Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go. In a time of enormous change, the Friends of Narnia each find a way. Part 3 of The Stone Gryphon.

Reposted from fanfiction.net. In progress.
The other end of the Varsity Line

Part 3 of The Stone Gryphon, Apostolic Way

Introduction

In Part 1 of The Stone Gryphon, in the summer of 1942, Peter Pevensie reluctantly studies theology, Latin, and logic at Oxford with Professor Digory Kirke. More enthusiastically, Peter also tramps about museums and the countryside with Professor Richard Russell, a polygamous ethnologist. Peter becomes acquainted with Asim bin Kalil, an Arab mystic, and Professor Russell's wife, Mary Anning Russell, a paleontologist with a passion for drooling lizards and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. At the conclusion of Part 1, Peter receives a telegram from his brother, Edmund. Edmund reports that he, their sister, Lucy, and their 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.

In Part 2 of The Stone Gryphon, Peter learns from Edmund that their sister, Susan, in America ostensibly for a summer of fun and frivolity, the War in the Atlantic notwithstanding, has inserted herself into the Special Operations Executive in the British Embassy in Washington, D.C. Under the cover of Mrs. Susan Caspian, she reports to Colonel George Walker-Smythe and "babysits" an SOE agent, Wing Commander Reginald Tebbitt. In the interest of furthering the British war effort, Mrs. Caspian and WC Tebbitt manipulate and bribe the writers and owners of American media, forge documents, steal documents from the Vice President of the United States, aid the acquisition of American Sherman tanks for the Eighth Army in North Africa, seduce an American Congresswoman, and thwart a Soviet mole operating out of the British Embassy.

In England, Edmund has been able to communicate the essence of Susan's activities to Peter and Lucy because Edmund and Susan have been violating the Official Secrets Act all summer. Susan described her espionage activities in letters to Edmund using Narnia as an allegorical code. In Washington, Colonel Walker-Smyth confronts Susan for her indiscretions. Peter's confidante and friend, Asim bin Kalil, revealed to also be Major al-Masri in British Army intelligence, delivers the same cautionary message to Edmund. Major al-Masri concludes that Edmund, like his brother and older sister, is no simple school child. Susan leaves America with her sights set on entering France as a spy.

Lucy contemplates how the Valiant Queen might be unleashed upon an unsuspecting England. A sick man awaits Peter's return to Oxford and fulfillment of the High King's promise to discuss the remarkable abilities of owls.

Part 3 of The Stone Gryphon story arc continues the story begun in Part 1 and Part 2, as well as characters and conflicts addressed in By Royal Decree, The Palace Guard and Harold and Morgan: Not A Romance. Harold and Morgan: Not A Romance is posted on fanfiction.net and is in progress and continues the tale begun in By Royal Decree of the Just King's relationship with Evil Banker Morgan of the House of Linch.

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As often repeated, I am an adult, writing adult characters for adult readers. The rating is consistently
T. If it veers upward from T to M (a possibility) there will be additional warning.

I further am grateful to Miniver for the title of Part 3. She noted that frequently Narnia fan fiction portrays the Pevensies as cast out of the Eden of Narnia into the harsh Hell of Spare Oom. She posited that an alternative metaphor might be found in the chapter of the Christian Bible, the Acts of the Apostles, which describes how the followers of a Jewish carpenter-rabbi went out into the wider world beyond Judea as messengers, teachers, and healers.

_Apostolic Way, Chapter 1
The Other End Of The Varsity Line

_Apostle: Origin: Middle English, from Old English apostol and from Old French apostle, both from Late Latin apostolus, from Greek apostolos, messenger, from apostellein, to send off: apo-, apo- + stellein, to send; see stel- in Indo-European roots.
From Merriam-Webster

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.
English Standard Bible, Acts of the Apostles, 1:8

Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.
T.S. Eliot

"Perhaps it will not take all day," Lucy said. "Budge over, Eustace."

Eustace dutifully scooted over in the train's seat to make room for Lucy and her bag of books, journal, pencils, lists, and incomplete school assignments Peter had been badgering her to finish. Edmund stepped over Eustace and Lucy's legs and the battered suitcase Peter had set between the facing seats that would be their makeshift table and footrest.

Dust and a spider drifted down as Peter settled their other bag in the overhead rack. Eustace sneezed and Lucy caught the spider.

"Excuse me, again," Lucy said, already clambering over knees and luggage to free the spider out the train window. She was leaning over Eustace, had her elbow in Edmund's jaw, and she stuck her head out the window and tossed the spider away.

"Maybe you want the window seat?" Eustace asked.

"Oh, perhaps, I…"

"No, Lucy," Peter told her firmly. "You will then be climbing over all of us at every moment to wander the aisle and strike up conversations with anyone who looks interesting."

Edmund signaled a thank you to Peter. Lucy in a confined space was never a good thing. It had taken a swift Wolf and a faster horse to keep up with her in Narnia. It had taken the rigging of The Dawn Treader and the width of the Eastern Sea to sate her energy and fill her soul.

"I suppose." Lucy waved merrily to the strangers on the platform, who looked over their shoulders wondering if the girl hanging out the train window was farewelling some dear relation behind them.

Peter settled in the seat next to him. "Sit down, Lucy. And we will get there when we get there."
She scrambled back to her seat, leaving Eustace to ask the very relevant question, "How are we all going to fit at the Professor's? Wasn't lack of space the reason you all didn't stay with him this summer?"

"We shall kip out in his garden," Peter said. "And hope it doesn't rain."

Lucy's face brightened and then flashed a *Mind What You Say* hand signal. "Hello, Colonel! Are you off to Oxford, too?"

Edmund scrambled up to his feet. There was only one Colonel who merited both the greeting and the hand signal. Eustace's embarrassed flush confirmed it.

"Good morning, Miss Pevensie, Eustace"

"And good morning to you, Colonel Clark," Edmund said. He had to push his way around Peter who was also rising.

"Oh, hello, Edmund. I thought that might be the back of your head. It's good to see you again."

The Colonel looked politely to Peter.

"Sir, this is my older brother, Peter," Edmund put in smoothly, secretly pleased that Peter would see that he was not the only one who had met interesting people this summer.

"Thomas Clark." The Lieutenant Colonel rank and American Army service were plain enough from the crisp uniform; the clipped accent, with its soft R's and broad A's, Edmund had learned was the speech of East Coast Yankee. "Edmund speaks of you often."

"It's a pleasure, Sir." Peter couldn't easily say, "Edmund has told me of you," as Edmund hadn't written a word of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Clark. There were reasons for that, of course.

Lucy looked through the blocking arms and chests. "Is Jack with you?"

Colonel Clark patted the satchel under his arm. "No, this is work, so he is home with Ruby. And you?"

"Offtosee familyinOxford. Sir." Eustace blurted it out all at once and thrust out his hand.

Clark had to juggle his bag for the gesture was ill-timed, but he managed a properly cordial handshake. Given how wretchedly Eustace had behaved in the man's home over the summer, this was hugely conciliatory. Edmund managed to keep a solemn face as Clark gravely nodded, perceptive enough to see an apology when it was offered and gracious enough to accept it without comment.

"Your parents return next week, don't they?"

"They do!" Lucy said, bouncing up on her toes.

"And with a safer crossing now than when they left," Peter added.

"Jack will want to say good bye. Might you be able to come by for dinner before you leave for school?"

It really should have been Lucy's prerogative or Peter's, to accept the invitation. But, Eustace was trying so hard, none wanted to correct him when he lurched out, all in a rush, "ThankyouSirwewould."
There was a whistle and the porter's call. The train heaved.

"Are you going all the way to Oxford, Sir?" Edmund asked, not expecting an answer, and not receiving one when Clark shook his head.

"No." He flashed his ticket. "I had best get to my seat. It was a pleasure seeing you and ring us up when you are back in Cambridge."

They muttered their good byes and took their seats. Edmund saw Peter watching Colonel Clark easily keep his footing on the jerking train as he moved forward to the first class car.

Lucy squeezed Eustace's arm. "That was very well done!"

Eustace turned scarlet and mumbled his thanks.

Peter turned to him with a questioning look.

"I met his son, Jack, at the library this summer," Edmund explained. "Being American, he helped me with my school research." Peter would intuit what assistance Jack had really rendered. Edmund would have had a much more difficult time with the nuances of American politics without Jack's boastful insights. Really, the idea of the President's party not controlling the Parliament was so odd; it was no wonder the Americans could not accomplish anything. Nor did the President seem especially effective at maintaining party discipline and the structure of their courts was peculiar for all that the American system was based upon the English rather than, Aslan forbid, the civil law system. Or, what had been the civil system until the Nazis had obliterated the rule of law in all of Europe.

"And what of the Lieutenant Colonel, apart from the obvious?" Peter asked.

"Colonel Clark is a West Point graduate and Harvard trained lawyer who was a Commissioner for an American trade agency."

Oh it was good to see Peter's disapproving frowns again. His MRF-ness never disappointed. "A lawyer? Is he here with General Eisenhower, or…" Peter trailed off, seeing as Edmund had that Colonel Clark's patrician bearing and Cambridge location did not seem to quite fit their understanding of senior American staff in the European Theater of Operations.

"Did you see his pin?"

Peter would not be outdone in this game. "The golden one, four pointed star and rosette? I didn't recognize it."

"US Army Intelligence. I suspect he will get off the train at Bletchley."

"Bletchley?" Peter repeated. "Is there some reason I should know of it?"

"No. I only noted it because Jack said something about it and I saw a train schedule in their home."

Eustace was squirming with the mention of Jack Clark. Jack was a difficult sort even if one wasn't a dragon. He was arrogant and sarcastic but Edmund had grown up with the likes of Sir Leszi and enjoyed Jack's challenging manner. For Edmund, everyone who had come after Leszi seemed polite and self-effacing by comparison.

"That was bravely done," Edmund told his cousin. And really it was, to volunteer to go to the home of someone who had quarreled with Eustace as Jack had.
"We'll make sure it goes well, Eustace, don't you worry," Lucy said airily, and administering another reassuring pat to their cousin's arm. "And we will pound him, if Jack does not see reason."

A few hours later, their train staggered into the Bletchley Park station. Edmund looked out of the window and easily spotted Colonel Clark's towering figure on the platform. Peter, too, was watching intently and saw when a British Army staff sergeant smartly saluted the Colonel and took his bag.

Peter searched further, looking up and down the platform. "I don't see a staff car, do you?"

"Perhaps they are walking, if it is a short distance, to save petrol," Lucy said. She was not interested in Rat and Crow, but this did not mean she had no skill at it. She turned a page in the battered copy of Through the Looking Glass that had been in the pack Peter had borrowed from the Major. Or was it Asim, as Peter called him? Edmund supposed it depended upon how the man was dressed and introduced himself.

The train lurched forward and everyone had to readjust as Lucy put Alice aside and began rooting through her school bag, though Edmund doubted there was any schoolwork in it, her promises to Peter notwithstanding. She dragged the packing case qua writing table over Eustace's feet, banging Peter's shins in the process and set her writing paper, pencils and her list on top of it. Tongue between her teeth, she bent over and began her work.

"That does not look like your mathematics," Peter observed.

"Of course it isn't," Lucy said offhandedly.

"Or your Latin Primer or Robinson Crusoe."

"Oh, Peter, don't be thick. These are my letters."

Peter looked to him, as Lucy was too intent on her work to explain what she was doing. "As we have been seeing in the papers, Nazis are murdering Polish Jews," Edmund said.

Picking up the hint that Edmund was referring to the story that had unfolded in Susan's letters and the detective work to decipher them, Peter added, "The Daily Telegraph and other English papers are reporting over a million dead." He gestured to Lucy busy writing away. "And?"

"Lucy has been copying the newspaper reports about the murders and writing letters about them to anyone who will listen."

"And writing to a very great many who are not paying it any mind at all," she said severely, underlining the number 1,000,000 in her letter so thickly her pencil broke. Lucy leaned back in her seat, removed a pocketknife from her bag, and began whittling a sharper point.

"To whom have you been writing?" Peter asked, reading her letter upside down.

Lucy gestured to her list of correspondents on the packing case with her knife then continued whistling. Edmund had helped her with it initially, but the list had grown progressively longer over the weeks.

"Prime Minister Churchill, Foreign Secretary Eden, Mister Attlee, Home Secretary Morrison, and Lord Beaverbrook. Also, The Daily Mail, The Times, The Evening Standard, The Manchester Guardian. The papers have been very attentive to it, actually. It's the people who read them who just don't seem to really believe it." She was glowing with enthusiastic purpose and waved her lethal pencil about. "Also, Archbishop Temple. I like him so very much. If Father Donald or the school vicar were more like the Archbishop, I should think them less like toads and respect them a great deal"
more. Oh, and Chief Rabbi Hertz. I have been writing him as well. He and Archbishop Temple have formed a brilliant organization to stop Jewish bigotry."

Eustace nervously cleared his throat and looked around. "A million Jews murdered? It doesn't seem possible. Do you really think it is true?" he murmured.

"Yes," Edmund said bluntly, as Lucy added, "It's horrid," and Peter emphasized with a firm, "Absolutely."

Eustace flushed, but nodded stoutly. "Then, I believe it, too." He looked a little sick.

"Lucy has been sending her money to Archbishop Temple as well," Edmund said.

"Actually, to the Council for Christians and Jews he founded with Chief Rabbi Hertz." She pocketed her knife and checked the sharpness of her pencil with a fingertip. A dirk had a blunter tip than Lucy's pencils. "It's just a few shillings to a splendid organization. I shall give you the address Peter and you shall donate to them as well. I've asked them to form a chapter for students."

Peter picked up Lucy's pile of materials and began sorting through it. From the pile, he removed a book stuffed with marks and notes. "Lucy, is Christianity and the Social Order on your required reading list for the summer?"

"No, of course not, Peter. Don't be ridiculous. Blockhead would never permit such a thing."

"Blockhead?"

"Lucy's name for her Head of School at Marlhurst-Brockstone," Edmund told Peter.

She bent over the packing case and returned to her letter.

"And the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute?" Peter asked, continuing to sift through her stack. There was a pause as he skimmed the table of contents, and then murmured a thoughtful, "I see."

Lucy glanced up from her work which, judging from the misspelt heading, was to the Home Secretary. "I found that one on Harold and Alberta's bookshelf. It was too technical, but I followed most of Professor Russell's discussion of cutting."

"Russell? Which one?" Eustace injected, craning his neck for a look at the journal. "What's the cutting discussion about?"

"Richard wrote it," Peter supplied into their awkward silence that followed. For all that Edmund had joked to Peter about seeing to Eustace's education on the necessary and agreeable company of women, this was something else entirely and not one to be made light of. Certainly a train car on the Varsity Line was the wrong time and place for such a conversation.

"Richard writes about certain traditional, tribal practices in Africa," Peter continued calmly, "and the controversy they pose in the Anti-Colonial movement."

"So it's not about dinosaurs?" Eustace asked.

"No."

"Oh." With a shrug, their cousin returned to the book in his lap.

"You have odd and disparate choices in reading material, Lucy," Peter told his sister, reaching down
and slipping the journal back into her bag.

"It's not odd at all. It's all quite related." She hesitated. "I think. I'm still working it out."

Peter looked to him again. Edmund shrugged. He had not yet focused fully on Lucy's awakening political awareness, but she evidently was formulating some connection between the Archbishop of Canterbury's discussion of the right of the Anglican Church to speak on matters of economic consequence and female circumcision in the Kenya Colony.

"How do you spell murderous?"

"M-u-r-d-e-r-o-u-s," Peter told her, looking again at her upside down correspondence. "Lucy, what word is that supposed to be?"

"Unconscionable."

"Unconscionable does not have an h in it."

"It doesn't?"

"And cease has two e's and one a." Peter eased the letter out from under her bold pencil and studied it more carefully. "Perhaps, Sister, if you turn to spelling you might be a more credible advocate?"

The train gave a lurch and Lucy's letters slid to the floor of the car. There was groping and sliding and finally practicality overcame her enthusiasm, and Lucy packed everything away again.

"If you are not going to read Archbishop Temple's book, I'll just have it back, Peter." They tussled briefly over *Christianity and the Social Order* with Lucy finally winning out.

It was a very interesting book. While Edmund certainly agreed with Archbishop Temple in theory, he thought the calls for social and economic reform were a trifle premature when they were still in a fight for their very existence.

With the luggage getting shoved about to accommodate Lucy's bulging book bag, Edmund had to shift in his seat as Eustace stretched his legs.


There was a big blackish green beetle on the cover and he felt the barely healed scab picked at again. If Peter or Lucy saw the cover, they would certainly see its obvious resemblance to the beetles the Crows had raced. Edmund did not want to endure their sympathetic and knowing looks. She had always insisted that the slow beetles tasted better to the Crows. She probably would have thought the Archbishop of Canterbury completely correct on the argument and utterly naïve in the execution of the solution. They would have argued about it, for the sheer joy of it, and then…

If Eustace turned to a page about ants, Edmund was going to chuck the book out the window. He was thirteen. He could not bear to think of going behind the Wall and appearing before them all, before her, like this. He shouldered away and turned to look out the window, signaling to Peter and Lucy that he wanted to be left alone. The green of Buckinghamshire crawled by the rolling train and it looked nothing like Narrowhaven or even Narnia.

"Peter, do you think we might have time to visit the Oxford Museum?" Eustace asked.

Edmund closed his eyes and tried to shut out the conversation that required a politeness his mood
now did not suit at all. He knew he was ready to be irritable and it was not anyone's fault. He was vexed. It was the seeming constant reminders and the voices he was still hearing from beyond the Wall. It would pass, eventually, and fade as it had before. It would fade sooner if he was not reminded of it.

"Of course," Peter said. "I am sorry you will not be able to see it with Richard, but Aunt Polly knows it well. Some of the specimens are hers. And, if you allow Mary to instruct you on ichthyosaurs or dinosaur hips, we may have to account you among the lost along with Percy Fawcett and the crew of the Mary Celeste."

With appalling enthusiasm, Eustace gushed, "Doctor Anning Russell did a very interesting paper on the morphology of Dinosaurs! She really has built upon the hip differences of the Ornithischia and Saurischia categories of Seeley and her review of the papers on Archaeopteryx as a transitional fossil was ever so insightful."

Neither Lucy nor Peter responded at all, at first. Peter finally said very carefully, and undoubtedly to stop Lucy's laughter, "I believe you and Mary will get on very well, Eustace."

They were blessedly quiet for a little while.

He heard Lucy ask, "Now Peter, when did you pick those up?"

"At the recruiting office, across from the station."

Edmund snapped out of his sullen reverie.

Peter was leafing through War Office recruitment pamphlets. Edmund saw the RAF, Flight Training, Bombers, the Airborne paratroopers, the Infantry, the Tank Corps, and others.

"Have you reconsidered?" Lucy asked.

"I never stopped considering, Lu," Peter replied.

"Even after the summer with the Professor and all your work for University?"

Peter's wincing grimace was so quick, Eustace missed it. Lucy and Edmund did not.

Lucy's brows knit in inquisitive worry.

"Uni may be less attractive than it once was," Peter said slowly. There was no hand signal asking them to desist, but the warning message was plainly there.

Edmund was shocked. Peter had not written much about his studies that summer with Professor Kirke, to be sure, but this sounded very concerning. Unprecedented, even. The road of Peter's bright academic future had been straight, clear, and never uncertain. The bar to enlistment had always been whether Peter, or any of them, would be able to adjust to the lowly status or countenance poor command decisions. They had assumed they posed a risk, to themselves, and to any Allied chain of command and control.

Speaking the thought aloud, Peter said slowly, "After meeting some individuals this summer and hearing of the quality of the command in America, I have wondered if I might find something that suits."

"They cannot all be idiots like Auchinleck," Edmund added. He had not considered the issue in this light before, but surely an Army that included men like the Major and Susan's Sallowpad could
possibly accommodate Peter as well. The issue had always been how to assure Peter landed in the right place.

Lucy leaned forward and took the Infantry leaflet from Peter's hands. "You would not be able to serve under a fool," she said, glancing through the exciting descriptions of travel, training, battle, and glory for God, King, and Country. They always omitted the screaming, stench, blood, and death. "However, you did take orders, from the General, from Sir Leszi, even from me and Edmund at times."

"But they were not foolish orders," Peter said. He was smiling, but Edmund heard no humor. This was deadly serious. The issue was not battlefield risk – they had faced that before and if Aslan called them home, so be it. But, they also bore a solemn duty to not hasten that day with stupidity. They all felt the desire to serve – but not if it ended as a court martial for insubordination.

Lucy handed the brochure back. "As Edmund says, they cannot all be idiots. It is a question of finding the right company and commander for you."

Peter turned the pamphlets over in his hands. The ones about the excitement of crewing Halifax bombers and the manning of the tanks of the Royal Regiment went to the bottom. "Does it seem strange that I would not wish to kill…"

As Peter struggled for the word, Lucy added gently, "remotely?"

He nodded. "Yes, that's the word I was looking for. If you take a life, you should feel it. I would not want it to be a distant thing."

"It might be wise to consider non-combat operations," Edmund reminded him. "Signal Corps, mechanicals and engineering, even intelligence. You would do well in any of those as well."

Peter opened his mouth to protest, then his sense caught up with him. "In a non-combat capacity, I would be more removed from battlefield command decisions."

Another alternative for Peter might be a position that demanded autonomy and encouraged independent thinking. Edmund did not know if it was possible to enlist and be assigned into the Special Service Brigade as a Commando. Still, that was worth investigating as well.

"You do have good resources available to you," Edmund said. He wondered if Susan had already raised Peter's possible service with her contacts in America. He would stay out of that one. Peter would value Susan's opinions, but would take very ill to her sometimes presumptuous meddling.

Peter nodded. "I had thought I might pursue one of those resources when we are in Oxford."

It was another two hours before they rolled into Oxford, and they were all so bored as to be almost waspish. In her eagerness to see Aunt Polly and the Professor, Lucy nearly climbed out the window. She flew out of the train and into their arms. Edmund found he was only a few steps behind and let himself be drawn into the warm embraces of these elder Friends of Narnia. Only now, with Narnia closed to him did Edmund fully appreciate how extraordinary Polly and Professor Kirke were. He felt a surge of gratitude and hugged Polly again as she was closest and Lucy had her arms thrown around the Professor's neck. Polly's spaniel, Simon, stationed at her heels, pushed Edmund's leg with his eager nose.

*If I do a fraction of what they have accomplished in this world, Aslan would be well pleased.*

Edmund felt a warm, fragrant breath and looked about. Lucy's radiant smile told him that it was not his imagination.
Thank you, Aslan. Thank you for giving me such wonderful people to emulate. If I follow their example, it will be well.

Behind him, Edmund heard the throat clearing of his MRF-ness.

"Sorry, Peter," Edmund said. He had not meant to leave his brother with the baggage – suitcases, pack, and Eustace.

"Professor Kirke, Miss Plummer, if I may?"

If they had not been on a train platform, Edmund thought Aunt Polly would have dropped to a curtsy right then and there.

"Of course." Even the Professor stumbled for, at a moment such as this, Peter was High King, their High King, for all of them.

Peter stepped to the side and gestured a reluctant, foot dragging Eustace forward. "I would like to make known to you a new Friend of Narnia, our cousin, Eustace Scrubb, who is undragoned by Aslan's Grace."

Eustace stumbled into the welcoming arms, all slights and transgressions forgiven.

"Are you sure you don't want to go to the Museum with them?" Peter asked as they climbed the steps to the Radcliffe Hospital.

"Quite sure," Edmund replied, pretending greater disinterest than he actually felt. He very much wished to see the Professor and Aunt Polly, but not if it meant hearing Eustace go on about beetles in glass cases. "Besides, we have many meetings to accomplish. You want to see Professor Russell and need to speak to Asim, and I should like to speak to Asim and meet Professor Russell, and so shall move this all along, if I can."

Peter blew out a breath. "Thank you. That had all occurred to me, but I did not want to impose upon you."

"You are welcome, but I will always have your back, Peter, even if you have let Asim replace me as your logistics man."

"Never, Brother!" Peter emphasized the point with slap to the shoulders so hard Edmund nearly pitched over the railing into the holly bushes.

Reception confirmed that Professor Richard Russell was still in the room 23. The orderly made the pronouncement with all the gloom that greeted air raid sirens.

On the second floor, they had to run the gauntlet through the Nurses' Station. It was Narnia all over again. There was no way they were going to sneak by without proper courtesies. A Nurse Hawkins was most attentive. To Peter.

"Oh, Mr. Pevensie, how lovely to see you again! Professor Russell has been asking for you."

"Asking?" Peter repeated.

She smiled, all dimples and ringlets of blonde hair framing her pretty face, and took a step closer, blocking Peter's way down the hall to room 23. Seeing how this was going to unfold, Edmund performed the Good Brother Manoeuvre and wandered back a few paces, pretending to intently
study a lifeless watercolor landscape on the corridor wall. He did not want to interfere, for he would be able to rib Peter about it until his brother pummeled him senseless. Not that it was a particular hardship for Peter other than the obvious. Nurse Hawkins had a nicely curved, trim figure that her uniform showed off to brilliant advantage. She did not giggle.

"Well, Professor Russell can be a trifle demanding," she admitted. If she twirled her hair with a finger, Edmund was not certain he would be able to contain himself. Ah, no, not twirling, just one of those impudent head tosses. So, Nurse Hawkins was an independent sort.

Peter laughed and… oh yes, he was leaning against the wall now. Immovable object (Peter) meets irresistible force (Nurse Hawkins).

"I think we can agree that Professor Russell is a brilliant man and a terrible patient. I admire him very much, but would not wish to be his nurse."

"There are compensations, Mr. Pevensie."

She had made her offer and if Peter missed the appropriate response, Edmund would have to provide remedial tutoring. She would be batting her eyes, widening her smile, and sidling up just a bit closer into the crook of Peter's arm.

Edmund mouthed the words silently as Peter responded, "And what compensations might those be, Nurse Hawkins?"

"Why, the company who come to visit Professor Russell, of course!"

Peter laughed again and Edmund wondered where the custodial closet was. He would need a mop and bucket to sponge up the limp carcass of the smitten Nurse Hawkins.

"Is there anyone with him now?"

"Mrs. Russell was here earlier, but she left and that Arab man came."

This was Edmund's cue.

"Oh, I say, Peter! Shouldn't we be going then!" Edmund pitched his voice higher and younger. "I so wanted to meet Mr. bin Kalil."

Peter managed to neither grimace nor laugh at his prevarications. His brother did the quick fake in one direction and then duck to the other side that had foiled the pursuit of ladies from all the Known Lands.

"Thank you, Nurse Hawkins. I hope to see you again."

She swatted him playfully with her clipboard. "I'm here at the same time as always, Mr. Pevensie, Sunday through Friday, and …"

"Yes?" Peter prompted, all charming good manners. Goodness, his brother still performed this role beautifully.

"I'm off at 4 o'clock."

With that smart reply, she tucked the clipboard under her arm and sashayed away down the corridor.

"Nice legs," Edmund murmured watching Nurse Hawkins' retreating backside. She was certainly swaying her hips for Peter's benefit, so he saw no reason to not appreciate the view she was going to
such effort to provide. "But a little short for your tastes, I think."

"Sixteen, remember?" Peter said with a grumble. The age differential did not stop him from looking. She knew it too, for she tossed Peter a saucy look and a wink before turning a corner. "School boy?"

"Nurse Hawkins seems to have no objection."

"I would not even know how to make a proper overture to a woman without you first negotiating a thirty page contract covering a simple drink at a pub."

Now it was Edmund's turn for the guffaw and chest clearing slap to Peter's shoulder blades. "I knew the day would come when you would see I had the right of it! She is a nurse so I would not even offend her purported virtue with impertinent questions! Great Scott! I could use a typewriter! But, how shall we ever manage precautionary measures without consulting a Hound!"

Peter shot him a venomous look and stalked down the corridor to knock on the door of room 23. A voice bellowed from inside, "If you are in the healthcare profession, go to hell!"

"Then I may come in?" Peter asked, pushing open the door.

For a sick man, Richard Russell did not seem to be dying just yet. He looked so peevishly irritable, Edmund was reminded of Sir Leszi laid up – furious, more than pained.

"Peter! Finally! A sane person who is not going to mollycoddle me to an even earlier grave."

Professor Russell snarled from his hospital bed. "That had better not be the nurse skulking behind you. I'll throw a bed pan at her."

To the man sitting quietly in the chair next to the bed, Peter said, "Hello, Asim. It's good to see you again." He spoke so easily, Edmund knew his brother had been reviewing how precisely to proceed with this awkward beginning.

"And you as well, Peter. Digory said we should expect you today."

"As for Nurse Hawkins, Richard, you are quite safe from her for the moment."

"But you are not, which means I'm not so long as you're here. And don't say another word about her, or I'll need an aspirin." Dr. Russell craned his neck and Edmund emerged from behind Peter's obscuring bulk.

"Richard, Asim, this is my brother, Edmund."

Even knowing that Asim was in the room, he was still not fully prepared for just how different this man was from the Major in the Cambridge pub – bearded and glowering, belted knife, long robes. He was an unnervingly dangerous figure and Edmund found his hand automatically moving for the sword that was not strapped to his back. Asim was of a type Edmund instinctively recognized, just as Peter had when they had first met. Edmund found he was automatically sizing up the man and examining what might be used offensively and defensively in the room. He fervently wished for something more than his pocketknife.

Asim saw him as clearly and did Edmund the courtesy of not provoking his instinctive unease further. He rose slowly from his seat, carefully keeping his hands loose, open, and at his sides, palms out. "It is very good to meet you, Edmund."

Edmund stepped forward to shake Asim and Richard's hands. "It's a pleasure, Professor Russell, Mr. bin Kalil. Peter has spoken of you often." Richard's hand was shaky and clammy; Asim's was firm
and cool.

"There are too damn many of you for last names, Edward."

Edmund did as Peter and Asim and ignored Richard's error.

"Very well, Richard," Edmund replied with a nod.

"Is all well with your family?" Asim asked. "We have of course been concerned."

"Yes, fine," Peter responded. "Thank you for asking. There was a family matter that has resolved itself. Which reminds me, Asim." Peter shrugged off the pack. "Thank you also for seeing to my provisioning. I was able to replace the candle and matches. Lucy could not find any nuts to replace what she ate, and so has substituted a sugar ration and a note of apology."

"Thank you, Peter. I would say not to worry about the provisions as they are meant to be consumed, but Lee will make good use of an additional ration." He looked passed them, toward the door. "Is Lucy with you?"

"She and our cousin, Eustace, have gone with Polly and Professor Kirke to the Museum. We are staying with the Professor for a day or two, and then it is back to Cambridge."

"Edmund!" Richard suddenly barked. "Where's your cricket bat?"

Edmund looked to Peter and Asim, but neither seemed any wiser than he. This did seem more intentional jesting than forgetful belligerence.

"Cricket bat, Sir?"

"Or do you use a farmer's cudgel? Bag of bricks? Hammer?"

"I might use any or all of them, at need. For what purpose, Richard?"

"The blunt force you apply to your brother's thick skull. What's your weapon of choice?"

So Richard had experienced some of Peter's obstinacy first hand? Edmund wondered what the context was for Peter had never intimated that there had been any conflict at all between them. This was, like Peter's apparent uncertainty regarding University, yet one more thing his brother had omitted from his letters.

To Richard, Edmund said, "I prefer a mace for close-in application of force. A quarterstaff is my weapon of choice for longer range whacking."

"Medieval savagery then? You and Asim should get on quite well. Asim, take Edmund somewhere and teach him how to kill things with his bare hands. I want to talk to Peter."

Richard did not know and so could not appreciate the humour that there was probably very little that Asim could teach him of killing with his bare hands. From the grim, knowing smile, Edmund saw that Asim had drawn the same conclusion. There was no denying it; civility simply made it necessary to politely pretend otherwise. There was a tacit code of silence on the subject between them and that was enough. Edmund never turned his back on the man though – not without something in his possession sharper even than his wits.

Edmund had wanted to come to know this man all summer. Now, with the opportunity finally presenting itself, he felt oddly tongue-tied. Usually Edmund did not wish to discuss Peter with others...
whom he wished to converse with himself – as Lucy would say, as a subject of conversation, her brothers were duller than toast. Edmund excepted himself from that conclusion; Lucy did not. Moreover, what so very much needed to be said between Asim and Peter was for them alone. Yet, though he showed it no more than Peter was, surely Asim must be feeling some anxiety and Edmund should do what he could to alleviate it.

By further unspoken accord, they left the hospital to go out of doors and spoke only of the obvious common ground between new acquaintances, delays on the trains and coupon ration booklets.

He followed Asim onto the hospital's encircling grounds. "That is Richard's window," Asim said, threading his way through a stand of oak trees and pointing upwards. "If we circle the building, we will know when Peter issues his SOS."

It was up to him to begin. "So, Richard wishes for me to use his first name. I find, however, that titles and names, like beginnings, can be very deceptive things." Edmund chose to deliberately echo their as yet unacknowledged conversation of barely two weeks ago.

"They can be cumbersome as well," Asim replied, picking up the nuanced thread immediately.

"And when there are many names and titles, it can be difficult to know which to choose. So, I shall await your prompting."

"I am, as you see me, Asim bin Kalil, currently of Oxfordshire." He held out his hands and the robes flowed from his arms.

Edmund nodded. "Very well." They turned a corner and rambled into the hospital garden. The blooms were beginning to fade, browns and yellows replacing the green. The winter storms would rise up in another month and lock the ships into Narrowhaven. Edmund pushed the intruding, irrelevant thoughts away, irritated with the lapse.

"I will risk overstepping my bounds to say that Peter harbours no resentment. He does not like the situation, but he understands it. It is in his nature to openly acknowledge such things, however, and so he will certainly wish to discuss it with you."

Asim stopped walking and so Edmund did. He clasped his hands behind his back and stared ahead at the garden's winding path of crushed stone and moss. "Edmund, I must claim ignorance even of what you might be referring to."

He was disappointed, but thought this might be the way of it. "I do not expect you to respond," Edmund told him. He wanted to say that he understood, but that was revealing far too much. "And having now said my piece in the hope of easing the way between the two of you, I will happily move on to easier subjects. I very much wish to learn more about your faith, if you would share. I pestered Peter with questions all summer, but he has proven to be an incomplete correspondent in this regard."

They were deep into a discussion of the Five Pillars of Islam when Asim stopped suddenly and in mid-sentence, stated, "Thank you, Edmund, both for your information about Peter and for your understanding. I have been perturbed and you have eased my spirit." He then continued on as if there had been no interruption and continued an explanation of the historical development of the Holy Qur'an.

Edmund did not ask him to elaborate, for he knew already. It was up to Peter now.

They were comparing how angels and messengers were presented in Islam and Christianity when
they passed beneath Richard's window and Peter stuck his head out.

"Richard and I are almost done."

"I am not taking a bloody nap!" billowed from the open window. "Get out of my room you god damned leech!"

Peter's grimace was tolerantly good-natured. "I shall come down and join you soon." The And then, Asim, you and I shall have a conversation was implied.

Asim nodded his understanding to Peter and his brother pulled his head back into the room and disappeared from view.

They sat under the colouring oak tree on the dry, prickly grass and Richard's curses faded.

Edmund finally spoke, for the first time, of the idea that had been stewing most of the summer. Here now, was the opportunity. "Asim, a favor if I may?"

"You may ask, of course. Whether I may grant it depends upon the request."

It was the sort of response Edmund would have given, and had given, in the past.

"I would like to speak to the Major about the service. Might we arrange that?"

"If your brother wishes to pursue such things, it will be for him to raise it, Edmund."

"I did not mean Peter. I am pursuing German and Russian when I return to school. I am interested in how those skills and others might have applicability in the Major's line of work and what I might do to prepare for it. I would appreciate his advice, possibly even sponsorship, when the time comes."

"I should hope the War would be over before you would eligible to serve," Asim replied gravely.

"But, what of after the war? If we lose, the age for enlistment is irrelevant. If we prevail, the Great Game never really ends. Only the rules and players change. With his long experience, I thought the Major might have insight into this."

Edmund had noticed before, when he had met the Major, how very difficult he was to read. The man, in whatever guise, had extraordinary self-control and communicated precisely what he wished to and nothing more. Peter had said he was a bit like the elder Centaur mages who had been so gravely obscure. Edmund thought him more like Lambert, Susan's Wolf Guard, who had trained himself to not even put a hair out of place unless he intended to do so. Wolf and Man shared the same lethal qualities, competence, and serious manner.

Asim (for that was who he was at the moment) templed his fingers and shifted his position on the grass. His face was polite and interested. They might have been, again, discussing train schedules and ration books.

"You are at Blackpool School? Near Reading?"

Edmund managed to quell his (admittedly boyish) excitement and mirror the same polite expression that Asim bore. "I am."

And that was all that needed to be said and it was time to move on. Edmund leaned against the oak tree. "I have not yet read the papers today. Has there been any further reporting on Dieppe?"
Phew. And so it begins with a dense chapter, a new character, and many references to the past and what is to come in the future. Links to the research and footnotes are in my Live Journal, tag AW.

A special thank you to Snacky, Autumnia, Min, Intrikate, Miniver and the rest who have been so supportive during this difficult time as I struggled with whether to continue the tale.
Chapter Summary

In which Peter is student, teacher, friend, mentor, mentee, soulmate, and father.

Apostolic Way, Chapter 2
Learning Curve

Be an opener of doors for such as come after thee.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Once they have located an animal that has strayed some distance from the group, the cheetah tries to get within 45 metres of the intended victim before accelerating. Full sprints last roughly twenty seconds and rarely exceed one minute. Most hunts fail. If the hunt is successful, the prey is usually knocked down by the force of the cheetah's charge and then seized by its throat and strangled. Smaller prey such as rabbits are usually killed by biting through the skull.
From Animal Diversity Web entry for *Acinonyx jubatus*

I promise to never cause you harm and to protect you from all ill and danger.
I give you loyalty with love, respect with fealty, and discretion with honour.
I place my body, mind and heart in service to you.
I swear this Guard's Oath before Aslan and in His Name, until you release me, until death takes you, or the world ends.
-Guard's Oath Sworn To Narnian Monarchs

The metal clang was surely the sound of a thrown bed pan banging into a wall. "I will nap when I'm tired, you harridan! Get the hell out of my room!"

The nurse (but not Nurse Hawkins) bit out a venomous curse of her own. "You keep behaving like a child, Professor Russell, and I will sedate you!"

Peter waved to Edmund and Asim outside, pulled his head back into the room, and turned about from the window. "Nurse, I assure you that Professor Russell will quietly rest." He paused, catching her eye and demanding her full attention. "But, Professor Russell and I have already delayed our planned discussion almost a week and we will not be put off now. He will rest when I leave and not before." Crossing the room, Peter held the door open and beckoned for her to depart.

"How long?" she spit, backing toward the door.

