to your brother anything that you say of him, of course. However, as I have indicated before, I value your insight to the extent you might share it, Mrs. Caspian."

She spoke so carefully, he concluded that the older brother was either in need of her protection (highly unlikely) or was a considerable force in his own right (far more probable and intriguing).

"I believe, speaking hypothetically, that Peter has a deep appreciation for and understanding of Rat and Crow. Though he would take little real pleasure in participating in it himself, he would do so where necessary to serve a greater cause or to spare someone else an unpleasant task."

"So, Peter Pevensie is noble and self sacrificing to a fault?" And also, like his sister and brother, far older than his actual age.

Her smile was warm. "That is very well put, Sir."

The rug had been pulled out from under her, the gig was up, and Mrs. Caspian was not only adapting, she was turning it to her advantage. She knew he was desperate for talented personnel and was dangling attractive solutions that depended upon her continued cooperation.

"While I do so with great hesitation, it does occur to me, Sir, that there is a matter on which I would
appreciate your advice."

"Of course, Mrs. Caspian. Please continue."

She sat more primly in her chair, taking command of the conversation and he let her do so. They needed one another here and the give and take was a fascinating position to be in.

"As you noted, Sir, Peter will certainly try to enter the service next year yet I suspect he may take ill to certain types of military discipline."

"What sort is that?"

"The stupid sort that he could improve upon."

From any other, he would have dismissed it outright as a family member fretting about a young man going to war who she believed was ever so unique. Those young men were all unique and most took very ill to virtually all discipline, at first. But, this was Mrs. Caspian speaking to him. No more of this hypothetical nonsense.

"In your judgment, Mrs. Caspian, might your brother, Peter, have the same sorts of skills that you possess?"

She nodded.

"Do you believe your elder brother has the acumen that even an old, jaded hand like myself could profit from attending to?"

She nodded again.

He had recruited local talent for decades in slums, brothels, docks and orphanages throughout the Empire. Those gritty children – with a gift for languages, a knack for blending in, and a quick ear – were old beyond their years. With a little love, a little encouragement, and a little discipline, they blossomed into extraordinary resources that were fed back into the grimy places from whence they had come, but with the zeal of a purpose and loyalty to him and their shared cause. He had never expected to find such a rich pool of talent in a middle class English family, but he was not one to let it go to waste. Not with a War to win.

Mrs. Caspian had said when she arrived and made herself indispensable that she was a godsend, and so she was and her family with her.

He could not explain it. It was fashioned as a children's story, but was not. Rather, a place called Narnia and a fantastic tale called The Queen Susan in Tashbaan had bred sophistication in English children that was more akin to what a life on the streets bred into his urchins. The end product was different – more Eliza Doolittle than Kim O'Hara – but the feel of it was very similar. Forces could create canny, savvy adults from children – he had seen it before and would be damned if he let this opportunity slip by. It was the passports and birth records that lied and his error had been in trusting them.

A godsend.

He folded up the letter. "I will be cabling a colleague of mine in London. He shall oversee the contact with Edmund, Mrs. Caspian. Does he need to speak to Peter as well?"

She shook her head vehemently. "No, Sir. I wrote the story for Edmund, alone."
The Colonel very much wished to handle this himself. As that was impossible, a sternly worded cable to McFarland would have to do. Given the unexpected talents within the Pevensie family, it would be very unwise to alarm or threaten Edmund Pevensie. They could lose the lot of them. McFarland would bluster a lot, but he could read between carefully written lines and he had a keen eye for talent. If this unfolded as he expected it would, McFarland would meet with Edmund Pevensie, go back to his office and put a tickler in his calendar for the day the boy turned seventeen. To that end…

"Are there any other particular instructions I should communicate to Colonel McFarland to assure he does not unduly alarm your brother?"

She had the graciousness to not appear too over smug at this victory. "Might you permit me to send a note, Sir?"

He mimicked her upraised, disapproving eyebrow.

"No?" she asked archly.

Of all the cheek. "No."

"In that case, if you ask Colonel McFarland specifically to deal with Edmund discreetly and gently, that will be sufficient."

She lightly emphasized the words just so and he wondered what they signified in the Narnia code with her brother. They were probably a call sign for Mrs. Caspian herself or a signal as to her state.

Not Money, not Ideology, not Coercion. Appeal to Ego, yes, of a sort. Mrs. Caspian knew she was unique and very much responded to those who recognized it and acted accordingly. As she had written in her letter, I have made many good friends who appreciate me for what I truly am. He was certainly very appreciative.

With this new rapport, he was reluctant to open up the issue of her guilt over Hill's death. Even trying to approach it hypothetically would likely not be productive. To explain why would necessitate explaining how, and Mrs. Caspian would not do this; as Agnes would remind him, the High Priestess keeps her own counsel. So, he tucked the precious letter away again in his pocket, next to the OTP cipher. Two very different pieces of cryptography and both unbreakable in their own way.

He now proffered the Geneva cable discussing the report of an Allied "mole" in Hitler's own headquarters. "Before I show you this cable, Mrs. Caspian, let me repeat my warning for the final time. You might have characterized your Narnia tale as a bedtime story, but clever minds could see it otherwise. This is very serious. Do not confuse Narnia with our business again."

A troubled expression crossed her face.

"Is there a problem, Mrs. Caspian?"

With a deep breath, her mask of brisk competency swept away the uncertainty. "No Sir, I understand. I will be more careful to avoid such confusion in the future."

He waited, but she did not seek to fill the silence with whatever misgiving it seemed had stayed her momentarily. Satisfied, he handed her the cable. "It is from the American Vice Consul in Geneva. He reports his source says that the executions of European Jews will begin this fall."

She studied the cable, skimming it first, then going back and reading it more carefully, grimacing
as he had at the grim contents. She then scooted her chair closer to his desk and putting her fingers under the grooved edge, pulled out the writing table and set the cable on it so they could both review it together.

"We thought the information reported in the papers in June was being smuggled out of the Polish ghettos in Łódź. This makes it appear that the murder is far more widespread, with deportations from," she paused and her finger moved along the sentence in the cable, "Paris, Holland, Berlin, Vienna, and Prague."

"Paris," he repeated. The Colonel withdrew the earlier reviewed dispatches from his desk and began thumbing through them. "I recall something odd in here between the Americans and Vichy France about Jewish orphans."

"Perhaps they are orphaned because their parents are being deported and murdered?" Mrs. Caspian rose from her seat, face set in a stern line. "I shall collect the file and we can go over it again, and prepare for our meeting with the Secretary tomorrow morning."

To her retreating back, he called, "Our meeting?") It was their private humour. Of course she would attend with him. She always did.

Mrs. Caspian turned slowly about to face him. She stood in her plain, perfectly fitted blue suit, framed at the doorway, hand resting on the jam. In that moment, in the golden haze of dusk slanting through the blinds, the Colonel saw someone else, not the school girl, not Mrs. Caspian, but another, gowned and crowned, taller and older. It was an apparition that matched the regal voice he sometimes heard and the commanding presence he sometimes saw. He started as she flicked on the switch and the gilt vision of the Queen of Pentacles popped like a bubble in the harsh white of the office light.

"Sir?"

He blinked and saw a look of concern at his distraction. "Nothing, Mrs. Caspian. A trick of the light only."

She waited, but this was not a silence he would fill with tales of fanciful visions. Mrs. Caspian pivoted again, out of the doorway, but not before tossing over her shoulder, "Oh, and Sir? Our meeting is at ten o'clock."

The conclusion, Chapter 22, Crossroads, to follow

The One Time Pad system is described in various on line sources. The American National Security Agency (NSA) and Army Signal Intelligence (SIGNIT) worked with British intelligence as they began intercepting and eventually decoding Soviet cables and telegrams. The Americans began collecting the encrypted Soviet transmissions in 1942 and initiated the VENONA project in 1943 to attempt to decipher them. VENONA, under various names, would continue for another 40 years.

The World Jewish Congress representative in Geneva, Gerhard Riegner, obtained information from a German manufacturer, Eduard Schulte, indicating that Hitler intended to systematically annihilate all European Jews with gas. Howard Elting, Jr., American Vice Consul, Geneva Switzerland met with Riegner on August 8, 1942 and Elting communicated his report of the meeting to the U.S. State Department three days later. Links to the sources are in my LJ, and include various online sources (Google Riegner report or Riegner telegram) and the Jewish Virtual Library. The situation Susan and the Colonel reference, the status of Jewish orphans in Vichy France in August 1942, is discussed in the NSA Report, Eavesdropping on Hell: Historical Guide to Western
Communications. Intelligence and the Holocaust, 1939-1945, available from a variety of on line sources.
Someday there will be two spots on the French coast sacred to the British and their allies. One will be Dunkirk, where Britain was saved because a beaten army would not surrender. The other will be Dieppe, where brave men died without hope for the sake of proving that there is a wrong way to invade. They will have their share of the glory when the right way is tried.

Excerpted from an editorial of The New York Times from August 1943, quoted in Speaking Notes for The Honourable Dr. Rey D. Pagtakhan, Ceremony at Dieppe Canadian War Cemetery, Dieppe, France, August 19, 2002

Four things support the world: the learning of the wise, the justice of the great, the prayers of the good, and the valor of the brave.

Muhammad

Fooh ahead, Beehn behind, Peter wound through the gardens ringing the Palace. Morgan and her Hound guard, Rafiqa, were loitering just outside the stone archway into the garden.

Peter could hear the racket from within and from over the wall saw how the branches shook on the oak tree that dominated the garden. He also heard the kitchen door slam – that was a very ill omen.

"Good day, Morgan, Rafiqa." He had intended to move by them but Morgan abruptly stepped forward, having evidently made some decision and without particular regard for what else Peter intended to do at that moment. None of this was atypical.

Rafiqa, in fair imitation of her dam, Jina, sighed wearily, her lips fluttering with mild exasperation. She had been Morgan's Hound assistant and Guard since Jina's death some two years ago.

Morgan was, as her wont, standing too close. She was a notoriously poor judge of personal space with humans and was, as her custom, staring off over his shoulder as many of the Talking Beasts did. One did not make eye contact with Banker Morgan any more than one made eye contact with a Tiger or Wolf.

"Excuse me, Sir… Peter," she murmured, taking a step back with Rafiqa's gentle nose push.

Peter hoped he did not appear too shocked and willed himself to patience. In five years, he could not recall Morgan ever using his first name before and he had given up asking her to do so. "Yes, Morgan?"

"Tonight. About the…" she stammered and, looking frustrated and flustered, cast a mute look of appeal to her Canine Aide.

Rafiqa smoothly added, "High King, Lady Morgan had a question about the bonfire tonight for Sir Leszi."
"Could I come and say something?" Morgan blurted out.

Morgan had not attended a farewell since lighting Jina's pyre. "Of course, Morgan. You are part of us and always welcome." Her presence was certainly; what Morgan might say unchecked was, however, daunting. "Rafiqa, will you assist Morgan in preparing a few appropriate words?"

Rafiqa did not yet have the experience of her dam, Jina, but Peter trusted the well-socialized Hound to guide her Human companion. The look in the Hound's expressive face told Peter that Rafiqa understood his concern precisely.

"Of course, High King."

"If you will excuse me, I understand Cyrus has worked himself into a tree." Peter moved around them, aware that Morgan was now trailing behind. It was strange. She usually absented herself during the time around farewells.

Fortunately, Peter did not have to dodge any cabbages flung by their irate Cook as he entered the kitchen gardens. Having apparently instigated the latest Cyrus-crisis by informing the boy that it was the Just King's duty to speak the Lament for the Giant who had killed Leszi, Edmund had wisely absented himself from the scene. Still, that left in Cook's domain, two Humans and their Wolf Guards, a Satyr, and now two more Humans, two Cheetahs, a Hound, and whatever Crows and other Canines invariably followed in Morgan's wake.

Peter thought there were a few minutes left, at most, before the vegetables began to fly out the kitchen door. A few more after that and malodorous fumes would begin issuing from the stewpot, sufficient to drive everyone away, save the Wolves, Jalur, and the odd Dwarf or two with a taste for pig offal.

Heedless to the peril, Aidan Gunnarr, common foot soldier, lately of the Archenland infantry, now (for the moment and last Peter had heard) betrothed to Queen Lucy the Valiant and Knight of Order of the Lion, Lady of the Cordial, was dodging twigs and acorns being flung from the branches of a tree. As it was a tree, rather than a Tree, it meant that someone, probably with hands, was in the branches of the tree, assaulting the beleaguered and laughing man. Giving as good as he got, Aidan, very nimble for all his size, was scooping up the debris and flinging it back upwards.

"Cyrus! Quick!" Peter heard Lucy cry from within the depths of the tree. "Save me! I need to reload the quarrels!"

"Cease fire!" Aidan bellowed. "The High King is upon us! Lay up arms!"

There was a giggle from the tree above and a sniff. A large acorn clouted Aidan on the head.

"Ouch! Lucy!"

More giggles.

"It would seem," Peter observed sagely, coming to join Aidan under the tree, "that our Narnia precipitation has turned to something harder and more lethal?"

"Hullo, brother!" Lucy called

Lucy was hanging from a limb and looking more content that he had seen her in weeks. Lucy was at ease anywhere, save in the most stiltedly formal of company. Yet, she was most fiercely happy out of doors, amongst the Fauns, Trees and others who populated the Narnian Wood. She was Aslan's Lioness, the Heart of Narnia, and at the moment quite the mess.
"Lucy! Can you not steal Aidan's clothing now? You have torn the knee right out!" At least they were Edmund's trousers.

"The seat's torn too," said Cyrus. The young Satyr was on a limb above Lucy's.

Aidan crossed his arms across his chest and leaned against the trunk. "And I shall have to mend them to hide the damage from both Edmund and Mrs. Furner."