"As long as it takes," Peter told her firmly and shut the door on her before she could voice another objection.

"Bitch!" Richard fumed.

Peter shook his head, admonishing. "Some of the finest souls I have ever known were Bitches so I will neither hear ill of them, nor permit you to classify those noble Canines in the same breath with
With a satisfied grunt, Richard settled against his pillow and opened up his notebook.

"Yes, the Bitches. There was a Wolf, wasn't there?"

Peter sat back down in the chair. "She was one of them, yes. Also, there were several Hounds I was especially very fond of." Even now, Peter could not think of Jina, Lady Hound, without pain at the manner of her passing. They had been blessed to know her and only the gruesomeness of her painful death by snake bite had marred her great life.

"Yet, you self identify as a cat person?"

"I spent nearly every waking moment with Cheetahs," Peter said. And every sleeping moment as well. For how long? Fifteen years? Time was different in Narnia. It all felt so much longer. He had realized that gestation and incubation periods, which surely would be the same for the Beasts here and in Narnia, were measured in shorter time periods in Narnia. Here, a dog's gestation was 63 days; in Narnia, it measured at least one-third less of that time.

Richard’s face softened as he looked over his book, turning the pages with a shaking hand. "Cheetahs. You are astonishingly knowledgeable about those peculiar cats. Do the females really have offspring in the same litter from more than one sire?"

"Oh yes, and it was very confounding, I assure you. The mother had expected to see both sires present in the cubs, just as she was. It did not work that way at all." Poor Dalia. She had wanted both Zuberi's cunning and Fahd's speed in her children, but there had been no such apportionment between Fooh and Beehn.

"That's very calculating mating behavior," Richard mused. "Truly Darwinian decision making. We assume that females are not arbitrary in their choices and here is your confirmation." Richard sighed ruefully. "There should be ways to test this other than your testimony."

"Other than asking the Cat herself, you mean?"

"I told you not to talk like that!" Richard tried to write something in his notebook but his hand was shaking. He closed the book with a grimace and tossed the pencil on his bedside table. "Would you tell me about them?"

"I thought you wanted to hear about Owls."

"Oh, I do. Your description of their feather adaptations and hearing are fascinating. They have evolved into the perfect nocturnal stealth killing machine. But, I am in a mood to learn more of cats. That cheetah mother and her young will do."

Peter never tired of speaking of his Cheetahs. "They are elegant, beautiful animals, and unique among Great Cats."

"Acinonyx jubatus is so unique, it may not be classified among the Great Cats of Panthera at all," Richard said. "I imagine you take exception to that?"

"Vehemently. My brother's lover attempted that argument, and…"

"Stop it!" Richard bellowed, lobbing a pillow in his direction with more vehemence than Peter expected.
"What?" Peter asked, baffled and catching the pillow.

"Your brother was just here! He is twelve!"

"Thirteen, actually."

Richard waved his hands in a warding gesture. "He is too young to be so knowledgeable of the greater mysteries of the agreeable and necessary comfort of women and I don't want to hear of it!"

So, neither Richard nor Edmund wished to hear of Morgan, though his brother had undoubtedly heard Morgan from behind the Wall at the World's End. Peter had seen Edmund's reaction to Eustace's book on the train. This unpredictable sullenness was going to persist until Edmund buried it all, again.

Richard scowled as his back contacted the headboard. Peter rose and returned the pillow, tucking it around Richard again. He clutched the book to his chest and his face was gray with exhaustion.

"Would you like to hear more, Richard?" Peter asked softly. "Or should I leave?"

"Don't go. I am tired, that Witch notwithstanding." Richard spoke so quietly, Peter had to lean forward to hear him. "But, soon, you'll be off to school and War and when I see you again, I may not remember who you are."

Peter clasped Richard's quivering hand. "I think you'll remember longer than you expect. I shall come and see you on holidays, while I can."

"You sound like Mary. She'll realize the truth when I forget her and still remember Kirke and Polly."

Richard pulled his hands away and brushed his leaking eyes with his sleeve. He was too exhausted for the irritability that would have usually accompanied the gesture. "You and everything you've told me will be among the first things to go." He fell back into his pillows with a sigh. "Which makes you as calculating as that cheetah mother, in a way. Did you learn the skill from her?"

"Yes, in part," Peter replied taking his seat again. "And from a Gryphon as well. But you don't want to hear about flying lions, with the eyesight of eagles, and the cunning of both, do you?"

Richard shook his head. "Then I would have to lie to Mary even more than I do already. I don't feel guilty, exactly, you understand, but I would respect her more if she acted less like a child."

Peter did not understand any of this, but said nothing. It was not his business.

Richard closed his eyes. "Tell me about your cheetahs until I fall asleep, would you Peter?"

"I am uncomfortable permitting this with so little Guard, High King."

"You have made that discomfort very clear, General. Nevertheless, I am going, and without a full complement."

"I shall just be off then!" Lucy called, turning her horse about.

"Queen Lucy! We are not through yet, either!"

Lucy halted her mare and turned around in her saddle. "Yes, General, we are."

Peter winced though it was Briony, Lucy's She-Wolf Guard, who spoke up.
"With all respect, General, my Queen is in the company of more than normally make up a fighting unit. She is well-protected."

Lucy was indeed accompanied by fifteen Fauns, Satyrs and Dryads who normally dwelt at Cair Paravel but who claimed the Western Wood as their home. They were all traveling there together for the ten-day Woodend Festival.

And that was the rub. With the discovery of the Mole spies and the suicide of the instigating traitor, Mr. Noll, the General was especially distrustful of the Fauns. They would not let the General judge an entire race on the basis of one, or even a few, for they had learned that lesson after Jadis. Still, the General did not like seeing her Queen off with Fauns, even if she was not permitted to say why. But this was both what Lucy wished to do and a necessary show of the Monarchs' support and love of their loyal Fauns during a shameful episode.

"I am ordering a Wing to overfly you," the General snapped and her chestnut wings fluffed upon her back. She scraped the ground impatiently with a sharp lion claw, making a long dark scar on their leafy trail.

"Fine," Lucy said. She had acceded to the condition so readily, she had obviously worked out her strategy with Briony in advance. "If the Gryphons wish to join our party, they are welcome, of course."

Peter bit back his laughter and did not think Lucy had winked at him. The prospect of a somber Gryphon joining in the revelry of the Woodend Festival was deeply amusing. From the murmurs of Lucy's eager assembled group, they also saw the humour.

The General lashed her tail and nearly knocked an impudently grinning Satyr off his hooves.

"If we do not leave now, I shall be late in meeting Sir Leszi," Lucy said, implicitly adding to her argument of adequate protection. "I do not wish to keep our Sword Master waiting, General."

If the General muttered something about Leszi already being drunk on Lightning and Dryads, Peter did not hear her.

"Aslan speed you, Sister!" Peter called as she and her merry (but still very lethal and protective) company moved out. "If hope you find the lord Bacchus!"

Lucy waved a gloved hand in farewell. "Brother, sometimes you are so literal. I do not need to see the wine god to know he is there!"

With the swish of Trees and the clip of hooves, they moved out of the clearing. Peter soothed Herc's impatience with a pat to the neck. With Lucy and the others off, the stallion was fretful and anxious to go as well. Herc had been very attentive to Lucy's light mare, Fina; they would have to ask one of the Hounds if Fina was going into season soon, or it could be only that the sociable stallion did not like being parted from his stablemate.

Now it was Peter's turn to revisit, again, the terms of his departure. "General, as discussed, I have no objection to overflights or protective surveillance. But, I shall be in the company of Dalia and her sons, alone."

Dalia had been sitting impassively through the whole exchange, save for an occasional flick of her tail. If the General continued raising such a fuss, she was impugning Dalia's competence, which was so absurd as to be rude. To their credit (and hers), Dalia's cubs, Fooh and Beehn, were managing to appear more attentive to the General than they actually were. Dalia severely warned them that if they
failed to impress the General, the High King would have to take a larger guard, thereby defeating the whole purpose of the excursion. The cubs desperately wished to hunt wild, dumb game, and not the penned herds kept near the Palace for that purpose. If they traveled with a large company, the deer, goats, and boar would scatter.

"So little guard is not befitting your dignity, High King," the General said, snapping her beak again.

"Undoubtedly," Peter told his very status-conscious General. "So it is a very good thing that I am so little concerned with my own dignity that I am well able to protect it on my own. Look for us in a day or three."

She was his Commander, but he was her King and in this, his word ruled. There was a disapproving rumble from deep within her Lion chest but, finally, she bowed her head.

Peter saluted the General in return, fist over heart, the salute of the Order of the Lion. He gave Herc his head and Dalia nodded to Fooh and Beehn. At that signal, the squirming cubs scampered off and the stallion eagerly followed after them.

"Don't you dare," he warned Dalia as they trotted away from the General's solicitous oversight. Dalia did a devastating mimic of the General's mannerisms and now was not the time to display it.

"I am sure I do not know what you mean, Peter," Dalia replied, quietly prim. "The way you carry on can be so unseemly."

Peter laughed, as anxious as his horse to be away and on the road with none but his favorite company at his side and blue sky overhead.

Lucy had gone West. Peter set out North, toward the lush grasslands that would eventually rise into purple hills and finally into the jagged rocks and rough terrain that ringed Ettinsmoor. There had been woods here once, trees and Dryads both. The Witch had felled them, either as spies or to fuel her industry.

With the end of the 100 years of winter, grazing animals that had eked out an existence on the Northern moors moved down to the milder climate and richer grasses of Narnia. Varieties of wild deer and boar, rabbits, pikas, feral horses and others all grazed here now, and as they had moved South, so too had the creatures that fed on them.

The Ettins, unfortunately, had followed their food. The Rats and Crows had reported no activity in the North to speak of and that the way was clear. Still, the overflight of the Gryphons was sensible. If they espied a loitering Giant on their lands, the Wing would alert him with plenty of warning then raise the alarm at Cair Paravel. Peter would fall back and wait for the Army to join him to deal with the incursion.

Wild deer were very stupid. Peter watched from the cover of a downwind copse as the Cheetahs stalked the herd. Fooh and Beehn had argued in heated whispers for a very, very long time as they selected their prey. The tedious discussion had Dalia quivering with impatience, but Peter stayed her interference. He had seen Leszi and the General train up many soldiers, himself included, and this was the opportunity for the young and the green to work things out, make the decisions, and learn from their mistakes.

Their first error had been to target a large, battle-scarred buck, on the theory that since there were two of them, there would be more to eat. If the Cheetahs had been bigger and more experienced, it might have worked, though really, they were better off with smaller, weaker, less risky game. The buck
shook his many pronged antlers, lowered his head, snorted, and marched forward. Fooh wisely turned tail.

The second time, Beehn underestimated the distance and overestimated his speed and the prey bounded away before Fooh could cut off the doe's escape. They had to wait then for Beehn to recover his wind.

"He's still too far away, Peter!" Dalia griped as they saw Beehn slowly creep out of the concealing tall grasses.

Dalia was finding it very hard to sit it out as she crouched next to him in the predator's stance. Her head was down, her whiskers and ears swiveled forward, and her eyes were intent on the herd. She very much wanted to join their hunt. Her eyes were focused on the same deer Beehn had targeted – a limping yearling.

"Peace, Friend. Let him learn."

Dalia growled.

Peter could not see Fooh, but Dalia and Beehn both knew where he was. The brothers had decided that Beehn would run down the deer, and then Fooh would move in for the strangling kill.

The deer bolted as Beehn shot out like a quarrel from a crossbow, covering the ground in leaps many times greater than his body length. The herd scattered. Beehn stayed on the terrified yearling, now darting back and forth in a desperate race.

Dalia was right; surely the distance was too great. But, with a burst of speed, Beehn flattened out, hurtled himself at the terrified deer, and tripped it from behind. Prey and predator tumbled end over end and landed in an explosion of grass and dirt. In a golden flash, Fooh flew out from his cover, threw himself on top of the deer, and bit into its throat. The deer thrashed, but Fooh's grip was sure and it was a clean kill.

Dalia could not stay still any longer and she trotted out to meet to her sons, chirping anxiously. Peter jogged behind. She broke into a run just as Peter, taking in the scene, realized that Beehn had not risen, and was still lying where he had fallen.

"Mummy!" Fooh called, looking up from his prey and sounding panicked. His mouth was bloodied. He rose and started moving toward his stricken brother, chirping his distress.

"Stay with your kill, or you'll lose it!" Dalia snarled at her son.

Dalia was gently nosing Beehn when Peter finally caught up to them, winded himself. Beehn was lying on his side, eyes half-closed, moaning and panting, his nose dangerously reddened. Peter knelt down and quickly dribbled water from his skin over the Cheetah's face and into his lolling mouth.

"He's overheated," Dalia mewed, terse with worry. To Fooh, hanging back and not really guarding his kill, she called, "He'll be fine, Fooh! Keep those vultures away!"

Already there were circling birds. Others would surely follow a fresh kill – the smaller and larger meat eaters and the scavengers.

Peter put his hand over Beehn's side. His heart rate was slowing, fortunately. The Physician had told him Cheetahs could die from the exertion of the chase – their overlarge hearts would burst. He splashed more water over Beehn.
"Mummy?" Beehn gasped.

"I'm here, son."

Beehn pulled his head up and shook it, flicking water away. His eyes were still glassy and his nostrils red rimmed, but his breathing had quieted.

"Did we get it? Did we?"

Peter did not bother with a fire. The night was warm and lying next to Dalia was warmer still. Hard ground or sumptuous bed made no difference. After so many years on the road together, Peter had difficulty sleeping anywhere unless she was next to him – her soft fur against his skin and the weight of her tail across his legs, the sounds of her soft purrs, and the spicy, warm scent that was uniquely hers.

Lying on his back, staring up at the brilliantly starry sky, he could see the shape of the Gryphon circling silently over head, gliding with powerful strokes, rising and falling on the thermals. From the shape and size of the wings, it was the General herself.

He knew it was coming. This was the last step and why he and Dalia had not wanted anyone else along. He could hear Fooh and Beehn still licking themselves clean.

"You did not eat, Dalia."

"And you had naught but one of Cook's ration biscuits and water, Peter."

"I was not hungry," Peter told her.

"Neither was I." Dalia leaned closer and her whiskers tickled his ear, "Besides, I wish for Fooh and Beehn to enjoy their first kill."

"I heard that," Fooh said, coming over to join them. Beehn was still carefully cleaning his front paw. Peter was learning that Beehn, save for enthusiastically gnawing ox bones, was more fastidious than his brother, more careful in his grooming and ate more delicately and slowly.

Peter unwrapped himself from Dalia's tail and sat up against the rock. "And did you enjoy it?"

"Yes." Fooh licked his muzzle and his fur was sticking every which way. He smelled of blood, but that was simply the odor of Great Cats. While Peter did not especially relish it, neither was it concerning to him after so long

"Mummy?"

Dalia growled. In the heat of the afternoon's stress, she permitted the liberty, but not now. Fooh quickly corrected himself. "Dalia, I thought wild caught tasted better than what we get in the Yard or from the pastures. Is that true?"

"It tastes better because you had to earn it; it is the reward for a job well done."

"It's hard work!" Beehn exclaimed, dragging himself over to join them and flopping down again. "But really worth it!"

"You both did very well," Peter told them. "I'm very proud of you."

"Thank you, High King," Fooh replied promptly. With a reminding nudge from his brother, Beehn
added, "Thank you, High King. Except…"

Beehn did not finish his sentence but looked to his brother. Peter had noticed this – the two brothers communicated very well silently.

"You say you're proud of us, but you seem sad, High King," Fooh said, finishing for his brother. "That's what Beehn senses. I do too."

Dalia growled low and Peter put a hand on her back to quiet her.

"I am proud and sad, both," Peter said. "I'm proud at how well you are growing, but sad because it means you will not be cubs anymore who will chew on my sleeves."

"If it would make you happier, High King, we could still chew on you," Beehn offered.

"Dalia?" Peter prompted, for surely it was time for her to speak of what was to come.

She flicked her tail irritably. Why was she delaying the inevitable? Dalia had not changed her mind and putting off the day he released her from her Oath as she had requested only made it more difficult for both of them.

"The High King is sad because soon I will not be his Guard anymore."

Both Fooh and Beehn snarled fiercely.

"Why?" Fooh demanded.

"You have to have Cheetahs!" Beehn whinged.

"I must indeed have a Cheetah Guard," Peter said, answering the second and ignoring the first question for Dalia's sake – her decision was her own and, as much as it pained him, he respected her right to make it. "The High King of Narnia cannot be without one."

"Oh!" Fooh exclaimed and his ears flattened in shock. In the dark, his yellow eyes dilated hugely and he lashed his tail with excitement.

"What?" Beehn asked, turning to his brother. "Why are you surprised?"

Fooh swatted Beehn on the side of the head. "Because if Mum… if Dalia is no longer the High King's Guard, he means to ask one of us!" And a moment later there were never two more dejected Cats in all of Aslan's Creation. Their whiskers drooped, their heads and tails fell, and the hair rose on their backs.

"Only one?" Beehn asked in a very small voice. "You'd want Fooh because he's smarter."

Fooh swatted Beehn again. "He'd want you because you're faster. And, we'll be separated, too." If Great Cats could weep, Fooh would be, for his voice was very sad and miserable.

"I could not possibly choose between two such fine cubs," Peter told them. "If you will, I would ask you both to serve together as Guard. Then you might always be together and me with you both."

The joyous, rough and tumble, fur flying, pell-mell was most certainly not befitting the dignity of the High King.

Dalia finally called off the cubs when someone's semi-retractable claw caught on Peter's sleeve and there was the sound of Mrs. Furner's spun cloth tearing.
The cubs collapsed on the ground, heaving, but this time from their happy exertion. Peter absently dusted off the hair. He had lived in close quarters with Cheetahs for more than seven years and, as with the smell of blood after feeding, he had become very accustomed to hair in his nose, ears, mouth, and on every article of clothing and the ever present click, click of claws.

Between gasps, Fooh asked, "Now? Do we take the Oath now?"

Dalia lashed her tail in disapproval and Peter again drew her closer to him. She wished to leave him, but was not ready to see someone else in her place. "No, not yet. You must learn to Guard from Dalia and grow a little older. And you must think very hard on whether you wish the hard life of a Guard."

"That'll show those pups and cubs in the Yard," Beehn muttered.

"Sure will," Fooh drawled, sounding very smug.

"What is this?" Dalia asked, thwacking Peter across the back when she lashed her tail.

"Just mean talk," Fooh said, flattening his ears again. "Some of the cubs say we aren't proper Cats and are more like dogs."

Beehn growled.

"And then the Dogs get mad because they say we aren't dogs either…"

"And who want to be? And then…"

"And Nebi goes flashing her teeth and says we don't have proper teeth at all!"

Fooh snarled, showing off his own teeth.

"And then there's a fight," Beehn finished.

"Nebi?" Peter asked, feeling very naïve that he had not known of swaggering and boasting amongst the children of Narnia.

"One of Isoba's cubs," Dalia said.

"And Jalur is her father and she goes on and on…"

"and on and on and on," Beehn growled, again interrupting Fooh.

"About how she's going to be a Guard someday just like her sire, now that Jalur is King Edmund's Guard. She just goes all us Lions over it."

_Going all us Lions_ was an expression that dated from when Aslan first breathed the statues back to life at the Witch's castle and the unfortunate Lion who had presumed too much. Peter had never been sure who had been responsible for the expression, but he suspected the General had something to do with its dissemination as she had been there.

"I want to bite Nebi's tail off," Beehn said.

"I'll help," Fooh agreed.

"Ahh," Dalia replied. "And so Nebi and the others tell you that your head is too small, your teeth too short, your back, legs, and tail too long, and that you have claws like a dog?"
Beehn growled again, lashing his tail so hard on the ground he stirred up dust. "And they call us Dwarf Baby because it looks like we're crying."

"How did you know, Mummy?" Fooh said plaintively. "Have you heard them say those mean things? Doesn't it make you mad that they are teasing us?"

It certainly made Peter mad – very angry indeed. He should Go All Royal We on the taunting cubs and pups and put a stop to the mockery. Maybe assigning some of them to a few days drilling with Sir Leszi would knock some respect into the squirts. They deigned to criticize his Guard! Peter might not be over-concerned with his own dignity, but this crossed a line and he did not like it at all.

Dalia gracefully rose from his side and went to her cubs. She nosed them each in turn, licking Fooh's ears, nuzzling Beehn's jaw. "I know what the others say because they have spoken so of Cheetahs since Aslan first sang us into being, my perfect sons."

"Why didn't Aslan make us more like the other Cats?" Fooh whigned. "We look so different!"

"There are important reasons for those differences," Dalia explained, patiently licking away her son's distress.

"Like what?" Beehn grumbled.

"We are made to run," Dalia said. "We have smaller teeth and heads but bigger noses and larger hearts so that we may run faster and love better. Our claws give us better purchase when we run – did you not feel that, Beehn, when you chased the deer?"

"Yes, Mummy," Beehn said quietly.

"Why does it look like we cry as Dwarf babies do?" Fooh asked. "The fur under our eyes is all black and smeary."

"Of course Cheetahs do not cry!" Dalia scolded gently. "The fur beneath our eyes is dark so that we see better under the bright Sun when we hunt and our eyes are long so we can see even when we run so fast."

"Your kind run faster than any other Beast Aslan created," Peter told them. "You use your tails to steer and for balance. If another Cat tried the turns you did today, it would fall."

Peter would always marvel at how their lean bodies moved on their long, thin legs, how they stalked and then exploded out of cover to take up the chase, trip their prey, and make the kill.

The cubs quieted. Dalia licked them and soothed their fears. Peter joined her and told them again how proud he was of them and what fine Guards they would make. Beehn fell asleep straight off. Peter was coming to think that Beehn had two modes – lightning fast and dead asleep. Fooh grumbled a little more about Nebi and Dwarf babies before he too fell asleep.

Silently, Dalia rose to circle their camp. She would make three full circuits, listening and scenting for the dangers that were not there that night. Then, she would return to his side and they would keep watch together until the Sun rose.

Peter returned to the rock and leaned against it, sword at his side. Fooh and Beehn's contented purrs were over loud in the still night. Looking up, he saw great Gryphon wings silhouetted against the Moon, blotting out her light as the General swept overhead.
Thinking of Dalia always made Peter feel a trifle melancholy. She was long dead. Yet, as she had once intimated, she was the standard by which he measured virtually every person – certainly every other woman – who had come after. Then, even Dalia had left him.

Such morose thoughts were not sensible or useful at all. She had been the greatest of Cats, the greatest of friends, and through Fooh and Beehn, Dalia's descendants had lived to serve Caspian. What Humans had long forgotten, the Beasts remembered. A millennium had passed, but the Great Cats and Wolves remembered their service as Royal Guard to the Monarchs of Narnia just as the Bears had remembered their place in the Lists. There was no more fitting legacy. How had Caspian mediated that dispute, Peter wondered, between Feline and Canine and the honour of Guard to the Narnian King? He would have to ask Lucy and Edmund what the solution had been.

More to the point, Dalia would have scolded him for not pursuing the opportunity of Nurse Hawkins. Perhaps he should ask her to join him at a pub when she got off tomorrow. He did not yet have much firsthand knowledge of how such things were done here, but Nurse Hawkins had winningly offered to provide instruction. And why not learn something new – he was in Oxford after all. It was a cheering thought.

Richard was sound asleep. Peter eased the notebook out from between Richard's hands and began leafing through it. He wondered if he should just destroy this record of his indiscretions. But, to what end? Even being the source of the information, Peter could barely read one word in ten and the notebook was a comfort to a man who was losing his mind.

Studying the pages, Peter could even see how Richard's handwriting had deteriorated over the summer months. The last pages were barely legible.

Peter took the book over to the window for a better look in the light of the late afternoon sun. Below, he saw Edmund and Asim still sitting under the tree. They seemed at ease with another. He would have to find out from Edmund how Asim had chosen to acknowledge or ignore their meeting of two weeks ago. Seeing them was a reminder of what still needed to be done and how it weighed on him.

Putting it off a few more moments, Peter saw in the pages of the notebook that Richard had been a deft draftsman. Mary had the same skill and he supposed it was all their field work and observations. There was a sketch dated from June of the doors of the Wardrobe, Aslan and the Tree, drawn in ink with loose, easy strokes. Below the Lion, but in pencil, was a drawing that was unmistakably a pair of feline eyes, apparently a later addition to the page. On another page, dated from his first meetings with Richard at the Museum, was a sketch of the Cat Window and a question mark.

Peter lightly traced the images with a fingertip, recalling that lonely hour on his knees before the picture of The Dawn Treader on the wall of Lucy's room. Susan had blamed herself for not hearing Aslan soon enough to prevent Bardon's death. And here, Aslan was, in the Professor's office, on the window of the Oxford Museum of Natural History, and in Richard's notebook. Outside, his brother was speaking to a man who Peter felt had betrayed him, and yet also dreamed of that same ship that both hung on a spare bedroom wall in Impington and that had carried his brother, sister and cousin to the end of a flat world. The Dawn Treader. So, Aslan was with Asim as well, and so here with them, under a tree outside Radcliffe Hospital.

They were all imperfect and, as Edmund insisted, loving the imperfect was a challenge, a duty, and more ennobling when undertaken in spite of those imperfections. Asim had Aslan's attention and grace. Peter hurt, to be sure, but the mark of the Lion's paws was plain. Aslan had been here all summer and Peter simply had not been listening well enough.

Edmund was on his feet before Peter could even greet his brother and Asim.
"I shall leave you both to it," Edmund said, brushing the dried grass away. "It was a pleasure meeting you, Asim. I look forward to seeing you again."

"And I as well, Edmund."

"I shall catch up with you all at the Professor's!" Peter called to his brother's hurriedly retreating back. "Do you know where you are going!"

Edmund gave him cheery, absent wave and disappeared around a corner.

Asim was rising as well. "I gave him directions to the Museum. He said he would wait for the others there."

"Yes, Eustace very much wanted to see the dinosaurs and that Komodo dragon Mary is hoarding." Peter made his first offering. "We could follow and then I might introduce you to Lucy and Eustace?"

"Unfortunately, Peter, I do not have the time." There was no mistaking his look of regret. "You but arrive and now I must catch a train myself. Would you wait, while I change and then we might walk to the station?"

This dashed any number of Peter's expectations – he was coming to think he should never set any at all. Asim disappeared back into the hospital and was gone only a few minutes. When he returned, it took a long moment for Peter to recognize the stranger in the brown serge service dress of the British Army. The green beret and rose and laurel cap badge denoted the Intelligence Corps; as Edmund had said, on his shoulder, he wore the crown, the insignia of the rank of Major.

Asim smiled his apology. "I know it is unsettling to see the first time." He shouldered the bag he was carrying. "Considering what we must discuss, I believe this is the better approach."

Peter instantly decided that he did not like the Major so well. "And what do I call you?"

"My friends call me Asim bin Kalil, even if I occasionally appear before them in something other than what usually goes with that name. My full name is long by English standards and, as your brother would say, cumbersome."

"What name goes with the uniform?"

"I am Major Abdullah ibn Abbas ibn Muhammad al-Masri, most lately of the British Intelligence Corps."

Peter wanted to make a point and call him Major. A low growl echoing in his head stopped him.

Proving the benefit of holding his tongue, there was a heartening and mischievous glint that proved the man beneath the uniform was the one he had known all summer. "For your ears only, Peter, I will say that the Corps is not to be confused with the other acronyms and cleverly nicknamed groups within our government and the amateurs who often operate out of them."

"I have never heard you speak so of your service. For all our conversation, we have scarcely discussed that detail at all." There were coloured bars and pins decorating the somber brown uniform. Peter did not recognize all of them. He thought the bar sewn on the sleeve was a wound badge.

"I can see you do not like the uniform, but you have said yourself you understand what it is to live in to two worlds, to have a foot in each. So it is with me and the many uniforms I wear."
Peter did understand that challenge, though he had never spoken of what it meant to be a Narnian
and English both. "Still, there is, in the end, only one man. Might I speak to that man alone?"

For answer, Asim gestured broadly and they began walking, leaving the infirmary, and striking out
along the manicured walk toward Woodstock Road and St. Giles Street. They waited to let others
pass by, two matrons were pushing prams, juggling their groceries in string bags, and counting ration
coupons.

Rather than answering his question, Asim asked one of his own. "Do you know the work of Jalal ad-
Din Rumi?"

The Calormenes and Centaurs both had often spoken thus and it had taken years for Peter to master
his impatience with the style. Susan and Edmund had been far better at it than he. The manner might
be elliptical and the speech obscure, but there was always a relevant point if he could but train
himself to wait for it.

"I have not heard before of him?" Peter ended with a questioning note, not sure even of the sex of
the person, if it was a person.

"He," Asim confirmed, "was Persian, a Muslim mystic and poet from the thirteenth century. He
might say, at a time such as this, 'Out beyond wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I will meet
you there.'"

So there was the relevant point.

"Shall we walk in that field then, on our way to the train station?" Peter asked.

Asim nodded, opened to his mouth to speak and then an Army lorry belching fumes heaved by. Men
were clinging to its side and the tarpaulin slung over the back covered something bulging and
probably explosive.

He began again. "Your distaste aside, the uniform allows me to say more than I could otherwise. The
judgment of Major al-Masri allows me to say, perhaps, even more than I should. But only to a point."

Peter's patience finally broke. "Rules, orders, and the Official Secret Act, and all that. Yes, Asim, I
understand, and why it had to be this way. But, you had information about my
sister, you delivered
warnings to my brother, and you said nothing of it to me, your friend." It all came out more angrily
than he intended and Peter thought he felt a growl again, but this time he brushed it aside. He could
forgive, he could understand, but it still hurt. "I am owed."

Asim put a hand on his shoulder then removed it before Peter could act as the child and shrug it off.
"I cannot give you an explanation that will satisfy. Surely, you see that?"

And once he said it, Peter knew what he needed. "I do not ask for an explanation. You say I am your
friend, and I want to count you as such. I know that you had to do what you did. I want to know if it
pained you to do it; if you were sorry you had to …" Peter almost said "lie," but that was unjustly
harsh. "I wish to know if you regretted having to maintain your silence."

He was so long in answering, Peter thought it might be rude, but again, he willed himself to give
Asim the chance to explain, even if he had said he could not. They waited at a cross street, both
stepping back at the same time as a passing bus clipped the corner and nearly took out a street sign.

"I am of two worlds, and so serve two masters, and must satisfy both."

More roundabout speech. Some of it was his culture, some of it was that he was a spy, and some of it
"Only two masters and two worlds?" Peter asked. "From the names, dress, and your history, I have begun to wonder if there might be more."

"Perhaps, on an exceptionally busy and theologically challenging day." Asim shrugged and the bag on his shoulder slipped. Peter caught it before it slid to the ground. It seemed very heavy for a change of clothing and Peter wondered what else was in it. He had never seen Asim carrying a sidearm, only knives.

"However many there are, the point, and yes there is one, is that I am usually able to harness these competing priorities so that all co-exist peaceably. Occasionally, that peaceful co-existence is strained."

"So you did feel some conflict?" And upon hearing this confession, the curling burn of hurtful anger finally began to die within him.

"I did, Peter. I routinely must conceal things of grave import from those whom I care for and whom I've known far longer than you. But, that afternoon of your departure, it was the most difficult secret I have had to keep in decades."

That was all he had needed to hear. Regrettably, Asim kept talking.

"Fortunately, the guilt has passed and given how this has unfolded, I do not regret it at all."

Peter bristled and his temper again flared. "And why is that?"

"Do not be angry. I mean only that I am not disinterested and, duty aside, did have your interests and those of your family in mind. Your brother was going to receive an official warning. However, you did not have some competent and curious officer, or worse, a stupid and curious staff person, involved in your affairs and those of your brother and sister. You had me."

The air went out of him so suddenly, Peter felt he had been kicked in the stomach. He stepped off the kerb and nearly stumbled to his knees.

"I had not considered it in that light, Asim." The horrid prospect of what this might have been blossomed before his eyes.

"The orders were to deal with Edmund discreetly and gently, which, while that might seem a good thing, invited significant curiosity here. This could have developed in any number of unpleasant ways, so yes, while it pained me to keep it from you, I did see it as the better course. I knew Edmund would tell you what I could not."

Asim did not know that those were code words for Susan's involvement. Surely, she was trying to send her brothers and sister a message. That she had been communicating at all signaled she had been well enough to send it. No news probably meant good news, but she had also been involved in a death at the British Embassy - of which nothing had been reported in the papers.

As they were "in a field" and Asim was, for him, in an expansive mood, Peter tried pressing a little further. "Can you tell me anything of Susan, of what she…?"

Asim held up a silencing hand and the expression on his face became very severe. He glanced around, but they were, for the moment, alone – the closest passersby were on the opposite side of the street. Still he waited until a car went rumbling by before speaking. "Peter, do not say another word to me about this. The official explanation is that the letters, for surely there was more than one, were
nothing but a slightly indiscreet story exchanged between loyal, British schoolchildren. That explanation best fits the facts and has satisfied my superiors to whom I reported. Had I not come to know you so well, that conclusion would have satisfied me as well.

Again, Peter was brought up short, irritated that he had not considered this aspect of the issue before. He knew that he had been very open with Asim – Asim saw things within him and had from the moment of their first meeting. Peter had not spoken of Narnia, but Asim had seen its effects – how could he do otherwise given the man he was?

Far more concerning, Asim had, of course, seen the same in Edmund. The implication was plain - he knew the letters were a ruse. He had done his duty in not telling Peter, and so had violated the trust Peter had given him. However, Asim also had kept a far, far greater trust and committed another sin of omission. He had deliberately neglected to report that, given what he knew of the older brother, the letter was certainly not an innocent story exchanged between schoolchildren but in fact was a sophisticated cipher reporting of unethical and even illegal acts England was perpetrating upon her ally.

More sobering still, if Asim or Susan's superiors knew of the conclusions shared in their letters that the British were privy to secret Nazi communications and capable of decoding them, well, no high placed protection would shield their family.

They had been very fortunate, and would have to be more careful in the future. They could not really play both games – either they were children, and treated as such, or adults, and had to take responsibility for their actions.

"Thank you. I came here expecting to deliver more of a lecture of righteous indignation. Instead, I feel humbling gratitude."

Asim slowed for they were nearing the shabby brick train station and there would be more people about and in closer quarters. The battered clock outside the station showed it was 5:30 – it was correct twice a day.

"Peter, after this, you trust me less, and that is not a bad thing. I do wear the uniform to King and Country. But, we both serve another, and please know that in that regard, you may trust me, completely. I will never lead you astray, nor your brother or sisters."

Asim spoke the words but they had the ring of the Guard's oath, when Dalia swore it to him, and her sons after. Some of it did not fit this time and place and the relative positions were all wrong. Yet, the sentiment felt exactly the same.

They had to step off the walk to allow others to go by them who were hurrying into the station for tickets and schedules. Asim did not seem anxious and no train was sounding. It was strange, but barely a week ago, Asim and Mary were seeing him off. *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?*

"Thank you. I greatly appreciate that offer on behalf of myself. I would ask, for my part, that you continue to help us as you already have, but I cannot speak for my brother and sisters."

"Thank you in return, Peter, I will gladly do so. However, these noble sentiments aside, I suspect none of you tolerates interference over much."

"Well, if you mean, to make decisions for us, and to keep us in ignorance of our choices, no, that would not do at all."
Asim laughed. "I have barely met Edmund, and never met your sisters, yet I feel you are quoting your siblings."

Now it was Peter's turn to laugh and he felt the weight of anger and disappointment leave for good. "Edmund, you may now judge yourself. Lucy was, as the saying goes, raised by Wolves. And as for Susan, she is of a very gentle nature. But so are tree roots and tides, until you try to move them where they do not wish to go."

He had only just been speaking to Richard of the dearest friend and closest advisor he had ever had. There was no way to make the comparison explicit to a non-Narnian without potentially offending – who would wish to be compared to a Great Cat or a Wolf? Yet, this extraordinary man was offering the same advice, discretion, loyalty, and such protection as he could afford – not the tooth and claw of their Guards – but something both more intangible and more relevant to this place.

"You are right that we do all take ill to those who purport to know what is best for us. But, as a guide, advisor, and friend? Someone who will speak the hard truths no one else will say? These are things we would welcome, and give in return." For, they had done so before.

"Companions on the journey," Asim replied slowly.

Peter nodded, feeling he had missed something significant, for Asim looked very, very thoughtful and it seemed as if spoke to someone else.

"And here we are at a train station," Asim said, "speaking of companions on the journey."

"I shall do you the favor and not question the adequacy of your packing," Peter said. Asim's bag was heavy enough to accommodate all manner of supplies.

They walked through the station and crossed to other side of the platform, which meant he was probably going to London, but could be anywhere. Peter did not ask. They were jostled by others, coming and going on the late afternoon trains. Soldiers, families, children, workers, University personnel, town and gowns, all milling about the train station.

In so public a place, Peter assumed they had come back from "the field" and it would be more comfortable to adhere to more ordinary subjects.

"Moving to easier matters, I have been thinking about enlisting."

Asim shook his head. "Only you would refer to enlistment as the easier task, Peter. You are eligible next year?"

"Yes, in March."

He crossed his arms across his chest and the look of serious interest was very encouraging. There was none of the parental hand-wringing; it was more akin to what his siblings would provide. "I have been wondering if you would approach me about this. I was unsure, given how hard you have been working with Digory."

Peter did not mention just how deceiving such appearances were. Well, to be more accurate, the effort had been there, for the most part. It was in the delivery of the results that he had been lacking. It was the first time in his double life that effort and hard work could not compensate for the lack of innate talent. He was not certain if he would ever be able to competently translate a chapter of The Aeneid. It was perverse, but he felt more confident of war than Dunce Scotus' metaphysics.

"I can defer University, of course."
"Certainly. I am concerned about your expectations for service, however."

He floundered here and found he was shifting from foot to foot, not certain how to express what had been so easily said with Edmund and Lucy. Enlistment might be less daunting than Greek – unless it was a deployment to Greece – but he had to be very cautious about this decision. Assignment to the wrong command, wherever that might be in the far flung war, would be a disaster.

Fortunately, Asim saved him from articulating the impossible. "Peter, I mean no offense when I observe that your temperament and talents are very, very ill suited to much of the Army that I know at the level at which you would enter it."

"Very tactfully put," Peter replied, feeling a grin in spite of it all. "Hence why I ask. I wish to serve, but I recognize my own limitations, so to speak."

On the platform, they were joined by three NCOs slouching about with their girls, waiting for their train, and chatting up two police from the Oxford force. The soldiers had the cap badge and the red Ox & Bucks patch of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.

The NCOs sharpened up when they saw Asim and saluted smartly. The police were very courteous as well. Peter uncomfortably thought that none would have greeted Asim so well if he had been dressed in his customary robes. He felt a sliver of irritation and realized this was something Asim contended with every day he was in England and yet faced it with utter equanimity.