"I am rubbish at stitchery," Lucy agreed. "I prefer sharp things rather longer than needles, you know."

"Sword, arrows," Aidan picked a twig out of his hair, "quarrels, pikestaffs, lances. But no needles, my love?"

Peter knew he was actually better at mending things – a skill needed on the road – than either of his sisters. No one gave Morgan a sharp object for fear of where it would end up when she dropped it or flung it in error when she gestured with her hands.

Peter stepped to the side as an acorn was spit out with a "Feh!"

"They are bitter, aren't they?" Lucy said to Cyrus.

"Foul," Cyrus agreed. The young Satyr, horns not yet sprouted, was crouching on his branch. Peter marveled anew at just how nimble goat hooves were. He could never shake the feeling of oddness when he saw Goats and their kin in trees and hopping easily from one rock outcropping to another. Satyrs were not Goats and would take offense at the comparison. Nevertheless, the similarities were there; it simply was not polite to remark upon them.

"You asked to see me, Cyrus?" Peter asked.

The boy shifted nervously on his branch, perhaps now seeing the cheek of his demand to speak to the High King. He was not crying – Satyrs did not cry. But his nose was running, a sure sign of distress.

"I… well, no," Cyrus muttered, looking away.

Lucy made a grumbling sound of disapproval.

Cyrus glanced at his Queen, knowing he should not fib and scowling at his own error. They all waited as the boy tensed on his branch, gripping it so hard, the limb quivered. Finally, "I'm mad!" erupted with a wail.

It was a sensible start.

"Are you angry at the Giant, angry at Leszi, angry at King Edmund, or angry at Aslan?" Peter asked.

The boy started and stared with wonder. "How did you know all that?"

"He's the High King," Aidan said. "It's his business to know everything about Narnia and everyone in it."

"Really?" Cyrus asked.

"I do know a lot about Narnia," Peter admitted. "And I know how it feels to lose somebody whom you care for. But a very wise Narnian reminded me once that we all go to Aslan, some sooner than
others, and it is churlish if our grief keeps them from their journey home."

"Who said that?" the Satyr asked suspiciously.

"Leszi told me this after I led my first campaign where four Narnians died." Peter would leave out the parts about drinking Lightning until he was sick and learning under the Sword Master's harsh tutelage, how, by Zardeenah's three sets of tits, to swear like a proper soldier.

"I thought it sounded like him," Cyrus said, eyes now downcast. "He'd be angry with me now for hiding in a tree."

The Satyr climbed down another branch, holding on with both hands and moving one hoof, then the other, to the next limb. He snuffled and wiped his nose on his hairy shoulder. "I'm not going to forgive the Giant though! Trickster's balls! I hope he burns in Tash's hell!"

Peter chose to ignore the swearing. Lucy and Aidan were soldiers themselves, had certainly heard far worse, and the boy had been living with Leszi after all. "That is why the Just King speaks the Lament instead of you, Cyrus," Peter told him. "King Edmund speaks it for all of us, on our behalf."

"Oh," the Satyr muttered in a small voice. "So that means I don't have to forgive the Giant?"

"That would be very hard for you to do now, Cyrus," Peter told him.

"Nor would we ask it of you, Friend," Lucy said quietly, swinging from one branch to the one Cyrus had just vacated. "You bear grief enough and it will follow its own course and in its own time."

Sensing Cyrus' anger had ebbed, a little and for the moment, Peter asked softly, "Are you read to come down now?"

With one hand clutching the branch Cyrus leaned forward, eyes darting frantically to their audience.

Peter drew as close as he could manage, listening attentively.

"I'm scared, High King," the boy whispered. "That's why I really wanted you to come."

"You doubt I will catch you?" Peter whispered back.

The boy's eyes widened in horror of questioning the might of his King, ignoring that in a few years time, a full grown Satyr could flatten someone twice Peter's size by hurtling himself from such a height.

"Oh no, Sire." Cyrus' voice dropped lower. "I'm scared about what happens next. I'm scared I'll be alone."

"But you will always have a place with the Satyrooi, Cyrus."

"What if they all die, like Leszi did?"

"There will always be those who will care for you."

The boy chewed his lip, methodically sucking on the coarse, wispy hair framing his jaw. "Will you be there, High King. Always?"
The fierce, desperate question brought Peter up hard and the glib answer died on his lips. Peter wanted to say that he would always be there for the boy, that Narnia was his and he belonged to her, that by Aslan's Grace, he had been there at the end of Long Winter, had come to fulfill the Prophecy, and seen her rebuilt by their own labour as a free land and as fair as she had ever been. Her Beasts and Beings were under his stewardship, and so Cyrus was like his own child, and Peter would always care for the boy, for he vowed to his last breath to shelter all Narnians. They were together, always and forever, and nothing would ever change that.

But Leszi would have said the same, and perhaps had, before he had marched off never to return. Others too, whom Peter had loved, would have also made such impossible promises, and they had gone before the Satyr Sword Master to Aslan’s Country.

So, Peter told the truth instead. "Cyrus, Friend, I cannot promise you what will happen today or tomorrow, or a year hence. I promise, though, that I will do everything in my power to secure your home so that you always have a place to go among those who love you."

"But, will you always be there?"

"No, Cyrus, I will not. Someday Aslan shall call me home, and I shall go to him. But, I would be no Narnian and a very poor King, if I could not secure a place for you."

"That sounds like a really tall order, High King," Cyrus said, with the bluntness of his kind.

"It is," Peter said gravely. "Yet, if but one Narnian suffers, insecure and afraid, we all do, and surely then have I failed in my duty to you all."

Cyrus' eyes blazed. "You would never fail at anything, High King, ever. And I'd run anyone through who says otherwise!"

Peter bowed at so ferocious a pronouncement. Perhaps Cyrus was Leszi's son. "Thank you, Cyrus, for such steadfast loyalty. I look forward to the day you stand beside me, as Leszi did, in my van."

Cyrus spit the hair out of his mouth and wiped his face on his arm. "I'm ready to come down now."

"Three, two..." On "one," Cyrus jumped and, with Aidan's quick steadying hand at his back, Peter caught the boy easily under the arms – Satyrs were heavy.

"My turn now!" Lucy cried.

Peter stepped hurriedly to the side. If there were ever a task for a betrothed, this was it and better Aidan did it regardless. Lucy loved to fly out of trees, the higher and farther, the better.

Laughing, Aidan stepped to the fore. "Pity my healing bones, Lucy," he said most piteously. "Please?"
"Of course, dear." With no preliminaries, Lucy launched herself from her branch, and Aidan did not so much catch her as cushion her fall and they both tumbled to the ground.

Peter discreetly turned his back to the giggling, grappling heap; Cyrus was half appalled, half intrigued. The age accounted for the disgust; the Satyr in him accounted for the interest.

Cyrus kicked the garden grass with a hoof. "Thank you, High King, Queen Lucy, Lord Aidan."

There were snickers from the tangle in the grass. The limbs organized themselves; Lucy rolled up to a sit, Aidan lying next to her propped on his elbows. "I'm no Lord, Cyrus. You are welcome all the same."

"You are quite welcome, Friend," Lucy said, smiling. "And thank you for I have not been in that particular tree for some time."

"I owe King Edmund an apology," Cyrus muttered.

"You do," Lucy said gravely. "You were most severe to him when the Just King does naught but a duty that spares the rest of us." She winked in Peter's direction.

"If you are sorry for your ill treatment of our brother..." Peter paused, and Cyrus nodded earnestly, "then I shall convey your apology to him on your behalf."

"Like what King Edmund will do tonight?" Cyrus was quick to see and quick to learn. He was a fine boy. "You'll say the apology so I don't have to?"

"Just so," Peter affirmed.

Morgan suddenly called from the Tree she had been half hiding behind, "Cyrus!"

The boy looked about, wiping his face on his hairy arm. "Lady Morgan?"

"There is a beetle over here, very fast. Can you catch it for me? Oh, hurry!" Morgan cried. "He'll escape!"

Cyrus threw a desperate, questioning look, and Peter hurriedly waved the boy away. "Go! Do not let it get away! Lady Morgan has need of you!"

Cyrus bounded to where Morgan was bent over the base of a Tree.

Peter looked over at Lucy and Aidan, but they were no wiser than he.

"There!" Morgan exclaimed, pointing.

Cyrus dove to ground and bounced back up, his hands cupped about Morgan's fast beetle.

"Here, Lady Morgan!" Cyrus said. "Hold out your hands!"

"Would you hold it for me, Cyrus?" She looked up into the tree. "Harah! Is that you up there?"

There was a rude noise and a Crow flapped down to a lower branch.

"Sorry, Kangee," Morgan said. "Could you fly over to the Murder and tell them I'm ready to start the beetle racing?"

"Will I get a shiny?" Kangee demanded.
Morgan patted a pocket. "After you deliver the message."

Kangee flew off in an eager flap of wings.

Cyrus hopped back and forth excitedly on his hooves. "Can I come too, Lady Morgan, and watch the beetle races?"

"As you've got my beetle, yes. Don't crush it though. They make an awful crunch sound when you step on them and squirt green goo."

Cyrus looked enthralled at this and Aidan barked with laughter.

"Do they taste good?" Cyrus asked.

Morgan to her credit was never bothered by Narnian things such as children (or adults) asking if bugs tasted good. To some Narnians, they certainly did. As far as Peter knew, Cook had never tried to serve beetles but such experimentation was certainly well within her purview.

"I don't know. The Crows like them, but only eat the slow ones. Do you suppose slow ones taste better than fast ones?"

Neither Banker nor child made their proper departing courtesies but, really, Peter would have been more surprised if they had. As Rafiqa followed her charge, Peter reinforced his order saying loud enough for Hound, but too quiet for human, "Please help Morgan with her farewell?"

Rafiqa nodded and quickly trotted after Morgan and Cyrus.

Peter left Lucy and Aidan to their business of mending Edmund's trousers. Following Fooh's nose, he searched out Edmund to discharge Cyrus' apology. His brother was on the slope leading down to the lawns, leaning against a tree, observing the Dryads shedding bits of bark and branches for the bonfire that evening. The General and Master Roblang stood far to the side, separate but together, and watching as well. Peter had known Leszi but fifteen years or so; the Gryphon General and the Red Dwarf Arms Master had known the Satyr from the early days of Jadis' campaigns. They had survived where so many others had not and persevered even during the last bitter few years when the General had been turned to stone in Jadis' courtyard. Without Leszi, a leg of their triumvirate was gone.

"All settled then?" Edmund asked cheerily. "Cyrus out of the tree? Peace restored in the kitchen gardens? Our dinner secured?"

"For the moment," Peter replied. "I have been asked to convey Cyrus' sincere and humble regret at having spoken so ill to you."

"We do accept his apology," Edmund responded, smiling through his grave intonation. "And thank our brother in turn for so conveying it."

Edmund looked again toward where Roblang and the General stood. "Lucy said Aslan was here, to see Susan."

"Yes, and my hope is that he will accomplish what we cannot." Peter waved an approving "well done" at the Trees and their bonfire construction. It was too fine a day to be indoors. The remarks would take care of themselves.

"A visit by Aslan to Roblang and the General would not be amiss either."
Peter sent the wish away to the Lion, knowing Edmund was doing the same.

"Has the General made her recommendation to you yet about selecting a new Sword Master?"

"Not yet," Peter replied. "I expect her to do so shortly. I have wondered if she would recommend making Lucy's temporary appointment permanent."

"As have I," Edmund said. "Though I fear we shall break under our sister's relentless drilling if the General does so."

Peter laughed, of a sort. The fact was, Lucy had taken the pages on arduous training straight from Leszi's book.

"How might Aidan see it if the General does so will be interesting." Not that Peter intended to inject himself within 20 leagues of such an argument.

"Lucy said that she intended to follow the advice of Trice the Eagle in that regard."

"And that means?"

Edmund shrugged. "I have no idea."

Peter settled at the tree's base to watch the activities and Edmund sank to the ground next to him. Taking their Kings' encampment at the tree as their cue, Fooh, Beehn and Jalur, Edmund's Tiger Guard, withdrew to stretch out in the summer sun. Beehn would be asleep in moments.

Distantly, they heard the shouts and caws from the Murder. The beetle racing had evidently begun.

"I am sorry if this business with Cyrus was awkward for you," Peter told his brother. "Cyrus does not understand yet. He will, in time."

Edmund was twirling a piece of grass between his ink-stained fingers. "He is not the first, nor will he be the last."

The bark was pleasantly warm and rough against his back. Peter thought he could contentedly remain there until the bonfire. When Mrs. Furner began directing the tables to be set up for the feasting, he could either sneak off or lend a hand which would embarrass her helpers into working that much more efficiently.

"I will say, again, Edmund, that you need not always do the Lament for the wrongdoer. I could speak it, or Susan."

It was not that Peter wanted to speak the words of forgiveness and understanding for the Giant who had ended Leszi's life. But, Edmund's relationship with Leszi had been complex and combative. To spare his brother, he would gladly take on the burden.

Edmund, patiently tolerant, shook his head. "You can offer, Peter, but my response will always be the same, as it has always been. The Traitor's Lament is my right and duty."

Even now, Peter winced inwardly at the word. "I admit I do not like hearing you speak so, after all this time, and when you have redeemed yourself so many times over."

It was known that Edmund would pronounce that Lament, but very few knew why and most assumed it was because he was the Just King and not because he had once, long ago, been Traitor to Jadis.
"No one makes me speak for the wrongdoers. I have felt it was a privilege to speak publicly of my gratitude and to wish it for others." Grass blades duly shredded, Edmund's restless hands gently plucked a few more.

"Yet, all this time and you still do it and never seem to resent it."

"Resent it? No, I do not resent it, Peter, and never have. I am glad to say I now undertake it for less personal reasons."