"We should be further away so that they may at their ease," Asim murmured, and they moved down the platform. He checked his watch and ticket and Peter had to hide the smile for Edmund had done the identical things only that morning. Logistics men through and through – both were the type who kept railway tables in their heads.

"Do you have any particular interest?" Asim asked, continuing. "The Allied Force is a very large place."

Peter shook his head, mindful of what Edmund and Lucy had said. "I believe the fit is more important than the actual duty."

"Combat or non-combat?"

"Truly, Asim, I shall stick to my initial assertion and insist that to whom I report is paramount. The mechanic on a Halifax bomber is no less important than its pilot, the pilot could not fly without the crew, and they would not know what to target without the work of intelligence and would not be able to fly without weathermen."

Peter had fought Giants and built roads; he had killed men and repaired the homes they had destroyed; he had led an army and counted the potatoes that fed it. He would not say that one was more important than another. The point was the service, not the personal glory that arose from it.

"That is very realistic outlook, Peter. I should have expected no less."

Asim glanced again over at the NCOs. "Many members of the Oxford police joined the Ox & Bucks. I know a number of them from my time here, and those that survived Dunkirk are now COs – and good, sensible men. The First Battalion of the Ox & Bucks is traditional infantry. The Second Battalion was retooled to the First Airborne last year."

"The First Airborne?" Peter repeated. "The Paras?"

Asim nodded his head toward the NCOs. "Yes, those men are paratroopers. Do you see their
"shoulder flash?"

Peter could just make them out. He had not spent all summer immersed in Greek to miss this reference. The men wore the arm patch of Bellerophon astride Pegasus.

"I know many others, of course. There is my own area. Mr. Patel has consulted with the Sappers of the Royal Engineers and has a uniformly very high opinion of them. Seeing the Ox & Bucks merely put me in the mind to mention them." He smiled, but bemused, rather than mirthful. "It's appropriate, I suppose, as it was your arrival that sparked Mary's latest obsession with Gryphons. And, Polly and Digory of course have their own shared fascination with flying horses."

Peter wondered why he did not, at that moment, feel a giant, velveted paw thwack him on the side of the head. A train whistled and there was a clanging of bells. Over the din, both internal and external, he managed, "Asim, I recognize this is all unconventional, and I don't mean to dictate, but if there is a call up for the Paras, or you learn of a place within them that would suit, and how to approach it, please let me know."

The train rumbled in. Over the roar, Peter reached out to take Asim's hand, accustomed now to the long shake that was culturally appropriate. Asim did not attempt to kiss his cheeks, which he understood from the Professor was common among Arab men – maybe Asim did not do such things on Oxford train platforms.

"Good journey, Friend, Inshallah."

"Ma'a salama, Friend."

Only after the train pulled away did Peter remember that the weight in his pocket was Asim's knife.

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**Chapter 3, Back to the Museum**

*In which Eustace and Mary discuss a fine set of hips*

This is Dalia's first appearance in *TSG*. She is featured in Chapter 5 of *The Palace Guard, The Cheetah Guard of the High King*. At the time I wrote her, I was playing with the Mary Sue convention and readers were divided on whether I succeeded. If Dalia seems a little gratingly over-perfect, and Peter unjustifiably besotted with her, that is rather the point of it.

The General is another character, like Cook and the Physician, long identified but not developed. She made her first appearance in Chapter 3 of *Harold & Morgan*.

Asim's reflections regarding a companion on the journey occurred in Chapter 17 of *TQSiT*. Morgan's attempt to classify Cheetahs as other than Great Cats was addressed in Chapter 3 of *H&M*.

Links are in my Livejournal to the military references including, the Ox & Bucks, the Sappers, and the shoulder flash of the 1st Airborne division of the British Army, Bellerophon astride Pegasus. Also, I am delighted to say that after searching in vain throughout Part 1, I found a picture of the Cat Window at the Oxford Museum of Natural History. It is not what I was expecting, but it is so fun! I'll put that one in both my LJ and my profile.
Chapter Summary

In which, finally, Mary gets to talk to someone about hips and Lucy begins to plot her crusade

*Apostolic Way*  
Chapter 3, Back to the Museum  
In which, finally, Mary gets to talk to someone about hips and Lucy begins to plot her crusade

The man who fights too long against dragons becomes a dragon himself.  
Freidrich Nietzsche

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.  
"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."  
"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.  
"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."

L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

The creeping reptile is commonly imagined as the antithesis of the bird. For the bird overcomes the forces that hold even man to the earth, and enjoys exalted aerial conditions of life. Therefore the marvel is shared equally by learned and unlearned, that the power of flight should have been an endowment of animals sprung from the breed of serpents, or crocodiles, enabling them to move through the air as though they too were of a heaven-born race.  
Harry Govier Seeley, *Dragons of the Air* (1901)

"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

Francis of Assisi

Eustace wasn't sure how he felt about going face-to-face with dinosaur skeletons. Big, dead Mesozoic reptiles were a lot like big, dead Narnian dragons and he felt a little queer about it all. But, still, he really wanted to see them.

The Professor and Polly were especially nice and he really appreciated it. He wanted to talk to them more about being a Narnian even if he wasn't a King – things like what was he supposed to do now, how should he act.

But right now, he really wanted to see the Oxford Museum of Natural History.

Polly had said the Museum was mostly closed during the summer but if it was locked up (it wasn't) she had a key from *Richard, Richard Russell!* Eustace still couldn't believe that they all knew that famous man. He sounded very intimidating and Eustace hoped he could meet Professor Russell. But not today.

Lucy stayed outside with the Professor and Polly. The three of them were out looking at the Cat
Window. It was pretty famous and Eustace thought they were looking for Aslan. Since Aslan was in Fulbourn Fen and at the Dieppe memorial and on the train platform in Oxford, and in the spare bedroom of Harold and Alberta's house (and that was really the oddest of them all), he could obviously be in stone carvings in a window too. Being around Lucy so much had taught him that you didn't need to see something for it to be there. Still, it was pretty hard to miss Aslan. He was in so many places, you could practically trip over him, like a cat.

It was an odd window with the carving of the cat eating a mouse and all. The Professor had said when the Museum was built that it was supposed to be monkeys in the carvings. But Oxford University wouldn't let that happen because monkeys meant evolution and evolution was still too controversial when they carved the window.

Why evolution was more controversial than other theories, Eustace did not understand. Did people really think that the reason the dinosaurs went extinct was because they didn't make it on to that boat? It was a boat, wasn't it? And a flood? Eustace thought he read something about that and had heard it was a story in a book called the Bible, which he'd never read because Harold and Alberta didn't hold with that sort of thing. Wasn't something changing over time at least as likely as animals somehow ending up on a big boat and water covering the whole earth and killing everything that wasn't on the boat? Maybe he hadn't understood the Bible story properly but it sounded pretty far-fetched to him. He should probably try to read the Bible once he got back to school.

Though his school, Experiment House, didn't hold with the Bible either. The thought of returning to school in another week made Eustace completely depressed. It was one thing to work at being Narnian here, with all these good influences. At wretched school it would be all about sucking up to Them, the whole fagging system, and getting roughed up if you didn't do what They wanted. He'd be running and hiding all term just to avoid Them. And, when They realized he was not going to be hanging on to Them anymore, well, that was going to be very uncomfortable. There would be lots of flushies, banged shins, black eyes, wrecked school work, bugs in his bed (which wasn't so terrible as long as he checked his sheets first), and torn bookbags.

Eustace shoved the grim thoughts of Experiment House away. He was in the Oxford Natural History Museum and it was much nicer. There were columns with carvings and a glass ceiling and lots of windows. It was nothing like the British Museum or the South Kensington Science Museum. Peter had said there was a big case of beetles, but Eustace wanted to see the dinosaurs first. And then, he wanted to see the things that weren't dinosaurs. Not technically anyway.

Peter had said that he'd learned over the summer that Narnia was in this world a lot more than he'd expected and that he'd first started to see it here in the Museum. So maybe some of the things from the Eastern Sea were here, too. He didn't think he'd find a Dufflepud in the Oxford Museum of Natural History, but maybe he'd find something that was a Mesozoic reptile here, but was a sea monster or a dragon there. Animals like that might be extinct now, but even knowing that they, or something like them, had been here, well, it would be like seeing a bit of the Eastern Sea in Oxford.

He'd been mulling this over and could see several theories that would explain the facts. There were Mice, and Dogs, and Cats and Bears in Narnia and here, so maybe the two things had developed independently in similar environments – it was called convergent evolution – and they were pretty much the same except that in Narnia they talked and were different sizes. Or, since humans had traveled by magic between the two places, maybe animals and creatures had, too. He couldn't see how the magical doors would be human-specific – if the door was open and big enough, anything could have tumbled into it, maybe even dinosaurs, dragons, or sea monsters.

Eustace had a lot to do at the Museum and not a lot of time.
He stopped by the *Megalosaurus bucklandii* first. It was exciting but really there wasn't much to him for all that he was the first dinosaur ever identified. Assuming he was a *he*. Really, *he* could have been a *she* and Eustace scolded himself since Lucy or Alberta wasn't there to do it for him.

Eustace stared for a while at the hip, trying to figure it out. It was a lot harder now that he was just staring at a random piece of bone and he felt very irritated with himself. This should be something he should see, shouldn't it, the differences between the hips? They were what made the dinosaur the dinosaur and why they weren't crocodiles or lizards and what made the carnivore theropods like *Megalosaurus* or *Tyrannosaurus* different from a *Triceratops*.

The first attempted reconstructions from the 19th Century were pretty funny. The little placard said that Mister Goodrich had made the model. It looked a lot like the one by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins that Eustace had seen in London. The notes said that the reconstructions had been based on what Europeans had thought dragons looked like.

Eustace felt a swell of anger. This model looked nothing like a dragon. It looked like a particularly stupid rhinoceros. *With paws.*

He felt a little better when he looked at what Robert Plot and Richard Brookes had thought, at first, about a *Megalosaurus* bone. These men really did not know what they were about. Plot had thought the bone was from an elephant the Romans had brought to Britain, or maybe a giant human from the Bible – there was that book again. He was really going to have to find the Bible, hide it from Harold and Alberta, and try reading it. If it had giants, maybe it would not be so bad. He wondered if there were dragons in it or mentions of dinosaurs and dragons going on the boat.

It was immature, but Eustace really couldn't help sniggering when he looked at the drawings by Plot and Brooks of the *Megalosaurus* bone. Properly constructed, it was obviously part of a leg. But Brookes had tried calling the specimen *Scrotum humanum* because the bone looked like, well… Eustace was trying to be properly scientific about it, but it was really funny looking and it did look a little like a boy's private parts – except it was *fossilized bone*. And that made him want to cross his legs and snigger some more.

As bad as the early reconstructions made *Megalosaurus bucklandii* look like a scaly bear, calling the big, carnivorous dinosaur *Scrotum humanum* was very silly.

The *Eustreptospondylus oxoniensis* and *Iguanodon bernissartensis* were both impressive. He was a little disappointed that the *Iguanodon* was so much bigger than the *Eustreptospondylus*. He thought the theropod meat eater should be larger, just on principle. Next to the *Iguanodon* skeleton was a picture of the Waterhouse Hawkins reconstruction from London and that one looked even more like a rhinoceros with the horn sticking out of its nose. This was very, very wrong since it wasn't a nose horn at all but really a thumb claw on the Iguanodon's front hands.

Eustace lingered for a little while at the *Iguanodon*. He remembered sneaking around and hearing Lucy and Edmund say something about the iguana with the broken tail. This was probably what Peter had been referring to in his letters to them. Eustace studied the tail, but he didn't know what he was looking for. It was just a row of vertebra.

Eustace wandered between the cases, studying the walls and displays. He really wanted to find the ones that weren't dinosaurs. Dinosaurs had special hips so they stood a certain way, on land, and they didn't fly like dragons or swim like sea monsters.

Oh! On the far wall – he thought it was the South side, but really it could have been the East – he saw them! Eustace hurried over to the display. He'd really been wondering if the ichthyosaurs or…
"Watch your step!" a woman's voice snapped and Eustace tripped and stumbled over something on the floor.

There was another, angrier, cry and he knew he'd stepped on something. Someone, that is. A notebook skittered across the floor and pencils rolled away. Brilliant.

"I am sorry!" he cried, feeling awful and stupid. "Are you alright?"

A woman had been sitting on the floor and he had run right over her. She was scooting away from him on her hands and knees, scrambling for her rolling pencils and notebook.

He took a look at her face, and worse still, she was crying.

"Did I hurt you?" Eustace asked, searching his pockets for a handkerchief. "I'm terribly sorry. I didn't see you."

"I was sitting right here," she muttered, grasping about for her scattering pencils. "You couldn't miss me, yet you did."

Eustace picked up her notebook for her. There was an amazing drawing on the page.

"I say! This is brilliant!" he exclaimed, studying the drawing. There were big, blotchy marks on the page and that was a shame because it was a beautiful drawing of an ichthyosaur. It looked a lot like a dolphin – he'd seen those in the Eastern Sea – but he knew ichthyosaurs were reptiles, not mammals.

"I'm sorry," he repeated again. "I really didn't mean to hurt you."

The woman climbed to her feet, shoving the pencils into a bag slung over her shoulder. She snuffled and blew her nose with a very large handkerchief. "You didn't hurt me," she muttered. "It's not your fault I'm sniveling. I was sniveling before you trod on me."

"Oh." Eustace tried to think what the Narnian thing would be to say. "I'm sorry I made it worse, then. I was just really looking forward to seeing the marine reptiles. I wasn't paying attention to where I was going."

Well that was stupid.

But, she nodded in a way that made him feel a little better. "I understand. I do it as well. I become distracted, especially with ichthyosaurs and crocodilians, and run over things." She dabbed her eyes again and crammed the handkerchief into her bag. "Now that it has happened to me, I can't say I like it much. So, I shall chalk it up to a learning experience."

She was dressed in a very modern way, was wearing trousers and khakis, and she looked really old. Like maybe 23, or even 30 or 40. She wasn't a student.

Eustace handed the notebook to her. "Your ichthyosaur drawings are amazing. It's too bad you blubbed on them."

She wiped her eyes on her sleeve and smiled at him in that tolerant, amused way adults did sometimes as she added the notebook to the bag under her arm. "The tears are my own fault, but thank you all the same."

From her pocket, she pulled out a squishy package and took several small round things out that were wrapped in paper. She unwrapped one and inside it was striped brown and tan. It smelled like the mint in Alberta's garden. She extended her hand, offering one of the little wrapped balls. "Humbug?"
"What are they?" Eustace asked, staring at it.

"Humbugs? Peppermint candy?" She shook her head. "Blasted war, that children forget what candy is."

Eustace had never had candy before. Harold and Alberta didn't permit it. The greedy dragon would have snatched it out of her hand or lectured her on how candy was bad.

"Thank you," he said instead and took one.

He gingerly put it into his mouth as the woman popped another one into her own and crinkled up the paper wrap between her fingers.

The candy was so sweet he almost gagged and the mint flavor was really strong. He heard a crunch as she bit into hers but Eustace wanted to savor this first sweet he had ever had. It wasn't delicious, exactly, but it was interesting. He wasn't sure if he liked the taste and he felt naughty trying something he knew Alberta would criticize him for. But then, she would certainly criticize him even more for Narnia, so the guilt didn't last very long.

"We can't get it, of course, but chocolate is better for this sort of thing," the woman said, sniffling again.

"Better for what sort of thing?" Eustace asked.

"For pacifying emotionally overwrought, sniveling females who are weeping over men they are hopelessly in love with who yell at them for being emotionally overwrought, sniveling females."

Her eyes were very red and her nose was still running. Eustace thought she'd been sitting on the floor crying alone for a while. He felt badly for her – up until Narnia, he knew what it was like to cry and not have anyone to cry on.

She continued in a very logical voice, "You see, women prefer chocolate during emotionally trying circumstances. But peppermint Humbugs will do in a pinch. You are very polite to not comment."

Eustace turned over in his mind the sorts of things his cousins would say other than *thanks for the candy*, the sorts of things he had tried to say at the Dieppe memorial, and the kinds of nice things Reep had told him when he'd been a dragon. With that last one, he felt his own throat tightening up a bit.

"I'm sorry that you're down. I'd like to say, I'm sure it will get better, but I really don't know anything, so I'll just say that I hope it does get better."

Something was missing – his cousins would hug her or something, probably, but that didn't seem proper. So he patted her arm awkwardly.

"Thank you. Were you looking for the ichthyosaurs? I was blocking the view." She tilted her head to the case with the mounted fish lizard.

"I wanted to see the marine reptiles." He looked into the case she had indicated. "That's *Ophthalmosaurus*? The one Mary Anning discovered in Lyme Regis?"

"It is. In 1811. I always get peevish when I see it and think about what scientific society did to her. Given what Mary Anning endured, it usually helps put my own problems in perspective, though that doesn't seem to be working so well anymore." She sniffed again.
"It is too bad it doesn't have her name, like *Megalosaurus* over there has *bucklandii* in its name."

"Indeed. I could not agree more." She smiled in a way that Eustace could tell meant that he had said something she really appreciated, even more than *I'm sorry that you are down.* "The plesiosaur is over there," she said, pointing.

He moved a little further along the case. Plesiosaurs had a long neck and tail, and paddle-like flippers. He'd hoped that it might look like the sea monster that had attacked *The Dawn Treader.* But, the plesiosaur wasn't a sea monster any more than the dolphin shaped ichthyosaurus was.

He sighed his disappointment. The plesiosaur's body was much too bulky – there was no way it could have coiled itself around a ship – and the head was too small to have eaten anything even as small as Reep.

"Looking for the Loch Ness monster?" the woman asked, interrupting his study of its tiny head and long, thin neck.

"I had thought it might be like a sea monster, but the head is much too small. It just eats fish, doesn't it?"

"With needle teeth like that, yes, probably," she agreed. "The pliosaurs are bigger and toothier. The lower jaw of one is there."

She pointed and Eustace looked in the case at the skull remnants and pictures. "I've never seen a complete skeleton, but *Liopleurodon ferox* could have been thirty to fifty feet long, depending upon its size relative to skull length. I've rather fancied her surging out of the water to grab a *Eustreptospondylus oxoniensis* by the tail."

It made for a vivid image and the skull was impressive. Still, the shape was all wrong. *Liopleurodon* had no neck to speak of at all and was even less snaky-looking than the plesiosaur. He sighed. "It would be a monster, to be sure, and lived in the sea, but it's not what I was looking for."

"Have you seen mosasaurs before?"

Eustace shook his head. With a nudge, she directed him along the wall to another mounted display. "It's just the head, but you can try to visualize it. Mosasaurs are more lizard-like, and in fact are classified as Squamates, along with snakes and lizards. At forty to fifty feet, they are certainly sea monster-sized."

"They are extinct?"

"Regrettably, or fortunately, depending on one's perspective. I suspect a U-Boat would not fare well against a *Tylosaur.* Mosasaurs lived in the late Cretaceous."

She gestured to the adjoining case. "These are photographs and reconstructions from Osborn's study."

Eustace whistled. It was close. The mosasaur looked like a giant, swimming snake-lizard. The jaws were huge and, like the pliosaurs, the neck was thick and heavy. But, the body and tail were long so maybe it could have been able to loop around a ship and squeeze it into bits of timber.

"Have you seen one before?" he asked. "In a museum, I mean?"

"The Teylers, in Haarlem, has several. Though who knows what the Nazis have done to them? I have no idea if they would cherish a *Mosasaur* as Aryan, or smash it to pieces as a Jew." The
woman frowned. "Actually, charming though this is to discuss my manias with someone else, why are you here? You are too young to be a Tril."

"Tril?"

"University research assistant. How did you get in here? The Museum is supposed to be closed. Or, blast, did I leave the door unlocked?"

"It was unlocked," Eustace told her. "But I came here with Miss Plummer and Professor Kirke, and they had keys."

Her eyes widened. "Good Lord, are you Peter's brother? Or are you the odious cousin?"

Eustace almost spit out the Humbug as he suddenly realized who he had to be talking to. "I'm Eustace Scrubb, the odious cousin. You're Doctor Russell!" When she nodded, he stuck out his hand – it was sticky from the candy but so was hers. "ItsapleasureDoctorRussell. Imhonouredtomeetyou."

Doctor Russell let him pump her hand pretty enthusiastically but really meeting her in the Oxford Museum was better than meeting the PM as far as Eustace was concerned.

"As I told Peter, Mrs. Russell is my disapproving mother in law and convention identifies Professor Russell as my husband. I'm Mary."

Her handshake was very firm; not like a woman's at all.

"I admit to confusion, Eustace, for your cousin intimated that you were a prat. Is this definitive proof that the paragon of insight and rectitude that is Peter Pensive has actually erred?"

Eustace bristled a little, but there was no way she could know any better, and Peter had joked that she never got his name right. He shook his head vehemently. "Oh no, Mary. Peter doesn't make mistakes. I was a right …" He was going to say Beast, but he knew that wasn't a polite thing for a Narnian to say. "Ass," he decided upon. "I've been a complete brute."

"And now?" she asked. "You are pleasant, intelligent, conversational, if slightly too focused upon Mesozoic marine reptiles, miraculously cured of your brutish illness and no longer a prat?"

She wasn't making fun of him, exactly.

"I think I'm still a prat," Eustace said honestly. "I'm just trying not to be."

"Ahh," she said wisely. "You are still a prat, but it is no longer an excuse?"

He nodded.

"Self-improvement is a noble goal, Eustace. And sustained self-improvement is elusive indeed."

Eustace had the feeling Mary was really speaking of herself. "And speaking of, where are my manners? Was your brutish illness the reason for Peter's sudden departure? Is everyone well?"

"Fine," he managed, repeating the lines they had rehearsed. "Just a family matter."

"And where is everyone else?" She looked about over his shoulder.

"Lucy and the Professor and Polly are outside."

"Admiring the Cat Window?" Mary asked, and she sounded sort of dry and ironic.
Eustace nodded.

"They are very predictable that way," Mary said.

"And Peter and Edmund went over to the Hospital."

Now Mary sighed, looking so very sad, Eustace felt awful for mentioning it. But would not saying anything just be worse?

"That's very kind of them. Richard does better when he sees Peter. And Polly and Digs, for that matter."

It all sounded so falsely cheerful, Eustace thought she might start crying again. Instead, Mary, very deliberately, unwrapped another Humbug and popped it into her mouth. "Here," she said, handing him five more from the bag. "In case you trip over another sniveling female."

"Thank you," Eustace replied, pocketing the wrapped sweets. At Experiment House, the odds of stumbling upon a crying girl hiding from Them were actually pretty high.

"If I know Digs and Polly, they'll be out at the Cat Window for a while yet. Is there anything else you'd like to see now that we have exhausted the fossil record of sea monsters?"

"Dragons," Eustace said. "I really wanted to see dragons."

Mary brightened like a searchlight during an air raid. "I have just the thing!" She grabbed him by the arm so firmly, it almost hurt. Eustace understood now what Peter had meant. Mary Anning Russell was really passionate about reptiles. He hoped he wouldn't get lost in the Museum with her, like the crew of the Mary Celeste or Alice down the Rabbit Hole.

He felt awful, because she was so excited about the Komodo dragon. But for him, it was really disappointing.

"It's not what I was expecting at all," Eustace said slowly. She was just a really big lizard.

"She's a magnificent specimen," Mary said.

Eustace winced and he caught Mary grinning in a very knowing way.

"I confess I said that on purpose. Last week, before he ordered everyone about and flew out of here, Peter admitted that his siblings would tease him about the word magnificent."

Eustace admired Peter even more to have carried off something like that. It could not have been comfortable. It did seem so idiotic until you really understood just how magnificent the High King of Narnia was.

"So you share Peter's concerns for an adjective I use frequently to describe large reptiles and owl vomit?"

"Well..." Eustace wasn't quite sure how to answer this. She wasn't winding him up exactly, but Mary didn't know anything about Narnia and he sure wasn't going to be the one to spill it. "It's not an issue exactly. It's like tomatoes and toast," Eustace said. "Or Mary Anning and ichthyosaurs. The words belong together."

She smiled again, but it didn't feel mean.
"An association? Peter is to magnificent as steak is to kidney pie?"

"I'm not sure about those steaks and kidneys since I'm a vegetarian." Mostly. But then, that was just another way in which Peter was so good and kingly, how he was so nice about vegetarians and didn't mock him at all. "But really, he is, Mary."

She pursed her lips in a way that showed she didn't quite agree and Eustace felt himself getting irritated. She didn't keep needling the point, though. Instead she turned back to the lizard and ran a finger over her toe claws.

"So why is this dragon disappointing? She is the largest living lizard known to science."

"I was expecting her to be more like a dragon, with wings, instead of a lizard. I mean, she's a very impressive lizard, but she's not really a dragon at all."

Mary's glasses had been swinging from a chain around her neck. She shoved them back on over her nose and used a pencil to trace the lizard's back and shoulders. "This is a big, heavy animal. It would take a lot of power, lift and wingspan to keep a Komodo aloft. There is the genus of lizard, *Draco*, that has folds of skin attached to its ribs that form wings. They can glide great distances from trees but, like all modern reptiles, cannot sustain powered flight."

"Are they big?" Eustace asked.

"*Draco Volans*? No, I regret to say that it and its ilk are not. No more than ten inches, I think, tip to tail."

Eustace tried to not look as crestfallen as he'd felt. He had hoped to see something more Narnian here.

Mary carefully lifted the dragon up and put her back on a shelf, then dusted off her hands. "Come, let's go see the pterosaurs. Seeley called them *Dragons of the Air* in his book. Perhaps that will bring you closer to a dragon."

It didn't.

"This is *Dimorphodon macrorynx*," Mary explained. "Yet another discovery first made by Mary Anning that others took credit for. Buckland and Owen made the usual mess of it. It's much larger than the *Draco* genus, three to four feet, wing to wing. Pterosaurs predate birds and are the first vertebrates to have achieved powered flight."

"They look like big bats," Eustace said. He could see from the skeleton that the bones were very thin. They were spindly and awkward looking and the illustration in the display case made it look worse.

Mary leaned against the case and stared down at him over her reading glasses. "What were you hoping for, Eustace? A live dragon? Because, if so, we've already seen the best example upstairs."

From his cousins, he had been learning to fib his way through awkward conversations, and how you could leave out some of the explanation and let people assume that you were speaking about ordinary things. "I wanted to see if there was an animal here like what is in stories, something so large you could ride it and that could kill goats with a whack of a tail or lift trees."

"Like the dragons in the stories?" she repeated.

"Yes," Eustace said. It was *his* story. That wasn't lying, exactly.
When Mary started smiling, he added sourly, "You don't need to fun me about it. I was just curious."

She looked almost hurt. "I am not funning you. Though you aren't articulating it very well, I think you are posing very interesting questions about the relationship between extinct animals and their influence on folklore and myth."

"I am?" Eustace had just thought he was hoping to see some glimpse of dragons and sea monsters in Oxford.

"You are. And you are not the first. We don't have one here, but if you look at the skull of a dwarf elephant there is a very large nasal cavity in the center that could be mistaken for an eye socket. And those skulls have been found in the Mediterranean which has very interesting implications as the possible source for the Cyclops giants of Greek myth."

Eustace was really regretting that he'd not read more of the right books. "And maybe people got the ideas of dragons and sea monsters from fossils of other animals?"

"Yes! The dragon is a very, very persistent creature in folklore and it stands to reason it came from somewhere – probably several somewheres, given the prevalence of dragon stories. Perhaps there are fossils that make people think of dragons."

"Have we found any fossils that look dragons?"

"Well, I'm not aware of any fossil that, properly reconstructed, looks like the European dragon you are describing. Pterosaurs are the closest and, as you say, they really don't hold up to the dragons of our Western myths."

She frowned, but it was from thinking. "It would be interesting to compare fossils in Europe and China and see if they might account for the differences in the dragons of those cultures…"

She rummaged in her bag, pulled out her notebook, and jotted something down with a pencil. "That's a very interesting point, Eustace – it's worth making note of."

Mary shoved the notebook back in her bag and stuck the pencil behind her ear. "Regardless, just because we've not found it yet, doesn't mean it's not out there, waiting to be discovered and described. And, since the fossil record will always be incomplete, we many never find it, but that does not mean it never existed."

It was strange, very strange, to be hearing from a scientist about things that could be there even if you hadn't observed them. Coming from Lucy, he expected it. Coming from Dr. Mary Anning Russell, it was a surprise.

"So you don't think it's barmy? To be looking for things here that don't exist?"

"What do you think paleontology is? Of course it's barmy. It's completely mad. But, we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."

"Mad?" Eustace echoed, feeling as if he'd just missed a few paragraphs of a conversation. "I'm not mad."

"You must be, said the Cat, or you wouldn't have come here."

She looked very hopeful but Eustace was just confused. Mary rolled her eyes and threw up her hands. "Oh bother. You are as bad as Peter at the start of the summer. I'm quoting Alice!"
Oh. "I've read all the wrong sorts of books, Mary. So I've not read Alice."

"Now Eustace," she said, shaking her head. "Not reading Alice is a gross omission which you can rectify. But, you have certainly read some of the right books to be as knowledgeable as you are. And if you are mad, I certainly am to have spent all summer researching gryphons."

Eustace decided that being as "mad" as Mary Anning Russell probably wasn't such a bad thing.

"What are you doing with gryphons?" Lucy, Edmund and Caspian had all spoken of the proud Gryphon Wings of Narnia and he would have liked to have met one. "Have you found anything interesting?"

Mary suddenly looked a little guarded. "Found? Yes, I have been tracing their history and mythology. And, thanks to Peter, I did have a Eureka moment that will take some months or even years before I can develop it properly and I shall not say anything more about that."

"Oh." It sounded fantastic, so he was disappointed at her lack of explanation.

Mary laughed. "Don't be so glum, Eustace. It's a matter of scientific inquiry and saying anything about it is very premature when I've barely begun."

She clapped an arm about his shoulders. "So we have seen the marine reptiles and my dragon and the pterosaurs. While Lucy, Polly, and Digs continue their study of a stone window, what shall we investigate?"

"Well, I was wondering about your paper on Archaeopteryx being a transitional bird."

Mary smiled widely. "You read my article? You are hopelessly flattering me, Eustace."

"Anyway, I did and you seem to be taking a view that birds..." He trailed off here because he didn't understand it that well and he didn't want Mary to think he was an idiot, but he was really curious about this.

She seemed to understand that and filled in his blanks. "It's well beyond your normal biology course, Eustace, so don't be embarrassed. I was looking at Huxley's view that Archaeopteryx is a transitional fossil between dinosaur and bird." She turned away to put her fingers on the Dimorphodon display, running a finger over the placard. "I find it attractive, but it's not a popular theory. Heilmann and Seeley put forth a convincing case for convergent evolution, which is a very compelling theory, to explain things like the boa and python I have in my ballroom."

Convergent evolution might also explain the same animals in Narnia and here, but he did not mention that. Eustace also did not know what to say about a woman who kept constrictors in her house. Alberta didn't like animals, any animals, at all. She didn't even like his beetle collection, and they were all dead.

"So what would you need to prove it one way or another? More fossils?"

"Precisely," she replied with an approving nod that made him feel like maybe he had read some of the right books, and that it was the dragon that had been the problem all along.

"If we find more theropods with bird-like structures, something between Compsognathus and Archaeopteryx, the answer may come. Maybe, oh, who knows, a dinosaur with feathers! Wouldn't that be exciting!"
Dr. Anning Russell going on about lizards sprouting feathers made Eustace think that he was not barmy at all.

She shrugged again, looking so animated it was easy to forget she'd been blubbing in front of the ichthyosaurs only a few minutes ago. "As I said, just because we've not seen it, doesn't mean it's not out there waiting to be found."

Feeling that maybe liking these things didn't make him a dragon, Eustace decided to plunge ahead. "My question's very basic," he admitted

"Oh?"

"Well, Seeley created the bird-hipped and lizard-hipped distinction in dinosaurs, right?"

"He did! And a brilliant piece of analysis it is. The mark of a really good theory is that it just gets stronger the more information that accumulates!"

She was so enthusiastic, it was infectious and a little overwhelming.

"Well, why are the bird-hipped dinosaurs not most like birds? Why are the dinosaurs with the lizard hips the ones you think evolved into birds? I tried looking at the skeletons and I just don't see it. I'm having a hard time even seeing the differences in the way the pubis bone is supposed to be pointing."

Mary was still for so long, Eustace wondered if he had said something offensive. She slowly removed another Humbug from her pocket and popped into her mouth. There was a loud and satisfying crunch sound as she chewed it. "Just so I understand, Eustace, you are asking me for some instruction on the subject of saurian pelvic anatomy?"

He nodded.

"Eustace, my friend, you may be recovering from a severe bout of brute and ass illness, but on at least one very important parameter, I find you vastly superior to your cousin, Peter."

"What's that?" he asked, feeling both pleased at the compliment and sullen about the slight upon Peter. He decided to not mention that he really thought Peter was like King Arthur, if King Arthur had been real.

"You are interested in discoursing on the subject of hips and Peter was not."

They sat outside, in the grass, under the Cat Window and a blue sky. Lucy told Polly and the Professor of Narnia, of Aslan, of Caspian, of The Dawn Treader, and of sailing the Eastern Sea. She rested her head on Polly's shoulder, held the Professor's hand, and cried a little bit as she told them of Aslan's command.

"It's the same thing he told Peter and Susan," Polly said softly.

"Yes." Lucy brushed away her tears before she made Polly's shirt all wet. "For all of us, the door back to his country will open here, not there."

The Professor clasped her hand tighter. "You've not lost Narnia. Aslan is here as well, Lucy."

"I know." Sniffling, she looked up at the Cat Window. Peter needs your help today. Peter needs your help today, she told the Lion. And maybe Edmund, too. You will go to them?

She did not hear Aslan, but knew he had heard her. Next time, I shall ask for a pony, she told him. It
was an old demand she used to make in her prayers as a child.

She felt the Lion's laugh.

"Lucy?" the Professor asked. "I have already thanked him, but do add a word from us to Aslan about Eustace."

She smiled back at him and nodded. The Professor always seemed to know when her connection with Aslan was especially strong.

"I have."

"Lucy is playing shortstop, again?" Polly asked. "And don't you dare roll in that, Simon!" She gave the spaniel's leash a tug and Simon reluctantly left whatever had interested him to return to their meeting on the grass.

"I prefer to think of Lucy as an intermediary," the Professor replied.

"That's what I said!" Polly retorted.

Not finding anything to eat by nosing in her pockets, Simon flopped over on his back in invitation and Lucy scooted forward, out from between Polly and the Professor, to rub the spaniel's belly and ears. They would now be able to continue their good-natured raillery without having to talk over or around her.

"I was comparing Lucy's communications to Aslan on our behalf as like those Catholics direct to Mary and their Saints; you were comparing her to a sporting team."

"She's a shortstop!" Polly teased. "Lucy can span the distance between the infield and the outfield."

"American baseball is an appalling sport, and doubly so when applied to matters of intercessions made on to the divine."

Polly was an avid supporter of the New York Yankees baseball team. Lucy had no idea what a shortstop was, and wasn't going to ask.

Before Polly could launch into praises of someone named Joltin' Joe, the Professor interrupted her with a brusque *ahem*. "Regardless, Eustace's change is truly miraculous."

"It is," Lucy agreed happily. "He says it's like turning from a dragon into a boy. And while everyone, Eustace included, certainly appreciates the change, I think there are times when he wishes still for a dragon's abilities."

"He was most anxious to see the Museum, but very polite about it," the Professor observed. He was gently fingering the grass they were sitting upon. "He did not return for a key, so he must have found a way in."

"Mary might have left the door unlocked," Polly said, untangling Simon's leash from around her ankles. She had kicked off her shoes and was wriggling her white stockinged feet – Polly liked shoes as little as Lucy did. "She tends to do that."

The Professor leaned back on his hands and squinted up at the towering Museum wall. "Was Mary coming here? I thought she was with Richard?"

Polly's warning *hrmmmm* sounded very much like Simon. Lucy therefore listened even more
attentively, but pretended not to. "She was with Richard and left the hospital to come here."

"To see the ichthyosaurs?" Lucy could hear the sudden spark of worry in the Professor's voice.

"Yes," Polly responded tonelessly.

"Oh dear."

The Professor removed his glasses and began polishing them. Lucy lay down and leaned against Simon who slurped her fingers, tasting for essence of something left over from lunch. "It's all gone, Simon," she told him gently.

"Eustace was looking forward to meeting Mary. Perhaps they shall run into one another," she said, deciding to interrupt the covert looks passing between Polly and the Professor. She wished to meet Mary as well. Anyone who was so fond of Alice, was researching gryphons, and looked like a Birch dryad was someone she very much wanted to come to know better. "He wanted to talk about dinosaurs and hips and things."

The Professor made a strange, strangled sort of noise and Polly snorted. This sounded entertaining, so Lucy turned about to study her friends.

The Professor was polishing his glasses so vigorously, Polly commented, "Careful, Digory, or you shall bend them."

"This only happens with you, Polly," the Professor said,

"And Mary! And doubly so when we are together!"

"Quite."

"Is there a problem?" Lucy asked sweetly. "Peter did suggest that we might never see Eustace again if he expressed an interest in those matters to Mary."

"No," the Professor said hurriedly. "Not a problem. Exactly." He shoved the glasses back on over his nose because they certainly were clean – though cleaning them wasn't really the point of the exercise.

"Now, Digory, do not be so censorious. Mary is perfectly capable of carrying on an appropriate conversation on the subject of hips, so long as there is no gin involved."

"You are the one who becomes very silly on gin, my dear, not Mary."

At this point, Lucy very much wished for the addition of Peter or Susan's observations, as she could see that there were things being discussed other than gin and dinosaur hips that were considerably more interesting (to her anyway) than gin and dinosaur hips, but she was only catching about half of what was unspoken.

"Do we need to mount a rescue party?" Lucy offered. "I have a knife."

They laughed, so whatever peril there was to Eustace did not seem to require immediate intervention.

Seeing the Professor look upwards, Lucy followed his gaze. There were small birds flitting about overhead. Peter had written of them. The Oxford swifts nested in the towers of the Museum. They birds were amazing hunters, swooping about, catching insects in the late afternoon air.

"The swifts are lovely, aren't they?" she said.
"Each mortal thing does one thing and the same: Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells, Crying What I do is me: for that I came."

To her surprise, it was the Professor who spoke the lovely words.

"That is beautiful!" she exclaimed. "Whoever wrote it?"

Polly, however, began waving her arms. "Digory, stop right now. In another minute, you shall be expounding upon Hopkins, inscape, Scotus and haezetas."

"Haecceitas," the Professor corrected mildly, otherwise ignoring Polly's efforts as he watched the darting swifts.