This sounded intriguing. "Oh? How so?"

His brother looked out again at the Trees breaking off their bits. The dead wood pile was steadily growing. It would be a fine, grand fire for Leszi that night.

"At first I would say the Traitor's Lament for me—a bit selfishly, I suppose. As I said, it was an opportunity to give public thanks for the gift I had received. Even if most did not know why I did so, it did showcase my humility and compassion."

Peter laughed at the self-mocking, understanding precisely what Edmund meant. "And now?"

"Now, I say it for us, for Narnia."

Peter puzzled through it. There were exultant shouts drowned out by caws. Someone had just won a race; or a Crow had eaten a racer. "I do not understand why you speak it for Narnia then?"

"No? Well, I suppose it is that I have thought on this so long, I take it for granted. It is simple, really. Think about the Hummingbirds or the Otters…"

At the perfectly timed moment, a blue-throated Hummingbird Cock buzzed by, cursing as he flew. "It's my effing bush. I'll run her off, that bitch!"

Jalur rumbled something about tasty Otter and they pretended to not hear him.

Peter sighed for dramatic effect. "Must I?"

Edmund laughed. "Precisely. But if Narnia was solely her soaring Raptors and Gryphons, her clever Dwarfs and Fauns, her…"

There was another rumbling complaint and so Edmund hastily added "Great Cats, or…"

"Not Canines," Fooh interrupted, not to be outdone by Jalur. "We could do without the Canines."

"As I was saying," Edmund said a little more loudly with a bemused glare at his injecting chorus, "if every Narnian were like Mrs. Beaver or Mr. Hoberry or our noble Guard, where is the merit in loving those who are so worthy of our love and who give so much in return?"

"Sentiment," Jalur muttered through a yawn of flashing teeth. "Lower your voice; you are embarrassing us."

Peter laughed as Jalur underscored Edmund's point. His brother gestured to the Tiger. "As my Guard so well illustrates, loving some does require that extra effort."

Jalur snarled.

"And how then does this bring you to the Lament tonight for the one who killed the Satyr whom you routinely named Sir Hairy the Horrid?"
"Because, High King, the real work comes in doing right even by those who test us, those who do not deserve it. We protect our innocent, we are gifted with love. But, I think we are judged by how we love those who are most difficult to love and by how we love even the guilty."

The large box muffled the van driver's curse as he negotiated down the front stair from the Pevensies' flat.

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night. Because thou hast strength to see and hate
A foul thing done within thy gate.'

Tebbitt held the door for the driver who pushed the final box into the back of the van and slammed the door shut.

"Thanks, Sir. Tell Mrs. Pevensie she will catch up with her luggage in Halifax."

Now finale to the shore,
Now land and life finale and farewell,
Now Voyager depart, (much, much for thee is yet in store,)

Tebbitt handed the Embassy man a few dollars for the trouble of climbing too many flights of stairs with too many hat boxes in the August heat. "Thank you, I will."

"Any word from our men out of Dieppe?" the driver asked. "We had a few there, didn't we? From the Embassy? Some Canadians, I'd heard."

'O hell!' He thought—'there's things in war one dare not tell
Poor father sitting safe at home, who reads
Of dying heroes and their deathless deeds.'

"You likely know as much as I," Tebbitt said instead. "Unfortunately, the news accounts are accurate."

They had been at the cables and telexes all night. It still was not clear how many hundreds, or thousands, were dead or captured. The summer had been an unmitigated disaster for the Allies. First Tobruk, now Dieppe.

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The Ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

"Nazi cocksuckers," the driver snarled. He scratched his unshaven chin and pushed his cap back from his balding head. "It's Dunkirk all over, but good Canadians dead this time. You know anyone in that frog hell hole, Wing Commander?"

The 2nd Canadian Infantry had been the main force. Rumors were that half at least had not made it back to England. Lowrey had been assigned to a commando unit; they did not know which one or if he had even been there. His name had not (yet) been on the lists of dead or missing. Gladys had been checking all day and night.
"I don't know," Tebbitt said instead. "Possibly. Probably."

The man gave him a familiar and hearty clout on the back. "We'll get 'em, Wing Commander. Our Bulldog will chew up them krauts yet."

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.

And so heartened, the driver awarded him sloppy salute and climbed into his van.

Forward, the Light Brigade!
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Their's not to make reply,
Their's not to reason why,
Their's but to do & die,
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Dieppe had been a disaster from the start. The only consolation was that it had been canceled, so the stories had gone. Something had obviously changed. It did not appear that a single tactical goal had been met in the raid and the toll was still rising.

As one who was to do and die and not to reason why, Tebbitt trudged back up the stairs to the Pevensies' flat. Mrs. Pevensie was seeing to their final packing and vacating of the flat. She and her daughter were taking the train tomorrow for New York, meeting John Pevensie, and then the family would travel to Halifax and from there board the convoy back to England. At least the crossing was safer now. Tebbitt did not think an Allied ship had been lost to U-boats in the Atlantic for weeks.

The reports on Dieppe had roused them from the beds and they had been up all night. Hill would have helped Mrs. Pevensie with this, but he was dead. Today, the Embassy could not part with two secretaries at the same time, and Gladys was a ruin, so Mrs. Caspian had stayed to assist with the chaos out of England. While Tebbitt could read a cable and answer a phone as well as the next exhausted, nervy, Brit, for the moment, he was the most expendable to help with women's moving day.

I'm Nobody! Who are you? Are you -- Nobody -- Too?
Then there's a pair of us! Don't tell! they'd advertise -- you know!

In the flat, Mrs. Pevensie was organizing the last of her packing, a much more manageable single suitcase for the train tomorrow.

"It is the last of my lemonade, Wing Commander, please drink it up."

He gratefully accepted the cool glass she offered. Washington was lovely in the spring and fall, muddy in the winter and just gruesome in the summer. He had almost acquired a taste for that cold, sweet tea that was served everywhere. Another summer here, and he would be drinking it like a native – and thoughts like that led to drinking a bottle of rum to wash the taste out of his mouth.

When I'm among a blaze of lights,
With tawdry music and cigars
And women dawdling through delights,
And officers in cocktail bars,
Sometimes I think of garden nights
And elm trees nodding at the stars.

Of things like these I choose to think
When I can never be alone:
Then someone says 'Another drink?'
And turns my living heart to stone.

"And I believe that does it," Mrs. Pevensie said, looking about her handiwork of the neat flat with satisfaction. "Thank you for your assistance, Wing Commander. I dare say this flat is cleaner than when Susan and I arrived here. We were grateful for furnishings and to have a place at all, but its general state was wanting."

"I am glad to help, Mrs. Pevensie. We can phone up a taxi and drop your luggage at your hotel for tonight. The Colonel and I can help you to the train tomorrow."

"With all that is occurring at the Embassy, we can certainly manage Union Station, Tebbitt," she said crisply.

"I don't doubt it, Ma'am. While I do not normally speak for Colonel Walker-Smythe, we both wish to see you and your daughter off.

_Farewell to thee! but not farewell
To all my fondest thoughts of thee:
Within my heart they still shall dwell;
And they shall cheer and comfort me._

_Damn Brontës._ He drained the glass and took it into the kitchen to wash it up. Mrs. Pevensie followed, opening cupboards and poking in drawers to assure that what needed to stay for the landlord stayed and what was hers was removed.

Soap to the glass, a hot rinse, and they would be done.

"Do you have children, Wing Commander?" Her question startled him and Tebbitt took a firmer grip on the slippery glass.

_That to the world are children;
Through them it feels the glow
Of a brighter and sunnier climate
Than reaches the trunks below._

"No, Ma'am." Not that he knew of, anyway. He left out that observation.

"It is strange, as a parent. You set up these special moments you expect to enjoy with your children– their first steps, birthdays, first days of school, first sporting wins, a good mark in a difficult subject, first beau, first broken heart. So, it does hurt, terribly, when you realize you have missed these milestones in their lives."

Her matter of fact statements belied intense emotion lurking beneath. Tebbitt wondered why this strange confession, why to him, and why now. He was trapped in the narrow kitchen, standing on bright linoleum with a soapy glass in his hands, a mother blocking his only exit.
And, if I pray, the only prayer
That moves my lips for me
Is, 'Leave the heart that now I bear,
And give me liberty!'

Damn Brontës. That he could remember The Old Stoic at all meant it could not be that bad. He took a deep breath.

Mrs. Pevensie smiled, though it did not warm. "Do not look so alarmed, Wing Commander. There is a point to this seeming digression and yes, even the urgent business calling us back to the Embassy can wait just a few moments. I wished to explain to you why I turned a blind eye to all that has been occurring in Colonel Walker-Smythe's office this summer."

The glass nearly slipped out of his hands.

Mrs. Pevensie's smile widened and he saw in her the same expression of smug accomplishment that her daughter displayed with jobs well done.

But he was quick on his feet as well.

"Your daughter is no fool, Ma'am. It stands to reason you would not be, either."

"Thank you for seeing that, Tebbitt. The distaff side of things is too often ignored." She sighed a little and leaned against the counter. "It is ego, I suppose, to tell you that I was not fooled and that I did see what was occurring between you and Susan. Though it made me uncomfortable, I had to trust her judgment and Colonel Walker-Smythe's oversight."

His mind and body took that very inconvenient moment to surge back to the night by the Reflecting Pool, the backseat of the car afterwards, the morning in his flat, Susan's mouth, her body, her hands on him…

License my roving hands, and let them go
Before, behind, between, above, below.

He needed clarity of thought and Donne's Mistress was not helping this. To teach thee, I am naked first; why than, What needst thou have more covering than a man? Brutally he smothered the sensations and memories under a blanket of rising indignation.

Because it was really rich, and unfair, to be accused of things he had never even done. He should not be condemned for impure thoughts alone! Damn it, he had not acted on them! She had said no, he had abided by that injunction, their cover had held and the rest had just been (mostly innocent) flirting and really not even very much of that.

Feeling the injustice of such accusations, he found his voice and defence. "Mrs. Pevensie, I assure you…"

She raised a silencing hand. "I understand, Wing Commander. More than you can imagine, actually, and, in fact, rather more than you do."

He blinked, now completely lost. "Ma'am? Forgive me, I…"

"You see, at first, I thought you were an unspeakably foul degenerate."

The anger and discomfort he felt at the unfairness of the unfounded charge, erupted. "That is …"
"Tebbitt!" she injected sharply, slapping her hand on the counter. "Hear me out! I did think very ill of you until I realized that you did not know the truth."

Truth? What truth?

_Tell all the Truth but tell it slant --_
_Success in Circuit lies_
_Too bright for our infirm Delight_
_The Truth's superb surprise_
_As Lightning to the Children eased_
_With explanation kind_
_The Truth must dazzle gradually_
_Or every man be blind --_

Tebbitt felt something horrible coming on, like the lightning of Dickinson's poem or a bullet one could not dodge. He tried to focus closely on Mrs. Pevensie's words, staring dumbly.

"Regrettably, I do not think Susan intends to enlighten you regarding the situation before we leave tomorrow." She paused and the look was sympathetic. "Her omission is that of a young woman who seeks to avoid conflict and while I appreciate that sentiment, as someone who is a trifle wiser in these matters I feel that you have acted honorably in this and deserve to know the truth."

The compliment soothed even as he felt a coldness moving through him despite the oppressive heat. There really was a husband somewhere; Caspian had not been an invention…

_O never give the heart outright,_
_For they, for all smooth lips can say,_
_Have given their hearts up to the play._

"Susan is not the woman you think she is, Wing Commander."

Mrs. Pevensie took a step forward and the supporting touch on his shoulder felt maternal.

"Susan is only fifteen."

The glass fell from his hand and smashed on the floor.

_And who could play it well enough_
_If deaf and dumb and blind with love?_
_He that made this knows all the cost,_
_For he gave all his heart and lost._

To follow, **The Queen Susan in Tashbaan**, Chapter 22, Crossroads, Part 2

With a look ahead to Part 3 of The Stone Gryphon, Apostolic Way

Poetry by: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, _A Curse For A Nation_; Walt Whitman, _Now Finale to the Shore_; Siegfried Sassoon, _How to Die, When Im Among A Blaze Of Lights_; Anne Brontë, _Farewell_; William Wadsworth Longfellow, _Children_; Emily Brontë, _The Old Stoic_; John Donne, _To His Mistress Going To Bed_; Emily Dickinson, _I'm nobody! Who are you?, Tell all the truth but tell it slant__; W.B. Yeats, _The Second Coming_ and _Never Give All The Heart._
Crossroads, Part 2

The Queen Susan in Tashbaan,
Chapter 23, Crossroads, Part 2

Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.
T. S. Eliot

Is the last word said? Has all hope gone? Is the defeat definitive? No. Believe me, I tell you that nothing is lost for France. This war is not limited to the unfortunate territory of our country. This war is a world war.
Charles de Gaulle, BBC broadcast, June 18, 1940

Susan wound down the stairs to the Annex basement. In a building full of secrets, this was even more so. Upstairs was, if such a thing were possible, the outward face of intelligence work. Down below were the tools and machinery of espionage.

The building was a frenzy of activity. Not since Tobruk had it been this frantic, and that had been spread over several days. As news of the Dieppe disaster began ringing in, they had all been roused from their beds, or had stayed at the Embassy and never actually made it home. Susan was in the latter category and had been at the Embassy since yesterday morning. She was pushing onward, buoyed by coffee and the pressing needs around her. Sleep could wait – tonight in the hotel with her mother, tomorrow on the train to New York, on the ship back to Liverpool. It was her last day at the Embassy and there was too much commotion to do anything properly, but so be it. This was the nervy reality of war.