"Haecceitas? What's that?" Lucy thought it sounded very complicated or, perhaps, it was a disease.

"This," Polly said with an eye roll. "Or thisness more precisely, which is surely contradictory."

"This?" Lucy repeated.

"Polly, do cease your attempts at elucidating metaphysics before you injure something." To Lucy, the Professor said, "For our purposes, I shall say only that I was commenting upon the unique nature of each swift, and enjoying the praise each bird was making to its Creator."

"Oh, I suppose," Lucy replied. "I was admiring how well they flew and hunted."

"Precisely," the Professor said with a smile. "And so you and I see the same thing, and are in perfect accord, though we describe them differently."

"It's theology and philosophy, Lucy," Polly said. "Just nod your head wisely and say, 'I see.'"

Lucy giggled.

"That usually suffices for you, certainly," Digory retorted, taking whatever sting out of the words with a gentle touch to Polly's shoulder.

Polly laughed again. "And so, moving from thisness to that, how is your letter writing campaign faring?"

"Not especially well," Lucy replied, with a sigh. Simon nosed her hair, probably sensing her distress over it all. "Thank you, Professor, for recommending Archbishop Temple and Chief Rabbi Hertz. They both wrote back very courteously and I do feel better knowing that some people are actually paying attention to what the newspapers are reporting. I cannot help thinking that there would be more outrage if it were one million Anglicans who were dead."

"Historical bigotry to Jews is certainly a factor," the Professor agreed, stretching out his long legs. He was still wearing shoes and Lucy could see a small hole in one of his dark socks. There was no one to repair them and she thought the Professor was even worse with a darning needle than she was.

"It is also probably the unthinkable enormity of it," the Professor continued, running his fingers through the grass again. "As hateful as Hitler is, it is difficult to imagine killing a million people for no crime other than simply being born."

"Were it not for what Jadis and the Telmarines did to the Narnians, I am not sure I would have believed it," Lucy had to admit. And Susan believed; so they all did. Though they could of course say nothing about that. Or this. Or thisness.
"She was not human, but Jadis murdered her entire civilization of Charn," the Professor added quietly.

With the words, Polly reached over, closing the space between her and the Professor. Together, they bowed their heads over their clasping hands. In the rare instances when they discussed Charn, the Professor and Polly were very somber about it and Lucy always felt she was interrupting something when they did. It was a very private thing and so she looked away, watched the swifts, and waited silently for them to observe whatever it was that was for them alone.

"Also, people are apathetic because they think cannot do anything, and so do nothing," Polly finally said, as if there had been no break in their discussion of the plight of the Jews. "It's very difficult for people to be comfortable making a fuss."

"And girls especially are not supposed to make a fuss, are they?" Lucy muttered, feeling the bitterness rise again. She was not a Queen in England, and she was not an adult in England. She tried to and usually did accept these limitations upon her actions. But she loathed that girls and women were told, usually by men, what they could and could not do.

Both Polly and the Professor laughed so heartily at this, Lucy felt she should be laughing, but mostly felt a little peevish that they seemed to be mocking her comment.

"On the contrary, Lucy, we old suffragists believe that women denied or ignored make the very best sort of fuss," the Professor said, with a fond look at Polly.

"We do!" Polly said with another merry laugh. She leaned forward and squeezed Lucy on the shoulder. "When the time comes, Lucy, do let me know and I shall be happy to instruct on the many creative ways that unladylike ladies can make a fuss."

"Polly, do leave out those parts about the hunger strikes and arson!"

Lucy's short-lived coolness melted away in the warmth of her admiration for the Professor and Polly. Peter had also spoken of these wondrous influences – though more generally and he had not mentioned going on strikes, getting arrested, and starting fires. Discussing Narnia with Polly and the Professor was wonderful, but they had only been there a few days. They had spent their whole lives since then making it real. They were astonishing people who had lived, and were still living, astonishing, inspirational lives.

"You were a suffragist too, Professor?"

"Do you really think Polly would have let me do otherwise?" he replied dryly.

Polly gave the Professor an affectionate shove. "He was a card-carrying member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage."

"The meetings were ghastly. Boiled Russian tea and pretensions of modernity."

Polly whispered at her, "They always talked about sexual freedom" and the Professor pretended to not to hear her.

Lucy laughed, welcoming the reminder that hard changes were often hard won. "Oh, and thank you both so much for sending me Archbishop Temple's book. You were right, and it was just what I needed to read."

"He is a great man," the Professor said.
"I have heard him preach before," Polly said. "It is not an experience one ever forgets."

The Professor nodded a little but to her surprise added nothing further; Lucy filled in the silence. "I so admire what he says about how every person should be able to live in a proper, safe home, and have an education and an income, and freedom. And I can't help thinking that those things all sound so very Narnian…"

She trailed off from the enthusiastic babble that was surely to follow, confused that Polly and the Professor were now both frowning. "What?" she asked, feeling defensive. "Did I say something wrong?"

"Only in characterizing such values as Narnian, Lucy. You might think of them as such, because that is your reference. These are important matters with a long history here as well."

With the Professor's gentle reminder, Lucy sent another thank you to Aslan. She had not known how badly she needed to hear these words of hope and purpose for the future here until she had heard them spoken.

Lucy nodded. "You are right of course. It is only that I know Narnia so much better and know how to accomplish things there. Here, I'm a bit ignorant and probably very naïve."

"You have made an excellent start, Lucy, and we are very proud of you." Polly spoke so feelingly, Lucy nearly wept in gratitude. "And speaking of trying to get something done and raising a fuss, the Labour Party is sponsoring a meeting at Caxton Hall on the second of September about the murders of the Jews. Would you like me to take you?"

Lucy was so astounded, she thought her heart might burst. She flipped up from the ground and Simon barked in protest at this rough treatment. Lucy threw her arms around Polly. "I had heard about it and so wanted to go!"

Polly's thin arms tightened around her. "This world needs you so much, Queen Lucy," Polly whispered.

"And we are so fortunate to have Queen Lucy with us," the Professor added softly, his hand on her back.

Lucy had to untangle herself as Simon was pushing his way between them, assuming that with that much emotion, he was obviously required for something.

The Professor tried to pull the spaniel away, but there was a hopeless tangle of dog, slurping dog tongue, quivering dog stumpy tail, limbs, shoes and missing socks (Lucy's).

"Simon, heel!" the Professor grumbled, climbing to his feet and hauling the spaniel after him.

Lucy scrambled around on the grass for her shoes and socks as Polly stood. "Simon is telling us he has sat around long enough."

As she was shoving her feet into her shoes, Aslan whispered in her heart, though it was not about a pony for Christmas.

Thank you anyway, she told the Lion.

"I shall take him, Polly," Lucy said, jumping up to take Simon's leash from the Professor. "Edmund is on his way here, and I shall meet him."
"Very well, thank you, Lucy."

The Professor was staring at the Museum's front doors. "Polly, while Lucy finds Edmund, I believe you and I should mount an expedition for the recovery of Eustace."

"I shall be your native guide!" Polly cried, taking his arm.

"Then we shall certainly be as doomed as Eustace," the Professor replied, kissing Polly's cheek.

"You could not find South at the North Pole, Digory."

With another laugh and two hugs, Lucy pulled Simon away down the lawn. She left the elder Friends of Narnia linked, arm to arm, and discussing how surely Faeries had been the culpable party in an unplanned overnight excursion on the wilds of Dartmoor.

"So it is the hip joint that makes the erect stance possible, and necessary, in dinosaurs, and explains why other reptiles, such as Crocodilians and Squamates have a less erect and more sprawling posture." Mary was illustrating the point by drawing pictures in her notebook of V's and femurs fitting into ileums.

They heard a door slam and footsteps.

"Eustace!" It was Aunt Polly calling.

"I'm over here!" he called back.

"Where?"

"On the South wall, by the dinosaurs," they heard the Professor say.

Polly said something indistinct and Eustace heard them both laugh.

Mary pushed her notebook back into her bag and glanced over her shoulder in the direction of the voices. The Professor was saying something about making sure Lucy saw Alice's Dodo.

"Eustace, would you do something for me?" Mary whispered quickly as their footsteps thumped closer. "Tell me, do I look like I've been crying?"

"No, not really." Her nose was still red but that looked like sunburn.

"Please, don't tell the others I was blubbing."

Given how much weeping there had been, and Peter's stout assurances that it was perfectly alright because of Narnia and everything, Eustace didn't like to think crying was something to be ashamed of when you had a reason for it. Mary's husband was in the hospital and so of course she was worried. They all would understand.

"If you are sad, wouldn't it help to talk to your friends?" he asked. "Wouldn't it be better to tell them about how upset you are?"

She shook her head. "That's not it. I wouldn't want Digs or Polly to feel that they must take sides, that's all."

Eustace wanted to ask about this because it didn't make such sense to him. He remembered though what Peter had told him. He did not have to understand – he only needed to be understanding.
Mary's eyes were starting to get red again and she angrily brushed tears away. Eustace quickly pulled a peppermint out of his pocket. "Humbug?"

She took the candy with a pale, half sort of smile. "Thank you, Eustace."

Chapter 4, Dodos and Dunces
In which there are many meetings in Oxford and a few more gaps are filled in the record

There are many links in my live journal to pictures of the various specimens Eustace and Mary discuss.

Mary's discussion of the debate regarding the significance of Archaeopteryx is from numerous sources. To summarize the Wiki entry regarding the origin of birds (repeated and expanded in many other places), there were, by the time of 1942, two competing theories to explain Archaeopteryx. Thomas Huxley (Darwin's Bulldog – who debated Wilberforce on the merits of evolution at the Oxford Museum in 1860) theorized an evolutionary relationship between dinosaurs and birds. The predominant, more respected theory of Harry G. Seeley and Heilmann was that the similarities were due to convergent evolution – a phenomenon well demonstrated by the Green Tree Python and Emerald Tree Boa that Mary keeps in the ballroom at Russell House (referred to in Chapter 3 of TQSiT). In 1969, John Ostrom described and named *Deinonychus* - a genus closely related to the infamous *Velociraptor mongoliensis*. Ostrom began describing the many similarities between theropods and birds, resurrecting Huxley's original hypothesis.

As paleontologists have begun to fill in the fossil record, there have indeed been many discoveries of feathered dinosaurs.

Information about the Museum's collections is taken from its website and the picture of the Cat Window appeared in a recent entry on the Museum's blog.

Digory is quoting *As kingfishers catch fire, as dragonflies draw flame* by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Huge thanks to Snacky for the final proofing!
Dodos and Dunces

Chapter Summary

In which there are many meetings in Oxford and a few more gaps are filled in the record

Apostolic Way, Chapter 4, Dodos and Dunces

In which there are many meetings in Oxford and a few more gaps are filled in the record

"Why," said the Dodo, "the best way to explain it is to do it." … First it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle, (‘the exact shape doesn’t matter,’ it said,) and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. [When] they had been running half an hour or so, and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out "The race is over!" and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking, "But who has won?"

L. Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

In any essential order a circle is impossible. … The first proof is this. There is no effect which does not stem from some proper efficient cause; if something is not ordered to an end, it does not originate with a proper efficient cause… Aristotle adequately expresses this in the second book of the Physics where he says that intelligence and nature as proper causes are necessarily prior to the incidental causes of spontaneity and chance. … Every proper agent acts for the sake of an end, for it does nothing in vain.

Bl. John Duns Scotus, A Treatise On God As First Principle

Digory climbed the stair back to his office. Eustace was now buried in the King James Version, Revised, of the Bible. His college office’s library had eight different versions of the Bible, in five languages. Though for very different reasons, neither he nor Eustace was especially concerned with nuances of translation and interpretation. The KJV – 1885, not 1611 – was the most accessible and he had directed Eustace to the Creation and Flood stories of Genesis, as well as where in the first Book of Samuel he could find reference to giants – the story of David and Goliath. As for dragons, well there were those many passages in Revelation, but Digory simply did not feel up to explaining the apocalypse as a genre of literature and John's heavy symbology.

Strange that Eustace was beginning this particular journey while Lucy was embarking upon a similar one, but in the opposite direction by his judge. As to her blossoming social conscience – and he and Polly both recognized those symptoms very well – Polly would have it all well in hand. For his part, he had not yet had the opportunity to discuss the growing doubts Lucy had expressed to him in her letters over the summer. It was possible her views had altered with the return to Narnia. Or, perhaps, that would only accelerate what Digory thought was to be an inevitable schism in her future. He remembered asking these same questions, and he knew the answers that would be spewed at Lucy would content her no more than they had satisfied him. Divining the likely causes for her growing disillusionment, Digory had hoped that directing her to Archbishop Temple's works would have slowed the momentum. He knew from painful experience that such profound spiritual changes were best tackled when one was beyond boarding school and not living with parents.

And from Lucy, to Peter. Digory now tarried on the stairs, stalling the coming discussion. He was
still trying to sort it all out. With High King Peter unmasked last week and haring off to Cambridge, Digory was struggling with how to treat Peter Pevensie now. It had been far less complicated when they had all been at his country house and Peter had needed nothing from him except shelter during the Blitz. This position as tutor and academic advisor to a young man who was his King by Aslan's will and, appearances aside, was over thirty years of age, had become unexpectedly uncomfortable for both of them.

He and Polly had discussed it. She, however, had no issue with High King Peter, other than the appalling habit of feeling she needed to drop a curtsey when in his presence. Her problems tended to arise with Susan. Polly Plummer and the Gentle Queen were very, very different people and friction tended to follow when they were in close quarters.

Simon was lounging in a patch of sunlight in the middle of the floor. When Digory had left the office, Polly and Peter had been arguing about who would take the one extra chair. It had not been wholly resolved for Polly was still hovering. Peter was perched at the window sill looking as implacably immovable as ever. Digory scooted around Polly and his massive desk to his own desk chair – it and his bones creaked as he settled into it. He had to shove a stack of journals to one side for an unobstructed view. Polly looked concerned, but he knew precisely how far he could push academic publications before they toppled over the edge.

"Sit down, Polly," Digory told her. "Or, Peter will have to issue an order and really it is just a chair."

With a grumble reminiscent of Simon, Polly grudgingly took the seat – Digory was not sure if it was that she felt she should stand in the High King's presence or if the sexism of a man giving up his seat to a woman irked her. It might very well be that Polly was conflicted and could not decide herself.

"What did you wish to speak to us about, Peter?" Digory asked, though he had to look askance as he did so. Leaning against the sill, Peter appeared to be as he had all summer, in rolled up shirtsleeves, with shirt tails that never stayed put, and trousers that had been let out as far as they could go. He needed a haircut. Yet, when Peter spoke, Digory was hearing echoes of Lions and clashing steel. The din had only been growing louder and added to the dissonance. Peter had not been back to Narnia, yet there seemed to be a stronger sense of the place clinging to him.

With a backwards glance, Polly reached behind her and gently pushed the office door closed.

"Yes, Peter?" Polly asked politely attending.

"It is about Asim. How well do you know him?"

Polly frowned and she was mirroring Digory's sudden spike of unease. "Is there something wrong?" he asked.

Peter crossed his arms over his chest. "No, not exactly. But something singular has occurred of which you should be apprised."

"I met Asim through Digory and Mary," Polly replied promptly, obeying the tacit order of her King. "I am acquainted with him only through Mary, really."

He was still considering what Peter was broaching. Something singular might have occurred, but where Asim was concerned, this was to be expected. Which meant this must be highly singular indeed.

"Have you heard any of Asim's story, Peter?" Digory asked.

"We have spoken of when he rode in the Arab Revolts and about his military service. There are large
periods of time unaccounted for. Richard had told me that Asim saw Mary in a souk in Marrakech and followed her home?"

"It was over ten years ago," Polly added, looking to him for confirmation. "1930, perhaps?"

Digory picked up the tale as he had come into it. "It is as Richard told you. Asim saw Mary in the souk. She had run away from her governess…"

"Again," Polly injected.

"Mary had spent years fleeing from her chaperones and tutors," Digory explained. "This time, she was trying to pay a camel driver to take her to the Kem Kem basin to look for dinosaurs."


"Yes, Polly, thank you for that clarification," he retorted, smiling to take away the sting.

"Always be precise in scientific endeavors, my dear boy!" she chortled in a fair imitation of Uncle Andrew.

Peter laughed and shook his head. "To the point, I should be neither surprised nor critical of Mary's efforts, I suppose, as any of us might have done the same." He paused. "Come to think of it, Lucy frequently picked up strays and brought them home, though her forays were never on paleontological expeditions that I recall."

"What did Lucy get up to?" Polly asked, sounding very approving.

"Caravans, traders, gypsies, tinkers, pirates, winemakers, and disappearances once a year into the Western Wild to look for Bacchus."

Bacchus. Oh dear. These were Narnian stories that Digory was resolved to not hear told. Rather like those ones Peter had intimated involving old men with young women not their granddaughters. Polly, on the other hand, had that dangerous gleam in her eye that only came after a stiff gin.

"Bacchus!" Polly exclaimed. "How marvelous! Did you ever meet him? Or his maenads?"

Before he could express his ardent desire for an immediate change of subject, Peter came to the rescue with a look that was sympathetic but not apologetic. "Perhaps, Polly, you should ask Susan or Lucy to tell you of it?"

Polly laughed. "I shall!"

Digory cleared his throat, ever so relieved to have dodged that conversation. "Returning to your query, Peter, Asim introduced himself and convinced Mary that going out into the desert with so little preparation was foolhardy."

"So, he was astute enough even in that first meeting to suggest incompetence rather than a prohibition?" Peter observed.

"Indeed. Upon introduction to Mary's father, Asim assumed the role of guide and tutor and Mary never had a governess again."

Peter considered this. "So, truly just as they say, it was a chance meeting in a market?"

Digory cringed inwardly at this misapprehension. "Not chance," he corrected firmly. "The question is what caused Asim to approach Mary? And that is where it becomes singular."
"Digory and I are so accustomed to singularity, we never found it particularly remarkable," Polly said.

"The perils of being a Narnian," Peter quipped dryly. "One's standards for normalcy do shift."

"Quite," Digory said with a nod. "And that undoubtedly coloured how we approached it. When Mary returned to London later that year, Asim was with her. She said that God had told Asim to follow her, but to please not tell her father as he would think it odd." He smiled, thinking back to that day in the British Museum. "Mary was going to help Asim on his spiritual journey and he was going to teach her how to speak Arabic, drive a camel, and orienteer."

Mary had been about Lucy's age and she had spoken of this with such conviction it had all seemed perfectly reasonable. Perhaps it was. To a Narnian.

Peter nodded, as if not really surprised. Which was, Digory thought, also singular. Asim's cultural, religious and military histories were plain enough. His intense spirituality was far less obvious and Digory had not assumed Peter had been privy to it.

"Did he or Mary ever elaborate upon the nature of this spiritual journey?"

Polly shrugged. "Asim has never said, but from Richard, I understand that he seeks those who are God-touched."

"God-touched?" Peter repeated.

"I admit it is unclear as to how he identified such persons. But, wherever Mary goes, Asim usually follows." Polly gestured broadly using her hands and walking fingers. "While she is off with her latest research interest, Asim finds those whom he believes are God-touched. It is, by Richard's account, quite a rag tag collection."

"I have wondered if Asim sees Aslan's presence in us," Digory said quietly. "I have never asked, of course, and he has never said anything of it. But, if he believes trailing Mary leads him to such persons, logically, we might be part of that rag tag collection." He shifted in his chair and with a finger gently rocked a bird's nest hidden amidst the paper on his desk. "If that is indeed the case, his first introduction to us in London would have been a confirmation from God that trailing Mary was the correct path for him."

There was a long, long pause broken only by Simon snoring. The spaniel's legs twitched – a dog dream.

"This is not especially illuminating," Peter finally said, a little ruefully, shaking his head.

"Can you enlighten us at all?" Polly asked.

"Some weeks ago, when I was speaking with him, Asim told me of a dream he said God showed him. He was shown – his words, not mine – a green boat, with a purple sail and a dragon prow."

Digory felt singularity give way to outright shock. "The Dawn Treader?"

"In one," Peter replied. "The same boat is also in a picture on the wall of Harold and Alberta's house. The picture drew Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace into Narnia."

"How extraordinary!" Polly exclaimed.

Digory fidgeted and removed his glasses to polish them. This was causing a serious reassessment of
things. "Surely Asim has not been to Narnia?"

"No, we don't believe so."

Digory wanted to ask how it was that Peter could speak of this so authoritatively. Lucy might know, he supposed. He glanced at Polly – she returned the look, and shook her head slightly. She wanted to ask, but would not. If Peter wished to explain, he would and as he had not offered to do so, it was not their place to question it.

"It is, as you say, singular."

Peter let out a deep breath. He straightened out of his school boy slouch and Digory felt that gulf between them widen again. "It seems that Asim is, by Aslan's will, a part of our story. As you have both known him so long, I wished to inform you of this and learn if you knew anything that might clarify the issue."

Undoubtedly this was how Peter had treated his advisors and councilors – explaining, listening and then making his decisions with a finality that brooked no argument.

"Of course, thank you," Digory murmured.

"What does this mean going forward…” Polly stumbled and almost said High King.

"We do not know."

Digory thought Peter was speaking on behalf his siblings. He didn't think this was the royal We.

"Asim has effectively offered his fealty to us and I deemed it Aslan's will to accept it, but how that will work here with his other competing duties remains to be seen."

And really to that extraordinary statement, he and Polly could make no answer, other than a muted, "Of course," and "Certainly, that seems perfectly sensible." It was all completely mad, unless one was a Narnian or otherwise Down A Rabbit Hole.

"Is there anything else, Peter?" Polly asked.

"I need to speak to the Professor, but as to this matter, no." The High King paused and then spoke to him directly. "If now is convenient?"

Digory nodded and fiddled with the handle on his desk drawer. There was aspirin powder in there – should he have it now, or after?

Polly stood and gathered her carpet bag. Simon was snoring. "Wake up, Simon! We must be off to the Hospital." The spaniel raised his head, and then the rest of his body, stretched, yawned and shook himself.

"For a sick man, Richard seems very vigorous," Peter said, bending down to administer a scratch to Simon's ears.

"Not too much, Peter, or Simon will go all floppy and I'll never get him out of here!"

Proving her point, Simon rolled over on to his back for belly rubs. Peter declined the invitation and straightened. "I believe Richard has concluded that if he misbehaves, they will evict him sooner."

Come to think of it… "Polly, a visit from you is in order," Digory urged, rising to see her off.

"Eustace mentioned that those humbugs in his pockets came from Mary."
Polly scowled. "Oh really?" Her lips firmed into a hard line.

"Oh yes."

"Is there a problem?" Peter asked.

"Just a habit of Mary's that we've both observed when she is stressed. Which indicates I should beat Richard with my umbrella."

For emphasis, Polly grabbed her umbrella hanging on the back of the chair, tossed it in the air, and with a flourish caught it neatly in one hand.

Peter clapped his approval. "I had a Sword Master who could have taught you to do that with a short sword!"

"Who says I never learned?"

"She is showing off," Digory said, laughing. "Swords notwithstanding, Polly is very skilled at the lost sport of umbrella fencing, wields a carpet bag like an axe, and is a crack rifle shot."

Digory held the door open for her. "I shall walk you out."

They were on the stairs before either said anything. "So…" Polly began.

"Quite," he responded.

"Who would have thought…"

"Extraordinary, isn't it?"

"She'll rot her teeth if this continues."

"Please scold him for the both of us."

"I do wonder how though."

"Perhaps he is keeping her in supply?"

"Dinner tonight?"

"Of course."

"Do you think the usual?"

"I'm sure Bingo can accommodate the lot of us."

"So long as…"

"Good heavens, I hope not!"

After so long, actual verbal communication between the two of them was often perfunctory at best, and indecipherable to anyone else.

At the front door, Polly looped the umbrella on her arm, leaned forward, and gave him a peck on the cheek. "You are fretting about Peter. Don't. It will be well."

"I am not certain any more how to treat him," Digory admitted, leaning over to pat Simon. "It all
"Of course it is awkward," Polly replied. "He looks like a boy, acts like, and in fact is, our King, and treats you as a minister on matters of state, not as a tutor."

"That does sum it up," Digory replied gloomily.

"Budge up, Digory. And don't forget you've left Eustace in the library with the Bibles."

"That sounds like a murder mystery, doesn't it? Holmes, I say! It was Eustace in the library with the Bibles!"

Polly laughed. "Well you certainly only use them for heavy doorstops, Digory!"

Others found their Gods in churches, temples, shrines and mosques; Digory heard the song of the Divine Creator in Polly's laugh.

"The Bible does feature murder and mayhem aplenty."

By the time he returned to the office, Peter was reshelving Douglas' superlative translation of The Aeneid. Peter's own half-hearted attempt at the War in Latium and the very marked up essay on Scotus' metaphysics were neatly stacked on the corner desk. All had been forgotten in the haste to get to Cambridge. There would not be time now to complete the work, and perhaps no point to it.

"Please, sit, Professor."

At his desk, Digory fumbled at the drawer latch and decided to wait on the aspirin powder until after they concluded. It tasted vile without a beverage and it would be unseemly to drink from his flask of port when Peter was there.

Peter pulled his own chair forward and sat. They faced one another across so many divides, of which Digory's cluttered desk was the most easily spanned.

"To alleviate your worries, Professor, in the Michaelmas term, I intend to sit for the entrance exam and apply for admission as we planned."

Another conversation, another shock. "You do?"

"Yes, unless you believe it to be in vain?"

"No, not at all, Peter. Much of your work is very…" Digory groped for the word. "Solid. Some of it is very, very good. On the strength of your essay on the use of iron in Greek buildings, Professor Beazley is eager to recommend you to the Modern Greats programme and his recommendation and my own are not without weight. Your Headmaster is very enthusiastic. With a decent exam and interview, I have every confidence you would be admitted to a College."

Peter smiled, evidently pleased with this, or perhaps merely amused that he had confounded his minister–tutor. "You seem surprised, Professor."

"I am, Peter. Very. I had assumed that you were looking for a change. Granted, with the War, I do not see Modern Greats as offering the clear path directly into the civil service that it once did. But, I had thought coming to this meeting that I would be trying to convince you to stay the course. I'm very pleased to hear you intend to continue."

"No, I had never intended to abandon this effort and I apologize for letting you think otherwise. This
has always been our goal. I cannot imagine disappointing Father, or you."

How was it that Peter could still so astound? Richard had been so vociferous in his objections to Peter's academic course, Digory had thought that Peter was at least a party to it. Digory felt guilt for ever doubting the man's commitment. "Peter, you could never disappoint. A country has been built twice upon your leadership. A university curriculum is simply no challenge for you by comparison."

Digory found that he could not quite read Peter's curiously flat expression. His "Thank you, Professor," seemed warm, but not especially genuine.

Before Digory could consider it further, Peter went on, "I would not be here without you and Father, so I am very much the fruit of your hard labour. I could do no less." He leaned forward. "There is, however, a second part to this. I hope that if I obtain admission, I can defer, and my parents will then sign the necessary consent so that I can begin the process of joining up."

And so, finally, it had come. Digory let out a deep breath and gathered his thoughts, separating logic and emotion, and the appearance of youth from the reality of the man and King. Peter had been wary of the service for very good reasons. Yet, having been there himself for the Great War that was to have ended all Wars, Digory had been equally certain that as Peter approached 17 and 18, his commitment to serve would prevail. Even with his very legitimate concerns, Peter would not be able to sit it out, serving in the Home Guard, waiting for the mandatory training and conscription, and the possibility that the War would end before he was called up.

"As to the deferment, that poses no difficulty at all. And so you intend to use your admission to bargain with your parents?"

"That, or if they refuse, I'll make such a spectacle of myself in the school's Officer Training Corps or the local Home Guard in Reading that I'll be picked out, with Asim's help if need be."

Digory nodded at that. He knew that Peter and Edmund had both deliberately tried to avoid the attention of recruiters to prevent charges of insubordination in another General's Army from arising any sooner than they would otherwise. If Peter showed himself truly as the man he was, it was going to be noticed and he would be packed off to a training unit as soon as, and maybe even before, the ink on the paperwork had dried.

"And if it is supposed to happen, and I think it is, I shall probably see the effects of Aslan's paws in it."

"I do not disagree, Peter. I commend you for thinking this through. I shall write to your Headmaster and see if you might come up here on weekends and I can continue to coach you until your exam."

"Thank you, Professor." Peter stood and began collecting his papers. "Is there anything else?"

Digory shook his head. The conversation had gone far better than he had anticipated.

Peter shrugged into his jacket and drew out from a pocket a short knife in a leather sheath. "I have managed to forget twice now. Professor, this is Asim's knife. Might you return it to him for me?"

"Well, that depends, Peter. If you ever admired that knife, he probably gave it to you as a gift. In which case, it would be rude of me to give his gift to you back to him."

With a frown, Peter returned the knife to his pocket. "Very well. I am sure I shall be seeing him again soon."

Looking over the corner desk where he had worked all summer, Peter ran a finger along the top of
the now cleared space and dusted it off with his sleeve. "Saharan sand, I believe."

"Mary upend her bag on to your desk?"

"She did. And removed a *Castor fiber* paper from the Russell binder."

"I shall never see it again," Digory replied mournfully. "Mary never loses anything, but she never returns anything, either."

"I shall be off to the hospital then," Peter said, slipping a pencil into his coat.

Digory waved him away. "It is fine, of course, but you might want to give Polly a little more time with Richard." As Mary was eating candy again, Polly was going to have to poke Richard quite a lot before his behavior improved.

"I will not visit Richard until the hollering stops." Peter glanced through his valise, inventoring the contents then snapped it shut. "There is someone else at the hospital I wished to see, so I might be late for supper. Don't wait for me."

*Oh.*

Peter was likely speaking of that very attentive nurse Richard loathed. However, even Jadis threatening him with an iron bar and wand would not make Digory ask for further clarification. Nurse Hawkins was probably two or three years older than Peter, but … Digory's Victorian sensibilities rallied and strangled any further speculation as most assuredly not his concern. Whatevsoever. At all. Ever. Under any circumstances up to and including an Apocalypse of Biblical proportions, featuring galloping Horsemen, swarms of locusts, and rivers running with blood.

"Of course. No hurry, Peter. You are at your leisure. We shall eat at the pub tonight." He found his voice was cracking a little with the stress.

Peter had the good grace to keep a bland countenance and make no commentary at all. But, then, come to think on it, Richard had been similarly polite to him during those ghastly suffragist meetings of the Men's League. Digory had attended because Polly would have beaten him with her umbrella if he had not done so and some of the philosophical discussion had been engaging. Richard had gone to meet the thoroughly emancipated women who also attended and had enthusiastically partaken of the very Bloomsbury milieu. He and Richard had always come together to the Men's League meetings and Digory had always left alone.

"Until later then, Professor," and Peter sauntered out, valise tucked under his arm.

Digory yanked open his desk drawer. A few moments of frantic searching and he found the object of his need. Tucked between the pages in his volume of poetry by Gerard Manley Hopkins was his bookmark and godsend – the aspirin powder.

The dancing and drinking at Leszi's farewell bonfire had a sharp edge. Edmund hoped that there were no invasions within the next day because any member of their Army who could drink wine, ale, or Lightning was doing so with a fervent vigor. Mr. Hoberry had laid in quantities of willow bark pain reliever, but a full third of their fighting forces would be incapacitated in the morning.

He settled back against a tree and sipped his own wine. Leszi would have disparaged him for it now and that was why Edmund was bent upon moderation this evening. It was his final sarcastic comeback – and so one that their Sword Master would have approved of in his own caustic, combative way.
Edmund was now rounding toward age thirty and, with the siege of Anvard and Leszi's passage to Aslan, he was feeling his mortality. Narrow shaves and death had a way of prompting self-examination.

There were bellows, cries, and the pounding of hooves, and the Mischief that was Aidan's many small relations thundered by, accompanied by two Centaur Foals, a litter of Puppies, and a rustling of Dryad saplings. The Wolf and Leopard Guards galloping alongside the horde had their tongues lolling out of their mouths, obviously fatigued. They needed Guards with endurance to keep up with five (or was it 7? 10? 23?) Human children under the age of twelve.

At some very intellectual level, Edmund knew that he and his family had ascended the Narnian throne at about the same tender age as this brood. Yet, to his jaded eye, these Archenlanders seemed far too young for such weighty responsibilities. They were exhausting, exuberant, entertaining, and at times, irksome. He would not trust them to fetch a bucket of water – except perhaps Aidan's eldest niece – a very serious and quiet sort.

The sudden silencing of the raucous caws and shouts meant that the Crows were breaking from the beetle races. He looked about, expectant. Then, through the dimness beyond the light of the crackling bonfire, Morgan emerged. Cyrus, Leszi's (purported) son, was still with her, holding her hand.

Morgan bent down to confer with Cyrus on a matter of beetle racing importance. She shook her head and gave the young Satyr a push in another direction, toward the Archenland Mischief who were doing a poor job of trying to climb an accommodating Oak. Lucy would have to show them the tricks of it. Cyrus made a hesitant step forward in the direction of the ruckus. There was a reluctant look back, Morgan gave Cyrus another shove, and the Satyr finally trotted off. Being part Goat (though it was not polite to remark upon), Cyrus would be able to demonstrate proper tree climbing skills.

"Will you join me?" Edmund asked, beckoning.

"That was my plan," Morgan replied. Rafiqa, her Guard, withdrew and Edmund heard the Hound exchange some quiet words with Jalur in the darkness behind them.

Edmund took her ale and set it far to the side to avoid the otherwise inevitable spills. Holding out a steadying hand, Morgan was then able to lower herself to the ground next to him without banging, upending, or tripping over anything.

"The Crows are eating the racers again, so it was time for a recess," Morgan said. She hiked up her skirts and twined her bare feet with his. Leaning in very close, she whispered, "I think it is helping Cyrus."

"So it seems. It was kindly thought of." He took her hand and squeezed it. "And so were your words at the Farewell for Leszi. You spoke very well, Morgan. Thank you."

He waited, giving Morgan the time to organize her rapidly running thoughts into coherent speech. She tipped her head on to his shoulder.

"Truly?"

"Truly."

"I did not know Leszi very well." She settled closer, sneaking her arm around his waist. "I was worried the sentiment seemed selfish, but Rafiqa said it was fine."
"It was more than fine." Edmund laced their fingers together. "It was very appropriate and I was very moved by it. All who heard you were."

"Thank you," she whispered. There was another long hesitation. "I've never been here before when you have ridden off to war, like you did to rescue Anvard. I didn't like it …" Here she paused again and then deliberately added, "Edmund."

It had been their custom of over five years; Morgan called him "Harold," a joke between them from the first days of their courtship. It was always unexpectedly pleasant when she used his real name.

So you were worried about me?" he teased.

"Yes!"

As with everyone that evening, there was an edge to her that needed soothing. "It was all well. The Siege of Anvard was an utter rout for Narnia."

"That's why I wanted to thank Leszi," Morgan said softly. "I thought I should speak about how those who stay behind feel knowing that you all have to go." Another pause. "And how grateful we are that he trained you all so well." Yet another hesitation. "I thought it might mean more … because I said it."

She was blurtin in fits and starts, saying things long rehearsed but never said. But, for all that speaking to Humans was very difficult for Morgan, when she did speak, it was fervent, honest, and heartfelt. She might omit, but she never lied.

"I know Farewells are difficult; it was very generous of you to speak so." He did not mention Jina, dead these last three years. Morgan had not attended a Farewell since. "And I was very glad to have you there with me."

Odd that he had not really thought of it before. In speaking her slow, careful words to the listening Narnians, Morgan had stood in for those who did not march off to war, but waited. She spoke for the ones who missed those who were gone and who were missed by those who went. Susan might have said such things, but when Morgan said them, it did mean something more to the Narnians, for she occupied the same place as many of them.

Morgan drew her hand up and ran her fingers along his jaw, making the sort of satisfied sound that stirred his imagination and circumvented rational thought. "I did not include it in my remarks, but I am also very grateful to Lune for not letting you return home with that horrid beard. Really, Edmund, was all that hair necessary?"

There was his name again.

"I have been in Calormen! It made me look very distinguished and wise!"

"Wise my arse, as Leszi would have said. It was so you could slip into the Old City bazaars and sneak about without the trouble of a disguise!"

He heard Jalur snarl a concurring complaint in the darkness behind them.

"I have no idea what you mean!" he protested.

"Oh, so you sent Sallowpad to find that book you brought back for us from Tashbaan!"

He drew her closer, placing a kiss on her cheek. "I am discovered. You are quite correct. That was
indeed a purchase I needed to acquire myself."

The book was another in a series of illustrated, erotic Calormene poetry the two of them had thoroughly studied over the years. His imagination was urging an immediate return to the Palace to see if the third time was the charm for the accomplishment of Illustration 43. His intellect found that her tightening embrace and small shudder signaled some other greater concern and that Illustration 43 would wait.

"What is it, Morgan?"

She did not say anything right away, but nestled in closer still. His imagination contemplated the absence of a corset but even it recognized that her distress was an obstacle to another attempt at Illustration 43. "What is it?" he repeated.

"I couldn't have done it," she finally muttered.

"Done what?"

She sighed and burrowed under his arm. "What you said about the Giant who killed Leszi."

"The Lament I speak on behalf of the wrongdoer?"

She nodded into his chest. "If you had died at the gates of Archenland, if Rabadash or one of the other Tarkaans had killed you, I could not have forgiven them. Ever."

Edmund tilted her head upward, surprised at her fierce sentiment. "That is why I say it," he told her gently. "I speak on behalf of us all, just as you did."

"It's not the same," she snapped, jerking away to wave an arm that he had to duck to avoid. "I was speaking of gratitude for Leszi. *You* speak of forgiving his murderer. It's a generosity I don't have."

She might be right. Morgan did have a vengeful streak. Still…

"You show great charity to others, Morgan. Narnians would not love you as they do without it."

"You are changing the subject," she accused. She wrapped her arms around him in a possessive hold. "I was afraid you weren't coming back, and if you hadn't, I would have cursed who was responsible, and never forgiven him."

Cyrus' well-timed arrival interrupted the tense moment. He trotted up with a Crow clinging to the hair on his shoulder. Edmund thought it was Kangee.

"We're going to start the next races, Banker Morgan!"

"You all go on without me," Morgan responded. She shifted away and dug into her pockets. "Here are some Shinys. Don't let the Crows steal them."

The Crow squawked a protest – it was definitely Kangee. He also looked with deep interest at the glinting objects she put into Cyrus' hands.

"I'm giving you some extras so you can share them with the other children."

Cyrus nodded and clutched the Shinys tightly in his fists.

"Also, once you are done, let me know if you think the slow beetles taste better than the fast ones."
Cyrus bounced up and down on his hooves, nearly unseating Kangee. "I will, Banker Morgan! Thank you!"

As he bounded away, she called, "And make sure the Archenlanders join you!" For clarification she shouted after him, "But not for the beetle tasting! Humans don't eat beetles! Unless they are in Cook's pot!"