She did not want to go, loathed the prospect of returning to school, and was wild to see Lucy, Edmund and Peter. She recognized the raging desires were not compatible. The Colonel had not had any word of Colonel McFarland's meeting with Edmund and with the Dieppe disaster unfolding, such inconsequential information was likely to get crowded out, buried by other, more urgent tasks. Edmund surely would realize that she was not injured but beyond that his anxiety would be as great as hers. Susan knew that Peter especially would chide her for the guilt that was amassing, but then it was a very, very fine line between his sense of responsibility for everything, and her sense of guilt for responsibilities failed. And Lucy. She so wished to curl up next to her sister, weep on her shoulder and have Lucy tell her that it would all be well, that it was well. Guilt and Susan were constant companions, but without Lucy, doubt and regret entered the mix as well and made for uncomfortable and sleepless nights.

Her hand spasmodically clutched the rail on the dark stair and Susan felt herself falter. No, this would not do at all. Not when so much had been accomplished of which she could be and was very proud. If she did not persevere, Guy's death would have been pointless. She had done this before and could bury her uncertainty under her competency and sense of purpose.

Every day she made herself relive the painful memory of her Oh Edmund whatever shall we do helplessness of Tashbaan. Susan vowed to never again be so ridiculously and embarrassingly vulnerable. She felt guilt for the whole of that ghastly episode and always would but she did not allow it to cripple her. This was not something Edmund and Peter understood. Susan dwelt upon the guilt of her failures because it powerfully motivated her to do better next time.

With a deep breath Susan found her composure and descended the stair. She had to be patient. This
was not the end. These were steps on a new journey Aslan willed her to undertake, a journey that he had trained her to do, that had begun in Narnia and that would end here. Aslan would make the darkness bright and though the way would be hard, already she traveled the path he set.

Susan first tarried at the Translation Services office. The anteroom housed the main office, tutoring room, library, and telex machines. Behind a closed door was the muffled din of clanking typewriters.

Susan’s very intimidating French teacher was standing at a telex machine, studying the rat tat tat of a message coming over the wire.

"Miss Carré? Je suis venue vous dire au revoir. Nous partons demain."
"Miss Carré? I wished to come and say good bye. We are leaving tomorrow."

Miss Carré spun about, perfectly balanced on heels as small as the head of nail. Everyone in the Embassy, save Ms. Carré, was ragged and haggard. Ms. Carré looked as fresh and perfectly manicured as if she had only just exited a posh Georgetown salon.

"Mrs. Caspian! Evidemment vous nous quittez déjà et j’aurais été horriblement vexée si vous n’étiez pas venue me faire vos adieux."
"Mrs. Caspian! Of course you are leaving and I should have been very cross if you had not come to see me."

Miss Carré was always warmer when Tebbitt was not about for she found him lacking in some fundamental way. As an aviator, he adored the way she balanced on tiny, towering heels and the way she could ride a bicycle in skirts so slim, laws of physics were surely compromised. The admiration was not reciprocated.

"Je vous remercie infiniment pour le temps et l’attention que vous m’avez portés, Miss Carré. Vos leçons ont été inestimables."
"Thank you so much for your time and attention, Miss Carré. Your instruction has been invaluable."

Her teacher was smug in her agreement. "Je suis très satisfaite de ce que je vous ai enseigné."
"I have taught you very well."

"Votre grammaire et votre syntaxe ont toujours été excellentes, mais nous avons si bien travaillé cet été que votre accent pourrait meme tromper un Nazi."
"Your grammar has always been superb, but we have accomplished this summer’s goals and your accent could now fool a Nazi."

Susan hid the smile for Miss Carré was as proud of her student as she was of her own teaching skills. Miss Carré deftly tore the cable off the machine, frowning at its contents. It was likely something in French or German that needed translating. Susan would not keep her. They were all too busy.

"Je vous remercie. Je dois dire que je suis ravie de ne plus parler comme une petite buveuse-de-thé."
"Thank you. I am very glad I no longer sound like a tea drinker."

"Il ne manquerait plus que cela! Comme si j’avais pu vous laisser me ridiculiser ainsi! Ah oui, si vous aviez un moment, j’aurai encore une dernière chose à vous dire."
"Certainly not! I would not have you shame my teaching so! Now, if you will wait one moment, I have something important for you."
Miss Carré set the cable on her desk and began rapidly thumbing through her file box of contacts, each name neatly typed on an index card. She withdrew a card and quickly copied it on to a clean card with a flourish of her fountain pen.

"Voici le nom d'une femme que vous devriez contacter Mrs Caspian. Elle se chargera de vos leçons à ma place et je pense qu'elle réussira à vous enseigner aussi bien que moi. Ne la faites pas attendre."

"This is the name of a woman to contact, Mrs. Caspian. She is expecting to hear from you. She will continue your instruction in my absence and I concede that she will be able to teach you as well as I have."

Unsurprisingly, Miss Carré had anticipated her request for assistance in finding a tutor in England.

"Merci beaucoup. J'ai peut-être dépassé mon professeur, mais je n'en désire pas moins continuer à apprendre."

"Thank you. I believe I have surpassed my instructor and do wish to continue."

Miss Carré moved around the desk to stand next to her and handed her the card.

"J'aurais été terriblement déçue si cela n'avait pas été le cas, Mrs. Caspian. J'ai également parlé au Colonel Walker-Smythe et écrit à quelques autres connaissances qui seraient fortement intéressées par vous et vos talents. J'espère que le moment venu vous utiliserez à bon escient ce que vous avez appris."

"I should have been disappointed if it were otherwise, Mrs. Caspian. I have also spoken to Colonel Walker-Smythe and written to others who would be very interested to know you and learn of your proficiencies. When the time comes, I hope you will use well what you have learned."

Susan felt herself flushing at the praise. Miss Carré had never been so complimentary before. It was so strange to be surrounded by war, espionage, and language, living the life of Mrs. Caspian, and knowing that in less than a month, she would be in a school girl's uniform. She was being forced back into that smaller vessel of Susan Pevensie. Queen Susan the Gentle of Narnia had barely fit in that confined space; she was no longer certain it could accommodate all her other selves as well.

"Je ferais de mon mieux."

"I shall do my very best."

Miss Carré clasped her gently about the shoulders. Susan saw tears well in her friend's eyes and returned the embrace, feeling profound gratitude that she had two places to call home and had never been exiled from them as the French and so many others had been.

"Vous la saluerez pour moi, n'est-ce pas Mrs Caspian? Vous lui direz à quell point je l'aime et combien elle me manque?"

"You will greet her for me, Mrs. Caspian? You will tell her that I love her and miss her?"

"Qui donc?"

"Who?"

"Mais la France bien sûr ! Car je suis convaincue que vous la verrez bien avant moi."

"France, of course! For I believe, Mrs. Caspian, that you shall see her before I shall."

They embraced again and then the phone began ringing, the telex began pounding, and three typists all had urgent translation problems. Susan filed the precious card for the recommended tutor in her handbag – which Miss Carré complimented and went so far as to ask where Susan had purchased it.
Mr. Halpern, the Shoemaker, was in the printing room. Susan had adored coming here over the summer, with the bright lights, the hum of the presses and typesetting machines, the photography equipment, the stacks of inks and paper, all of it beautifully organized. In a world gone mad, Mr. Halpern's studio reminded her of beauty and order and the incomparable worth of a highly skilled man who valued both.

Unlike Miss Carré, Mr. Halpern was too brittle and harsh, too guarded and wounded, to ever be a friend. They found somewhere else to co-exist, a place with admiration and respect, but no warmth.

Today, he was at the drafting table, perched on the stool, working with inks and paper. Susan stood at the door, waiting silently until he finished a line of hand blocked print. Only when Mr. Halpern set down his fountain pen did she enter the shop.

He looked up "Good afternoon, Mrs. Caspian. You leave tomorrow, I understand."

For Mr. Halpern, this was so welcoming as to be nearly suspicious.

"We do. I wanted to say good bye and to give you my card. If you ever return to England, I hope you will look me up."

"Oh yes, afternoon tea and scones at your father's club?" He was less openly sarcastic than when they had first met, but Mr. Halpern wore his defensiveness like armor.

"I was thinking of a drink at a pub and introducing you to my brothers and sister," Susan responded dryly.

He threw back his head and laughed. "You are nerveless, Mrs. Caspian, truly a most shocking young lady. You are not proper at all."

Really, he could never stop goading her. She found this behavior very tiresome. "I am a better judge than most of what is proper behavior," Susan retorted. "As I have said to you before, even if I found you objectionable, which I do not, your personal affairs are neither contagious nor my business and I resent you continually implying otherwise."

Susan handed him her card and reached out to shake his hand. Mr. Halpern stared at her outstretched hand, then shook his head and laughed again.

"You win, Mrs. Caspian. Again."

"I was not aware there was a contest?"

He gingerly removed a crisp plain envelope from the drafting table. "I had thought the Colonel might ask you to return those papers I made up for you at the beginning of the summer."

"I don't know," she said with honest regret. "I hope not. I am very fond of Mrs. Caspian."

"I am as well."

It was the kindest thing he had ever said and she smiled her thanks.

"If you came by, I intended to give you this. As you are here, it's yours. It's not as if anyone else can use it."

With such an ambiguous and surly introduction, Susan took the envelope from him with trepidation. Prying open the clasp to look inside, she gasped in astonishment and felt tears prick in
her eyes. Quickly, she dashed them away, not wanting to drip onto the precious gift.

"They are beautiful," she breathed.


"There is a passport, identity card, and birth certificate. I did not wish to give you a driver's certificate. I deemed that too unsafe for you."

"How very paternalistic," Susan said, fingering the well-thumbed passport. The documents had all been properly aged as well. It was astonishing, gorgeous work.

"My card is in the envelope. If you ever need some good shoes, look me up, Mrs. Ellis."

Susan put out her hand again. "If you do not shake it, Mr. Halpern, I shall have to resort to an Americanism and hug you. It is not as if my condition is contagious, either."

He stared at her offered hand and then, warily and stiffly, shook it.

"Thank you so much," Susan told him again.

"That's first rate work, Mrs. Ellis. Don't waste it. Send them all to hell for me, with my personal regards."

Mr. Sykes was the last stop. Susan carefully organized her precious gifts and tucked them in her handbag and under her arm before entering the thief's workroom. Mr. Sykes had been teaching her something of smash and grabs, bait and switch, and the compassion, distraction, bump and run, and other techniques of pickpockets. Her education with Mr. Sykes made Mr. Halpern's concerns about protecting her morality and safety truly ironic.

Susan carefully rapped on the door frame. "Mr. Sykes?"

The shabby little man shuffled out from behind a shelf. "Hullo, Mizzus C. Ready fer 'nother go with a Banham? Er, uh bump 'n run in G'town?"

"I do not have time, Mr. Sykes. I will have to hope I never encounter a Banham on a short deadline."

"Breezin off, are you?"

"I am. I wanted to say thank you and good bye."

He grinned, showing a toothy smile of yellowed and missing teeth. "You're a right number, Mizzus C. Gotta light touch."

"Thank you. You are an excellent, if hazardous, teacher, Mr. Sykes."

He grunted and with the shrug, every part of him seemed to move. He was half master criminal, half Houdini. "Awright I 'ave a prezzer fer you. All sorted, yeah?"

She managed to not take a wary step back as he opened up his shabby jacket.

"A gift? You did not have to do that!"

He removed from an inside pocket a leather case and handed it to her.
It was awkward to handle the case while juggling her handbag and holding the folder securely under her arm. Mr. Sykes did not offer to help and she was not so trusting as to ask for it. He wouldn't keep what he lifted from her but he would make her practice and she really did not have time for another hour or two lifting wallets in the Embassy compound and then returning them to the irritated victims.

She gingerly took the case from him and unsnapped it. Inside was a gorgeous array of lockpicks, over forty of them Susan thought, of a quality similar to Mr. Sykes' own set. Only law enforcement and other professionals had sets so beautifully complete.

"Thank you," Susan breathed, running her fingers over the picks. There was a whole set keyed to European lock sizes.

"Wicks and sticks. First rate screwsman, such as yourself, Mizz C, needs first rate wicks and sticks."

With a grimy, delicate finger, he touched the set in her hands. Susan kept an eye on where his other hand was, but it stayed at his side.

Sykes' voice turned soft. "You'll get sent down, into the bucket and pail, if yur caught with dez, Mizz. Just sayin."

So, Susan Pevensie would be returning to school with a professional's lockpick set and a stack of fake identities that could send her to prison. Oh yes, having tea and scones at her father's club with a homosexual forger and a very competent thief seemed not surprising at all.

Susan returned to the office. She did not need to ask. Glady's reddened eyes and biting lip told her they had yet to hear anything from or about Lowrey. The more time that passed, the worse the outcome would be. Dead perhaps. Or in a camp. Perhaps. Lowrey wasn't Jewish but a prisoner of war camp would surely not be immeasurably better. She wanted to ask the Colonel, but his door was shut.

Unfortunately, the War did not stop for their grief. The Canadians and British were limping their way back from France. It seemed, miraculously, that an American had actually died! In Europe! Susan kept her sarcasm to herself, of course. Reports were streaming in as well of American engagement on Guadalcanal. They desperately needed more help in the office and the situation made leaving even more difficult. She had thought, dozens of times over, of broaching the subject with her mother of staying behind, but knew it would be futile.

Nor was she certain she was ready to be separated so far and for so long from the others. She needed to have long conversations with Edmund and Lucy, and a very, very long one with Peter, that would end with broaching the subject of his upcoming service. He would take very ill to any interference and she did not know how he felt of coming to America, even if it was to work under someone like Colonel Walker-Smythe. But, Peter surely knew he would chafe under a stupid commander and would only be able to take bad orders for so long, and not at all if he felt command was needlessly endangering others. It would probably be several conversations actually, come to think of it.