Morgan dusted off her hands and settled again next to him. Edmund did not know what to say. In five years, she had never missed an opportunity for wagering on beetle racing. She had just given away Shinys. Obviously, the Morgan he knew had been replaced by an imposter.

That possibility was eliminated, however, when she blurted out, as only Morgan could do, without preliminaries or explanation, "How long have you been doing it?"

Edmund sorted through the conversation, and decided she was speaking again of the Farewell, and not beetle racing, Cook's culinary proclivities, or the dispensing of Shinys to Crows for services rendered to the Crown. "The Lament?"

"Of course."

Edmund rested against the tree, put his arm around her again, and stared at the hot, high bonfire. The musicians were on the other side and though he could not see them, they were loud and the sounds were not for dancing or singing. The haunting music was strange and wild – shrill whistles and deep notes blown through reed and wooden pipes of different sizes. The Wood Narnians had taken Leszi's body deep among the Trees and trees that surrounded Cair Paravel. Tonight, Pan would come and take Leszi's body and someday remake a new Satyr in his likeness.

"I do not really remember when I began it," he told her. "I do remember the first time I was truly tested in saying it."

Morgan had learned over the years that while he appreciated her awkward and insightful words, at times, he wished only for her silent touch. And so, she said nothing but her gentle fingers softly stroking his neck told him that she understood. His imagination posited that now would be a good opportunity for her to practice Illustration 55 from the new book. The rest of him was grateful and eased.

Slowly, he admitted, "It was almost ten years ago, when I had to speak the Lament for Merle's murderer."

Out of deference to Jalur, he whispered the name of his first Guard, Merle, though the Tiger probably heard regardless and Rafiqa certainly had.

"It was a wretched time. Merle was dead by treachery, Dalia had renounced her oath to Peter, a Labour of Moles had turned spies, and their leader, the Faun, Mr. Noll, was bent on regicide."

Morgan's hand slid over his shoulders and down his back. She bent her head to hear his words.

"Never have I less wanted to lead by example. I wanted to see Noll punished for his crimes, but he took his own life before I was able to find my sense and see to his trial. I had to speak of healing even though I wanted vengeance."

Morgan looked up and stared at him, though her gaze was askance and focused, as always, somewhere else. "I shall say again, everyone calls Peter the Magnificent, but Just doesn't begin to cover the full of your goodness. I could never have done it and I doubt anyone else could, either."
She had spoken so before, many times before. Yet, each time, her blunt, tactless expression of regard soothed something within him that Edmund never even knew he had.

"Thank you. I suspect bias though, Morgan. Peter or Susan would speak the Lament, at need."

Morgan shook her head vigorously. Her braid spun about and whacked him on the side of the head. "Don't even suggest that because the only way it would be spoken by someone else is if you weren't here to say it."

"Well, I am here, so that settles the matter, doesn't it?"

"Edmund?" Lucy's hand at his shoulder started him out of the reverie.

He shrugged her and the daydream off. This was ridiculous. He had not given a thought all summer to his uncle's name or Eustace's bugs. Now he was in the Oxford Museum of Natural History staring stupidly at a display case full of beetles.

If the bugs had not already had pins stuck through them, he would have impaled the lot of them.

"I suppose those English beetles do look a bit Narnian," Lucy said peering into the glass case.

He felt himself blushing, flushing, or something, and turned abruptly away from his sister and her empathy. Her fingers were on his shoulder again but, this time, too firm for him to shrug her off.

"Who did you hear?" Lucy said softly. "At the wall of water and lilies?"

"It doesn't matter," Edmund said gruffly. "It's not relevant."

Peter had his Most Royal Frown, Edmund had his scowl, and Susan had perfected the cool, condescending look. Lucy had a truly terrifying glower. "Edmund!" she snapped, giving him a rough shake. "Stop it!"

"I don't want to discuss it!" he bit back. He did not want her sympathy, especially not with their shared history and their very, very different approaches to dealing with it. "I'm not like you, Lu! Picking over it makes it worse!"

Her eyes blazed with anger. "Honestly, Edmund, you can be as thick as Peter sometimes." Her grip on his shoulder was smarting. "Has it occurred to you that the reason you keep seeing reminders is because Aslan wants you to be mindful of something? He's trying to tell you something! And it's going to keep happening until you understand that!"

Edmund stared, dumbfounded, at his sister. All this time and he should never, ever be surprised at her insight. Somehow, he always was. He remembered now what Lucy had said regarding Peter earlier in the summer and Aslan's own words to him of last week.

Her death grip gentled and the blood flowed back into his arm.

"This isn't a test, is it?" he managed to say.

Lucy shook her head. "Nor a punishment." She took a step closer. "I heard them too, Edmund. And I am struggling, just as you are, to understand what it means."

"You? Struggle?" He did not wish to admit any more than he already had of his own difficulties— of a regret he had thought himself well beyond.
Lucy nodded and he saw tears spring to her eyes. Edmund pulled her into a hug. "I am sorry, Lu. I should have realized." He had been so caught up in Susan and Peter's travails and burying his own, he had completely forgotten that this was difficult for Lucy as well.

"I don't know what Aslan wants of us. Sometimes I do, and sometimes it's just a frightful muddle. I just want to know, for certain, and then start upon it. No more dawdling."

"You have only been back a week," Edmund said quietly. "Give yourself another month to learn what you should do for the rest of your life."

"I'm over twenty-five," she grumbled. "I should know now."

"Perhaps improving your spelling should be a short term goal with long term useful application?"

Lucy pulled away to deliver a hard punch into his arm. "My spelling is fine."

"When your correspondents don't have hands."

And with that, Lucy laughed. "The first thing I've got to do, is to grow my right size again."

He recognized the quote, though he did not know the text as Lucy did. "Alice's Adventures does have an answer to every muddle."

Lucy put her fingers up to the glass case. "When we were on The Dawn Treader, at first, I wanted to return to Narnia instead of sailing ever further away," Lucy said. "But, now I'm glad we didn't and I'm very grateful to Aslan for it. It would have very wrong to try to return to the way it was when we should be going forward. Does that make sense?"

"I felt the same thing, Lu. The path to Aslan begins here. We can't, and shouldn't, go backward."

He stared again at the beetles. Cyrus had reported that the slow ones tasted the same as the fast ones. The Museum had mole skeletons as well; Peter had said he had seen them. It was strange to be thinking of that awful time – and the humbling pain of trying to forgive someone he so desperately hated. But, he, the Just, had also been the Traitor and so he knew of what he spoke and why it was important – for him and for them all.

She had tried to understand; Edmund wondered if she ever did. He thought not, but she had often surprised him.

He could see why it was all coming back now. There had been the Wall of Lilies and all that lay beyond it. And, since Leszi's Farewell, he had not again said this duty of his office until the Lament last week for Bardon, dead at the hands of a Mole.

"Edmund?"

He blinked, but the mental distance to cover was less than before. "Yes?"

"Don't say that it's not relevant. Susan has shown us just how relevant Narnia is. You have said so yourself. To say otherwise means there was no point to it, to anything."

Edmund understood why she said this. He also knew that while some things were very relevant, others could not be.

She took his hand. "Polly said she would be showing us about. Shall we go look for her?"
Mary had only one humbug left. She thought for a moment of trying to preserve it – maybe bury it in the bottom of her bag with the crocodile tooth. But, that was futile – she had no willpower. She dug the peppermint out, unwrapped it and popped it in her mouth. She would try to suck on it to make it last longer. Asim said he would find some in London and took her clothing rations in case he needed to make a trade. She now regretted giving those candies to Eustace.

Eustace. Really, why had Digs, Polly, and Peter been on about that boy? Eustace was charming, intelligent, and very engaging.

Engagement. She now had an engagement, of sorts. Richard … oh bother that, Mary bit the candy clean through. Richard had been yelling at her and Polly had been yelling back at Richard. In a pause to catch her breath, Polly asked her to come and meet Peter's brother and sister at the Museum as Polly intended to pummel Richard with her carpet bag, which surely was weighted down with a cannon ball.

There might be cannon balls in the Museum, but Mary had never looked for them.

"Besides," Polly had said, "Lucy adores Alice and you are the expert there, Mary, not I."

Mary could see the wisdom there. "I went to the Classical master, though. He was an old crab, he was."

"I never went to him," the Mock Turtle said with a sigh. "He taught Laughing and Grief, they used to say."

The Museum door was open, so Polly must have given them a key. There were voices over by the Dodo – an auspicious beginning. Mary wove through the display cases and spied them, a boy and girl, their backs to her, looking at the poor, dowdy bird. If Mary bothered noticing such things, she supposed there might be some resemblance to Peter. The boy and the girl, that is. Even if she did not see why everyone made such a fuss over Peter Pevsness, even she could see that he had no resemblance to the extinct Raphus cucullatus.

"It is an awkward thing," the boy said.

"The Dodo was one of Mr. Carroll's favorites!" the girl protested. "I will not hear ill of either, Edmund!"

Mary liked the girl very much already and decided on an appropriate introduction. She came out from behind a display of Indonesian crustaceans and spoke, "Who are you? said the Caterpillar."

At her words, they both spun about and started in what looked to be amazed shock.

Mary turned around herself. "I don't believe the Jabberwock came in with me."

Edmund recovered first, though his first words were certainly odd and not directed to her at all. "Lucy, shall you murder our brother, or shall I?"

He stuck his hand out. "Edmund Pevensie. And you must surely be Mrs. Russell."

"It would be very peculiar if you were the only one to call me so, Edmund. It's Mary."

"I'm Lucy!" The girl thrust out her hand and shook vigorously. Mary very much approved of the firm grip. "Oh, would you please say the line again, Mary?"

She repeated, "'Who are you?' said the Caterpillar."
Lucy responded, "I, I hardly know, sir, just at present — at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

Mary put her hands on her hips, doing her best to mimic the stern and sour Caterpillar. The effect was lost when her satchel slid down her arm to the floor with a thunk almost but not quite like a cannon ball. "What do you mean by that? Explain yourself!"

"I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, sir, because I'm not myself, you see."

"You may not be yourself, Lucy, but whoever you are is certainly splendid!" Truly, she was delightful.

"Is Polly with you?" Edmund asked, craning his neck about and around.

Mary resisted the urge to dig into her pocket for a humbug she knew wasn't there. "No, she was at the hospital and asked if I might pop in to show Lucy more of the Alice exhibits."

Lucy bounced up on her toes. "Would you, Mary? That would be lovely! Peter, the Professor and Polly have all said that you know it so well!"

She hefted up her bag. "Certainly. I would be glad to show you the specimens that inspired Dodgson to write about Alice." Specimens. Which reminded her.

"First, however, before we do anything, you must explain why Peter, Digs and Polly said that your cousin was so odious? I met Eustace here yesterday and he was thoroughly charming." She left out the part about her blubbing and Eustace trodding over her. His absence of mind had been due to fascination with the marine reptiles and Mary would not criticise Eustace for it.

Brother and sister exchanged significant looks. "Honestly." Mary snorted with disgust. "You are as bad as Polly and Digs. I am very weary of the meaningful glances that I am somehow in the middle of, but always ignorant as to the content of."

"Eustace was quite the prat," Edmund finally said. "He has, however, undergone significant improvement."

"Within the last week?" Mary asked, skeptical. Barely a week ago, much eye rolling had always accompanied any mention of Eustace Scrubb.

"It has been the work of the summer," Edmund said and Mary thought she saw some strange hand movement in Lucy's direction. Well, at least it wasn't a secretive look.

"So Mary, where are the specimens that Mr. Carroll referred to?" Lucy asked brightly. She stepped forward and linked her arm in Mary's own. "We have seen the Dodo, but what of the others?"

Mary took them around and they examined skeletons and the preserved birds and animals - the eaglet, the lorry, the duck, the hare, and the mouse. "I am sorry, but there is no mock turtle or gryphon. Eustace was looking for dragons and sea monsters yesterday."

"Eustace can be a mite fanciful at times," Edmund said dryly.

Lucy just snorted.

"He was asking very interesting questions," Mary said, rising to Eustace's defence. "We posited how gaps in the fossil record might be filled, and with what."
Lucy was studying Carroll's first illustrations in a display case. "Mary, may I ask you a highly impertinent question?"

Mary joined her at the case. The illustration was of Alice with an ostrich croquet mallet instead of Tenniel's well-known flamingo. "I certainly cannot stop you from asking, Lucy. But if I answer, then you must answer one of my impertinent questions." And she knew just what to ask and had been awaiting the opportunity to ask it.

"Oh, that's fine," Lucy assured, so airily that Mary wondered if the girl took a liberal view of such things.

"I wished to ask the question because I knew someone once who looked remarkably like you."

This was unexpected. "How extraordinary! Was she clever? Kind? Entertaining?"

"No," Lucy admitted. "Not especially."

Mary looked to Edmund to see if he knew of this ordinary doppelganger and had a different view of her.

"Dull," Edmund said with a confirming nod. "Very dull, except…"

Lucy cut him off with an abrupt wave of her hand. Mary might have become peevish over this unflattering comparison, but Lucy added, "Really, it is only the appearance that is similar, Mary. In every respect you are far superior."

She looked over to Edmund and he vigorously nodded. "Absolutely."

Mollified, Mary was therefore prepared to be agreeable. It wasn't as if she actually minded impertinent questions so long as they did not malign her competence. "In that case, and regardless of what Alice said at the tea party about rude remarks, you may ask the impertinent question."

"Do you have a birthmark? On your back?"

"I agree that is a very impertinent question." Mary reached behind her and felt her up and down her back. Her bag landed on the floor again with a clatter that was probably the torch hitting her pocketknife. "I do not believe so and no one has remarked upon one. Did this person whom I resemble so superficially have one?"

"She did."

"And how did you come to learn of this birthmark, Lucy?" Edmund asked, turning from his study of a walrus skull in a nearby glass case. If she did not know better given their age, she would have thought his comment suggestive and more impertinent than the question she had answered.

Lucy seemed to agree. "Edmund, don't be venal. Susan told me, of course."

This was evidently an astonishing statement for Edmund stared at his sister some moments.

"Susan?" he repeated.

Lucy boldly winked at her and Mary laughed. She did not understand the undercurrent passing between brother and sister, but she had not been so well entertained in some time.

"Close your mouth, Edmund, or insects shall fly in."
"And so now is it my turn to ask a rude question?"

"Impertinent," Edmund clarified, leaning against the case with the walrus skull and a pigeon and lizard. "An impertinent question was the consideration to be exchanged, not a rude one."

This seemed a distinction without a difference to her, but Mary wasn't going to debate the point. She sensed that Edmund could be one of those tedious people who loved argument for the sake of it. And if they got into an argument, she would forget the question.

"So, I had noticed that your older brother winces every time I, quite unintentionally, use the adjective Magnificent. This is unfortunate as I use it frequently to describe things like owl vomit and extinct reptiles the size of lorries. Eustace asserts that Peter is to magnificent as tomatoes are to toast."

Lucy giggled. Edmund looked amused in a very sardonic sort of way.

"My question is, if tomatoes are to toast as Peter is to magnificent, what analogous relationship applies to each of you?"

Mary had really not meant to confound them. She had thought it a nonsense game, rather like the caucus race in a circle with a thimble and comfits for prizes. Though she was very intrigued by Lucy and Edmund's apparent discomfiture, she also regretted the grinding halt to a merry and engaging conversation.

Lucy looked at Edmund. Edmund looked at Lucy. Mary thought she spotted some sort of subtle hand gesture from Lucy but she might have only been scratching an itch discreetly.

"Just," Edmund said, so blandly surely there must be some other meaning implicit.

"Just?" Mary mused. "As in, 'Just Edmund'?"

"Yes."

"Why not, 'Only Edmund'? Or, 'No one but Edmund'? Or, 'Edmund alone'?"

"Just," Edmund repeated, very, very firmly. Now she remembered Peter's threat – that if she needled him, he would never disclose anything to her, ever again.

"And you Lucy?"

Lucy opened her mouth but Edmund interrupted. "Oh no, Mary, it was only one impertinent question, not two."

"That is very legalistic of you, Edmund!" she cried. As with Peter, Mary was coming to sense that in addition to a love of argument, Edmund, for all his easy manners and quick wit, was not someone whose will she would wish to cross.

"Just so," he replied, radiating smug satisfaction.

"Pay him no mind, Mary," Lucy said with a very decisive authority. "It is my decision, Edmund, not yours."

Rather than spiraling into the sort of tiresome argument that she would expect of siblings of any age, Edmund inclined his head in something oddly like a regal bow. "Quite right, my sister. I apologize for usurping your prerogative."

Lucy did not gloat but merely nodded her head in satisfaction at carrying the point. "My answer,
Mary, is that tomatoes are to toast, as I am to valiant. I'm quite proud of it, actually and won't hear ill of it at all."

Again, there was a firmness that Mary heard that commanded respect. "Valiant! How splendid! We really need more valiant girls and women, I think. There are some represented here at the Museum, even!"

With that artful transition, Mary thought Lucy should see some of Mary Anning's ichthyosaurs next, because really, who would not wish to see them, and Mary Anning had been a most valiant pioneer.

Lucy, however, was frowning a little and seemed distracted. She was looking to something behind her. Mary pivoted to follow Lucy's gaze and saw that Edmund had moved away to look at one of the displays. It was a replica of Dodgson's desk, with a big, stuffed, black bird sitting on top of it, alongside an inkwell, a fountain pen, and a copy of Alice's Adventures, opened to Chapter 7.

Lucy moved around her, joined her brother at the desk, and put a hand on his arm. "It is from the Mad Hatter's tea party," Lucy explained.

"Why is a raven like a writing desk?" Edmund intoned, repeating the Mad Hatter's riddle to Alice.

"I haven't the slightest idea." Mary quoted back the Mad Hatter's answer. "Edmund, you have been concealing latent talents to be able to quote Alice!"

"I have," Edmund admitted.

Mary had the nagging sense that there was something amiss, but she could not quite place it. Edmund's answer sounded more ambiguous than it should have.

Lucy continued to stand next to her brother and Mary was beginning to wonder if maybe she should excuse herself and give them a moment.

But, Edmund smiled a little crookedly at Lucy, putting a hand briefly over hers. "I am attending, my sister."

Lucy nodded, as if in approval. But since they had both been attentive, Mary really had no idea what they were talking about.

Lucy gestured to the desk. "As it happens, Mr. Carroll was bothered so much by readers about the meaning of the riddle that he finally wrote that it had no answer at all."

"Except of course that there are all sorts of answers to the riddle," Edmund said, letting out a breath. "Wouldn't you say, Mary?"

"There are!" she exclaimed. Mary somehow felt she was being diverted – she had become very sensitive to the tactic over the summer because Peter so excelled at it. It was evidently a familial trait. "Poe wrote on both!"

Edmund turned deliberately away and put his back to the desk. "They both have inky quills!"

"There is a B in both and an N in neither." That one was from Huxley, and Mary's personal favorite.

"They both caws communication!"

Mary laughed. "Very clever, Edmund. I award this round to you. I have not heard that one before." And, truly, that was noteworthy as Mary thought she knew all the answers to the raven and writing
desk riddle, including the obscure ones about cheese and bicycles.

"Lucy! Edmund?" Polly's voice drifted through the Museum from the direction of the front door. "Are you still with Mary and Alice?"

Lucy giggled. "I do like the sound of that very much." Pitching her voice louder, she called back, "We are, Polly!"

Mary gestured toward the entrance and would settle for paraphrasing her offer to guide them back. "It doesn't matter which way you go, for you shall get somewhere."

They met Polly by Darwin's finches.

"Simon, heel!" Polly barked as the spaniel began sniffing around the display. There was always a struggle because Simon, true to his breeding, had an intense interest in the stuffed birds. A hunting dog among birds in a Museum was not to be contemplated.

"Mary, thank goodness I found you!" Polly was tugging hard on Simon's leash and trying to keep the dog from putting his paws up on or into the bird display. "Richard threw me, and Peter, and his doctor, out of the room."

Mary pulled her satchel around and began digging through it, hoping to find another humbug. "Well, perhaps Digs can go see him. Mr. Patel will be here soon, so…"

Polly shook her head and stepped down hard on Simon's leash to keep him from wandering around to look for a bone or bird.

"Richard said he didn't want to see anyone except you, so would you please go because otherwise I think the staff might evacuate the place and burn the hospital down around him.

Mary's hands closed around a humbug buried in the hairbrush at the bottom of her bag. "Me?" she asked, feeling stupid and elated and really not caring a whit. "Richard is yelling for me?"

"Yes," Polly replied wearily.

She yanked her hand out of the bag. "Lucy, Edmund it was a pleasure! I really must be off! Polly, will you…"

"Of course!"

"You should go, obviously," just Edmund said, "to prevent a heinous act of arson."

Lucy waved good-bye and said so very perfectly, quoting the Dodo, "I move that the meeting adjourn, for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies."

Next up, Chapter 5, Change of Heart
In which there is a dinner party in Cambridge

(and then, finally, the Gentle Queen returns)

My great thanks to E, whose comments about Chapter 1 became a centerpiece of Edmund's reflections. I must rely on Deus Ex Leo a little bit with regard to Peter's service as I'd never intended
to write of it, yet, here we are, and so my thanks to Theoretica for helping me negotiate this area. Thanks also to Min and Snaky for the suggestions.

In short, yes, what you say and tell me really, really matters and I'm very grateful for it.

Morgan and Edmund's discussions look back to their stories, *By Royal Decree*, and *Not A Romance*. There are hints from *The Palace Guard* as well.
Change of Heart, Part 1

Chapter Summary

In which we find out what Asim thinks about all of this and he and Col. Tom Clark reflect on how America and England are two nations separated by a common language.

Apostolic Way

Chapter 5, Change of Heart, Part 1

Be an opener of doors for such as come after thee.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

We are two countries separated by a common language.
George Bernard Shaw

The first condition of understanding a foreign country is to smell it.
Rudyard Kipling

The lessons learned and the relationships forged between British and American forces and their leaders during this campaign would ultimately lead to the liberation of Europe.

When I joined the US Army Intelligence 'Special Branch' of Colonels McCormack and Clarke, early in August 1942, there was virtually no connection between the Branch and Bletchley Park.
Telford Taylor, Anglo-American Signals Intelligence Co-operation, Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park (F.H. Hinsley, A. Stripp, eds.)

The night before Asim bin Kalil met Edmund Pevensie for the first time, and Major al-Masri met Peter Pevensie for the first time, God showed him a dream. Asim and Major al-Masri were not surprised to dream, but thanked God who is great for showing the dream.

It was a strange dream, of the sort that he had come to associate with the Pevensies, dreams with green ships and purple sails, white birds, gold and silver swords, dragons who smoked liked Mr. Patel's cigarette, and rats and crows that spied and understood human speech.

As the Cat who was not a cat had explained, he knew that seeing and understanding were not the same. Yet, this time, the dream was preceded by some illumination. He had memorized the letter Susan Caspian née Pevensie had written to her brother, Edmund Pevensie, the remarkable liar and killer who shined with God's bright light. He had the cryptic telegrams exchanged between Edmund and his brother, Peter, the boy-who-wasn't-a-boy, who shined with God's bright light, who had killed like a soldier, but thought like a General and was a King. He had been graced by a visit from the Cat who was no more a cat than the Pevensies were English schoolchildren.

So, when God showed him a rat scurrying furtively along the cobbled streets of a domed city so hot he felt the stone scalding the rat's toes, Asim welcomed the dream and praised God. He waited and attended. The rat climbed up a baked sandstone wall and ran across its top. Below, there was a
vibrant souk, filled with hawkers and wares that were not so different from what he knew, even today, with spices, copper, tin, gold, smoking braziers, and billowing silks. He could smell the turmeric and cinnamon, cardamom and sumac, olives, sweat, donkeys, camels, and humanity. The rat darted under a shadow where a crow waited. Before, he would have asked, how a crow could wait for a rat? Now, he knew, as certainly as he knew his many names, that the crow and the rat were conferring.

Rat and crow met in the shade of something that looked like a minaret, but was not. In all his long journeys throughout this wide world, Asim had been in every city where the muezzin recited the adhān calling all devout Muslims to salāt five times a day. Asim had never seen a minaret such as the one God showed him in this dream, under which rat and crow conferred.

Beyond the minaret-that-was-not, in a brilliant blue sky, an eagle soared on unseen thermals. As the bird spiraled closer, Asim saw that she was not an eagle, for she had a long tail and four legs. It was as if the gryphon had flown out of the wardrobe in Digory Kirke's Oxford office and into his dream. Perhaps she had. In her front talons, she carried Peter's gold and silver sword that glinted in the desert sun.

The gryphon circled above a dying mole, its life's blood pouring out into the sand.

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

Afterwards, while packing his uniform for the planning meetings and delicate negotiations to come in London and at Bletchley Park, Asim wondered at the dream he had seen. Unlike the green ship on the silver sea, these things he saw were of a place, a real place, with real sights, sounds, and smells. God had shown him the blue sky, the souk, and the minaret-that-was-not, and in an earlier dream, the crow in the leafy green tree, and the rat behind a heavy curtain in a room near a harbour where money men counted their coin. Was this Narnia God had shown him – the place of which Susan Caspian née Pevensie had written and to which Edmund, Lucy Pevensie and Eustace Scrubb had gone and to which Edmund and Lucy would not return? The place where A, who was surely Aslan, and Casp were?

Another sharp realization hit him with the force of a bullet to the chest. Edmund's telegram wrote of seeing Casp in N. He had since learned that, indeed, Susan Pevensie had used Caspian as her cover to run an SOE agent out of the British Embassy, and so effectively, Intrepid had promised her to Colonel Buckmaster and Vera Atkins as soon as she could be landed in France without her age causing a scandal. So, Caspian was in Narnia with Aslan and, for whatever reasons, Susan Pevensie had taken it as one of her working names.

Everything packed, he went downstairs to wait until Mary was ready to leave. There was banging from behind the ballroom door and a fine coating of plaster dust in front of it. Mary was still looking for something like the proverbial hound to the scent that she was certain was in a plaster block in the ballroom. Or, perhaps, in the barns. Or, the carriage house. Or, the first floor library. Unless it was in Bradford, or still in the Museum. Or the basement of the Museum. Or with some other Museum friends in Leeds, Harrogate, or Carlisle.

Mr. Patel had brought the car up on to the drive and was waiting for both of them, enjoying a cigarette. He would drive them both into Oxford for the day and Asim would catch the more regular London trains from there and Mr. Patel would see Mary back home. Mary behind the wheel of the Standard was unthinkable for, though she could drive passably well, she was a danger to the car itself. She handled camels, horses, elephants, canoes, sailboats, and bicycles very well, but internal combustion engines were known to spontaneously ignite in proximity to Mary.

He and Mr. Patel were just beginning to exchange looks to decide who would draw the unenviable
task of prying Mary from the ballroom when the front door open and she emerged, slinging her bag over her arm and pushing her oversized sunglasses over her nose. The glasses admittedly made more sense in the Sahara, but Mary was fond of them and she had taken to hiding behind them when Richard made her cry. She had plaster dust all over her trousers and bulging pockets that signaled a day's supply of humbugs – if Richard was in a pleasant mood. If he was harsh, Mary's candy wouldn't hold her to noon.

There was the usual silent jockeying regarding who would drive and who would sit where. Asim held the front door open for Mary on the passenger side and with an understanding nod, Mr. Patel slid into the driver's seat.

He climbed into the back. As Mr. Patel pulled out on to the lane, Mary turned around and from over the seat, pushed her ration book in his direction. "If you happen to pass a sweet shop wherever you are going, I'll take anything you can find. Humbugs, liquorice toffee, boiled sweets, anything. I'd give teeth, my own and the crocodile ones in my bag, for a proper chocolate milk bar."

Adults were only allowed twelve ounces of sweets a month; when Mary was stressed, she would eat more than that in a day.

"I know of some shops where I am going, Mary. Perhaps, I might even find some ration chocolate, if you can abide the taste."

She smiled, wan but grateful. "Thank you. You are quiet this morning. Is everything well?"

"Another dream," he replied. "And I am thinking of the things to come."

Nodding with understanding, she turned back around. "We shall leave you to your thoughts."

The dream alone would account for his pensive mood. The whole household inferred he was deeply involved in something related to the War, but knew better than to ask for a single detail that he could not and would not provide.

He had been summoned for more interminable London meetings with the American and British Combined Chiefs. Last he had heard, Eisenhower's newest plan for the retaking of North Africa, dubbed Operation Torch, was being severely criticized, even by those who had drafted it. The ones actually trying to assess how many assault ships would be needed for amphibious landings of a joint Anglo-American force in North Africa knew October was probably not realistic with the American Navy engaged at Guadalcanal and in other parts of the Pacific.

Assuming they could transport one hundred thousand troops to 1,000 miles of North African coastline, there was the thorny matter of the nationality of the invading force. Peter had identified the same issue. Roosevelt and his advisors felt anti-British sentiment was so strong in French North Africa that including British troops in at least the initial assaults would doom the landings. Churchill did not think the Americans were so beloved, nor the British so hated. Asim was not certain himself – he could not help wondering what Protestant Irish would feel with a "liberating" force comprised of Catholics, or whether Indian Hindus would prefer their oppressive British overlords to being "freed" by Muslims. He was loyal to the Crown, but had never supported European colonial power either, for all that he had lived under some form of it most of his life. That was, in fact, certainly the reason why he did not relish living in an Empire and would privately be pleased when the sun finally could set upon it.

It would be another week of painful negotiation and trans-Atlantic essays between Roosevelt and Churchill, but an invasion plan would emerge. He assumed there would be outreach to Vichy in Algiers and wondered if he might be dispatched there to accompany the secret delegation. Peter had
suggested instigation of a coup d'état and that, too, was being discussed. He might also be sent back to brief the Long Range Desert Group or perhaps Rigor and his spies.

After London, he was to report to Bletchley Park. With all the highly competitive cooperation regarding Torch, it seemed that the British had finally run out of excuses for denying the Americans access to the ULTRA product and were beginning the delicate process of hammering out an intelligence sharing arrangement. Asim assumed he would discuss the operational limitations of the Bletchley Park work. To protect ULTRA, everything had to be independently verified and a fake source identified. The codebreakers were always attributing the deciphered signal intelligence to drunken sailors and chambermaids emptying wastebaskets holding the carelessly discarded secrets of the Wehrmacht. Interesting that, as far as he knew, there were no plans to share the ULTRA intelligence with the Soviets, though there was plenty of traffic coming from the Eastern Front.

It would be long and difficult days with the Americans and wearisome shuttle diplomacy between London and Bletchley. Diplomacy of a different sort would be required in Oxford.

According to Polly’s information and his encyclopedic knowledge of British railway timetables, the boy-who-wasn’t-a-boy who was really a King and his brother the remarkable liar would be arriving at any moment. Asim was attempting to meditate upon how Peter would approach him regarding all that Major al-Masri had concealed, the likely effect of Edmund in the mix, just how odious Eustace was, and his raging impatience to see Lucy. Regrettably, Richard Russell's hospital room was not conducive to contemplation. Richard was turning the pages over and over in his journal, scowling, and taking furious notes. Out of habit, Asim surreptitiously read it upside down – a skill he had honed twenty years ago. He knew from experience he could not read Richard's code – it was too idiosyncratic and there was no key save what the writer created at the moment. Mary and Polly were both clearer and more methodical in their journal entries; Digory's scratchings were utterly unintelligible. This page of Richard's journal, however, was filled with drawings; oddly, they appeared to be cats.

*So Richard plays a role in this too?* He asked, but God did not answer.

"We need to discuss Peter," Richard said, studying the cat page and putting a check by the upside down letters *PP*.

Richard's tactics became clear. "You could have just asked Mary to leave us alone to speak, Richard. You did not have to send your wife off to the Museum as you did."

He did not even look up from his study of the cats. "On the day you have one, Asim, you may criticise, and not a moment before."

That was, Asim had to concede, fair. He lived in a world of men and war. His eyes, mouth, body, and heart always were given over to God, King, and Country. He knew nothing of marriage and very little of women. However, he did understand some part of the puzzle that was Mary Anning Russell though that was only because he had known her so long.

"Richard, surely you see that Mary will not abandon you no matter what you do."

"She might, Mary's self-respect could assert itself, she'll see what is best for both of us, and she'll grant me the divorce. She'll be free to go her own way and I can go back to Kenya Colony."

Richard's hopes were as much fantasy as Mary's were for a cure. Mary was desperately trying to hold on to her husband and her husband was as desperately trying to escape that hold. Asim had learned that when Richard had persistently pursued Polly, it was Digory who had helped her stay
firm and avoid a marriage that was surely ill-advised. Asim did wish that someone had done the same for Richard in the face of Mary's determination to marry him.

"And stop trying to divert me. I need to talk to you before Peter arrives." Richard snapped the book shut. "Peter's sense of selfless duty is far stronger than his actual sense. He is determined to follow his father and Kirke straight into university and it will be a disaster."

Of all the things Asim thought Richard might say, this seemed so bizarre and so unsuited to its audience, he supposed it must be the creeping dementia. His expression must have shown it for Richard shook his head, disgusted at his obtuseness.

"I hope you might trust my judgment – which is still very much intact on this issue – when I say that Peter is no more suited to academia than I am to maths."

One of the reasons that Mr. Patel had so often had accompanied Richard into the field was that Richard was known on three continents for his inability to judge a lorry's volume and weight load capacity. The landscapes of Asia, Europe, and Africa were littered with Richard Russell's broken truck axels.

"Surely not that ill a fit?"

Richard leaned forward and grabbed Asim's sleeve. "Do you think Peter has failed at anything before? Do you think those who know him best think he even can fail? Because I am telling you, he will fail, and spectacularly."

Asim was truly taken aback. This passion seemed so misplaced. He knew Richard had been tutoring Peter, as Digory had. He had had no inkling of any of this seething discontent and he thought he knew Peter, Richard, and Digory well.

He shook his head. "Really, Richard, I cannot say…"

Richard rolled back into his bed with a disgusted harrumph. "You don't see it now, but you will."

Asim wished he could discern whether God was speaking to him through Richard's impassioned ramblings, or if these were just ramblings.

"The brother is probably the only lever that can shift Peter," Richard said. "Possibly the sisters. No one else."

He did not necessarily dispute that assessment but of course said nothing whatsoever regarding the remarkable Edmund Pevensie.

And then Asim heard a roaring in his ears and a brilliant light blossomed behind his eyes and grew, like a train barreling toward him in a dark tunnel. He turned toward the door and knew that behind it were two men, very different, yet both very much loved by God.

Asim had known from the very beginning that spycraft was not Peter's talent or inclination. God's light burned in a man who had killed honestly and had done so by seeing in his opponent's eye the knowledge of the swift death to come at Peter's own hand. Peter had not killed with the knife to the back or the poison in the food.

Asim had felt Peter to be like a brother who understood what it was to have loyalty to more than one place and time. Yet, brothers though they were, Peter also looked askance at one part of Asim's layered life – the ambiguity of spycraft, where terrible ends justified dubious means.
Edmund, however, was cunningly exploring what his brother eschewed. He had been teaching himself German. He had determined, probably on the basis of the letters from Susan Caspian née Pevensie, that an aspiring spy would do well to learn Russian as well.

A mole had appeared as a victim in his dream, stabbed and dying in the dirt. A mole had been a spy in the clever letter of Susan Caspian née Pevensie to Edmund. Asim had since learned that a spy, who had killed a British national and been apprehended by Mrs. Caspian and WC Tebbitt at the British embassy, had taken his own life while awaiting military prosecution in Ottawa. And Sallowpad himself, Colonel Walker-Smythe, believed the mole was not a Nazi sympathizer, but Soviet.

The Cat-who-was-not had charged him to be the guide. Asim did not yet perceive Edmund’s path though he understood what Edmund was asking in his subtle, probing questions regarding what he might attend to in school. Even with developing foreign language skills, Asim was certain Edmund would be snatched up in an instant by the intelligence service talent spotters.

Yet, even as Edmund spoke with thinly veiled enthusiasm for the Great Game that might be afoot soon in his future, Asim could not dislodge a persistent vision of the mole, bloodied and dead, in the sand. For the first time, he wondered if it might be a warning.

"Does God show you dreams, Edmund?" Asim would ask later as they stood by the hospital's goldfish pond.

"Not God, no," Edmund replied, testing a flat stone between his fingers.

Asim would understand in the years ahead that when confronted with a question that would not be answered candidly, each Pevensie handled the challenge differently. Edmund would provide an ambiguous response that only later would you realize did not answer at all. He would then swiftly and subtly alter the direction of the conversation. "Peter said you dreamed of a green boat with a dragon on its prow and a purple sail?"

"I did. She sails on a sea of white lilies."

"Where do you suppose she sails to?" Edmund asked.

Asim wondered if the ship docked in Narnia, at the place with blue sky, green trees, dragons, rats, crows, dead moles in the sand, and minarets-that-were-not. "I do not know," Asim replied instead.

"Perhaps she sails to the end of the world."

Sailing to the "end of the world" implied a flat one and in Islam a spherical Earth had long been recognized to calculate accurately the distance to Mecca and to determine the Qibla – the direction a Muslim should face for salāt five times a day. Still, Asim did not answer Edmund's question as an Islamic scholar would, or as European would, lecturing about geodesy, astronomy and what do they teach in schools these days? "I wonder what lies at the End of the World that she would sail to it?"

"Perhaps the purpose is found in the journey itself." With a hard flick of his wrist, Edmund sent the stone skittering across the pond so swiftly and so well, it leaped four times before finally sinking. "If you wonder at what lies at World's End, I wonder at how to reach what lies beyond."

"But, if you are already at the end of the world, how could you travel beyond it?"

Edmund picked up another stone and worried it between his fingers. "Perhaps through a door."

"Or a window?" Asim asked.
The stone flew from Edmund's fingers, skipping right out of the pond and into a bush on the far side. "Yes, I suppose a window might do as well. It would be a tighter fit, though."

Major al-Masri holding the door open meant he could not slam it shut behind him.

"Colonel Clark, why don't we walk to the station together?"

Goddamn, it was impossible to storm out when one of the bastards was standing right there. Tom supposed he was grateful – it would have been embarrassing to break a window in the front door of the Bletchley estate which, honest to God, was the most ghastly heap of ugliness he had ever seen.

Old boy! Don't you know! The Bletchley manse 'tis a maudlin and vulgar pile unsurpassed in the architectural gaucherie of the mid-Victorian era! And we both know the keen competition for that honour, what? Alhambresque by way of Leicester Square! Every Brit in the conference room had gotten the jokes; as the only American in the meeting, he had not. He had no idea what Leicester Square was and would have to look up architectural gaucherie in the dictionary when he got back to Cambridge. He thought, on the subject of the aesthetics of the Bletchley Park mansion, that he and his British counterparts had actually agreed in sentiment, though certainly not articulation. That was, Tom thought glumly, a metaphor for this whole circus masquerading as Anglo-American cooperation.

Major al-Masri closed the door gently and shut out the men inside and their godawful infighting. "When the Government Code and Cypher School first moved here to Bletchley Park, they called themselves Captain Ridley's Shooting Party."

Tom shook his head in silent disgust. Of all the self-important, ridiculous…. Shooting party. What am I doing here? He shoved his cap on. "Figures." He stepped out on to the driveway, or whatever the hell the English would call it. Car park?

"My point is that being as I am so often subject to them, I dislike stereotypes. However, even I admit there is occasionally truth to them."

"So if I rant about insufferable, stuck up, old boy, old school Redcoats and Lobsterbacks, you won't take offense?"

"I shall pretend not to hear." The Major put on his own beret and they set off across the lawns.

Tom glanced in the direction of Huts 3 and 6, the part of the Bletchley Park operation where the British were decoding, translating, and analyzing the signal traffic of the Nazi Army and Luftwaffe. Getting access to that signal intelligence was the whole point of this futile, frustrating exercise in would-be diplomacy. He had to get an intelligence sharing agreement in place or McCormack would have his ass.

"We could help there, al-Masri," he said, nodding toward the huts – what they did within them was probably the greatest secret of the entire War. "I know you all have been doing it, and very well, for a few years, be there are smart men in America, too."

"And that is part of the fear, Colonel. We cede to the Americans here, and there, and eventually we lose everything."

It was interesting that sometimes the Major self-identified with the British and other times did not. In these interminable meetings trying to hammer out an agreement, Tom could see, even as an outsider, that there were centuries of race and class differences at play among these Brits on the other side of the polished table. The closest he could come were those elite scions he had seen among the
undergraduates when he had been at Harvard Law. He was amused now to realize that those pretentious First Sons of Boston, Philadelphia and New York were poor, aspiring imitations of the *Shooting Party* he was meeting with now.

Tom looked at his watch. He needed to head to the station to catch the train back to Cambridge.

"You have enough time," al-Masri said calmly. "The fourteen hundred is reliably on schedule."

"So only an hour late?"

"Forty-five minutes, at most," the Major replied.

"I've got a dinner at home and my son, Jack, will never let me hear the end of it if I miss it." Jack would be furious and rightly so as Tom had been the one to extend the invitation.

They shuffled through the sentry gate, exited the Park, and began the short walk to the Bletchley station. It was convenient, though he still had at least two hours on the train before he would be back in Cambridge. All Tom wanted was a stiff American whiskey, a proper meal, and some time with Jack and *The New York Times* crossword. Instead, it was English food, English weather, English manners, English superiority, English transportation and god almighty, English plumbing. He'd have to get Jack to a proper American dentist at some point, too.

As if reading his mind on just how wide the Atlantic really was between England and America, al-Masri asked, "Do you speak any language other than English, Colonel Clark?"

"Unlike your fellows back at the Park, I never studied Latin and Greek. I do a devastating mimic of a Boston Brahmin accent." His own family's storied history of arriving with the Puritans was mere gossip to these men whose familial estates were recorded in the Domesday Book – odd to think that Tom's ancestors would have been fleeing the ancestors of the men he was ordered to negotiate with. He understood the sentiments of his forbears very well at the moment.

"I am unfamiliar with the Brahmin, unless you are referring to the first principle of Hinduism or the priestly caste of India."

"A caste, certainly, though not especially priestly, except in their own minds." Tom had to laugh at the absurdity of an Adams or a Lodge dressed in one of those long shirts or loin cloths like what he'd seen in the papers with the British arresting Gandhi and all the leadership of India's Congress Party because they dared to demand independence. The tactics of the Redcoats really had not changed all that much in the 172 years since the Boston Massacre.

"I was going to suggest, Colonel, that you consider approaching British English as you might approach French. For all that we speak the same language, the idiom is very different and part of our obstacle to understanding may lie in language."

"I speak Amer-i-can. I don't speak no Engleesh," Tom said, imitating the broadest Texas twang he could muster. "Speaking of stereotypes with a grain of truth."

The Major shuddered at the broad, long drawl. "Indeed. Unfortunately, it is only occurring to me in retrospect, but when you asked that we table the issue of wider dissemination of the output, what did you mean?"

He knew al-Masri was being vague about the topic – they were entering a countryside train station – but Tom understood the meaning just fine.

"Any fool could see that we weren't going to make headway on the issue of who up the chain on my
side of the pond was going to get what, when. I wanted to put it aside, table it, until we could make progress on issues where we were already closer, such as the staffing, training, and access by cleared personnel."

"And then return to the issue of dissemination later?"

Tom snorted softly. "Of course, after we'd built a solid foundation to work from."

Major al-Masri nodded. "This explains much. You see in British idiom, 'tabling' means putting the issue aside permanently."

That brought Tom up short just as they were entering the station. "It does?" He ran a hand across his face. The British stiff-necked intractability and refusing to just let the issue go looked much different in this light.

"It does," al-Masri confirmed. "I think our next meeting will be more productive if we agree to common terms in advance and try to avoid idiosyncratic expressions altogether."

The Cambridge train was, according to the station manager, early, that is, only twelve minutes late. Seeing al-Masri was carefully doing the same, Tom checked his tickets as well. With luck, he'd have time to change and enjoy a drink before Ruby had dinner ready and scolded him for putting his feet on the rented furniture.

"Where are you headed? Back home to Oxford?" Tom had heard that was where the Major lived.

There were a few people milling about – certainly more than what one would expect for a sleepy village station. Tom had heard that estates all over England had been converted over to military use. He supposed the British didn't mind quartering their own soldiers in their homes.

"No, I'm to report to London, which will likely continue for some weeks, unless I'm posted elsewhere. My train is due ten minutes after yours."

Tom knew al-Masri was part of the North African intelligence behind the Torch planning. Given how even those stuffed Bletchley bastards deferred to the man on Rommel's logistics and capabilities, Tom could see why.

"So, I have yet more meetings tomorrow – at which I shall keep an ear out for that troubling 'table' idiom – and hopefully thereafter complete a very important mission."

The lightness in the man's tone made Tom think he could ask for further clarification without risking military secrets. "And the mission is?"

"I have a friend in Oxford whose husband is in the hospital. She is hoping I might find some chocolate for her. Real chocolate, not ration chocolate."

The state of the English economy and lack of food in particular had been the biggest shock for them all. Ruby had been furious. *There's no point in being a housekeeper when you can't buy anything to keep in the house.* Thank God for access to the American commissary or Ruby would have packed up Jack, caught the next ship back to Massachusetts, and moved them both in with her family. Two months ago, Jack would have helped shovel the coal to motor the boat faster.

"I can help you there, Major. I picked up some Hershey bars at our PX. They are the real thing, and not even the D Ration."

Tom knew the whole reason Ration D bars tasted like potato was to keep soldiers from eating them
except at need. Still, did they really have to be as hard as a brick and taste like a three-day old New England boiled dinner?

He set his case down on a bench on the platform and flipped it open.

"Colonel, I couldn't possibly…" al-Masri began, looking very embarrassed.

"Yes, Major, I think you could possibly." Tom took two bars out of his bag and watched al-Masri's eyes get ever so slightly bigger. "I've got four more in my case."

"Four?" al-Masri repeated, sounding, even for a hardened veteran, a little faint.

Tom had picked the chocolate bars up for dinner tonight, but he could spare a couple. "Cocoa beans are an essential good in the States and Hershey is making millions of bars a week for the War Department. Most of it is the D Ration, but not all of it." He shoved two bars at the man. "Take two, one for your friend, keep one for yourself."

"Colonel, I…"

Tom pushed the bars into al-Masri's hands. He understood why the British, any British, did not want to be beholden to Americans; Tom would not have liked it either. But this was why they were over here, in the War. "I really appreciate your insights, Major, and I'm glad to repay you, however I can. It makes me think I'm not losing my mind and I've got a chance of making this work." He gestured to the man's briefcase. "And if you don't take them, I'll just shove the bars into your case and probably break them."

Slowly, gingerly, the Major took the brown-wrapped bars, handling them as if they were gold, which in rationed England, they were. "You are very generous, Colonel Clark. I thank you, both on Mrs. Russell's behalf and because you have saved me a day's searching in London. I believe Mrs. Russell ate her last chocolate on Christmas Day, 1940, and caring for her husband has been very difficult."

Tom was absurdly pleased. After all the frustrations of the past few days, it felt good to make a contribution, however small. "And what about you, Major? How long has it been?"

"Since my last taste of real chocolate?" al-Masri mused. He looked thoughtful and raised the bars to his face to sniff them appreciatively. Tom felt another stab of sympathy for the common British. There was hardship here that even Murrow had not been able to capture in his reporting from the London rooftops during the Blitz.

"I believe it was from a confectioner in Lyon – one remarkable piece with over fifty percent cocoa solids, in April 1940, a month before France fell."

Major al-Masri opened his case, removed his copy of The Times, and carefully wrapped the bars before slipping them in among his briefing papers. "I know that Mrs. Russell will want to write and thank you. Do you have a card?"

Tom pulled one out of his wallet that he had had made up with their Cambridge address and handed it over. The Major took it, then paused and studied the card carefully. He looked up and, really, Tom didn't know what to make of his strange expression.

"Something wrong, al-Masri?"

"No, not at all. But, a curious coincidence the likes of which should no longer surprise me yet still do when they occur. You are in Impington?"
"Yes, we're renting a house there.

"Have you come to know any of your neighbors? The Scrubbs, by any chance?"

"You know the Scrubbs?" Tom certainly hoped not – if their son was any indication. Jack really disliked Eustace, but the boy had brought it on himself. Although, there had been that odd moment on the train the other day where Eustace had shaken his hand and tried to be, and mostly had succeeded in being, polite. The Eustace Scrubb he had seen all summer would have never acted that way.

Belatedly, he realized his tone had sounded too incredulous but, before he could stammer an apology, the Major held up a hand, shaking his head. "I do not know the Scrubb family. I am, however, acquainted with Eustace Scrubb's cousins, the Pevensies."

"Are you! What an amazing coincidence!" Here, Tom was able to provide the endorsement Eustace did not garner. "Edmund and his sister, Lucy, have been very kind to Jack this summer. They are all coming to dinner tonight."

It was going be an interesting night with Jack, Eustace, and the Pevensie cousins over. Maybe Tom would have a double whiskey before dinner.

"I have met Edmund once or twice before. I know better his older brother, Peter, from this summer."

"That's right! They said their older brother was studying in Oxford. I met him on the train. So you've not met Lucy?"

"No, unfortunately, not."

"She is delightful. Jack is completely besotted with her. I have thought of sending Jack to Edmund's school. I've not heard much about it, one way or another, but Edmund's very bright so he must be getting something good out of it."

The Major was carefully placing the card in his own wallet. In the distance the train sounded and Tom looked at his watch. It was on time – only fifteen minutes late.

"I'm sorry I can't offer any advice insofar as schooling is concerned, but Peter is the product of the same school and he certainly has the respect of some very learned men in Oxford. As for Edmund, my impression is as yours."

The platform began to rumble beneath their feet and, glancing down the track, Tom could see his train rolling forward. The clanging bells were making it harder to hear.

"He and Jack have spent hours going over American government and politics together. I thought that seemed strange for an English boy, but Edmund said it was a school project. He's been raiding my library; in fact, he's got my copy of Crime and Punishment, and I need to get it back before they are off to school!"

"When I saw him, he was also reading Sun Tzu's Art of War and trying to master the German language in thirty days," al-Masri said dryly.

Tom laughed. "That sounds like Edmund. He has very ambitious interests." Edmund had been a good foil for Jack's natural, combative competitiveness and the boys had been well-matched. Lucy was fearless and managed Jack almost as well as Ruby did.

With the train coming in, it was loud and getting louder. Tom grabbed his bag from the bench and
noticed al-Masri's eyes flick downward to the case.

"If I might offer a word, Colonel?" the Major said, leaning forward so he could be heard over the din.

Tom turned his head so that al-Masri could speak into his ear and not alert the platform of straggling passengers who, it appeared, were all Bletchley personnel regardless.

"I think Edmund Pevensie is a very curious young man. He means no ill, but I suggest keeping your briefcase well secured if he is about."

Tom laughed and nodded. "I noticed that as well, Major, the first time I heard him asking Jack about my train schedules."

Tom put out his hand; he and al-Masri shook. "It's been a pleasure, Major, and I look forward to working with you."

"I as well, Colonel. Please give my regards to the Pevensies."

Chapter 6, Part 2 of Change of Heart to follow
Then, Chapter 7, The Queen Susan in Liverpool

All those words, all those characters, and finally I have my first American point of view in this very OC-heavy chapter. I'm getting to know Tom Clark as you are and as he is getting to know England. We'll just assume that an American, even one who is educated as he is, is not going to be especially knowledgeable about English Victorian architecture and that he does not know that the correct term is *dhoti* and not loincloth to describe the traditional men's garment most common in the western states of India.

A special thanks to reader E who provided me with the "tabling" anecdote and some of the backstory on the Torch planning. Also, a thanks to reader Priscipixie who has been supportive for so very long and provided valuable insight into India's colonial past. Anastigmat shared her thoughts on the Asim and Richard exchange.

For the sake of the story, I've altered the dates when the American and the English begin negotiating an intelligence-sharing agreement. The actual negotiations do not begin until early 1943.

And Gilian, it was LARM and Metogator who thought Asim would like dark chocolate. A huge thanks to Snacky for the invaluable beta assistance.
Chapter Summary

In which there is a dinner party in Cambridge.

**Apostolic Way, Chapter 6**  
**Change of Heart, Part 2**

It is never too late to become what you might have been.  
George Eliot

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Alice loudly. "The idea of having the sentence first!"  
"Hold your tongue!" said the Queen, turning purple.  
"I won't!" said Alice.  
"Off with her head!" the Queen shouted at the top of her voice.  
L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

"The best political weapon is the weapon of terror. Cruelty commands respect. Men may hate us. But, we don't ask for their love; only for their fear."  
Heinrich Himmler, *Reichsführer of the Schutzstaffel or SS*

The train was on time into Cambridge, which meant the sky would open up and Luftwaffe bombs would come raining down. They didn't. Tom hailed a driver at the station to take him home. After all the aggravation, he didn't feel up to waiting for a bus or walking the five miles to Impington.

There was still at least another hour of daylight when he finally got out of the car and sent the driver on his way. This meant he could see that the house was still standing, even if Jack and Eustace were both in the vicinity. Tom then saw legs dangling from the tree in the front yard. If it had been one set of legs, he would have thought Jack had ambushed Eustace, tied him up, and hung him by the collar from a high branch. Thankfully, there were two sets, both in trousers. Having seen this tree sprout legs before, he knew to whom these legs belonged.

"Dad!" the tree shouted.

"Good afternoon, Colonel Clark! Welcome home!"

One set of legs (the one with shoes on) vaulted down and the arms that went with the legs with the shoes wrapped around him.

Tom dreaded the day when his son thought he couldn't hug his Dad in public without getting embarrassed.

Jack lifted his head and Tom got his son's full-on freckled smirk. "See, Dad? Look!" Jack turned, first to one side, then the other. "No black eyes! No scratches! No broken teeth or bones!"

"Did Ruby have to lock you in our room? Make apologies to neighbors, the police, or the local tradesmen for rude American behavior? Pay reparations?"
"Nope. And besides, they'll never find the bodies."

There was movement in the tree and Lucy appeared – top half only – she was hanging upside down. "I only had to pull my knife on him once, Sir!"

"Twice!" Jack tossed over his shoulder.

"I suppose I owe you that reward I promised for all this good behavior," Tom told his son.

Jack looked up, so eager and hopeful it would have broken his heart to have given his son an answer other than the hoped for one. "Can I, Dad? Are you going to let me go?"

Tom nodded. The hug that followed was strong enough to break a rib. "I've spoken to the Headmaster, he's seen your grades from Andover, and I have enrolled you at Blackpool. You and Edmund will be classmates in September."

"That's splendid!" Lucy crowed from her perch.

"Thanks, Dad," Jack murmured into his arms. "You're the best."

Tom bent over his son's head and whispered, "I love you, too."

Hugs were one thing for a thirteen year old boy; there was no way Tom was going to get an "I love you" on top of it. Jack quickly pulled away because there were limits to embraces as well, especially when a pert and pretty girl was hanging like a monkey from a tree in the front yard. Girls were a lot more interesting to Jack than a boring father who was just trying to save the world from the Nazis.

Lucy waved. "How are you, Colonel? Everyone else is inside, and Ruby said that dinner would be ready in about an hour."

"Thank you, Lucy, for that information." Tom gave his son a narrow look.

"I would have told you!" Jack said, grinning and looking absolutely madcap with glee. "Eventually! Maybe!"

"After Ruby threw a shoe at me for falling asleep and making our dinner dry out?"

"We're in England, Dad! All the food tastes like wet dog ears."

Before Tom could correct his son's impolitic statements (which he himself believed but would not actually say), Lucy, still swinging back and forth, piped in, "Nothing is more horrid than pig intestine."

"I thought you said fish eyes were worse!" Jack accused.

Tom left them to it. Delicious smells led him up the walk and into the house. The scents thankfully bore no resemblance to offal meats - granted the Massachusetts fascination with lobsters and clams might seem odd, but why were the British so fond of eating organs and guts?

There wasn't any mail in the front hall basket; Ruby would have already sorted it, dealt with the bills, posts, and notices, and locked the personal and work letters in his desk. He heard laughing and voices in the kitchen at the back of the house. It was all, unexpectedly, peaceful with the absence of the hollering and acts of arson he had been anticipating, which meant that there was no need for a negotiation of a cessation in the hostilities in advance of dinner. Perhaps there might Peace In Our Time, after all. All this previously unknown tranquility when Eustace and Jack were in the same
postal code meant Ruby would have both foreseen what he would want and would permit him some time to savor it. Tom looked about and spotted it at the end of the sideboard.

_There you are, my love!_

"Thanks, Ruby!" Tom called, scooping up the glass of bourbon.

As he headed upstairs, his hat came off on the landing. Tom shed the jacket at the top of the stair. It was hard to juggle drink and briefcase, so, keeping his priorities straight, Tom dropped the case in the hall leading to the bedroom.

_Bed._ Tom collapsed on his bed, pulled off his boots and let them thump, loudly and carelessly, to the floor. He loosened his tie with one hand, savored another draught of this very, very fine bourbon, and stretched his legs to span the distance between his bed and Jack's.

There was the sound of footsteps in the hall, followed by a heavy, disgusted sigh from the door. He slowly opened his eyes. As expected, his housekeeper was leaning against the door jam, frowning at his indolent sloppiness. Ruby's mouth would move, but he'd hear his father's voice exhorting hard work to purge the sin of sloth of which he assuredly was guilty of at the moment. Guilty yes; feeling guilty, not at all.

"Men of my family have died in every American engagement against the British since a Clark came over on the _Mayflower._ What in God's name are we doing here?"

"Went well then?" Ruby asked.

"Not really, no."

Tom pulled his tie off all the way and let it fall to the floor to join its comrades, the boots. Damn. He would always spill his drink if he tried to get one sock off when the other foot still had a sock on. He waved a foot in the air. "Please?"

"No. You'll have to put shoes and socks on for dinner, so you just leave them on. And put those clothes in the hamper, or you'll wash your own."

Tom decided he really needed to sit up or fine, aged Kentucky bourbon would be coming out his nose. He flailed to a sitting position, without spilling or spitting, and toasted Ruby with an upraised glass.

"What's the news? Smells wonderful, by the way. Jack implied there was murder done. Was it to get us a chicken? And can we eat the dinner before the police, excuse me, a _bobby_, comes to haul my son away?"

She shook her head and started dusting off the cap he had dumped on the landing. If he left his jacket on the stairs long enough, Ruby wouldn't be able to stand it and would pick it up. In retaliation, she might also move the buttons so he wouldn't be able to close the jacket when he put it on, leaving everyone to assume he'd gone to fat.

"We have Eustace to thank for the food on the table tonight," Ruby said, wiping off his cap with the corner of her apron. "Since his parents aren't using their ration books for meat, he bought me chicken, a nice side of pork, and some sausages."

"_Eustace_ came bearing gifts? _Meat_?"

"Eustace," Ruby repeated firmly. She held the cap up to the light and blew a dust speck unseen
"Something mighty strange has happened to that boy, God knows."

"And the armistice between Jack and Eustace..." Tom trailed off, for Ruby would, as she always did, and always had, fill in his blanks.

"Lucy arrived earlier than the others and hauled Jack into the backyard."

"So you couldn't eavesdrop?"

She smiled secretively. "Oh, you know me better than that." He did, actually. "I heard most of it through the upstairs bathroom window."

"And?"

"Lucy told Jack that Eustace had had the fright of his life, and was trying very hard to turn over a new leaf, as the saying goes, and that if Jack didn't behave, he would not live long enough to regret it."

Tom imagined his poor, smitten son pinned by that young lady's very fierce glare. "Did she have her pocketknife when she threatened him?"

"Of course. She might have used one of my kitchen knives, but she's complained before they aren't sharp enough."

Tom winced in sympathy for his son. "And she brandished her very sharp pocketknife at my son's..."

"Throat."

"Love does hurt," Tom said.

Ruby rolled her eyes at him. On the scale of aggravation he caused her, this was only about a three on a ten point scale. "It worked, though. When Eustace showed up with Edmund and Peter, there was some of the usual shoving and shouting and backslapping and such that boys do."

"And men, too," Tom put in. "We're all savages and heathens without your gentling influence."

Tom couldn't duck with the drink in his hand and so got hit on the side of the head when she flipped his cap at him. The hat bounced off his ear and settled gently on the nightstand.

"Upshot is, Edmund had Jack's elbow in a grip that could have taken off his arm, Peter blocked Eustace's otherwise panicked escape, and Lucy made them shake on it."

"And?"

"Jack is in the tree with Lucy and Eustace is helping me in the kitchen."

There was nothing unusual about her first statement. Ruby paused to let that second, incredible statement settle over both of them.

"And?"

"Edmund and Peter were helping us, actually helping, mind you, not being nuisances. The two of them have now retired to the library to wistfully admire your liquor cabinet and read your newspapers. Eustace asked if there might be a spot of rum, seeing as he'd not had any in a spell."
Tom gave Ruby his most skeptical, askance look. He'd had practice using it on the Redcoats and Lobsterbacks at the negotiating table the last three days.

She threw up her hands. "God's honest truth."

"The same boy who accused me of being a drunkard," Tom raised his glass for emphasis, "is wondering where we keep the rum?"

"Aye, aye, Captain!" Ruby's family had been in military service as long as his own had been. She executed a smart salute.

"I'm a Lieutenant Colonel," Tom sniffed.

"And in this house, I'm the CO," she retorted.

Truer words never spoken. He saluted her, with the wrong hand, because the other hand had his bourbon. As he'd already given Jack the wish desperately hoped for, it was too late to take it back, but he wanted the confirmation. "If you would be so good as to brief me, Brigadier, but Corporal Jack said he'd minded his p's and q's even in the absence of this lowly SIC?"

Ruby glanced over her shoulder then moved fully into the bedroom. "He's done much better, Tom, with Lucy and Edmund about." She sat at the edge of Jack's bed and dropped her voice lower. "He's lonely and this is a very strange place for him. That's what most of this trouble has been about. If he goes to Blackpool, he has a friend, two actually, because Peter's there, too."

"I really wanted this for him too, and I'm glad he wanted it enough to behave himself." Tom leaned back against the bedstead with a squeak of rusting iron. "I don't know if the school is any good – I had no problem getting him in, but having friends is more important for him now. He'll do better if he's happier."

"And you know he'll work harder with Edmund there."

Ruby sounded accusatory, but they didn't see quite eye-to-eye on this. Tom kept expecting the Clark ethic to rub off on his son and so far, there hadn't been much evidence of that. Even so, he wasn't going to send Jack off somewhere to be miserable while he got a great education – Tom knew from personal observation that a Harvard degree didn't guarantee happiness, or even success.

"What's your impression of Peter, by the way? I met him briefly on the train."

She absently straightened the corner of Jack's bed and let out a deep, thoughtful breath. "As strange as his brother and sister. Peter carries himself with a lot of authority and isn't shy about using it – like having a real General in the house, except he's sixteen years old. Even Jack is obeying him, though I don't think he knows why."

Ruby thrust her hands into her apron and shook her head, with a sad frown. "It's terrible to see what the War has done to the children here. They can be light-hearted and make jokes, but they act like little adults. Even Lucy."

Implicit in her words was the criticism that Tom had selfishly brought Jack here and was now exposing him to the same things that had so aged Lucy and Edmund beyond their years and turned Eustace into a monster – though perhaps a reformed one.

Fortunately, a diversion arose, sparing him the argument that would have otherwise occurred. There was a clatter, a door slam, and then, "Ruby! The timer went off! Should I take the pot off the stove?" Eustace's voice drifted up from the kitchen.
Ruby stood and called back, "I'll be right down!" Reaching over, she picked up the tie from the floor and draped it next to the cap on the nightstand. "Ten minutes, then come down and be the proper host or I send them all up to drag you down. I'm looking forward to a pleasant dinner. Eustace is really trying to do the deed and show an apology rather than just saying the words."

"Do I have to put a tie on?" Tom didn't mean to whine but, really, he'd been in the uniform for days. He didn't want to wear a jacket, either.

"Shoes yes, no tie," was Ruby's pronouncement.

"I suppose that means socks, too," he grumbled.

On her way out the door, she kicked his briefcase into the bedroom. His uniform jacket magically appeared, sailed into the room, and landed on the coat rack.

Tom lay in the tiny, squeaky, lumpy, heavenly bed for a while longer, but in good conscience, couldn't, and really didn't want to, fall asleep. He was feeling pretty damned happy that Jack had some friends who were both engaging him and could stand up to him, and that the nagging problem of schooling had been resolved. Between the two of them, his and Ruby's knowledge might be broad enough, but it wasn't current enough to properly school Jack. He had planned to hire tutors, which had been the reason to get a house in Cambridge, but those trial runs had been a disaster. Instead, Jack would be going to boarding school, with a friend. Ruby would want to find some work while Jack was away, but Tom didn't think that would be an obstacle.

About fifteen minutes later, he was more comfortable, fortified, and late, according to Ruby's clock. They both knew, however, that when she said, "Pick us up at two o'clock," she really meant two-fifteen and that ten minutes was really closer to fifteen – maybe twelve. Heeding al-Masri's advice and his own instincts about Edmund's curiosity, he unpacked his bag and put all his papers in the lockbox in the closet. He did remember the casualty list Edmund had asked for and tucked that into a pocket.

Hearing one set of voices in the kitchen and another set in the library, Tom decided on the library first. Ruby thought him a nuisance in the kitchen as he had a bad habit of turning the heat up to make things cook faster, with the result that the food tasted like burned, wet, dog ears. He tarried at the partially shut library door. Really, he and Ruby were both terrible about eavesdropping on others. He could hear Edmund and Peter within.

"Peter, if you do not stop reading about the Congress Party and the general strikes, I am taking the papers away from you. I cannot abide the irony of your intense support for the Quit India movement much longer."

"The irony is that our government continues to deny people self-governance and independence even while Commonwealth citizens die in France and New Guinea. You are not going to defend that, are you?"

"Of course I would not defend it," Edmund countered, evidently not the least put out by what Tom could hear was a very disapproving tone. He could understand what Ruby meant about Peter sounding like a CO. "But, I'm not sure what independence would do for anyone if the Japanese invaded India through Burma and I doubt the Nazis are any more disposed to Hindus than they are to Jews."

There was a rustling paper. "With all the Colonel's excellent American periodicals, surely you can find something else that does not induce your Most Royal Frown on what should be a pleasant evening. Here, read about Guadalcanal, instead."
There was more paper moving about. Ruby knew she could never throw anything printed out without asking first.

Edmund had evidently carried the argument for Peter then spoke. "The Pacific theater has certainly expanded my knowledge of South Pacific geography. I don't believe I had ever heard of Guadalcanal until this summer."

"Speaking of, Peter, when I was reading about it yesterday, I was quite suddenly struck by the prospect of all these islands in the Solomon and Coral Seas, if you catch my drift."

There was a long pause then Peter asked, "I wonder if there are cave systems on those islands?"

Into the contemplative silence that followed, Tom realized that this discussion of salt water was making him thirsty. So, he cleared his throat deliberately and pushed the door open wider.

"Good evening, boys."

"Colonel!" Edmund called, crossing the room in two quick strides. "Welcome home! Thank you for having us! You've met my brother, Peter, before."

Peter quickly stood from his encampment at the reading table and Tom had the sense of someone who kept rising, and rising, like a skyscraper or a redwood tree. His head didn't actually brush the ceiling but it felt like it should.

He shook hands with both of them, wondering if Peter would favor bone crushing greetings. For the sake of his hands, Tom was glad he didn't.

"Before I forget, I was asked to convey the greetings of Major al-Masri. I cannot say where, how, or why, but we did cross the paths the last few days, and he wished me to say hello."

Edmund and Peter both looked surprised; they both recovered at the same moment.

"If you see him again," Peter said very blandly, "do convey our good wishes."

To the last man, woman and child, the British had all become so adroit at the nuances of war, espionage, and things going on behind estate gates, they just turned the blind eye to it all.

"Can I get you both something?" Tom asked, going to the bar to refresh his drink. Both Lucy and Edmund appreciated wine with supper when he'd served it and Eustace included alcohol consumption in the leaf now overturned if he was interested in the household rum supply. It might not be age appropriate, but as Ruby had first observed, it was hard remembering that the Pevensies were children. Goddamned War.

"Thank you, Sir, but liquor is scarce," Peter said. "We don't want to consume yours."

"Well, we do," Edmund put in. "Please do not think we are spurning your hospitality. But, these things are difficult to replace, so best hold on to it."

"The Americans are here, gentlemen," Tom said, taking two glasses from the tray. "Granted, there's no vodka and the whiskey distilleries are given over to wartime production, but like any good Caribbean pirate, we have plenty of rum. Further, I have it on good authority President Roosevelt enjoys his Children's Hour every evening."

Children's Hour did have a certain ironic ring to it given the circumstances.
Tom had the sense of something unspoken passing between the brothers. He and Ruby had noticed that Lucy and Edmund communicated the same way.

"Rum then," Edmund said, "with a splash of anything. And Peter will take whatever industrial strength alcohol you have in your cabinet."

"Peter, have you had tequila before?" Tom asked. "It's a Mexican spirit and there's lots of it in the States now. It's good for sipping, if it doesn't make you go blind."

"Sounds perfect!" Edmund put in before Peter could respond.

"That would be splendid, thank you, Sir." Peter said with a frown in the direction of his brother so severe that Tom could see why Edmund had dubbed it _Most Royal._ "I prefer spirits neat."

Tom poured and Edmund handed out the drinks.

As they raised their glasses with a "Cheers" said all around, Tom felt that maybe the cultural divide wasn't so insurmountable.

Tom couldn't really stomach tequila straight up, and so watched Peter's reaction. Peter didn't even blink as he tasted the tequila.

"You like it?" Tom asked.

"Very much, thank you, Colonel," Peter said, taking a deeper sip with a satisfied expression. "It's the best I've had in a while."

"Better than the usual?" Edmund asked his brother.

Peter handed his glass over; Edmund took an experimental taste and grimaced. "Maybe after my taste for rum wears off," Edmund said, handing the glass back.

"Speaking of, Ruby said that Eustace was asking for rum, specifically," Tom said, turning back to the bar. "As I understand he is responsible for our dinner this evening, he should have one as well, don't you think?"

"He would like that, Sir, thank you," Edmund replied.

Tom wished he could understand what Peter and Edmund were undoubtedly saying to one another silently behind his back. Eustace, the ardent teetotaler, was now swilling rum. In the same way that the British ignored how friends, family members, and neighborhood manors were suddenly given over to secret business, perhaps it was more polite to just ignore profound changes and pretend everything is and was all perfectly normal.

With the brothers' silent exchange resolved, whatever it was, Peter said, "Thank you, Colonel. I'll just take this to him," and went toward the door.

Tom felt a clarification was in order. "And, Peter?"

"Yes, Sir?"

"No one is to be drunk in my house. If Eustace can't handle that watered drink, take it away from him. That goes for both of you as well."

Peter nodded crisply. "Of course," and departed on his delivery errand of mercy.
"Lucy's the only way to worry about, and she prefers wine," Edmund said offhandedly, wandering over to the corner bookshelf to study the offerings – again.

Tom joined him there. One of the attractions of the house had been the parlor's floor-to-ceiling built-in bookshelves.

"Thank you for the loan of *Crime and Punishment*, Colonel."

"And?" Tom asked. He could see that Edmund had already neatly replaced the volume in its place on the shelf.

"An extraordinary book. I am not certain yet how I feel about Raskolnikov. I was troubled by his continuing lack of remorse. He is more regretful that he could not avoid implicating himself than he was of committing the crime itself."

The book was a favorite of his – so much so, Tom wished he could read it for the first time over and over again. "I've always found it to be a fascinating look into a criminal mind – someone so alienated and with so little understanding that he cannot even see the crimes he committed for what they are."

Edmund made a thoughtful *hm* sound of agreement and sipped his drink. "That seems an apt comparison for these times, doesn't it?"

"It is. Very much so."

Edmund's observation was, in fact, one that Tom had been pondering when not beating his head against a brick wall from dealing with intractable Lobsterbacks at the Bletchley *shooting party*.

"I find it an apt metaphor for the Allied forces going forward, assuming we can bring Hitler and his circle to justice after the War."

"Bring them to justice?" Edmund repeated with the barest scoff. "How could that be possible?" His fingers traveled restlessly over *Crime and Punishment, Les Misérables*, and Tom's collections by Locke, Bentham, and Emerson. "Could you really hale Hitler or Himmler into the dock at the Old Bailey for crimes committed in Poland or France?"

"Why the Old Bailey?" Tom countered. "Why not the federal courthouse in Washington, D.C.?"

Sometimes he just couldn't help himself. He had been a trade lawyer and trust buster for longer than he had been in military service and some of his passion for argument was always there. And Edmund had proven to be an enjoyable combatant.

"My bias is showing," Edmund said, conceding the point with a nod.

"As is mine," Tom admitted.

Neither of them apologized for the biases, either.

"But, really, isn't this sort of post-War planning a trifle premature?" Edmund said, sounding a bit arch. "Or, are all Americans so optimistic?"

As had happened so many times that summer, Tom had to stop, pause, and marvel at what the War and Blackpool School had done to turn Edmund into such an intellectually remarkable person. These were not the conversations an adult had with a thirteen year old boy. He knew this for a fact as he had a thirteen year old son and with Jack it was all about girls and sports and beating the hell out of the Axis forces in animated discussions that were long on armament and short on strategy.
"Well, we are perhaps not as jaded as you all since we've not been in it so long. But, the optimism isn't unfounded – the European governments in exile headquartered in London are circulating a declaration asking to hold accountable judicially those who committed crimes in the waging of the War."

Edmund frowned thoughtfully and put an elbow on the bookshelf. "Speaking of unfounded optimism. Are they really?"

"They are. So, at least some are thinking of how to try the likes of Hitler, Himmler, and the rest in court."

You could not see the wheels turn, for Edmund usually appeared very impassive in argument. But he was always very careful and precise in his speech, which meant Edmund did not speak until those wheels had stopped turning. "Returning then to my previous point, what law could possibly apply to such a case other than the authority of a victor's justice?"

Tom nodded at the bookshelf on which Edmund was leaning. "The international laws of war. That's what they would be held to and tried under."

Edmund started and turned to study the obscure titles – the slim volume of Lieber's General Orders No. 100, The Social Contract, The Hague and Geneva Conventions, the collected proceedings of the 1921 Leipzig Trials. "Laws of war? Surely that is an oxymoron?"

"Like military intelligence?"

"Why limit it to military alone?" Edmund replied with a grin. "Perhaps any intelligence work is also an oxymoron – anyone who would engage in it couldn't possibly be."

"I decline to answer on the grounds of possible self-incrimination," Tom replied, laughing at the wry humor. "In the case of the laws of war, however, it isn't oxymoronic at all. There is law to apply and precedent."

"I am surprised," Edmund admitted slowly. "I had no idea such a thing was possible. I had assumed the practice would be to just put them all up against a wall and shoot them. Sentence first, verdict afterwards, as the Queen of Hearts would say."

"Is that from Alice in Wonderland?"

"It is."

Tom took a deep drink, turning it all over in his mind again since he'd heard about the circulating declaration. Edmund was right, in a sense. It was optimistic, for the governments in exile had no real power. This would probably be a joint decision for Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin and while Tom had a pretty good idea where the Americans would come out on the issue, he wasn't so sure about the Soviets or even the British. Churchill had seen the sinking of the French fleet at Mers-el-Kébir two years ago; 1,300 French men had died there and Britain had not even been at war with France.

"There's no denying that many, maybe even most, hope every Nazi leader suicides or they'll be helped along to that decision with a bullet. But, if forcing criminals to a quick and messy death is the right solution, why are we here?"

"I don't disagree," Edmund injected hurriedly. Again, there was the thoughtful consideration, the weighing of words. "It just seems so…" And here, for the first time in this peculiar conversation, Tom saw the boy rather than the young man.
"Daunting? Overwhelming?"

Edmund nodded. "Yes. The scope. The magnitude." He sighed heavily. "The temptation for revenge. And, trying to separate who is Raskolnikov from…"

He trailed off, looking at the titles on the shelf, and so Tom finished, "From those who are not?"

"Even traitors may mend," Edmund replied slowly. "It's not unknown."

"Though remorse and repentance are relevant in the sentencing phase, not in the determination of culpability."

"True."

"I could say, Edmund, that you are yourself being premature and you should just leave such deep and weighty matters of war crimes justice to your elders and betters."

In response to the patronizing comment, Tom got a well-deserved, very sharp, scowl. He gave Edmund a rough, jocular shove. "As it happens, I'm not going to say that. If you are interested in the subject, I can suggest some reading for you."

The anger left Edmund's expression. "Thank you, Colonel. More than condescension of my supposed elders and betters telling me what I should be doing and thinking, I appreciate the loan of books to make my own judgments. If you can spare them this term?"

Tom had noted before a certain intellectual arrogance in Edmund. He was probably accustomed to being the brightest person in the room. It was what had first made Tom think that sending Jack to the same school might be a good option. Edmund's instincts and argumentative skill were first rate, even if they outstripped his actual knowledge and thirteen-year-old education. But, Tom had had to go to West Point and Harvard, serve in the JAG Corps and bust trusts and trade colluders for a few years before he had the foundation. Lack of background was a shortcoming that was easily remedied.