Tebbitt had been helpful when she had cautiously broached the subject, as someone who had seen combat and been sidelined and shuttled off for a duty that seemed far more glamorous than it actually was. Speaking of…

In a pause between ringing phones, she asked, "Gladys, have you heard from Tebbitt or my mother?"
He was going to help her move out of our flat. I would have thought they would have been done by now?"

Gladys started as Susan spoke her name. "Oh, Susan, I am sorry! Your mother did ring." Gladys began groping about on her desk. "Blast, I can't find the note. It was after lunch, while you were running messages to the Pentagon and State Department."

Susan picked up the phone to dial the switchboard, concealing her sigh. Gladys' cheery competence had taken a serious blow with Lowrey's deployment and now disappearance.

Her mother picked up on the second ring.

"Hello, Mum."

"Oh, Susan, hello. Is all well over there?"

"We are fine, but busy. Any difficulty with the movers?"

As she chatted, Susan began sorting through the cables and memos. At least the filing would be up to date when she left. Her beautiful system would be a ruin in a week without someone to maintain it and she felt another twinge of regret.

"No, none at all. Wing Commander Tebbitt was very helpful. I am very grateful to him."

"Do you know where he's gone off, to Mum? We've not seen him back in the office."

A through L complete, Susan started on the back half of the alphabet. Montgomery's file was getting large.

"Last I saw Tebbitt, he was storming off to the basement pub," her mother replied airily.

Susan set down the O's and P's, now attending closely. This did not sound like Tebbitt in recent weeks at all. He had been very reliable and an absolute brick since Guy's death. "Did something happen, Mum? Why was he angry?"

"Well, dear, since you were not going to do so, I told him how old you really are. He is, understandably, very disturbed."

The receiver fell from her hand. Gladys stared at her, mouthing, "Is something wrong?"

Susan frantically shook her head and snatched up the phone again, shocked and nearly shaking with fury.

"Mother!" she hissed into the phone. "That was uncalled for!"

Susan knew she was letting too much imperiousness creep into her tone, but the interference in her private affairs was galling. Her mother had never been so invasive before and even worse seemed completely unperturbed by this gross violation. What had gotten into her?

"Susan, your brothers are not here to get you out of this one. To my mind, he has behaved more honestly than you have. He has fallen in love with you, and he deserved to know the truth."

"This was not your concern!" she whispered furiously at her interfering mother. Gladys was pretending not to listen but really was.

"Susan, honey, I know you are angry, but listen to me." Her mother's voice took on something firm
and gentle, an almost cajoling plea for understanding. "You do not want Reginald learning the truth from someone else, after you have left, without the opportunity to discuss it with him. And he will learn of it, eventually. Eventually your partner _always_ learns the truth. And it is always better if he hears the truth from you."

Through her haze of anger, Susan heard that her mother was trying to tell her something subtle and heartfelt that could not be expressed directly. It was unspeakably rude. But, Peter and Lucy would both have told her the same thing. Lucy would have likely done just as Mum had and confided the truth to Tebbitt, for her sense of honour would have compelled it. Peter would have warned her of the dire consequences, neatly danced out of the way before the explosion, and then would come back and help pick up the pieces without a single _I told you so_. Edmund would have glibly ignored or finessed his way through the whole thing, but her younger brother was not a good model for normal, healthy romantic attachments.

Susan sighed, feeling her anger drain away.

"Susan?" her mother asked over the phone, a little timidly. "Are you still there?"

"Yes," she replied heavily. "I should address this, I suppose."

"It would be best," Mum said quietly. "I think Reginald is truly hating himself now and he does not deserve that."

Susan politely declined to mention that if Mum had not said anything, there would have been no problem in the first instance.

The basement pub was deserted. It was too late for lunch, too early for cocktails, and everyone was still too busy to take time for either.

Tebbitt was hiding so far in the back she would have missed him but Jimmy, the bartender, discreetly pointed to the corner.

"Miss Pevensie," Tebbitt muttered through gritted teeth, making the name sound like a curse. Susan had the strange feeling of disorientation that Miss Pevensie was someone else.

She was surprised at the drink in his hand. "Sweet tea?"

"I wanted the one thing I knew you detested."

"It is not even alcoholic."

"Of course not." He ran a finger around the glass. "I knew I had to go back to the office. I can't leave Gladys and the Colonel to manage this all alone. So…"

Tebbitt raised his glass in a mocking toast,

"Fill for me a brimming bowl
And in it let me drown my soul:
But put therein some drug, designed
To Banish Women from my mind."

Susan racked her memory, trying to catch the reference.

"Keats," Tebbitt replied to her unasked question. He tipped the glass back and drank from it. "'I am two fools, I know, for loving, and for saying so in whining poetry.'"
His words were bitter and Susan's heart twisted with guilt.

With a glare, Tebbitt set his glass down so hard the table shook. "John Donne, by the way, who I am having the damnedest time getting out of my head."

Susan started to pull a chair from under the table. If they kept their voices down, maybe Jimmy and therefore the rest of Embassy would not learn of this. To someone watching but not listening too closely, it would appear to be a lovers' tiff, which was fine. The truth was ever so much worse. "May I sit? Or…"

"Don't you have anything to say for yourself?" Tebbitt blurted out. He was speaking low, if viciously, and she admired his self-control in not letting his anger give way to volume. "Even a simple apology for lying to me?"

Her own temper flared at the accusation. "I never lied to you."

"That's damned legalistic, Susan."

"You never asked."

"And why should I have?" he spat. "Your papers said you were twenty-one and married, which makes a helluva lot more sense than you being a fifteen year old school girl tart."

She flushed hot and gripped the back of the chair, flinging back, "And you should be thanking me for helping you avoid a court martial for statutory rape!"

Susan had seen Tebbitt drunk, angry, hungover, exultant, clever, preoccupied, working, and kind. Until that moment, she had never seen him really and truly furious.

He was venomous. "I have a sister your age, Miss Pevensie." He shoved back from the table and even in the dim light of the pub, Susan could see him pale and the scars on his face disappeared in a curtain of whitening fury. "There would have never even been the risk if you had shown a shred of honesty."

Tebbitt roughly pushed away, gained his feet, and stalked passed her. The pub door banged shut with the force of his shove.

Of course she had known of Edith and how fiercely protective he was of his young sister. Susan had never thought for a moment to align herself with a girl who was so vastly different in experience and years lived, but for Tebbitt, it was obviously the first thing that had occurred to him.

It cost her. It cost her dearly, but Susan knew she could not let this go. She caught up with him at the Embassy front doors.

"Tebbitt!" She clutched at his elbow, trying to avoid a scene as personnel milled about around them, leaving early, coming in late, all staring at them politely.

The Guard at the front desk frowned. "It's nothing, Sir," Susan said, still holding on to Tebbitt. "Business for the Colonel!"

The Guard's frowned deepened and under her fingertips, Susan felt Tebbitt tense as he spotted another incoming hazard.

Shirley, the Rhinoceros from Procurement, was plodding determinedly toward them on an intercept
course, a saucy look in her eye. She adored Tebbitt in a maternal sort of way and he was kind to her. But not now.

It was one thing to be subject to pub gossip, but here, in the foyer of the British Embassy with all of official Washington trotting in and out, they could not carry on a public and very personal discussion.

"Reg, please, let me explain!" she whispered, tugging him in the direction of the cloakroom.

Tebbitt needed no urging and nearly mowed her down in his eagerness to duck away from Shirley. With an apologetic nod to the curious crowd and muttering about fetching umbrellas for the late afternoon thunderstorm that would be blowing in soon, they stumbled toward the Embassy coatroom off the main foyer.

Keeping a grip on his sleeve, Susan shoved the cloakroom door open with her other hand, nearly tripping over one of the many (many) umbrella stands. The military trenchcoats, Burberrys, Macs, and women's wraps hung neatly on the neat hooks and hangers. The boaters, fedoras, and driving caps were on a tall rack that teetered dangerously as Tebbitt bumped into it. Steadying that, he then had to push the hangers away to keep from banging into them. They protested his rough treatment, tangled, refused to budge, and clattered to the floor.

Susan shut the door quickly before the Guard came to warn them off.

Extricating himself from the shower of hangers, Tebbitt shoved them all impatiently to the side. He was trying to glower and be menacing, but it was not working very well.

Susan snickered.

"Slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," Tebbitt said, smiling a little, a small improvement. He extricated himself from the dangling, disobedient hangers and protruding hooks, found a clear space of cloakroom wall to make his stand and defensively crossed his arms over his chest. "I am prepared to entertain your apology and explanation."

Words deserted her. Susan had not planned ahead for this revelation. Unlike with the Colonel, this was a script she had not prepared. She finally threw up her hands and then let them fall with frustration. "I admit I am not used to having to explain myself. I do apologize for…" She stumbled again, and finally pulled herself together. "I don't know for what I should be apologizing. I do not regret Mrs. Caspian. I am very proud of what you and I have accomplished and we could not have seen it through without her."

His eyes narrowed. "That is a start, but is not nearly sufficient. Tell me, I assume the Colonel knew?"

Susan thought Tebbitt would likely have words with the Colonel about this once she left. "Yes, and Guy as well. No one else."

He shook his head. "Your mother knew. She saw far more than any of us thought."

"I have no idea how that came about." Susan was looking forward to a nice long, aggressive, reprimanding chat with her mother on the train ride tomorrow. "Before you do berate the Colonel, he did press me on whether I should tell you. He left the decision to me and I did not think you would be flexible enough to accept me as your spider…"

"Spider?" he queried with a distasteful look.

He nodded curtly, filing the name away. "Go on."

With a deep breath, Susan rattled off the factors that had led her here, again committing the sin of omission by leaving out her certainty that this was what she was supposed to do. "Betty had just left, the office was in chaos, Churchill was coming to visit, Tobruk was falling and you were doing brilliant work, but without a handler. The Colonel was desperate, and…"

"You walked in the door with New York's recommendation," he injected. Tebbitt did have a bad habit of interrupting.

"Yes. You needed a handler and I did not think you would tolerate my oversight if you knew what the passport said." Susan refused to say that she was a mere fifteen. She was not and it was dishonest, to herself and to Tebbitt, to pretend otherwise – she owed him that truth, to know that he had not been longing for the girl his sister was.

"And no one else would have accepted you either," he finished.

"Yes."

Tebbitt sighed and some of the anger he had been clinging to went out with it. He ran his hand across his face and absently rubbed his scarred chin. "I knew there was something holding you back. I thought maybe there really was a Caspian, some chap in Asia or Africa, probably dead and that was why you never spoke of him."

"No. I have no…" Again Susan found herself struggling for the appropriate words. These conversations were no easier in Narnia than here but she was far more practiced in how to deliver them there. "I am not committed to anyone now," she finally settled upon.

He looked up at the bare bulb lighting the cloakroom, frowning.

"Susan, it makes no sense. It's impossible." His frown deepened into an ugly scowl. "Edith is fourteen. And if any man…"

He paled and swallowed, shaking his head a little, undoubtedly trying to push away an image he did not wish for. "I would kill a man who tried on her what I…"

She had to stop this misdirected rebuke.

"Reg! Don't!" She reached across the divide for his arm, gaining his attention with a gentle touch. "Be fair to yourself. You did not know and I did not tell you and I was the instigating party, not you."

"Yes, well if Edith was instigating what I know you are capable of, I'd want her locked in a convent for the next twenty years."

Susan felt her expression go stony. She did not like his implication. It was her passport alone that was the concern, not the longing attraction they had both felt and how they might have acted together to fulfill it. Their desire was as honest and beautiful as anything she had experienced in Narnia; it was everything else that turned it ugly.

Tebbitt, to her aggravation, laughed. "Don't try to fool me, Mrs. Caspian. You are not a virgin school girl so you may cease these huffs of offended virtue."
"You are such a prat!"

Susan turned on a heel, preparing to storm out of the closet. Closet. A closet. By the Lion, she was a Queen, and did not have to explain herself to this insolent fool.

But, before she could fling open the door and storm out, the cloakroom door opened of its own accord. Susan took a hurried step back nearly into Tebbitt to avoid plowing into His Lordship, Ambassador Halifax. The Penguin in the flesh. He was as stiff as a poker, impeccably tailored, immaculately turned out, and a decided relic not of this age.

Susan managed to avoid dropping to a curtsey; Tebbitt snapped to attention.

Lord Halifax, if such a thing were possible, stiffened even further than his normal ramrod state. "I say, what is this?" He stared down at Tebbitt and then his eyes flitted back to her. "I was fetching my umbrella."

"Allow me, Sir," Tebbitt said, thoroughly gallant. "I suppose this is it, your Lordship?" Tebbitt withdrew from a Chinese urn at the door a very fine black umbrella with an ivory and gilded handle. "A fine specimen to be sure!"

"It is indeed. Thank you Wing Commander." He swiveled his head from Tebbitt to her and the effect was rather like an owl – head moving, body stationary.

"Miss Pevensie is it?"

"Mrs. Caspian, your Lordship."

"Quite right. And you are well, Mrs. Caspian? Good health, in the pink and all that?"

There was probably a subtext of concern for her virtue and welfare buried somewhere in the misguided pleasantries.

Susan deliberately took a step closer to Tebbitt. "I am very well, your Lordship. Thank you for inquiring. I leave tomorrow to return to England and shall miss my time here very much."

She was close enough that Tebbitt's hand found its way to her shoulder.

The Ambassador stared them down over his beaky nose for a long moment. "Quite, yes, well, carry on."

He backed out of the coatroom to their murmured polite farewells.

Tebbitt was choking back laughter and Susan thought she would crack a rib in the effort to keep from being overheard in the foyer. His hand had remained on her shoulder and she turned into him, closing the distance between them. Tebbitt ducked to avoid the swinging hangers and, quite neatly, she forced his retreat into the paneled wall of the coatroom.