"As you rightly noted, this is premature until we win the war. But, I can certainly spare the books until then. I suggest you start with the Lieber Code, the General Orders No. 100." Tom pulled the slim volume from the shelf and handed it to him. "Lieber wrote it for the U.S. Army in 1863 during the American Civil War. It's not long, but it's very thought provoking once you consider its practical applications in wartime. It's the first articulation I'm aware of on treatment of prisoners and noncombatants. It condemns cruel and unnecessary violence, a phrase borrowed from our own Constitution." Tom paused, and could not help adding, "The American Constitution, of course."

"I believe your prohibition came from ours," Edmund replied, blandly offhand, paging through the volume Tom had had bound for his own use. "Prohibitions upon cruel and unusual punishments are in the English Bill of Rights of 1689."

Now it was Tom's turn to admit to biases showing. "You are right, excuse my error."

"You are excused." Edmund could not quite hide the smugness. He snapped the book shut, set it on the reading table. "So, the laws of War regarding humane treatment of noncombatants arose from the American Civil War? Ironic, surely? Or, oxymoronic?"

Tom had to reign in his flare of temper at British superiority, which admittedly had been stoked by the Bletchley Park shooting party. He was getting tired of these not-so-veiled sleights.

"I understand that there are instructions within the British ranks to not discuss race and slavery with Americans."
"That prohibition could not possibly apply to civilians?" Edmund countered smoothly.

"Given Britain's present, I don't think there should be any assertion of moral superiority over America's past."

"Yet, is it in the past? Based upon my sister's letters, I understand that blatant discrimination against Negroes still is practiced in Washington? In the American Capitol, no less?"

"Don't assume all Americans are of one mind on race, Edmund."

"Any more than British are all of one mind on India? Or Ireland? It seems that there is blame aplenty to go around and still is."

That was, Tom had to concede, a fair point, especially given the conversation he had overheard between Edmund and Peter. He should be pleased that his son was going to the same school as a boy who could hold his own for a few rounds with a Washington lawyer, but Tom was irritated, too. Credit to Edmund for getting a rise out of him.

Edmund suddenly clapped him on the shoulder and Tom was startled at how adult the gesture felt, and how effectively it defused the tension. "Forgive me, Colonel, for I'm being especially grating. I'm expressing my curiosity badly and should speak more plainly of my motives."

"Probably a better idea, Edmund. You wouldn't know this, but I am very proud of where my family has stood on these issues for over two hundred years – I know that's a short time to you all, but it's a long time for an American."

"Well, perhaps that's where part of my answer lies. It's that having come to know Ruby this summer, I've not been able to reconcile what I infer has been her life and accomplishments with Susan's experiences in Washington."

And so explained, Tom could understand the basis for Edmund's query. "I can see why you would be curious. America's history of race is ugly, but some places were a lot uglier than others for a lot longer and still are. In Ruby's case, her family's proud story is her own, and Ruby would hide me if I tell it before she does."

"So I would not offend her if I asked?"

It was Tom's turn to laugh. "Ruby? The trick will be to politely get her to let someone else get a word in."

The front door banged open and slammed shut.

"Jack!" Lucy cried. "Pity the poor door!"

"What?" Jack said, indignant and oblivious. He stuck his head into the library. "Hi, Dad!" Jack's head disappeared and then reappeared. "And Ed, cricket is a girls' game."

He yelped and spun around. "Lucy, that hurt!"

"But it's just a girls' game, right Jack?" Lucy stuck her head in the room and waved. "It was time for us to come in and help with dinner. Do join us in the kitchen when you are ready."

Jack ducked around Lucy and from the sounds, pelted straight into the kitchen and possibly into Ruby, with dinner as the casualty.
Lucy blew out an exasperated breath. "If you will excuse me?"

Tom looked at his wristwatch and judging from the smells, dinner was about to be set on the table, assuming they would not, due to Jack, be scraping it off the floor.

Reading the same cues, Edmund began moving toward the door. "I'll collect the book before we leave?"

"Of course. Also, I found the list you asked for, Edmund." Tom reached into his pocket and removed the report. "I'll just put this in the book. It's the most complete Dieppe list I could find of the living, dead, missing, captured." He slipped the report in the cover of the Lieber Code. "It will save you combing through the papers."

"Thank you, sir. I'm assuming that, given when they sailed, Susan won't have had one, and I know she met some Canadians when she was in America. If they saw action at Dieppe, she'll want the most complete list there is."

"Happy to do it, Edmund. And thank you. I'm very glad Jack has met you all."

"Jack is a good friend. We'll have a good year at school."

As they left the library, Tom wondered if he should ask Edmund and Peter to keep an eye on Jack at school, help him remember that a jumper was a sweater, that trousers were pants and pants were underwear, and that tabling something in England meant putting the issue aside permanently. But, Edmund and Peter, of course, would do these protective kindnesses without asking.

It was the nicest dinner they'd had in England. As the parlor was given over to the library, and the dining room given over to the parlor, they crammed around the kitchen table. Both Eustace and Peter ate sparingly of the chicken but made no fuss about it at all. As on the train, Eustace was a bit too forceful in his compliments. But, as Ruby had said, he was trying to apologize with deeds as well as words and so the two of them were British about it and made no comment on Eustace's dramatic change at all.

Jack sat between Edmund and Lucy and every time some imaginary insult arose with Eustace, one of them stepped in to divert or defuse the situation. Peter was the bolstering support for Eustace and whenever the boy began stammering his way into something awkward, Peter smoothly stepped in with an adroit rephrase. By the seventh of these orchestrations, Tom felt his mouth twitching with comments just begging to be made – until Ruby kicked him under the table. Then his shins hurt and he forgot what the joke was going to be. A wink from Lucy told him she had observed the whole thing.

The carrots were perfectly and evenly cut – evidence of Lucy's knife skills. She told Ruby she liked sharp things very much, so long as they were larger than sewing and knitting needles.

There was also the matter of the bowl of potatoes. When Ruby was dishing up the potatoes from the pot on the stove, she was holding the serving bowl in one hand. Her fingers gave way and the heavy bowl slid from her grasp. It would have been, should have been, a crashing mess.

Except, suddenly Peter was there, catching the bowl, the loose, hot potato, and the serving spoon before any of them hit the floor and deftly depositing the whole of it on the table. Jack didn't notice; Edmund, Lucy and Eustace performed that British maneuver and pretended not to see it. Tom found himself wondering later with Ruby if they had imagined the whole thing.

For dessert, Tom produced the Hershey bars. He broke them into pieces and put them on a plate in
the center of the table. The hushed awe and stammered thanks of Eustace and the Pevensies were even more profound than al-Masri's reverence.

The moment was ruined by Jack making a grab for a greedy handful. As fast as Peter's rescue of the potatoes, suddenly Edmund's fingers were latched on to Jack's wrist. "Only one at a time, and wait your turn."

Jack jerked his hand away, looking rebellious and very angry. Before he could intervene, Tom got another painful jab in the shin from Ruby – her leave it be might as well have been shouted in his ear.

"Why should I?" Jack snapped at Edmund.

"Because it is rude and Lucy and the rest of us have not even seen real chocolate for two years." Edmund picked up the plate. "Ruby? Lucy? Chocolate?"

"Oh," Jack said, turning scarlet with embarrassment and glancing at Lucy. "Sorry," he mumbled.

"I accept your apology, Jack. Thank you, Edmund," Lucy said pleasantly, taking a tiny piece from the plate. She spoke kindly but there was a hard little glint indicating that she viewed her brother's swift reprimand as entirely appropriate and Jack had better not make the same mistake around her again or she might reinforce the point with something sharper.

Ruby started coughing – she was secretly laughing and was trying to hide it.

"Moreover," Peter said pleasantly, taking a small square from the plate, "if you did a snatch and grab like that at school, an upper would have you fagging for him for a month, you'd deserve every shoe he made you polish, and there's nothing that we would do to stop it."

With a forceful nudge from Edmund, Jack silently rose from the table and the two of them quickly cleared the dishes. A month ago, if he or Ruby had made the request, Jack would have shot back with a smart remark and obstinacy.

"Now, Ruby!" Lucy said, tactfully redirecting the conversation. "I've heard you mention your family history in passing. This is our last night. Might we hear a story?"

"Oh, you don't want to hear about that!" Ruby said with a wave of her hand. "I couldn't possibly."

Jack displayed his un-British manners with an incredulous snort. Tom decided to keep quiet and let his son take the blame as Lucy shoved Jack in the ribs.

"But we do!" Lucy insisted.

When Ruby looked at Edmund for confirmation, he opened out his hands in an expansive gesture. "Truly, we do enjoy stories and very much want to hear yours."

"And," Tom added, "they have it on good authority that you tell them best, Ruby."

"Would you? Please?" Eustace whispered, urged on by Peter's hand at his back.

"Tell the one about the Boston Tea Party, Ruby!" Jack said with bouncing, and very inappropriate, enthusiasm. He almost dropped the poor, abused, potato bowl.

"Maybe the Civil War?" Tom injected quickly. "Out of deference to our guests?" He was glad Jack hadn't asked for the Boston Massacre though, really, even Ruby's father admitted that the Smith
family's ties to Crispus Attucks were supposition, at best.

"Very well," Ruby said with a gracious smile.

Tom poured the American coffee, added sugar, and slid the cup over to Ruby. It was thirsty work when she told stories.

"My great grandfather," Ruby began, "was a free man, and in 1863 he was recruited by Frederick Douglass himself for the Massachusetts 54th Volunteer Regiment…"

The coffee grew cold as Ruby wove her tale of the free blacks who assured that the Old Glory flag of the Union never touched the ground at Fort Wagner and how they fought for freedom, Massachusetts, and seven dollars a month. This story of Ruby's always concluded with the quiet pride of William Carvey receiving the Medal of Honor.

Getting a story in return from the Pevensies was more complicated and a lot louder. They evidently had a lot of them, though they all began "Once upon a time," Lucy said.

"What about the story of the King who beat a Giant in single combat?" Lucy suggested.

"Yes!" Jack cried, but Peter's "No!" was louder and firmer.

Lucy tried again. "The story of the first time a King was caught behind an enemy encampment with nothing but a knife and an owl as guide?"

Tom wanted to hear how an owl could be a guide in what sounded like a tale of espionage. However, while Edmund's "Absolutely not," was not as loud as Peter's, it was every bit as firm.

"The King who turned a dragon into a Prince?" Lucy said.

Eustace turned bright red and mumbled "No. Please. No."

Peter took a turn. "What about the story of the Queen who led a mutiny aboard a pirate ship? That one is a tall tale with plenty of humor."

Lucy's glare was hot enough to set the table linens ablaze.

Finally, it was Edmund who solved the peculiar stand-off over what seemed to all be terrific fairy tales.

"I know one," Edmund said, leaning back in his seat and stirring his tea. "Gather, friends that you might hear the ancient tale of how the horse, and his boy, the mare and her girl, the rat, and the crow saved a kingdom and made an ass of a prince."

Chapter 7

The Queen Susan in Liverpool

In which there are meetings and reunions, although someone is missing.

Thanks to Snacky for the awesome beta.

Citations and footnotes are in my Live Journal. For non-American readers, the Boston Tea Party (December 16, 1773) and the Boston Massacre (March 5, 1770) were early events in the American efforts to gain political independence from England. Ruby Smith's stories relate to the Massachusetts Volunteer 54th, a regiment of free Blacks who fought in the American Civil War. Part of their story
is told in the film, *Glory*.

Col. Clark's discussion with Edmund regarding the oxymoronic laws of war is derived from numerous sources, specifically T. Taylor's *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials*.

Thanks to reader E for the information that there were instructions given to the British military that they were not to discuss race and slavery with the American service personnel. Peter and Edmund are discussing the decision by the British authorities in India to imprison Mohandas Gandhi and the members of the Indian Congress Party in August 1942 in response to the *Quit India* civil disobedience movement which called for complete and immediate independence for India from Britain. I give a nod of thanks to Priscipixie, E, and Clio regarding their insights into the Indian independence movement and the crumbling British empire.
Chapter Summary

In which there are meetings and reunions, although someone is missing.

Apostolic Way
Chapter 7, *The Queen Susan in Liverpool (and Finchley)*

A child is a curly dimpled lunatic.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Mothers are fonder than fathers of their children because they are more certain they are their own.
Aristotle

If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves.
C.G. Jung, *Integration of the Personality*, 1939

Liverpool is the 'pool of life'
C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 1928

I mean, I was born the day war broke out, but I don't remember all the bombs though they did actually break up Liverpool, you know. I remember when I was a little older, there was big gaps in all the streets where houses used to be. We used to play over them.
Ringo Starr

The wire had, unfortunately, been misdirected to Harold and Alberta in Impington. With Eustace packed off to his wretched school, Peter had decided that they had all had quite enough of their aunt and uncle's reluctant, surly hospitality. He, Lucy and Edmund caught the same train out of Cambridge with Eustace. They were all as glad to be rid of Harold and Alberta as his aunt and uncle were glad to see the retreating backside of their nephews and niece.

The three of them arrived to the stuffy, empty house in Finchley. It was grim and grimy, but not as bad for them as it would be for Mum. Lucy ran off with the ration books to find their neighbor, Mrs. Goodwin, who would help her with the laundry and shopping and to phone the Liverpool marine office to confirm when the ship was due into the Merseyside docks. Edmund unpacked, sorted the mail, and began weeding the garden. Peter was left with the cleaning and repairs.

So it was that when the telegram finally arrived, two days late and redirected from Cambridge, they were all up to their elbows – Lucy in laundry suds, Edmund in garden weeds, and Peter in carpet dust.

"You are supposed to meet their ship in Liverpool?" Edmund asked, smudging the telegram with a dirty thumbprint. He snatched it away from Lucy before she got it wet on her soapy hands. "That wasn't the plan, was it?"
Peter coughed out a lungful of dust; Edmund sneezed. Due to Edmund's allergies, beating the carpets was always Peter's job.

"No, it wasn't. We were to await them here, not go there," Peter replied. "And with the ship coming in, that means being in Liverpool tomorrow morning."

They all stood on the front walk outside the house and argued for fifteen minutes.

"It's my name, see? P-E-T-E-R. Right there on the telegram. Not E-D-M-U-N-D, nor L-U-C-Y."

"And how shall P-E-T-E-R get there without his logistics man advising him of the railway timetables and stations to Liverpool?"

"And if you two go, I shall not remain behind to iron bedsheets!"

Because a house half-done looks worse than one to which nothing had been done at all, the three of them stayed up most of the night cleaning. In the morning that came very soon, they profusely thanked Mrs. Goodwin for putting the rest of the house in order and filling the icebox. The three of them then hared off to Liverpool on an early morning train. And Peter could read a railway timetable perfectly well – he just did not normally have to do so because Edmund carried that sort of thing around in his head, which meant Peter did not have to carry it in his pockets.

With virtually every imported good from America and Canada arriving into Liverpool via merchant ships and then shipped by train and lorry to the rest of England, the trips between Euston Station and the port city were crowded, but regular. They crammed together in a single seat to make room for all the Army recruits and sailors being shipped out. For the first time, Peter felt no special envy or longing seeing the fresh faced soldiers with their blazons and packs. He had a plan in place, he felt the rightness of it, and something would be found that suited.

The journey into Liverpool was very sobering. As Londoners, they had become accustomed to the burnt out shells of buildings, rubble, craters, ash, and unexploded ordnance. Liverpool was nearly as grim. The city's port and miles of docks were Britain's lifeline to the rest of the world. Shipbuilding was concentrated here as well as the naval command. Liverpool had been badly hit during the Blitz a year ago – St. Luke's Church, the Customs House, and Museum were all casualties of the Luftwaffe.

"I knew it was bad," Edmund said quietly.

"But not this bad," Peter agreed.

There had not been an attack since January. Still, as they stepped out of the station, there was the familiar buzz of a Hurricane overhead. There were Observer Corps spotters on all the roofs. Members of the Home Guard cycled by.

"Will we be going by Durning Road?" Lucy had asked Edmund quietly as they pushed out of the crowded station.

"No," Edmund replied, as soberly.

"If we have time, we will stop there," Peter said.

Over 150 men, women, and children had died in the bombing and collapse of an air raid shelter on Durning Road. The PM had said it was the worst civilian loss of the war.

The rubble and debris, the sandbags and bicycles, the drab uniforms and tin hats, these were all the omnipresent, familiar realities of life after three years of War. Yet, in walking the streets from the
train station, west, toward the docks, following the milling crowds, Peter found it all strangely reminiscent of other places and times as well.

As Lucy strode ahead of them to peek into the steamy window of a Chinese laundry, Peter recalled a day that was an age and a world away. He and Lucy had been in Tashbaan in the Hawkers' Street. Then, as now, he stood beneath a swinging sign written in a language he did not know, his senses assaulted by smells, sights, and colours he had never seen before. Although it had been a dye shop and not a Chinese laundry, the billowing steam and Lucy’s keen interest were the same. In Tashbaan, he had tried and wholly failed to keep an eye on Lucy as she waltzed from one stall to the next on the Street, picking up words and friends, admiring and pointing at everything. They had burnt their mouths on hot, smoky, greasy skewers of goat. A man at a fruit stand had offered them an orange, doing so by deftly slicing the peel off so that the fruit looked like a flower with a juicy center as red as blood.

Here, there was less heat and colour, less food and wondrous smells. It was war-ravaged, rather than exotic, and the tang of salt, sea, and fish was stronger here. But, as they pushed closer to the docks, Peter again had the sense of being surrounded by people from a bigger world – though the world here was much, much bigger. Chinese men hefting duffels walked alongside their English wives who were carrying their babies on their hips. He heard thick Irish brogues. Indian men, wearing long shirts and loose trousers, scuffed along in the sandals and the sort of heelless shoes Peter had thought he would never see again. He saw the occasional African or Caribbean as well.

Had this variety always been in England and he had never noticed it before? In Narnia, there had been so few humans, the monarchs had been a rarity in the land they ruled. In all the neighboring and known lands, save Archenland, even fair-skinned humans were few. They had all become accustomed to being in a minority and England had seemed, on the return, to be monochromatic pale skin and gray sky.

As they picked their way by a fishmonger - the bomb-pocked pavement was strewn with guts – Peter muttered to Edmund, "How could I have ever thought England all looked the same?"

"For all your anti-colonial sentiments, Liverpool is a gateway to the rest of the Empire, I suppose," Edmund said, eyes looking ahead to a sign in Chinese characters and the words in English, Chinese Seamen's Union. "With so many ports closed in Asia, there's less movement, so maybe more people are staying because they cannot return?"

"Labour is scarce and there is work here," Peter added.

Lucy stopped at the boarded up window of what looked to be a grocer. She peeked in the door and traced with a fingertip the Chinese characters painted on the wall. "Surely there are places like this in London and we've just never been to them?"

"Perhaps the Docklands," Edmund said.

"Or, before going there, maybe we would have avoided them here?" Peter asked Edmund. That was a very uncomfortable thought.

Edmund nodded. "These are not the sorts of places Mother and Father took us for family outings before the War."

Lucy had gone ahead and now was stopped at a restaurant store front and admiring the dishes behind the one glass window that wasn't broken or boarded up. "Peter! What are all of these?"

He joined her at the window and it felt odd, in a pleasant way, to be able to tell her what was
displayed. There had been no experience like this since Narnia. "Those are chicken feet. The Russells called them fung zhao, which I believe means phoenix talons. And those buns are, well, again, I was told they are bao, but they have different names; I think those flat things are turnip cakes."

An elderly Chinese woman came out of the shop, smiling broadly. She was wearing a stained apron; her steel gray hair was pulled back in a comb. Nodding to them, she began speaking rapidly and Peter thought he caught the words he had just spoken, but really, he had no idea.

Lucy was never deterred by a lack of common language. She smiled in return and threw out her arms. "It all looks beautiful! You must be a wonderful cook!"

The woman motioned, putting her fingers toward her mouth and pointing, talking the whole while.

"Yes!" Lucy cried, with a vigorous nod. "I would like to try one!"

The proprietress ducked into the store and reappeared with a plate. Lucy gingerly plucked a chicken foot from the plate. "And you are sure it doesn't taste like fish eyes, Peter?"

"Positive," he assured her.

Edmund pulled some pence out his pockets to hand to their hostess but the woman shook her head and offered the plate instead.

"I suppose it would be very rude to refuse," Edmund said. "Not that I wish to, but I don't want to take food from this good woman?"

She settled the argument by shoving the plate nearly to Edmund's chin.

Peter took one of the chicken feet and Edmund did the same with smiling thanks.

They really were delicious. Odd. Chewy and gelatinous. But delicious.

Edmund was chewing his appreciatively. "Definitely better than fish eyes."

"Do you know how to say thank you, Peter?" Lucy asked.

"Ṃ̀h'gōi, I think." He hesitated. Was this a gift? Or a service? "Or, maybe dōjeh."

Lucy repeated both and the woman laughed and patted Lucy's cheek.

With bowing and stammering thanks, they moved on toward the Mersey River and docks.

The passenger terminal was a scrum, with everyone cheek to jowl, shoulder to elbow. It was gritty and warm and there was a jostling crush of humanity who could hear nothing through garbled loudspeakers and read nothing due to the unintelligible signage. Perhaps when the War ended, there would be less of the endless queuing up for everything.

They could see through the sooty windows that the ship was in. There was a ramp and a set of doors and a portly gatekeeper snarled at anyone from the waiting area who tried to get in and allowed only disembarking passengers and cargo out.

In the crush, a toddler, no more than two, bumbled into them. He was wholly intent on scrabbling about on the dirty floor, chasing insects. Lucy quickly righted the boy before he was stepped on in the crowd and when the boy kept squirming for his errant pet, Edmund scooped up the bug before
anyone stepped on it.

Edmund dropped the beetle into the boy's cupped hands. "Only eat the slow ones," he said, and with gentle nudges, he and Lucy directed the child back to his harried mother.

Peter turned away, finding it uncomfortable to watch Lucy or Edmund with young children. But, to avoid that scene, he was crowded toward another party. It was all simply too close for courtesy. A girl was fussing with her fussy baby. An older Chinese couple was with her and they were doting on the baby, making faces and cooing. They were joined by an Indian man who, at odds with the rough, crowded milieu, was in a fine suit complete with a bright orange and green pocket handkerchief. He did not seem bothered by the warmth of the close-in quarters at all.

Peter was politely ignoring them and keeping an eye on the ramp from the ship when he felt a sharp jab in the ribs.

"Ow! Lu!"

Her eyes darted to the group next to them and Edmund flashed a Listen hand signal.

"Mary said she would stay at the hospital with Richard, or go to Digory's, and Asim will be gone the rest of the week, so there is no hurry, Lee," the Indian man said.

Lucy nodded and Edmund raised an eyebrow with a Go ahead. Peter stepped closer, squeezing next to pillar. "Excuse me, but in these close quarters, I could not help overhearing and I believe we have acquaintances in common."

The group all turned to him and the older woman's mouth formed a polite, "Oh?" Her shrewd eyes slid over the three of them and then her face widened in comprehending surprise. "Goodness! Are you Peter Pevensie!"

"I am." He tilted his head, "My brother Edmund, and…"

"Your sister, Lucy!" Kwong Lee exclaimed.

She thrust out her hand. "A pleasure to meet you, Peter. And all of you. Thank you so much for the lovely notes!"

The introductions went all around. The young mother passed her baby to the silent Lin Kun before shaking hands. She, like so many others they had heard in Liverpool, spoke with a heavy Irish accent. "Maureen," she had said so softly they could barely hear her over the din and shook her head when they tried politely to call her "Mrs. Gallagher."

"It's a pleasure, Peter. Richard and Asim have both said so much about you." Mr. Patel's handshake was very firm and strong. "Polly had mentioned your family was arriving. They are coming in on The Star Empress?"

"They are, yes."

"Our mother and father and sister!" Lucy said.

"We are waiting for our son, Yi," Mrs. Kwong said. "He is in the Merchant Navy." She put an arm around Maureen, clarifying a relationship that had seemed obvious to Peter even if her name had not immediately suggested matrimony. "Maureen is his wife and this is their son."

"I'm sure he will be very happy to see his family again!" Lucy spoke with enough enthusiasm to
dispel any concern of prejudice on their part.

"You all must be very grateful for his safe return," Edmund added warmly.

And with that, the tension that had sparked as quickly eased. Maureen nodded and looked down shyly at the ground – she was nearly as quiet as her father-in-law. Her ruddy cheeks turned redder. "I am."

Mr. Patel tossed his cigarette to the ground. "Your mother, father, and sister, you say?"

"Yes," Peter replied.

"Well, let me go see what I can do about finding them. It's a maze back there and not well marked for passengers. If I spot Yi, I'll send him here?"

Mrs. Kwong nodded. "Thank you."

"You're very kind, Mr. Patel," Maureen murmured.

Mr. Patel reached into a breast pocket and withdrew a fat wallet. Edmund peered in his direction. Peter knew that Edmund had developed the skill of reading things upside down and felt keenly that Susan was better at it than he.

"I need to find my Blue Funnel credential," Mr. Patel said. "And, here it is."

He teased out the card for the marine shipping line, returned the wallet to his pocket, and slid through the crowd to where the guard stood. One flash of the card and Mr. Patel was waved through.

"He consults for all the shipping lines and the War Transport Ministry," Mrs. Kwong explained. "Designs loading equipment, works on systems for balancing and storing cargoes."

"Richard and Polly mentioned he is an engineer?"

"Materials, systems, and," Mrs. Kwong gestured about them, "moving anything from one place to another. He's useful here, of course, but a particular nuisance around the house."

"He always has ideas on more efficient ways to do things?" Lucy said, smiling.

"You know him, then?" Mrs. Kwong said.

"The type," Edmund replied with a laugh.

The walk from the station to the passenger terminal must have put him in the mind of it. Peter thought that Mr. Patel was vaguely reminiscent of the Dwarfs of Cair Paravel in his brisk, confident efficiency. Mrs. Kwong was not unlike Cook. From the way her mouth was twitching, Lucy saw the similarity as well and if someone mentioned pig intestine or lobbing cabbages for distance, his sister would probably collapse in hysterical laughter on the spot.

The baby began fussing again. Mr. Lin tried bouncing him, but the baby was reaching for his mother. Maureen took her son back, cradling him on her shoulder. Lucy began a distracting game of peek-a-boo with the baby and Edmund offered a finger which the boy clutched with wide eyes.

Peter tossed this poignant distraction into the River Mersey. Not now. As Edmund would say, not relevant. Really and truly not relevant at all.

And how is Richard?" Peter asked, focusing on Mrs. Kwong.
"Better," Mrs. Kwong said. "Stable. He may be coming home next week."

"That is excellent news! I shall have to write to him. And how is…"

"There they are!" Edmund cried.

Lucy squealed and stood on her tiptoes, craning her neck for a better look. Peter had a clearer view as he was head and shoulders above most of the crowd.

"What in blazes?" Edmund muttered as they all waved.

Lucy seized his hand in a sudden panic. "Peter?"

He squeezed her hand in return and waved with the other, plastering a smile on his face that he suddenly did not feel at all. "I don't understand it, either."

"Where is Father?" Lucy asked.

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Mum picked a place in the middle of the train. Peter helped her into the seat, settled the one suitcase in the overhead rack, and slid in next to her. Edmund, Susan, and Lucy tumbled by, arm in arm in arm.

Mum waved them on. "Why don’t you lot sit at the end of the car so you can get caught up?"

Lucy squeezed between the narrow seats to hug Mum, again.

"We missed you!"

Not to be outdone, but with less crowding or elbows in the jaw, Susan leaned in and wrapped her arms around his shoulders. Peter heard a sniff in his ear as he tightened their embrace, "I missed you too, Su."

"There is so much I need to hear from you, Peter," Susan whispered. "You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," he whispered back. "I know."

They were blocking the other passengers, which was actually good as it meant the bench seat at the end of the car was still unoccupied.

"Go!" Mum said with a mock Shoo! "Otherwise, you'll have to stand the whole way!"

Susan had known the moment she had seen Edmund and Lucy that they had been called by Aslan and, a second after that, also understood that they were not to return. There had been squeals, wide-eyed expressions, and a few tears. Susan hugged them very tightly and spoke soft, consoling words. Lucy and Edmund would tell Susan of their trip to Narnia. Which left Peter to keep their mother occupied.

His mother was watching her children crowd on to the bench seat, their heads already huddled together in a secret conference. She dabbed her eyes with a tip of her glove.

"I have a clean one, Mum." He handed her his handkerchief and put an arm about her shoulders.

"Thank you, Peter." She sniffed a little, then carefully folded the handkerchief and set it on top of the white gloves on her lap. "As this handkerchief is clean, but not new, does this mean you have done the wash?"
"We returned home yesterday morning and have been getting it ready for you. Mrs. Goodwin was going to put the last things in order."

She squeezed his hand gratefully and glanced out the train window as a porter pushed a trolley burdened with luggage along the platform.

"It was very good of your friend, Mister…"

"Patel," Peter supplied.

"Patel, yes. It was very kind of him to take charge of our trunks and see them sent on to the house. I tried to pay him for the trouble but he wouldn't hear of it. How do you know him?"

He was not going to try to explain the Russells to Mum; Peter did not think his mother would appreciate a polygamist ethnologist married to a paleontologist – evolutionist who was thirty years her husband's junior. So, Peter opted for his preferred tactic with difficult questions – answering truthfully, but incompletely, and very precisely. "Miss Plummer and the Professor know Mr. Patel well. He works for the shipping lines and the Ministry of War Transport."

"I planned this badly," Mum said. "Thank you for coming, Peter. We would have had a difficult time otherwise."

"I know you asked just for me to come, but…"

She shook her head and linked his arm with her own. "While you have better success than I in motivating your siblings to do what they do not wish to do, if you had not come with Lucy and Edmund, they would have surely followed behind you on the next train."

Peter was not quite sure what Mum meant by the comparison, though he realized uncomfortably that, in fact, he had been their High King in Narnia for longer than his mother had been parent to any of his siblings here.

"Edmund did remind me that I would be unlikely to make it to Liverpool at all without his encyclopedic knowledge of the railways."

Mum smiled and leaned back against the seat. "They are so much older," she said, watching Lucy describe something and Susan's look of angry shock. Peter supposed she was telling of Eustace's (initial) part in the tale, or the Lone Islands slavers.

"And you've grown too, Peter." The soft way Mum spoke gave him the sense she was not referring solely to the inches he had gained over the summer. With a tug, she worried his jacket sleeve between her fingers, turned the cuff over, and examined the hem he had let out over the summer. "Your stitching is as neat as a tailor's."

Before Peter could invent a lie on the spot to explain the mending skills he had had to master when on the road in Narnia (The Professor had taught him? Polly? Surely Asim mended his own clothing?), his mother smoothed his sleeve out and patted his hand. "I will look among your father's clothes. As he is in uniforms all the time, we should be able to find a jacket and trousers that fit you better."

With this opening, Peter felt he could now broach the subject. He assumed Susan would tell Lucy and Edmund of what had been only hurriedly mentioned but obvious when Mr. Patel had graciously escorted Susan and Mum off the ship. Amid the rushed introductions, one person had been absent whom everyone had assumed would be present.
"Why did Father stay? Was there a last minute change of plans?"

Mum wrung the handkerchief in her lap. "I am so sorry, Peter. I know it is difficult for you all, and I should have said something but, once we started with this fiction of his being discharged, I …"

Reaching over, he squeezed her fretting hands. "Mum, please. We are surprised and disappointed, but really, logically, this is not so unexpected. He is still in active service, isn't he? He was never going to America to give lectures?"

She rolled her eyes with a look of exasperation. "Fortunately, your father is better at what he does in New York than he was in concocting the story explaining why we went haring off to America in the first place."

Peter uncomfortably felt that he was missing something important. There was an unhappy and concerning edge to Mum's words.

"Father is well, though? Doing well?"

"Oh yes. Very well." With a pleasant smile that rang wholly false to him, Mum added, "He is fortunate to be in a post he excels at and enjoys that does not involve combat operations."

Faint praise that.

"I've heard very little from him," Peter admitted. "Though, I'm not much of a correspondent myself."

"I'm sure he exhorted you to study hard, to learn everything you can from Professor Kirke, and told you he is very proud of the fine scholar you will be and the outstanding asset to the English Civil Service thereafter?"

At sixteen, Peter would not have known these were warning signs. At age thirty-three, he instantly recognized the tone and the script and found he was rapidly recalling conversations he had been party to on this painful subject– Lucy's outbursts regarding Aidan's occasional obtuseness; Edmund's frustration with Morgan's oddities; the complaints by friends, ambassadors, advisors, and so many others about the foibles of their spouses, consorts, and lovers.

And now his mother was expressing a similar unhappy dissatisfaction with his father. Peter had (to his everlasting regret) never had a relationship of sufficient import to have the occasion to criticise it to another. As much as it pained him, he was no fool about these things, even if wholly unqualified to wade into this morass. He knew there was a private side to intimate relationships to which others were not privy and his parents had been apart for nearly three years.

"So you read his letters to me?" Peter joked. "Or, perhaps wrote them yourself?"

Mum laughed, a little, without mirth or warmth, and he could see her mentally push the negative away to cope with the immediate. Edmund did the same thing – never mind, not relevant, I shall think on this later, I should not have said anything.

"It was impossible for him to leave. They are very short-handed where your father is and they are recruiting heavily. Susan and I both barely escaped."

"What would Father's unit have wanted with you and with Susan?" Peter asked, though he felt thoroughly disingenuous in saying so.

Her eyes traveled again to Susan, Lucy and Edmund. Susan had an arm around Lucy, who was describing something. Lucy was upset, Susan was compassionate, and Edmund, a little confused and
trying to not show it. Perhaps Lucy was again alluding to whatever had occurred at Coriakin's House. He had inferred it had something to do with the Book of Spells, but Lucy had refused to elaborate upon the "mistake" she had made there. She had been waiting to share it with Susan. Peter hoped Susan was well-rested as it was going to a very, very long night for her.

Mum pursed her lips into a contemplative frown. "Your father is not really in a unit. Not in the combat sense, at least."

"Oh?"

"An outfit, I suppose, best described as a menagerie of charming, intelligent, and very enthusiastic amateurs." She smiled at him apologetically. "I am sorry to be so oblique, Peter. With my inability to say much of anything, surely you can infer what I omit?"

So Mum felt bound by the Official Secrets Act – not an injunction Edmund and Susan had followed, to be sure. Peter could wriggle his way through this one easily enough. "Yes, I can surmise what you are not saying, Mum. Again, through friends of the Professor and Miss Plummer, I have become a little more astute about such things over the summer."

At least here. In Narnia, Peter had always felt he had concerned himself with the substance of enough Rat and Crow to make informed decisions – save for that damned cipher Edmund and Susan had concocted. He did now wonder if he had delegated even too much in that regard. There was, however, nothing to be done about that now other than to assure he was more vigilant in the future regarding matters here that involved Rat and Crow.

"They were desperate for both me and for Susan. In my case, if I'd not put my foot down, I'd be on my way to a Cairo secretarial pool by way of the Belgian Congo."

Mum's inclusion of Susan implied that she knew something of her daughter's Rat and Crow activities. Did she know the depth of Susan's involvement, or that they had been found out? And, if she had known, how in blazes would Mum have ever permitted it?

"I can see why your skills would be in such demand," Peter said. "But why would they try to recruit Susan as well? She's only fifteen."

Mum raised a questioning eyebrow so skeptical, it was alarming and a perfect mimicry of Susan's own ironic mannerisms. "As to why, well, Peter, I'm sure you know the answer better than I do."

His own shocked and wholly fabricated, spur-of-the-moment, denial was interrupted by Susan's exclamation of surprise. Mum looked at her children at the end of the train car. Edmund had his hands out, mimicking dragon wings and Lucy appeared to be beating something with a bat – perhaps a sea monster with Caspian's second best sword.

Mum sighed heavily and shook her head. "I really can tell you nothing of it, Peter. I do not know that much as Susan keeps her own counsel, certainly from me. What I do know, I cannot say by law. But…"

Mum suddenly gripped his hand so fiercely he almost winced.

"Your sister is a hero, Peter. She is courageous and brilliant and has impressed some very important men." Mum dropped her voice lower to almost a hiss. "And you all damned well better appreciate her for it."

Mum's ferocity took him aback. Peter wanted to say that of course he knew Susan was brilliant; for fifteen years she had run a country and a castle; that she had been loved and revered; men (and
women, though that would really horrify Mum) had pursued her; she was a savvy negotiator. He had known, in some absent way, that there was evidence of Susan's oversight every time he reached for a bread roll or an inkwell, every time there was a clean shirt in a drawer, every time his saddlebag was filled. Every winter, their subjects had food in the stores because Susan had conducted the needs assessment, overseen the collection, and arranged the storage. Local customs were adhered to, events properly conducted and commemorated, and diplomatic errors avoided because Susan never went into a situation blind.

But, he also recalled his own, well, might as well be honest, surprise at Susan's tactical and strategic skills that had been on display in her cipher to Edmund over the summer. He remembered Susan's own statement, which had not sounded bitter at the time. No one is knighted for domestic management, by my judge. Susan had never been knighted. Here, she was often dismissed in an offhand way as the pretty, sensible, organized one who was rubbish at books.

He slid his hand out from under his mother's grip. "I'll be sure to congratulate her, Mum, for whatever she has done that you cannot say."

Mum, however, did not seem satisfied with the answer. She shook her head slightly and leaned forward in her seat, catching his eye.

"She needs to speak with you, Peter. And Edmund and Lucy, as well, as near as I can muddle through the …" she shook her head again. "Well, whatever it is that has developed among the four of you. We had a long voyage and she's still angry with me."

He chose to ignore Mum's odd and blunt, though accurate, statement about the accord that existed among her children. It was better to feign ignorance of her implication – though the tenor of this conversation was making him think that Mum might have seen more than they had supposed.

"Angry? Whatever for? Did something happen?"

"That is for her to say. I only tell you so that you know to ask her of it if Susan does not offer it herself."

Peter weighed the many things that might have caused friction between them, came up with several with no effort at all, and he knew only what he had inferred from the cipher, and none of the particulars. Susan's anger, while slow to come on, was also as slow to leave as snowpack in early spring and would manifest itself in cool sleights and hurtful asides for days or weeks. If Susan had been angry, it would have been a very uncomfortable return to England.

"And Peter, before I begin to quiz you, as a fretful and hovering mother, about every minute detail of your summer that was not in your maddeningly brief and infrequent letters, I do want to raise one thing with you."

Mum was twisting the handkerchief hopelessly in her lap.

"As you know I am a terrible correspondent, for which I am sorry. I found it very stifling to know my every word was being read by some Corporal."

"The censor review is off-putting," Mum agreed. "To my point, Susan took me to task for this during the voyage and, while I understand her frustration, I also see more than a little pot meeting kettle?"

"Mum?"

"When she learned that your father was not joining us, Susan became even angrier, and we quarreled, again. She pointed out that it was unfair to blame her age and her sex for uninformed
decisions or unfounded expectations when relevant information was kept from her due to her age and her sex."