"So you won't own to Miss Pevensie?" Tebbitt asked. His hand was still on her shoulder and his thumb was rubbing little circles. "Not even to His Lordship the Penguin?"

Susan shrugged and his hand fell away. No, this would not do at all. She thoroughly relished his hands upon her. "Miss Pevensie is there but truly that is not all I am." She knew she sounded fervent but she very much admired the person she had become and her accomplishments and was loath to part with them. "I am Mrs. Caspian and others as well."
He studied her thoughtfully. "But your mother?"

"She does not see the whole woman. How could she? She has not seen what the Colonel has of our achievements or experienced what you have."

Susan could not explain it further, not without revealing Narnia. She took a step closer, her eyes on his.

"We have to learn to trust other things, Reg. What our instincts tell us, our experience, our insight." It was so very Narnian, to perceive the world beyond what poor human senses could discern. To underscore her point, she took his hand, raised it to her lips, and gently kissed his palm. She should not have to say. He should know. Did know. Had known.

"I would like to ask that there be no more lies, but as I see it, you cannot promise that any more than I can," he said quietly. His hand slid to her cheek and tarried there. Susan leaned into the touch, trying to encourage his clever fingers to map the sensitive terrain of throat and face.

"No, though if there is a choice between silence and a lie, silence is preferable, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, I suppose."

Susan took his other hand in hers, lacing their fingers together, running her thumb over his knuckles. He looked down at their twining hands. "Omission, however, returns us to where we were when you dragged me into this cloakroom."

"I did no such thing," she huffed. "You were fleeing a flirtatious rhinoceros."

"It was a strategic withdrawal, not flight." He frowned and she nodded in understanding, for his words were bringing them back to their duty that trumped desire, to the real world beyond the cloakroom, to the failed raid and chaotic retreat from Dieppe.

"We do need to return to the office," Susan agreed. She nuzzled his palm still resting at her cheek, her actions at odds with the words and the necessity to be seen to. "I was going to go to the Bali tonight later to say good bye to everyone, and I hoped you would come with me."

"Before we harken to duty's call, there is one thing left to do," Tebbitt said with an exaggerated sigh and a rakish grin.

"And what is that?" Susan edged in closer, backing him all the way to the cloakroom wall, nicely trapping him there. She was not going to let Tebbitt escape quite yet, even if the skies opened up overhead and every person in the Embassy came looking for an umbrella. She was a Queen, she had her Knight where she wished him to be, and the rest of the world could await her pleasure.

"I am going to kiss you good bye and I am not going to settle for any school girl virginal peck, Mrs. Caspian. This is what is going to keep us both up at night for a few years until I can come back and do it properly without worrying about a court martial. I want what, however impossibly, I know you've already given to your husband or lovers, or whoever it is upon whom you practiced. Because you have certainly had some practice."

"I am sure I do not know what you mean, Tebbitt," she replied, as cheeky in return.

"Enough talk, Mrs. Caspian. More kissing."

She slid her arm around his neck and set their intertwined hands on her waist. "Allow me, Wing Commander, to instruct you in how we say farewell in Narnia."
Tebbitt was adorable and grinning like an idiot. "What's Narnia?"

"Narnia is where we kiss like this..." She gently held him at the shoulder, pinning him against the closet wall. With her fingertip, she delicately traced the fine scars from his neck, over his chin up, across his cheek and brow. Leaning in, she left a small, hot kiss where ear, jaw and throat met, savoring the taste, her lips lingering at the pulse.

"Not good enough, Mrs. Caspian, tantalizing though it is."

"You are impatient," she murmured and he finally drew her completely into his embrace. Susan molded against him, relishing again the feel of contrasts, her body to his, and his to the hard wall, the soft and the firm, the press and pull. She tried shifting against his roving hands, seeking more from his touch, but he shook his head with mock severity.

"None of that yet, Mrs. Caspian."

She felt her lips form a disappointed pout. She knew he was right, but that did not mean she had to like it. It was her last night in Washington and some greater latitude was certainly justified. Tebbitt laughed and gently caressed her lips with a fingertip. "You are brilliant," he whispered.

To silence his humour, her first kiss was biting, playful, a promise of passion yet to come.

"You're teasing, Mrs. Caspian," he whispered against her mouth, mostly amused, but heated too. "Again." His hands slid down to her waist, expertly tipping her back just so.

"Tilt your head, you fool," she muttered mockingly cross, nudging his head to the side. Really, these Americans were doing it all wrong and she would simply have to correct the sloppy haste he had settled for. "Didn't those lovers of yours teach you how to do this properly?"

"Show me, then. How do beautiful, strong, generous women wish to be farewelled?"

Susan always did enjoy teaching.

The conclusion to follow, really, in which more gifts are given to the traveler, cards are consulted, and farewells are made at a train station.

A special thanks to Titpuce86 for the French translation.
At this moment there was a loud ring at the bell, and I could hear Mrs. Hudson, our landlady, raising her voice in a wail of expostulation and dismay. "By heavens, Holmes," I said, half rising, "I believe that they are really after us." "No, it's not quite so bad as that. It is the unofficial force–the Baker Street irregulars. ... They can go everywhere, see everything, overhear everyone. I expect to hear before evening that they have spotted her. In the meanwhile, we can do nothing but await results."

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, Chapter 8

No official title had been given to this cloak-and-dagger outfit, and for that matter no prior War Cabinet approval. It was called BSC by default, after the original Baker Street address of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in London, but the initiated preferred to think of it as a reference to Sherlock Holmes's Baker Street Irregulars.

J. Conant, *The Irregulars: Roald Dahl and the British Spy Ring in Wartime Washington*

"Come now, Peter. It is never just a train ride. Surely you've set out before but ended up somewhere you didn't expect, taken the road less traveled, or fallen down the Rabbit Hole?"


They had come to the Bali Club straight from the office and would be leaving early. Susan wanted to murder Tebbitt. And kiss him. And do a great deal more to him in the Club's maintenance closet.

It was very aggravating. She was leaving in the morning and it seemed perfectly sensible to locate a comfortable, private, horizontal surface with Tebbitt and test some limits. She wished to begin basic instruction in how to do this all in a proper, Narnian way, because goodness, the skill and enthusiasm were there, but there was an exquisite languid appreciation of the whole experience that seemed utterly lacking. Instead, she was being teased and Susan did not like it one bit. Teasing had its place, of course. It was a very, very strange situation for the adult Queen she had been and for how Mrs. Caspian had been managing their relationship all summer. The tables had turned, Tebbitt had the upper hand, was promising and not delivering, and murmuring all the while, *Wait until the War ends*.

Yes, turnabout was fair play and Tebbitt was gleefully exacting penance. He knew exactly how to most thoroughly aggravate her without compromising either of them and it was *driving her spare and there was nothing she could do about it!* When the War ended, Tebbitt would find out just how patient she could be when she tested *his* patience to the snapping point.

Tebbitt had joined the band for a riff. Susan made the rounds, handing out her cards, saying good bye to Guy's friends and family, to Sadie, Earl, Ludie, Charlie, and all the others. There was no pig part consumed – thank Aslan – just sipping Bourbon from chipped glasses, chatting with kind, brilliant people, and listening to music in a place that when she shut her eyes, it could be Narnia – the smells, sounds, and sights were different, but the feel of it was closer to Narnia than anything else like she had experienced on this side of the Wardrobe.
Agnes was holding court at her table, surrounded by her protective bubble that kept unwanted advances away. However, the impenetrability was illusory and that was why Guy would always have been hanging back to glower threateningly at anyone who approached Agnes. Being so suddenly reminded of this gaping hole his stalwart presence had filled was painful. Susan forced her thoughts outward, to Guy, his good fellowship with Lambert, and her other Narnian friends. \textit{Do not let my grief keep you from your journey home.}

It was so hard, sometimes, to not be selfish or churlish when there were greater purposes at work and she wished again for Peter. None of them feared death – how could they? But, Peter had always been closest to death, and so he understood it best.

With a welcoming smile, and no handshake or embrace, Susan sat at the table across from Agnes. The Tarot deck was on the table. Papa Legba, the rat, was scampering about so Susan scooped her up and nuzzled her nose.

"Has there been any word on David Lowrey?" Agnes asked, her delicate face knit with worry.

"No, not as of an hour ago. Reports are still coming in. If we do not hear by tomorrow, I probably will not learn anything until I return to England. If you ask, I'm sure the Colonel or Tebbitt will tell you when they learn anything."

Susan hated to be leaving and she especially hated leaving and not knowing of Lowrey's fate. Once they boarded the ship, she would not have any news until they arrived in Liverpool and she could find casualty reports. She might be writing letters of sympathy to Gladys and Lowrey's family. If he was wounded, maybe she could finesse a trip to Suffolk where most of the casualties were being taken. It was all so dreadfully uncertain.

"Are you ready to leave?" Agnes asked.

"In the preparatory sense, yes. I do not want to leave the Colonel so short handed and with Gladys so upset, he and Tebbitt will have to manage alone."

Agnes' hands moved restlessly over her cards. "George and Reginald managed before you arrived, Susan. They will manage, though not as well, after you leave."

It might have been offensive, but it was not. Agnes simply spoke truth. The War did not stop, and so neither did they, and good enough to get the job done had to be enough when it was all that could be spared.

Legba began nibbling on her fingertips, her whiskers gently tickling. Susan finally asked the questions she had wondered of.

"Did you know, Agnes? About Guy? Did you know what was going to happen?"

For all the anxiety of deciding whether to ask the question, the response was anti-climactic. "I do not read family members for a reason, Susan," Agnes said simply, answering not at all and signaling the end of the discussion.

Nor was there any point in asking her of Lowrey's fate – it seemed she did not know for Agnes was fretting as they all were.

Susan had never decided what she thought of Agnes' abilities. Guy and most of her family had attributed Agnes' uncanny insights to the saints, God, or gods – the theories varied. The Colonel thought Agnes a naturally gifted, astute psychologist.
Agnes reminded Susan of the Calormen mystics and the Centaur astrologers, though she had never been sure if they were philosophers, scientists, or, in the case of the Calormenes, frauds. Perhaps the herbs the Centaurs consumed and inhaled really did lift the shrouds between the worlds as they asserted. The herbs they had given Peter during the rituals bonding the High King to Narnia had made him very odd and ill for days. But were those visions Peter had seen truly prophetic or merely the product of fevered imagination?

Having been in the presence of the Lion, Susan was loath to name anything impossible.

Agnes' eyes wandered to the stage area where Tebbitt was banging on the drums with the rest of Charlie's group. "It seems that the blindfold has been removed from Reginald's eyes and he sees you more clearly." As she spoke the seemingly ambiguous words, Agnes removed the Two of Swords from her Tarot deck on the table.

The Two of Swords was an image of a woman, blindfolded, holding a sword in each hand, arms crossed over her chest.

"The sword was never my weapon," Susan told her. She had become accustomed to Agnes' elliptical way of speaking in which she used the Tarot as illustrations for her words.

"The Two of Swords signals a stalemate, a closed heart, an inability to see the reality in front of you," Agnes said. "I am relieved though that with the blindfold of the Two of Swords apparently removed, the tension of the standoff might be relieved. Greater understanding is possible, but not assured."

Susan recalled the cards she had heard Agnes read for Tebbitt over the summer. She had shown him the Five of Wands and warned him of difficult choices. In the frequently appearing Five of Swords she had cautioned of futility, of a gain not worth the cost, and impending failure. She realized that Agnes had seen the risk from the very beginning. "You have been trying to warn him, haven't you?"

"Tebbitt falls in love the way other men change socks." From the stack of cards, she slid out and set next to the Two of Swords other cards Agnes associated with Tebbitt – the searching Fool, the energetic, passionate Lovers, and the dreamy Page of Cups. "I do wish he were drawn to those with fewer secrets and a more open heart, or at least that he would listen for more than what he wishes to hear."

Abashed, Susan gently deposited Legba back on the table for the rat was nibbling a little too aggressively on her wrist.

Agnes swept the cards away with a dissatisfied grumble of her own. "I am sorry, Susan, it is unkind of me to speak so and the night before your journey home. I am too blunt sometimes."

She stroked Legba behind the ear. Susan could not be angry at Agnes for what, while uncomfortable, was also true.

"It is not the first time I have heard such things," Susan admitted, thinking of her long talks with Aslan, Peter, and Lambert. Suitors had said similar things, as had Rabadash who, for all his horrid failings, had been a very astute judge of character. "I shall miss your insights, however you express them, and your friendship, Agnes."

"I feel the same way," Agnes said smiling. And before Susan could utter the protest, Agnes began rearranging her cards in the deck. "So let me look at something happier for you!"
"No Three of Swords," Susan warned. After seeing the awful image of the heart pierced by the three swords, Susan had not sat for any of Agnes' impromptu readings. Knowing that the images of the Tarot were a significant part of how Agnes communicated with others, she would listen as Agnes deliberately pulled out individual cards and shared what thoughts they prompted. However, Susan never wanted to chance seeing the awful symbology of the Three of Swords ever again.

"Of course not, Susan," Agnes replied gently and as firmly. She set out the contemplative Six of Swords, the man pushing off in his boat. Susan had seen this card before for Agnes had used it to explain Susan's own journey that summer in Washington.

"So here is my journey by sea back to England," Susan said, stating the obvious.

"And a triumphant one," Agnes agreed, setting down the glorious Six of Wands. The image was of a laurel-crowned victor riding a spirited white horse. The horse reminded Susan of her own devoted Narnian dumb mare. To Susan, she had always been a Love; everyone else had always referred to the ill-tempered mare as the Hell Bitch.

Agnes gestured over the cards that told the story. "And so, Susan you journey from a task completed for which you have received the honour and recognition you deserve."

Next to the Six of Swords and the Six of Wands, she set another card they had seen before, the Three of Wands. The Three of Wands showed a man on a cliff, framed between three supporting staves, looking out to the sea. "And here is your journey to come." Susan always felt a hopeful promise in the card and saw herself on the cliff, with her brothers and sister beside her, embarking upon a new adventure.

Agnes paused, biting her lip in indecision.

"No," Susan injected, anticipating her. Agnes would get carried away and Susan wanted no more rude surprises like the Three of Swords.

With a little sigh, Agnes sighed, resigned. "Very well. Though there is something I wish to revisit with you, Susan. If you will permit me?"

Susan nodded, for she could guess what Agnes wanted to read.

Next to the cards of tasks, triumph and journey, Agnes put down two other familiar cards, the Hierophant and the Chariot. The Hierophant, Agnes had explained, was a man of experience and divinity, an interpreter of secret knowledge. The Chariot, with its image of the yoked black and white Sphinxes, was about mastery, confidence, will and hard won control over competing interests.

"This Hierophant has his own, very complex journey," Agnes said, finally speaking her musings aloud. "He is an established, stable person, who, with the Chariot, somehow follows two masters. He has shackled light and dark both in pursuit of the path he wishes to go."

Agnes' hands traced lovingly over the images on the cards. "When you meet him, Susan, you must promise to write and tell me of him."

"You seem very certain that I shall, Agnes," Susan said.

"Oh, I am," Agnes insisted with something akin to fervency.

"And how will I know this person when I meet him? I cannot very well ask a stranger if he is a man of the spirit who has harnessed good and evil to his will."
Agnes clucked disapprovingly. "Your Hierophant will appear when you need him, Susan. He is so unique, he will be unmistakable. You will write me about him?" She was near pleading in her eagerness.

"Of course," Susan assured her.

Susan did not understand the source of Agnes' conviction and certainty. This might be simply another of Agnes' whimsical fancies, such as her insistence that Jo should have married Laurie in *Little Women* and that Heathcliff's obsession with Catherine was romantic. Aslan had guided her all summer and this could be the Lion urging alertness for a guide on a path to come, much as the Colonel had been in the Emperor card Agnes had first drawn the day they met. And so, Susan listened and would not spurn what came her way. If she had been more open to Aslan's voice, she might have seen the mole sooner.

The band ended the set with a flourish so they both applauded. Legba, startled by the noise, scurried about, scattering the cards, so Susan picked her up again. Agnes collected her cards, wrapped them carefully in a white cloth and set them in her bag.

"Oh!" Agnes exclaimed as she sorted through her things. "I am the fool. I have something for you, Susan."

Susan was deeply touched. The wealth of Agnes and her family was not measured in money. "Agnes, you should not have done so. The gift of your friendship and that of your family has been more than enough."

"Guy would have wanted you to have it."

From her bag Agnes withdrew a small object and set it on the table. Susan picked it up and saw that it was a wooden carving of a dog, with an intricate design inked on one side. It was rough and lovingly done.

"What is it?" Susan asked, turning the sculpture over in her hands.

"Guy carved it. The design is the veve of Papa Legba, his symbol." Agnes reached out and plucked the rat from her hands for she was trying to gnaw on the wooden statue. "George could tell you more of the many guises Papa Legba takes. We know Papa Legba as the loa who is the guardian of the crossroads and doorways. He is a master of languages, a warrior who relies upon tricks, and has the power to remove obstacles. The dog is Papa Legba's special animal, his totem. He is a good guide for you on your journey."

"Indeed he is," Susan said, misty eyed and with her throat constricting.

"Your Wolf friend, the resting Knight, is not a dog, of course, but Guy thought it would be close enough."

Susan ran her fingers over the sculpture. It was unfinished, as she herself was – a work in progress with guides along the way. "Thank you, Agnes." *And thank you, Friends,* she whispered silently to Guy and Lambert.

Tebbitt sauntered up. "I'm afraid I must relieve you of your companion, Agnes. It is almost Mrs. Caspian's bedtime. She needs to be back at her hotel before her eleven o'clock curfew." He put a hand casually on her back, his fingers gently stroking where neck and shoulder met. He was such a tease.

"It's not even ten o'clock!" Susan snapped as Agnes laughed.
"We need to give ourselves enough time," Tebbitt replied.

Susan tried, half-heartedly, to dislodge his hand with a shrug. "Time for what?" Really, this was so humiliating. Tebbitt would rue the day he ever tried these games, when the day came.

Tebbitt offered his arm as if he had just proposed an evening of dining and dancing at the finest supper club.

"Mrs. Caspian, if you will permit me, before seeing you safely delivered to your waiting mother's door, I believe an upgrade in environs from the Embassy coat closet to the Mayflower Hotel's service lift is warranted."

Susan sorted through the morning cables, dispatches, newspaper and memos. It had been her office routine all summer since that first day when she had come in to find Guy hopelessly buried under paper, phones ringing, telex banging and the place absolute bedlam. Susan spared another pang of longing for her soon to be desecrated filing system. She had explained it to both Gladys and Tebbitt, but Gladys did not have the time and Tebbitt did not have the inclination.

Tebbitt was running their errands that morning while Gladys answered the phones through sniffs and tears.

It had been an appallingly early evening. The service lift had not represented an improvement in the milieu at all. There had been the dust bins (smelly), the room service carts and soiled linens (foul), and the alarm they may have been responsible for setting off accidentally (loud and embarrassing). At that point, it was time to take the hint and Tebbitt dutifully delivered her back to her mother. Susan was not certain how much longer she would be able to refrain from using her fake identity if this sort of business persisted. She wondered what sort of person Jane Louise Ellis was like and was looking forward to getting to know her.

With the incoming messages and papers reviewed, sorted, and prioritized, it would be the last time she performed these clerical duties for the Colonel. Within a few hours, she and her mother would be on their way to New York, meet father, and continue on to Halifax and then board the ship bound for England.

She knocked on the Colonel's door.

"Come in!" he barked. He was looking through the latest casualty reports from Dieppe.

"I have the morning mail and papers."

"Thank you," he muttered and waved in the direction of his in-box. "Is there anything I should look at right away?" The Colonel scowled and with a disgusted shake of his head shoved the report into his burn bag.

"Sir?"

"I'm irritated, Mrs. Caspian. Not at you. Just irritated."

Susan let it pass. "As to the important information, there are two things. First, this came in for you via the New York courier. Your Eyes Only."

Messages so designated were unusual, but not unduly so. The Colonel took the envelope from her with a raised eyebrow and opened it. Through the thin paper she could see that the memo it contained was short.
The Colonel quickly reviewed it and from his expression he seemed intrigued, not alarmed. Which meant…

"Sir, is it about Colonel McFarland meeting Edmund?"

He glanced up. "Very perceptive, Mrs. Caspian. It is indeed, of a sort. Colonel McFarland reports that he did not actually undertake the meeting but sent someone else who he felt was better suited to handle the matter gently and discreetly – his words, by the way. Interesting."

"And why is that, Sir?"

"The man he sent is not actually in the SOE, though I've certainly heard of him. Major al-Masri is a bit of a legend, really."

"al-Masri?" she repeated. It certainly did not sound familiar, or even English.

"Major al-Masri is Egyptian, or well, he would be referred to as Egyptian now, I suppose. I do not actually know his tribal affiliation or with whom he self-identified before the Europeans went in and carved up North Africa and Arabia to suit our desire for neat, square borders."

Colonel Walker-Smythe studied the message again, then held it for her to read. It was maddeningly brief – the contact had been made, Edmund Pevensie understood the need for discretion, he received the message calmly, and he had not been alarmed or threatened. The memo concluded that Edmund Pevensie was "a loyal English schoolboy" – Susan managed to not snicker as she read this sentence. She wondered if Major al-Masri was dim, fooled, or astute and lying for reasons of his own, and how clever Edmund had been in playing the role of the innocent child. She hoped Edmund had not been unduly worried for her safety, but there was nothing to be done of that – Lucy would have helped him through it.

She handed the memo back to the Colonel and it joined the other paper in his burn bag.

"So that, Mrs. Caspian, is one dangling bit of unfinished business that need not vex you on the journey back to Liverpool." He shoved his cigar back in his mouth. "You said two items of importance?"

"Yes, Sir. One of the papers is reporting a rumor of the Nazis being forewarned of the Dieppe Raid. One of the Canadians is quoted as saying, 'it's as if the Nazis knew we were coming.'"

She handed him the Toronto Star article and set the other documents in his box. The Colonel quickly skimmed the paper, focusing immediately on the sections she had circled.

Susan waited until he finished reading and began chewing again on his cigar.

"Sir?" she began, voicing her rising doubt. "We did tell the War Cabinet that the operation might have been compromised by the mole, didn't we?"

"Yes, they knew about Ribin. They also have had a couple thousand men drilling in Southern England for months. Command had to abort Operation Rutter in July because of a Nazi attack on the flotilla. There are dozens of ways they might have been tipped to the Raid and all are more likely than our spy." He set the newspaper down. "Was the report picked up by any of the other papers yet?"

"A nearly identical story is in The Globe and Mail, Sir."

He sighed deeply, rubbing his eyes. "While I continue to believe Ribin was not hired by the Nazis,
we will not be finding that out directly from him. He was found hanged in his cell early this morning."

Susan sat down heavily on the divan, disturbed and disappointed more than shocked. "His guard found him?"

"Yes, at the shift change."

"Are they certain it was suicide?" It was the first question to ask. Certain people were not safe loose, but they might not be safe in a dungeon either. They had learned that the painful way in Narnia.

"No," the Colonel said simply. "I am taking the train up to Ottawa tomorrow to look in on the situation and speak to the Coroner. And speaking of Ribin..." He paused.

"Yes, Sir? What about him?"

"Not Ribin himself, but what he did. Mrs. Caspian, I hesitated to say anything before, but I did want to try to dissuade you from thinking you bear any responsibility for Guy Hill's death."

Susan stared down at her tightly clasping hands.

"As extraordinarily talented as you are and regardless of what Agnes might say, I believe there are limits to foreknowledge. I am very impressed that you became suspicious at all and am becoming irritated at your insistence upon taking responsibility for things that are completely beyond your ken."

The Colonel was speaking, but Susan was hearing Aslan and Peter.

She looked up and with deep breath, nodded. "I understand, Sir. I am trying to put it in proper perspective."

He stared at her for what felt was hours but was really only a few moments. Finally, he nodded. "Very well, Mrs. Caspian. But, this must not persist. You are compromising your effectiveness and doing so utterly without reason. It is not what I expect from you. Am I clear?"

Susan straightened in her seat, pretending more confidence than she felt and letting irritation of her own sneak into her voice. "I understand, Sir. Thank you." His implication of her implied weakness could be solely a challenge to motivate her to move on. Regardless, she could not reveal the true reasons for her sense of failure in not preventing Guy's death for they were rooted in Narnia.

"And speaking of proper perspectives ..."

He reached down to his desk drawer, opened it and removed the passport and identity card for Miss Susan Pevensie, Finchley, London. "You will be needing these."

Susan took the dreaded papers, not wanting them, and knowing she had to take them. It was inevitable. The Colonel's look of sympathetic understanding made it worse and she felt tears of frustration springing into her eyes. She looked down quickly at the traitorous passport.

"I am not going to ask for you to return the Caspian papers," he said quietly and speaking aloud her secret fear.

Relief and gratitude flooded her and she was able to look up again, clear eyed. "Thank you."
He continued, "While I do not think Mrs. Caspian covers the full of it, she is a good working cover for you and shoes of that quality are hard to come by, even in England." He paused and his tone became rough and harsh. "However, I do not want you using that identity for another year or two. If I have a hint of it, I'll have it confiscated."

"I understand, Sir," Susan murmured, feeling very rebellious.

The Colonel's mien softened. "Do not be so downcast, Mrs. Caspian. I simply don't want you using those papers to go where you aren't ready and I expect you to make good use of the time until you are ready."

Indignation blazed up. It was the passport that was the lie, not the person she was. "I'm ready now, Sir," Susan retorted.

"No, I don't think you are," the Colonel responded firmly. "I want you to do what my own daughter would be doing. Learn more French. Kiss some boys your own age."

To her chagrin, Susan felt a slight blush creep across her face. The Colonel missed nothing.

"Sir, I…"

He stopped her stammering explanation with a slice of the hand. "I trusted you, Mrs. Caspian, to keep the matter well in hand, and, for the most part, you did. To the extent I could spare it, I kept an eye on the situation and Hill was reporting to me. If I had any inkling that you were in any compromising situation, I would have pulled you out and sent you packing, for all our sakes. So thank you for not disappointing my instincts."

Susan almost protested at the audacity of being spied upon. Her judgment caught up a moment later. Of course the Colonel had been watching and the latitude she had been afforded in the office had increased over the summer as she had earned his trust and proven her worth.

"You were right, Sir, about living the cover. The cover made it much easier to play the role and maintain the boundaries." She did not mention which boundaries and with whom. He knew she was speaking of her handling of Tebbitt.

"Yes, though by my judge you knew exactly what you were doing in managing and manipulating him. In saying this, understand that I mean no criticism."

He was harsh, but honest. His frank recognition of her maturity also underscored the fundamental unfairness of waiting. "Sir, I don't want to sit this out. The War will be over by the time I'm old enough for it."

He frowned and shook his head. "Think it through, Mrs. Caspian. Your analysis is faulty." The Colonel swiveled in his chair and pointed to the map of North Africa on his wall. "You know what General Eisenhower is planning. Those tanks on the SS Seatrain, assuming they make it, won't arrive in the Suez until September. Monty is going to want to train. The plan is to retake Africa first. It will be a joint amphibious force, multiple landings, probably 100,000 men or more. An operation of that size won't occur until the end of 1942 into early '43."

"Secure North Africa and the Mediterranean, then move north into the soft underbelly of Southern Europe," Susan continued, looking at the map and thinking of the briefings they had been attending.

The Colonel nodded. "I think we will be fighting in Italy by the summer of '43." He spun back around his chair. "Even optimistically, the Allies won't be back in Western Europe for two years."
Dieppe will finally silence once and for all those open-the-second-front-in-Europe fools who don't remember Dunkirk and who thought we could just land in France and march straight to Berlin. When we go back, and by my judge, it won't be until 1944, we'll do it right. God, I hope so, because I'd not want to see all those good men dead for nothing."

Picking up the newspaper, he thrust it in her direction, nearly croaking and sounding so like Sallowpad it was disorienting. "Two years, Mrs. Caspian. France. If you need one, that's your goal."

She would be almost through school by then. For the most part. Enough. This was what Miss Carré had meant about Susan seeing France before her teacher would. "Perhaps learning some German in the meantime would be useful as well."

"Very much so." The Colonel flipped the paper into his in-box. "Though I hesitate to mention it, you should know that Intrepid asked about you staying, Mrs. Caspian. He wanted to send you to Camp X to get some training and see what more you might do."

Hope sprang up, beaten back a moment later by reality. Her parents would never have permitted it. "I would have liked that, Sir. Very much."

"I know. You are a valued part of the team here and I am sorry to see you leave. But, we need to keep the eye on the goal and for you I think that is 1944 and France." From a folder on his desk, Colonel Walker-Smythe withdrew a piece of paper. He had had it ready for this farewell, Susan realized. "When the time comes, this is the person you will want to see."

Susan read the slip with his neat, English schoolboy print. "Vera Atkins?"

"Yes. Look her up when you get back. She is in the SOE, French Section, reporting to Colonel Buckmaster. Tell her you are interested in what she does. I'll drop a word with her and Buckmaster as well. I think you may need first to join the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry or the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, first, but discuss it with her. Camp X is not the only place the SOE trains."

"64 Baker Street?" she asked reading the address on the card he had given and smiling at the irony. "Not 221B?"

"The SOE moved into that building in 1940. Hoover calls us the British Security Coordination but BSC really stands for the Baker Street Co-ordination. Welcome to the Irregulars, Mrs. Caspian."

He stood and held out his hand. Susan rose as well and gravely they shook. She wanted to stay but now leaving was bearable for the path was becoming clearer and it was leading back to England and France, not America. Thank you, Aslan.

"Thank you, Sir, for everything."

"And thank you. It has been a privilege for me as well. I want you to know that if this ends and if we win, and perhaps I will eventually be assigned to London, maybe at Baker Street at the SOE. Who knows? I'll find you, Mrs. Caspian. If you are still interested there will always be a place for you on my staff."

They were going to have to get another driver, the Colonel realized. His Lordship, Ambassador Halifax, was only going to tolerate the use of his car and driver until the moment his executive secretary boarded her train for New York. The driver had all of his Lordship's condescension and even more self-important arrogance. He had been impudently impatient as Mrs. Caspian had made her last good byes at the Embassy to Gladys, the Guards, and the other staff. The driver could not
be rid of them fast enough. He shoved them out at the entrance to Union Station and roared off before the luggage had even hit the pavement.

Tebbitt and Mrs. Caspian were unusually distracted. He took command of the ladies' suitcase himself and escorted Mrs. Pevensie under the triumphal arch into the great, vaulted foyer and waiting area of Union Station.

Their train was not yet in the station but due shortly.

"Thank you, Colonel," Mrs. Pevensie said, checking her tickets and tucking them into her handbag. "We could have managed ourselves and with all that is occurring I feel badly taking you and the Wing Commander from the office."

"I am glad to do so, Mrs. Pevensie. Tebbitt wished to come as well."

"I have no doubt of that and Susan probably insisted upon his attendance."

He managed not to guffaw at this extremely perceptive observation. Tebbitt and Mrs. Caspian had tarried at the entrance and not yet joined them. He imagined that they wished to make their farewell a little more private – as private as such things could be in grand foyer of the American Capitol's Beaux Arts railway station.

Mrs. Pevensie looked about and her mouth quirked up in a smile. "Colonel, might I suggest that we both carefully turn our backs?" She nudged his elbow slightly, pushing him a little to the side. "In this way, we can pretend we do not see Wing Commander Tebbitt and my daughter kissing madly behind that pillar."

"Of course, Mrs. Pevensie." Her astuteness startled him. He was not surprised, for he had been observing Mrs. Caspian and Tebbitt together for weeks. That Mrs. Pevensie was cognizant of the situation and seemingly unperturbed by her adolescent daughter kissing a man more than ten years her senior was causing a sudden reassessment. He found himself peculiarly unprepared to address a woman who was not as unaware as he had assumed.

"You seem surprised at my knowledge, Colonel."

"I admit, I am, ma'am. I was just considering what else you might have noticed this summer and turned a blind eye to."

"Well, with my gaze deliberately averted, I do want to thank you, Colonel, for keeping an eye on Susan. I was told I could trust your judgment and you did not disappoint me."

For a disorienting moment, the conversation he had had with Mrs. Caspian only a few hours earlier was replaying.

"You are welcome, Mrs. Pevensie, though your daughter was in need of no oversight. Nevertheless I did, with Mr. Hill, monitor the situation. I am curious. Who told you I was so trustworthy?"

Her smug smile was very like that of Mrs. Caspian. The mother had been keeping her own counsel as her daughter had kept hers.

"You cannot guess?"

"No."

She radiated satisfied accomplishment. "I was in New York, visiting my husband, the morning Mr.
Hill arrived with news of that fantastic and daring caper involving the theft of Vice President Wallace's incendiary pamphlet right from his briefcase."

It took a tremendous control to not reveal his disgust in failing to anticipate this. Where was his script? It was very humbling to be reminded so forcefully by the mother of the same lessons he had been drilling into the daughter.

She continued, obviously enjoying his discomfiture. "The New York office was in an uproar and everyone was asking to hear the tale from Mr. Hill of the daring Wing Commander Tebbitt and the quick thinking of his handler, Mrs. Caspian."

He recalled what she had said the night of Hill's death. "And Caspian was one of those mysterious, unknown names you had heard before from your children?"

"Very good, Colonel." Her eyes flitted casually toward a shop front window in which one could see reflections of kissing activity otherwise obscured by the train station's marble columns. "I discussed my concerns with Mr. Stephenson and with Mr. Hill who, to the credit of both, were forthcoming. Mr. Stephenson appealed to my patriotic duty, but it was Mr. Hill who allayed a mother's worries."

"Was Hill reporting to you as well?"

"He assured me that there was no need due to what I had already suspected – that even apart from your oversight, for which I am grateful, my daughter was well able to handle a randy RAF pilot and any other challenge of official Washington."

"Your daughter is a singular young woman," he replied.

"Not so young, I think," Mrs. Pevensie said. "Or, perhaps better stated, not as innocent as one would expect of a young girl." She looked down and picked at the finger of her glove.

He waited, knowing she would fill the silence if given the opportunity. Hers was a perspective that had been wholly lacking in his analysis.

"It makes no sense, Colonel," she said quietly. "Before my children were evacuated, there were the boys who wanted to write to Susan or carry her books. I had thought this would follow a logical progression with letters and introductions and dances, the usual things a mother would expect for her pretty daughter."

"And instead?" he asked, burning with curiosity.

She raised her head and snorted gently. "Colonel, surely you see Susan's worldliness as well? It is how she managed to make herself indispensable to your office."

"I have noted it," he admitted.

"I have found nothing that could account for her sophistication and I have searched, even though it meant looking for a mother's' worst fears."

"Ma'am, surely the War accounts for this?" He did not believe it, but this was the parent in him speaking to another parent of the worries they all shared.

"No, Colonel, it does not. Not directly, though it certainly began during their evacuation from the Blitz." She looked up at the overhead clock. "We will need to find a way to interrupt them in a moment if they have truly lost track of the time."
"The evacuations were very hard on children and families," he said, recalling the stories he had heard from other military men.

"I used that excuse as well, Colonel, until I objectively compared other children to my own." She shook her head and he saw that these were old questions, often rehearsed, and now being trotted out to a new audience. "They were evacuated to the home of Digory Kirke, who is a colleague of my husband's old tutor. Have you heard of Professor Kirke?"

"He is an authority on the Oxford Franciscans?" He recalled seeing papers with Kirke's name discussing the works of Ockham and the scientific method.

"Yes. Brilliant man, very kind, and thoroughly eccentric. Peter has been with him this summer." She shifted her handbag on her arm and glanced again at the board displaying train schedules. "After my children's return from his home, I spent a long day discussing their profound changes with Professor Kirke and his colleague, Miss Polly Plummer. She works in animal conservation for the Zoological Society of London."

He stored the information away for later reflection. Mrs. Pevensie lapsed into a thoughtful silence.

"And?" he finally prompted.

She shook her head, brow creasing with mild, frustrated annoyance. "Nothing useful. They were, frankly, as vague as spies."

He laughed a little at the irony and she nodded her agreement. "Indeed."

His interest was piqued. "I would be interested in hearing more of what you learned, however vague."

"Of course, Colonel. I shall write you of the particulars."

"Please." What was especially fascinating was the revelation that whatever had so altered Susan Pevensie and her siblings had happened to them all at the same time, at apparently the same place.

"If you wish to understand my daughter, I believe the answer begins there." Mrs. Pevensie leaned forward and rested a hand on his arm. "I tell you all this, Colonel, because, should you someday be able to investigate the source of Susan's remarkable skills, would you share your conclusions with me? As a mother, it is very hard to be so ignorant of what has made my children the adults that they are."

He hesitated a long moment before finally responding as simply as he was able, "Of course." He was not sure if he would be able to do so, or could. Spies were skilled manipulators of truth.

They both looked up as the overhead board showing incoming trains fluttered and flipped. A garbled announcement confirmed that the Congressional Limited Express, bound for Penn Station, was arriving at track 2.

Saving them the embarrassment of an intervention, Tebbitt and Mrs. Caspian sauntered out from behind their concealing pillar. Mrs. Pevensie smirked and quickly looked away, schooling her expression into one of total guilelessness. Mother and daughter both were skilled at pretense. Tebbitt was hurriedly wiping his face clean of what was certainly Mrs. Caspian's lipstick.

Mrs. Pevensie put out her hand. "Colonel Walker-Smythe, thank you. I hope we see each other again."
"And I as well, Ma'am. You should be very proud of your daughter."

Mrs. Pevensie's parting handshake with Tebbitt was equally warm. Tebbitt handled it with aplomb for all that he had been madly kissing the woman's daughter in a public train station but a few feet away. Mrs. Caspian seemed utterly unperturbed, though her color was pinker than usual. That was something they would have to work on, eventually.

His own good bye to Mrs. Caspian was perfunctory – what had needed to be said had already been communicated.

"Thank you, Colonel."

"It's been a pleasure, Miss Pevensie."

There was no hugging.

Tebbitt gave their suitcase and valise to the porter and handed the mother and then daughter up on to the train. If the pilot's hand lingered a moment longer on Mrs. Caspian, the Colonel did not see it.

Together, he and Tebbitt stepped away from the train. There was a crackle of an unintelligible announcement that might have been Congressional Limited leaving on track 2 but could have easily been Crocodiles loose in the tea room.

Through the train car window he saw Mrs. Caspian take a seat and wave a gloved hand. Tebbitt raised his hand in an enthusiastic returning wave (no blown kisses, thank goodness, they were British).

The train pulled away.

Waving the train good bye, Tebbitt suddenly broke in over the din of the station, "Sir, when did you realize that Mrs. Caspian is no school girl?"

So, Tebbitt had learned some version of the truth. He wondered how long it had taken the pilot to ask the question.

"Susan Pevensie's passport says she is fifteen."

"That's what Shoemakers are for – to forge passports and birth records."

He was not going to argue the point; he knew what her birth record said and he could not reconcile it any more than Tebbitt could.

"I can't explain it, Tebbitt."

"Yet, her mother says she's fifteen," Tebbitt said, still waving at the fading train.

"Speaking as one and to one, let us remind ourselves that spies are notoriously unreliable as narrators."

Tebbitt's hand fell to his side with a bemused sigh. "Yes, I had been wondering if deception runs in the family. That has been my latest theory. Or, part of it, anyway."

He was not going to mention his burgeoning suspicions that indeed Rat and Crow was a hereditary trait in the Pevensies and that he hoped to confirm it in the next year when Peter Pevensie turned seventeen. He had a burning interest in pursuing an interview with Major al-Masri about Edmund
Pevensie and wished for a long tea with Professor Kirke and Miss Plummer. Perhaps he could arrange a trip back to England in the next year.

"It is the cocktail hour somewhere in the world, Tebbitt. I suggest we mark it by toasting Mrs. Caspian's embarkation on her next adventure."

Tebbitt nodded, still staring off down the track on which the train had disappeared. "I should like to hear the truth of Mrs. Caspian's adventures some day."

"As would I."

Here ends Part 2 of The Stone Gryphon, The Queen Susan in Tashbaan

And so, Part 2 ends as Part 1 did, with an elder Pevensie on a train, embarking upon the Next Adventure. To quote the Gryphon from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, "No, no! The adventures first … explanations take such a dreadful time."

I have begun The Stone Gryphon, Part 3, Apostolic Way, at http://www.fanfiction.net/u/1873140/

If you are the sort who waits until it is all over, I do hope to hear from you. Thank you for taking this journey with me.

Works inspired by this: The Unsubtle Art of Defenestration by Syrena_of_the_lake

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