Peter found himself grinning, recalling that same argument presented many, many times. They had all made it, to others and amongst themselves. Every one of them resented being kept ignorant for your own good. A moment later, he had the sense to wonder where Mum was going with this line of argument and to become alarmed with that direction.

Mum's mouth quirked up in a little smile. "Yes, I'm not surprised you have heard that before." She took a deep breath. "What I want to say is, Peter, the same applies to me. I cannot make reasonable decisions about the four of you when I do not have all the relevant information."

Only every diplomatic skill learned as a King allowed him to smoothly counter that astonishing, shocking, and yes, disturbingly perceptive, statement.

"Mum," he said, putting a hand over hers, "you are worried for nothing. What information could we possibly have that you do not?"

It was becoming distasteful to continually feign ignorance and was really beginning to sound false even to his own ears. Mum was coming to the same conclusion. She jerked her hands away with a scowl that was classically Edmund. "Don't play me for the fool, Peter. You do it well, but Susan and Edmund are better at it than you are."

Her lip trembled and Peter saw a tear leak from her eyes. Mum angrily brushed it away.

"Mum," he began again, casting about for how to traverse this wholly unforeseen minefield.

"Don't patronize me," she snapped angrily. "I get enough of that from other men who refuse to see what is obvious to me."

Peter wondered if this was where the root of the trouble lay with Father. Mum pushed on and he had the sense of this being rehearsed but no less heartfelt.

"I understand you four have your secrets, whatever they are. I… I will respect your privacy; I have respected your privacy even if you don't acknowledge it. But, if you chose to withhold information from me, don't blame me if we disagree, or I do something you do not like."

There were more tears and he put an arm around her again, pushing the mangled handkerchief into her hand.

"You lot don't need a mother. I…" She stammered to a stop, collected herself, and pushed on. "I can accept that. It just happened too soon, for me at least. But, you are still my children. Can we try to find some point in the middle?" Her mouth quivered and more tears fell. "Please?"

He glanced up and saw that Edmund, Lucy and Susan were now watching them, concern and worry etched on all their faces. Need me? Lucy asked, signaling quickly with her hands.

Peter shook his head.

Are you sure?

His siblings could be so irritating. Yes!

"What did Lucy ask?" Mum said into her handkerchief.
He hesitated, and for longer than he should have, but their secrets were so secret, and had been kept for so long, it was instinctive. In a way, their personal code was deeper, for though it began in Narnia, it persisted here and reinforced the bond among them that would always be present, even beyond Narnia. Yet, all summer, others had been chipping away at some of the mystery of Narnia and there were ways to comprehend more of the mystery without knowing the whole.

With a deep breath, Peter said, "Lucy asked me if she needed to come and join us."

"And you told her, no?"

"I did. Susan and Edmund were second-guessing me, but they tend to do that. So, I had to reinforce it."

"They would, wouldn't they?" She blew her nose, dabbed her eyes again. "Thank you, Peter, for being honest."

He felt a pang of guilt. Telling Mum what Lucy had asked was so minor. It was nothing even akin to, "Oh, and I'm really over thirty and a King of a magical land." With her wan, satisfied smile, though, it mattered enormously to her that he had shared this insignificant glimpse into their secret world.

Yes, there could be some greater understanding. Not the whole, but more than there had been. And, it seemed, Mum was not as ignorant as they had supposed.

"And now, tell me of the summer and your plans," Mum said, sounding brisker and more like herself. "For your sake, you should be glad your father is not here because there would surely be a row over that parental consent to join up that you will be waving under my nose in March."

She confounded and surprised him, again. Peter stared at her and only a stammer came out. "But, I... I've only just..." How did she know?

Her countenance turned forbidding. "I shall probably sign it in the end, Peter, but can we at least first discuss it in a meaningful way?"

She spoke with pleading hope. Mum was not asking for everything, only enough. Peter had found such common understanding with Richard and with Asim, even with Mary, in a way. Edmund had found a similar middling place with Colonel Clark. Surely, he could find compromise here, with his own mother.

Peter nodded. "I would like that, yes. I have my reasons, and I believe they are sound."

"I'm sure they are." Mum's smile was thin and nervous, but that was just worry and, of course, was natural given the subject. "And I'm sure it will be impossible to move you off of those sound reasons but, still, I would like to hear you articulate them when the time comes."

Leaning in, he kissed her cheek, grateful and eased of some heavy burden Peter had not been aware he carried until it was now lessened. "You are only half-right. We don't need mothering, I'm afraid. But, we will always need our Mum."

The house seemed smaller. Everything seemed smaller and Susan recalled what Aslan had said about how he had seemed bigger because they themselves were.

And she was bigger, far bigger, so large and so complex a person that she no longer felt it all could fit in the confines of Susan Pevensie. She stared a long time at the freshly laundered school uniform.
hanging on the bedroom closet door and blinked back tears. The graying starched blouse and skirt that hit at just the wrong place, the flannel jacket, and the tie would replace the sensible, but very fashionable and flattering, Washington dresses that Mrs. Caspian favored.

She was not sure she could do it. It was like the way Lucy packed – tossing everything into too small a case, sitting on it, and hoping it would all fit, even if the thing was fit to burst. Susan Pevensie wasn't large enough for her many selves. She had to find a way for them to peacefully coexist.

Or, perhaps all she needed was a bigger suitcase. Maybe a steamer trunk. Or, and she smiled as she became hopelessly ensnared in the metaphor and Aslan gave her the answer, a wardrobe.

This was not the first time she had learned how a confined space could hold something so very much greater. Yes, she could fill a space the size of Narnia. Or, Washington. Or, France.

France. That was her goal.

"Susan?" Lucy asked from her bed.

"Just thinking about how much I do not wish to return to school."

Lucy sniffed. "It will be horrid." She sounded so miserable, Susan stopped staring at the stupid schoolgirl uniform and immediately crossed over to Lucy's bed. Sitting, she took her sister in her arms.

"So what is this all about?" Susan asked, dabbing Lucy's dribbling tears. "You've been keeping something inside a long time. What had to wait until I returned?"

"It happened on Coriakin's Island," Lucy said miserably. "When I was reading the Magician's Book and I had to find the spell to make the invisible visible."

"So it was a problem with magic," Susan said. Those were, in Susan's experience, often very nasty problems.

"Yes. It was all so twisted. I was standing there, reading this beautiful book, and the pictures were so amazing. There was a cure for toothache and the picture was so real, your jaw ached! You just knew that anything you said from the pages would work. You could feel how real the magic was."

Real magic. This was the worst kind.

Lucy swallowed nervously.

"And then?"

Her sister looked down at the coverlet and worried its loose yellow threads between her fingers. Susan had, with Peter, and Edmund, learned the trick and discipline of not filling silence. Lucy never had. Everything about Lucy was shared, openly, freely, and eventually. Susan needed only to wait.

"And then," Lucy said, "I found a spell to make me beautiful beyond the lot of mortals. And…" She paused and Susan stroked her sister's arms, coaxing the story out Lucy needed to, but did not want to, tell.

Lucy whispered, "And I almost said the spell."

"Oh, Lucy, I'm so sorry."

"I don't know why!" Lucy said in a cry that was almost a wail. "I saw all these kings and lords
laying waste to the Known Lands, all for the sake of my beauty." Lucy bit the last words out contemptuously. "And the book showed me that you would be jealous. I wanted to be beautiful, even though everything it showed me that would happen as a result was vile."

Susan had a clean handkerchief in her dressing gown pocket. She pulled it out and began dabbing Lucy's tears. Lucy had kept this terrible thing to herself for so long. But really, who could she have spoken to of it except her sister?

"Oh, Aslan, thank you so much," Susan whispered, feeling her poor sister's shoulders shake under her hands as she pulled Lucy into another comforting hug.

"What are you thanking him for?" Lucy asked, pulling away with an irritated sniff.

"I am thanking him because you have been so brave to hold this in for so long. And, I am so grateful to him that we are finally together to share it."

A consequence of Lucy's relationship with Aslan was that she also felt freer to get angry with him. "Better that I had never seen the awful spell in the first place," Lucy said, speaking to the air with a scowl. She absently smoothed the coverlet on her bed and flicked the yellow threads away. "I feel like such a Jezebel."

Lucy was referring to the vain Beaver with a fondness for Princesses, bows, and mirrors.

Susan shook her head. "Lucy, I understand exactly why a spell like that would have tempted you, and it's not for those silly reasons that you are so unfairly berating yourself over."

"Maybe you can explain it to me, Susan, for I find it all utterly reprehensible. I'm nothing close to perfect, but this was inexcusable weakness."

Susan put her hand to Lucy's face, cupping her cheek. "Are you done now?"

"With what?" Lucy replied, a little surly. "Primping and preening?" She fluffed her hair for good measure.

"Lucy, this is not about beauty, or you wanting to be beautiful. In a few short years, you will be a very beautiful woman."

Her sister threw up her hands in disgust. "I know that, Susan! I've never felt this way about how I look! I know I'm not very patient, but of all things I am in a hurry to accomplish, being pretty was never one of them! That's why I'm so disgusted with myself!"

"Which is why you should be asking what was different this time." Susan said this very slowly and deliberately, wanting her sister to come to the same conclusion that she had once she had heard the story of The Dawn Treader and how Lucy had spoken of the Lone Islands experience. "Think about it, Lucy. You were an anonymous, defenseless girl with none of the rank, authority, or protection that is your due. You and I have seen how beauty is power for a woman when she has no other weapon."

Lucy frowned and leaned back in her pillows. Her face scrunched up as she worked through Susan's reasoning. "The slaving," she said finally.

Susan nodded. "You were sold, Lucy, as dumb livestock at auction." She touched her sister's fair hair, pushing the loose strands out of her eyes.

"I was so angry," Lucy said tightly.
Susan could see Lucy still was angry, and for very good reason. She put her hand on Lucy's cheek, brushing away another, angry, tear. "Of course you were angry. And frightened. We know what would have happened if you had been sold to the sort of person who buys young girls."

"I knew there had to be a rescue," Lucy said stubbornly. "I never lost hope, but…"

"You are Queen and a woman and you look like a girl. A beautiful slave would become a concubine, but they are at least treated well enough to preserve their value, for a time. It is a horrid prospect, until you consider the alternatives."

"Even sitting in the stinking, cell, I knew I would be more valuable, and have better treatment, if I were desirable, instead of…" Lucy gestured down at her school girl self with a disgusted eyeroll. "Being beautiful would have certainly saved your life, though even that at enormous cost." Susan held Lucy's hands and kissed them. "So, be gentle to yourself, my sister. This was a very understandable temptation and one that, with your good sense, you overcame. You kept your faith and did not say the spell."

Lucy sighed and stared at their clasped hands. "No, I did not say the beauty spell. But…"

Susan waited.

"But I did say another one."

And so here was where the rest of the difficulty lay. "What spell was it, Lucy?"

"A spell to find out what your friends think about you."

"And?"

"I saw Marjorie Preston and Anne Featherstone in a train car."

"Oh!" Susan exclaimed, feeling a surge of disgust and concern. This could not have ended well. "That surely was very disagreeable for you and for Marjorie!"

Lucy sniffed. "I heard Marjorie mock me, Susan! She called me a little kid! Me! She said she'd gotten tired of me, and…"

The tears were really falling now and Lucy's lip was quivering with hurt and indignation.

Susan gave her sister a little shake on the shoulders and silently swore in every language she knew at that utter shrew, Anne Featherstone. Susan was not a vengeful person and she loathed violence, but Featherstone would suffer for this injury. This went too far and could not go unanswered.

"Lucy! Stop it! I know it hurts and it's awful, but really! Featherstone is dreadful. She is cruel and just the very worst sort of bully. If I had been trapped in a train compartment with her poisonous, sly ways, I don't know what I would do. If I couldn't poke her with an arrow point or threaten her with a knife, I might very well deny my own name to get away from her."

"Aslan said the same thing," Lucy said mournfully. "That Marjorie was afraid of her."

"He's right, and so am I," Susan responded smartly. "And, frankly, I know that pill of a girl better than Aslan does! And if Aslan and I are both saying the same thing then obviously we are right and you and I should not argue about it any further."

Lucy surged forward and threw her arms around her neck.
"Oh, Lucy, I'm so sorry."

Her sister choked out a dry sob. "Marjorie was my best friend."

Susan rocked her, running her hands down Lucy's back to soothe her pain. Betrayal hurt so much and for all that Lucy gave her love so freely, she was also an excellent judge of character and had not been disappointed by others very often. She gave love to those who earned it, reciprocated it in kind, and were worthy of it. That loss of trust made this trial even worse.

"Marjorie still is your best friend," Susan assured her sister. "She is a very kind person, she admires you enormously, and I'm sure she feels as guilty about saying these things as you feel in spying upon her when she said them."

"Do you really think so, Susan?"

"I am sure of it." Susan let Lucy wipe her nose and collect herself.

"Sometimes these things bring us closer, Lucy. In this case, you and Marjorie have something else in common – you have both been hurt by Featherstone's vicious meddling. This is an opportunity for the two of you to become even better friends."

"I will have to 'fess up to Marjorie, of course," Lucy said. "Clear the air between us. I am not looking forward to that, but it is the right thing to do, don't you think?"

This was a fundamental difference between the two of them. Susan would have no qualms about avoiding the problem altogether by assuming that silence and time would resolve the difficulty. She felt another prickle of anger over Mum's interference with Tebbitt though, admittedly, that indignation was harder to maintain when she saw the schoolgirl uniform hanging on the closet door.

"If you think that's best, then absolutely!" Susan assured her. "Though, you will need to find some better explanation than I used a spell from a magic book to eavesdrop on you."

Lucy laughed and gave her a little shove. "Enough of me. And speaking of being forgiving of oneself and not overly critical, how are you?" Her sister softened and her touch to Susan's arm and face was gentle and compassionate. "I am not the only one who has been keeping it all inside. Would you like to tell me of Bardon, or is the pain still too fresh?"

Susan sighed, deeply and mournfully. Lucy took her hands in her own.

"Guy Hill. His name was Guy Hill."

"Edmund said he was a very kind man and very brave."

"He was, Lucy. He was very noble. As Narnian as any I have met. His murder was senseless. I was with him when he died."

Death. Another death. Again. She had not been able to explain it in full to Tebbitt. They had both recognized that a huge component of the shock had been to experience violent death in Washington. They had assumed they were safe, so far from the combat. Neither of them was a coward - it just wasn't supposed to happen like this.

"We farewelled him," Lucy said softly. "Once Peter came. We knew that was what you would have wanted for your friend."

Susan nodded. "Thank you."
"Aslan was there. I mean, well, he's always there, but he was really there."

Susan smiled and dabbed her own eyes with the extra handkerchief she kept in the other pocket of her dressing gown. Guy's death did not hurt as it had. He had gone on, *transitioned* as they called it in his community. She hurt for the loss of his life here, but she was at peace with Guy's final journey. It helped knowing the good company he would have. Lambert and Guy would be friends now, however time was measured in Aslan's Country.

Reaching over to her dresser, Susan pulled her handbag closer. Miss Carré had complimented her on its very French style. Replacing her English and American look with something more continental was a project to work on over the next year.

Susan withdrew from her bag the small package Agnes had given her and unwrapped it.

"Guy carved this for me," Susan said, handing Lucy the gift.

Lucy turned it over in her hands and a tear of her own splashed onto the gray painted carving.

"It's Lambert, isn't it?"

"Yes. The dog is the totem of Papa Legba, who is a Trickster god." Susan ran her fingers across the veve Guy had etched into the carving. "This is Papa Legba's symbol."

Lucy looked up and smiled. "A Trickster?"

"Papa Legba is a guardian of languages and crossroads. He opens and closes the doorways between the worlds."

Lucy put the wolf back into Susan's hands and closed her fingers around it. "Guy was a very special man. You are so lucky to have known him." Lucy's touch became firmer. "And you are not responsible for his death, Susan. I know you said you should have anticipated this, but that is your guilt speaking, and not your sense. The security of the personnel at the British Embassy of Washington was not your charge or concern."

And Susan finally did what she had wanted so much to do in the days following Guy's death – it was a luxury she had not allowed herself given the exigencies of that time and the needs of others who hurt more. She put her arms around her sister, rested her head on Lucy's shoulder, and had a good cry.

"I was so blind, Lucy."

"Susan! How can you possibly say such a thing!"

"I was blind?" Susan repeated, relishing in her sister's strong, forgiving embrace.

"You were not!" Lucy repeated. "You did not see the whole, but no one else did either. And those others have greater responsibility for it than you."

Susan did not entirely believe this, but then she never did. Even Aslan had never been able to wholly rid her of the nagging guilt of the Siege of Archenland. She had gone to Washington hoping to atone for the mistakes of Rabadash and Calormen. What would she have to do next to atone for her failure to anticipate Guy's murder? Perhaps that was why her roads were all leading to the War and to France.

Susan nestled her head against Lucy and gladly took the comfort her sister gave.
"Besides, what you did see was very, very important!" Lucy said with such satisfaction Susan had to laugh even through tears. "Even though the papers are now reporting that the Nazis are murdering Jews by the hundreds of thousands, most people are paying it hardly any mind at all! You helped Sallowpad and others see the crime more clearly. This is no small thing."

"Well, yes, but I was just the office girl, it was…" The nothing died on Susan's lips, so fierce was Lucy's glare. "I just kept the files," Susan said a little meekly and, she had to admit, disingenuously.

"Don't you dare discount what you've done, Susan! So many people refuse to believe it; they don't see it, or they see and don't read it, or they read it and don't believe it. You saw it. You bore witness to it!"

"Well, I…" The words died on Susan's lips with Lucy's very disapproving look. "Very well, sister." She hugged Lucy again. "And thank you."

"We are so proud of you, Susan! Of course…"

There was a knock and the door slowly opened. Mum hung back at the doorway.

"Excuse me? May I come in?"

Susan felt her back automatically stiffen but Lucy's greeting was a cheery, "Please do!"

Her sister held out her arms and Mum stepped in to fill them with a hug. Susan moved over on the bed to give them more room as Mum sat down as well. Mum surely saw that the two of them had been weeping, but did not say anything as Susan shoved her handkerchief back into her dressing gown pockets.

"I am sorry to interrupt, but I know Edmund wishes to speak with you, Susan, and if he does not get to bed in the next two hours, he will be horrible tomorrow."

"Absolutely!" Lucy said with feeling. "Susan, I had more than my fill of Edmund's irritability this summer, so please spare us all!"

Susan laughed, though Edmund without sufficient sleep, food, and, once he was older, sex, was, in fact, no laughing matter at all. To achieve the serious and grave mien he affected with others as an adult had required the management of a full grown Tiger, attentive Palace staff, and a consort in residence.

"Very well," she said, rising from the bed. "I shall assure our peace tomorrow by seeing Edmund now."

"After that, Peter is waiting for you downstairs," Mum said. She turned back to Lucy. "I was sorting through the mail and found a note from Miss Plummer. What is this about her taking you to a political rally on Wednesday?"

At the door, Susan glanced back at Lucy. Her sister had talked of this event very enthusiastically. While political rallies were not the way she herself would approach an issue, she would certainly defend her sister's right to attend them.

Lucy's hand dropped to the edge of a bed with an It is well signal.

Mum's eyes flitted downward to Lucy's discreet hand gesture but she gave no other sign of having seen it in her expression.
"Oh yes, Mum! I so wish to go! It is at Caxton Hall and Polly agreed to take me! The Home Secretary, Mr. Morrison will be speaking, and Miss Sutherland, and ..."

Susan left the room, shutting the door behind her, and went one door down the hall to her brothers' room.

Chapter 8 to follow, The Queen Susan in Finchley
Followed by Chapter 9, School Daze
And then Eustace Scrubb finds a crying girl hides behind the gymnasium at Experiment House and offers her a peppermint humbug.

Thanks to Anastigmat and Snacky for the suggestions regarding the inclusion of a two year old beatle in Liverpool.

A note about race. I waded into it here, deep, and with the duck boots on. I have spent a lot of time researching the racial composition of Liverpool in 1942, its immigrant communities and immigration, and the really troubling issues surrounding the British treatment of her "Sons of the Empire" who served in the merchant marines. As I noted when writing of the southern African-American experience in 1942 Washington, some of this makes me wince. I see stereotypes yet my source documents tell me that the Chinese community of Liverpool owned laundries and restaurants, that the Chinese men married British and Irish women, and that Chinese homes and businesses on Pitt Street were badly damaged during the Blitz. The descriptions of those scuffling Indian men in heelless shoes comes from specific source documents. As Asim pointed out two chapters ago, sometimes there's some truth in what we now call stereotypes. My thanks to those who assisted in this research, including Clio and Autumnia.

The Caxton Hall rally and other issues related to the growing awareness of and yet continuing ignorance of the plight of Jews in occupied Europe comes from the book, British Jewry and the Holocaust by R. Bolchover as well as an issue of the Jewish Chronicle (thanks to Autumnia).

As always, my LJ is open for discussion of this further, with anonymous commenting enabled. If something bothers you, speak up.

Thank you especially to my anonymous reviewers. I hugely appreciate hearing from you and don't have any way to thank you except here.
The Queen Susan returns home, Lucy gets political, and Peter does not get drunk.

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Help your brother's boat across, and your own will reach the shore.

Hindu Proverb

Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity.

Book of Psalms 133:1

'Oh bother, bother,' said Edmund to himself. 'Need he be as gentlemanly as that? I suppose he must. Comes of being a Knight and a High King. I suppose it is what Aslan would like. But that brute will be up again in a minute and then—'  
C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, Chapter 14

There is no doubt that it is around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues, the most dominating virtues of human society, are created, strengthened and maintained.

Winston Churchill

One tequila, two tequila, three tequila, floor.

George Carlin

Having resolved Lucy's lingering sorrows from the Magician's spell book (magic problems truly were among the most intractable), in turn receiving the comfort from Lucy, and implicitly quarreling with Mum (again), Susan's next task was to sate Edmund's prodigious curiosity and get him to sleep in the next two hours. These were highly conflicting goals. Nor was it remotely a matter of maternal concern but was rather of the utmost importance to their collective peace and well-being. Edmund was incapable of a prolonged lie in and would not compensate for a late night by sleeping in the next day. Peter, in contrast, would manage, and very well, for days at a time with no sleep provided there was sufficient fuel for his engine. He would finally collapse like a fallen tree and would only rouse at the sounding of a battle horn.

Edmund was at least already in bed. He had spread out around him a slim book, a pad of paper, and a pencil. As she entered the room, he set the pencil and paper down and stared at her, a grin threatening on his face. Susan shut the door firmly behind her.

"Loyal English schoolboy?" she asked in her archest tone.

"Stealing the briefcase of the Vice President of the United States?"

Her brother opened his arms and Susan stumbled forward into them.

Their embrace was so tight it nearly took the breath from her.
"I told you that you would be brilliant, didn't I? And you were. You are." Edmund sounded so very satisfied, Susan laughed.

"I missed you so much."

Breathing becoming an imperative, Susan slipped away and curled up at the end of Edmund's bed. She picked up the book just as it was sliding over the side. "The Lieber Code? How legalistic of you."

Edmund took the book from her, put a slip of paper in to mark his place, and set it on his nightstand along with a stack of books by Dickens and Austen and a compilation of Shakespeare's plays - his school reading. On the top of the pile was a collected anthology of English poets - Susan pushed away the thoughts of the man who a week ago was quoting Keats and Donne to her.

"Colonel Clark lent me the book."

"Clark," Susan repeated, cataloging the ciphered information in Edmund's own letters. "The helpful Calormene scholar and spy in the court of the Just King?"

"Just so. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Clark, member of their American Army intelligence corps and here doing who knows what that involves frequent trips to Bletchley. You did not come across him, I suppose?"

"No, I don't believe so. I did not meet many within the American military intelligence community." Susan dropped her voice very low and whispered, "I think there might be codebreaking at an estate in Bletchley."

Edmund's eyes gleamed with excitement. "I hardly know where to begin, Susan. The most pressing, though, is surely the fate of your friend, Prince Cor. Was he on the Dieppe list I gave you?"

Susan's heart wrenched and she shook her head. "Thank you so much for anticipating me, Edmund. His name is Captain David Lowrey. We knew he was assigned to one of the Canadian commando units. He did not return to England and is not listed as confirmed dead. So, he is missing, possibly dead, or in a camp, and we may not know anything for weeks."

Edmund reached over and clasped her arm. "I am sorry, Susan."

Susan sniffed a little, still feeling emotional from her time with Lucy. "It's War. He is but one of thousands and I did not know him more than a few months. But, it is so wretched. He was, is," she corrected hurriedly, "a very good man and I liked him very much." Poor Gladys. Susan would have to write to her friend. She hoped they had found some additional help for the office.

With a little effort, Susan pushed the emotional Miss Pevensie aside, and the Narnian Queen with her, and slid into the comfortable, competent role she had filled in Washington. It was something she would have to continue to practice - these were skills she wished to hone, not lose. Though the summer had been expressed in the Rat and Crow of Narnian code, its execution was very much the work of Mrs. Caspian. "We had thought that Operation Jubilee had been aborted, what with Montgomery going to North Africa after Gott was shot down. The Dieppe raid grew from this ludicrous deal that Roosevelt made with Molotov to open a second front in Europe. The joke in diplomatic circles is that the Soviet Foreign Minister knows only four words of English, yes, no, and second front. Roosevelt's promise was all very well for the Americans, but we knew it was British who would have to pay the price."

Edmund shook his head with an air of frustration and impatiently flipped to a page in his writing
tablet. Susan could see (upside down) that it was written in their Rat and Crow code. "I have so many questions, and we won't be able to get through many of them. I had realized with Peter that it will take another summer holiday to get through everything that happened this summer holiday."

"I know," Susan replied. "And we do not have much time for more than the big moments. Lucy told me that you all farewelled Guy Hill for me. Thank you."

"Bardon," Edmund said, easily slipping into the cipher. "Once Peter joined us, we used the occasion to burn your letters in offering. It was fitting, and after the visit by Major al-Masri of British Army intelligence and his discreet and gentle handling of this loyal English schoolboy, I was feeling nervy about the whole thing. It was better that we not have them lying about."

As his face knit with not forgotten worry, Susan reached across to take his hands. "I am sorry, Edmund. Once I was blown, I asked the Colonel if he would let me send a message to you, or have me speak to you rather than sending someone. He would not permit it. The discreet and gentle code was the best I could do and still stick to our cover story."

Edmund leaned forward, resting his forehead and hers, and put a hand to the side of her head. "It was one of the most horrid moments imaginable, Susan. I was so worried for you and had to bluff my way through it. Major al-Masri, to his credit, did confirm that if you had been injured, or worse, that we would have already heard of it."

"I am sorry," she repeated. "I know Lucy has learned enough of what transpired through you. What of Peter? He seemed to know some, but we obviously could not be clearer on the train and with Mum about."

"He flew out of Oxford to see us the night of our return from The Dawn Treader. I kept him up all night the day after telling him your tale."

"And?" Susan asked, feeling nervous. "He did not appear angry, but..."

Edmund squeezed her hands for reassurance and leaned back against his headboard. "As you would expect. It took him a few letters to sort through the cipher and then he followed it with full comprehension. There was shouting in the predictable places. Frankly, his upset was more tied to Major al-Masri's involvement, but that seems to have resolved itself."

Susan puzzled through that and could come up with no explanation. "What does Major al-Masri have to do with Peter? My impression is that the man is something of a legend in the service."

"Oddly, that is Peter's story, more than ours. Suffice to say that under another guise, Peter knows Major al-Masri very well and counts him as a close friend. Peter felt it keenly when the man neglected to mention that he knew of your troubles and had then come to see me and warn me to keep my mouth quite closed regarding the very dodgy acts British intelligence was perpetrating upon our ally."

Susan's mouthed formed a wordless, oh. She let out a breath with a little shiver, imagining Peter's wrath. "He would not have liked that omission or ignorance at all."

"No," Edmund said flatly. "As said, there's more to it, though Peter is best suited to deliver it and, between ourselves, I wish to hear of you, not him." Edmund settled into the pillows and drew his notes closer. "Here we are at the end already and I know nothing of how this all came about."

He glanced at the clock with a scowl and finally, threw his hands up in aggravated despair. "Just tell me everything until we fall asleep over my notes!"
"And Sallowpad? Was he one person? Or a composite?"

"One," Susan said. "Colonel George Walker-Smythe. Over forty, perhaps over fifty, though very spry and fit. He has an enormous mustache, is always chewing on a cigar that he never actually smokes, has a truly explosive temper, one of those very proper accents by way of India, and is an armchair Jungian psychologist."

"I gathered he was no fool?"

Susan shook her head vigorously. "Oh no. Quite the opposite. He is a very skilled man and I admire him immensely."

She saw Edmund carefully catalog the bundle of traits that made the Colonel such a remarkable person. "Then how did you ever convince him to let you in? I gathered you had some intelligence going in through Father's office in New York?"

"Yes, though surely Aslan was with me. The office was in desperate straits. I arrived in the days leading up to Tobruk falling, Churchill was arriving, and I had the cheek to tell the Colonel that I was a godsend."

Edmund snorted. "Which in a way you certainly were."

"If you will me allow a moment of gloating?"

He gestured broadly and generously. "Susan, by all means, please, gloat to your heart and ego's content. I am hanging upon your every word, dumbstruck with admiration though, not, I'll have you know, particular surprise."

The affirmation was simply too much to be borne. Susan threw her arms around her brother. "Thank you!"

Edmund held her close. "I am simply thrilled that competent individuals recognize your competency as you deserve."

With tears threatening again, Susan eased out of Edmund's embrace. For the first time, she was able to revel in the tale and tell someone the full of it. She could have no better audience than Edmund. She had never been overly fond of Morgan of the House of Linch, for she really did not think that any woman was quite good enough for Edmund. Yet, Morgan, to her credit, had always been demonstratively appreciative of Edmund and very loyal to him. Her brother had greatly admired Morgan's acumen. Edmund's ease in delivering unstinting and sincere praise to a woman and his ability to treat her truly as an equal partner were habits practiced with Morgan.

"So, I had just gotten us out of a very sticky wicket with a Congresswoman by passing myself off as..." Susan had to pause and steel herself for the revelation.

Edmund raised an eyebrow, waiting.

"Mrs. Susan Caspian."

His stunned shock was everything Susan could have hoped for. Of all the irony-laced secrets, this one had been the hardest to keep.

Edmund burst into laughter so loud, Lucy thumped on the wall on the other side.

Finally having enough of her brother's hilarity, Susan swatted him lightly. "I'll have you know that
all of official Washington, up, to and including his Ambassadorship, Lord Halifax, the Penguin, know me as Mrs. Caspian, and I have the shoes to provide it!"

Her brother pulled out of his doubled over laughing with a mocking scowl. "I have not waited this long to hear prattle about your wardrobe, Sister."

"Tsk!" Susan retorted. "Shoes are not simply what you put on your feet!"

From her dressing gown pocket, Susan withdrew her very favorite pairs of shoes- the forged identity cards of Mrs. Susan Caspian and Mrs. Jane Louise Ellis.

"It was wonderful, Edmund, truly, to be able to use what we had learned in Narnia. And then to learn more from the Colonel. It was just as you said in your letters."

"A mentor," Edmund said. "Like Peter's relationship with Lune, I suppose."

Susan thought she heard the whisper of envy in his voice that she shared. They did not begrudge Peter his teacher but wished only that they had had their own. "They actually have training camps! At least one in Canada and one here."

Edmund whistled under his breath. "That makes sense, of course."

"By the end, once I had earned his trust, I was attending all the Colonel's meetings and handling his correspondence. It started with me only running Tebbitt, but …"

"Tebbitt?" Edmund interrupted, a shade too sharp.

"Oh, take that scowl off your face!" Susan countered, just as sharp. "Tebbitt was Peridan, of course, except not at all. Wing Commander Reginald Tebbitt. He flew in the Blitz, and in Greece and North Africa and was invalided from flight duty, which I assure you, he would much rather still be doing if he could manage the cockpit of a Hurricane without excruciating pain. For all that he affected being the drunken town clown, he is very good at what he does. We ran under the cover of being cousins, and Caspian was his CO."

Edmund waived his hand irritably. "Yes, yes, duly noted. I apologize, Sister, for maligning your agent."

He did not sound especially apologetic, but Susan let it pass. Although there was so much else that might be said of Tebbitt, Susan would not speak of it further with Edmund. Her brother had managed a close relationship over many years with a single partner - something the rest of them had not accomplished. Yet, Edmund, probably willfully, would not have seen it in her letters. Peter, on the other hand, had probably already intuited the truth.

"Did I guess correctly? Was the Ettin Cookbook the map of the American hemisphere reapportioned to Nazi designs?"

"It was!" Susan said. "The British tipped off J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI found it and it caused so much alarm. It was a beautiful piece of work. The SOE can fabricate any typewriter, forge any document. They are true artists."

"Though not of art to be found in any museum, to be sure," Edmund replied. He glanced over his notes then looked up. "With that, we come to the Rule of Three's and the mole. If this brings you closer to Guy Hill than you wish, I will desist, Susan. I'll not cause you pain in satisfying my
curiosity."

"Thank you, but I'd like to tell you of it." Susan took a deep breath. "I want to think that from the very beginning, I thought there were problems. While the problems were very real, based on what the Colonel has since concluded, it is unlikely the mole was the one behind them all."

Edmund listened carefully and glanced down at his notes, his pencil moving down the page. "From your letters, you noticed the splints possibly missing from the safe, the leaks to the newspapers, and the sinking of the ship headed to North Africa."

"The SS Fairport," Susan said. "It had over 300 tanks …"

"Any lives lost?"

"No, thank Aslan. The American replaced them and the ship, the SS Seatrain, is on its way to the Suez. I know the ship arrived in Capetown and was to pick up an escort for the journey up the east coast of Africa." She nervously rubbed her hands together. "I do not know, of course, if they made it. If all goes well, it should arrive within the week. But, the delivery of 250 top of the line Sherman tanks to Field Marshall Montgomery isn't going to be carried in The Times."

"I suppose you could write to the Colonel?" Edmund asked, even by his tone conveying he did not think much of that idea.

She threw up her hands with helpless frustration. "There's nothing for it. Unless they think to tell me, and really they are too busy to bother with such things, I have no way of knowing anything of our projects." This ignorance was very hard, but she would just have to become accustomed to it until she was back in the game.

"What of the leaks?" Edmund asked.

"Communications between Secretary Hull and the Penguin were ending up in The Washington Post, to the consternation of all."

Edmund grinned at the reference and glanced again at his notes. "Did I read rightly that there were also reports in the papers of secret memoranda about India policy?"

Susan let some of her irritation over that debacle show. She had had quite enough of hypocritical Americans and their reportage. "The Americans were very tiresome about it and really should get their own house in order regarding treatment of Negroes before deigning to criticise our policy in our colonies. And really, it is hopelessly naive of the Indian Congress Party to believe anything but that the Nazis would be so very, very much worse than British rule in India."

When Edmund did not immediately respond, Susan felt a deepening irritation. "What is wrong?"

"Only that I caution you to be judicious in discussing India with Peter."

"Whatever for?"

"Over the summer he has become quite passionate on the subject of Indian independence and rights to self-determination within our Commonwealth nations."

Susan rocked back and stared at her brother. Edmund was not joking. "Sir Peter Wolfsbane, Order of the Lion, High King of Narnia, by gift, right, prescription, and conquest, Emperor of the Lone Islands, Lord of Cair Paravel, has become anti-colonial?"
Edmund waved his hand, brushing the argument aside. "Irony aside in our brother's case, the summer has altered us all, Susan, and so please be mindful that you are not the only one who has changed in a few short months." He opened his mouth, but a yawn came out instead. "Regardless, I do not wish to spend our precious time discussing Peter when I might hear more of you."

She nodded. "Of course, I apologize, Edmund, and I thank you for the advance warning." Any issues with Peter would present themselves in due course, and with him, not Edmund. Nor was tonight the time to explore such things when the warmth of their happy reunion still burned. "You walked this road with me and there is no one with whom I more wished to share it."

She paused and then, finally, admitted her greatest shame. "Amid the Rule of Three's, the one clear sign of the spy, I regret to say, I missed completely."

Patiently, her brother waited, his manner compassionate.

"I caught the mole one morning trying to get into our office. He was part of the work crews on the Embassy grounds this summer. He said he was looking for maintenance and I believed him."

Edmund sighed into the heavy silence that followed. Finally, he spoke. "That is a might-have-been I wish you did not bear, my sister." He did not try to tell her that all was well, that it was not her fault, that no one could have foreseen it. They both knew what it was to live with guilt and regret and how atonement was not achieved in a single, spectacular act, but was the slow work of a virtuous lifetime.

As tears of self-reproach began to fill her eyes again, Edmund raised his hand to her face and brushed them away. "I am sorry. I am prodigiously proud of you and I am so sorry this mars your rightful pride and accomplishments. I would remind you that the chain of events leading from a gardener at a doorway to preventing Guy Hill's death is certainly more tortured than it appears now, in hindsight."

"That is bitter consolation, brother." She did not say it with anger and he did not take it as such.

"I know," Edmund said simply. He tilted his eyes up to meet her tearful ones. "We are imperfect. We do not see all ends. You will be less trusting next time, you will become wiser, you will learn. None of this aids in the slightest now or brings back one who Aslan called home. Should we stop, or change to another subject?"

Susan was not absolved, but she was eased for here, with Edmund, and Edmund alone, a burdened shared was one lessened.

"Thank you, but having begun, I wish to finish."

Edmund waited, in case she changed her mind.

"Guy stopped by the office one night and surprised the mole. Tebbit and I walked right into it all unknowing. He shot Guy and …"

Edmund took her hands in his, running his thumbs over her knuckles. She had to pull away to use her handkerchief. Crying with Lucy had helped. The time had helped. The funeral had helped.

"Tebbit and I subdued the spy. Guy died."

As she sniffled, Edmund continued quietly, "There was nothing in the papers, no word at all. Though, I didn't really expect that the censors would permit reporting of a Nazi spy infiltrating the British Embassy."
Susan tucked the handkerchief away again in her pocket; having gotten all this out, she hoped there would be less crying when she finally spoke with Peter. Again, Susan shoved Mrs. Caspian to the fore and continued. "Actually, the Colonel did not think the mole was a Nazi," she whispered.

Edmund stared in a way that felt very gratifying. "Who?" he mouthed very softly. "The Japanese?"

Susan shook her head. "The Soviets."

"Well..." Edmund drawled, his face bright with surprise. "That puts rather a different complexion on it."

With her composure reasserted, Edmund sat back again and ran a hand over his face, assessing the information. He obviously saw the same things they had discussed in the office.

"The Soviets would not have sunk the Fairport, certainly," Susan said. "Not given Stalin's demand for a second front."

Edmund nodded. "The Soviets would have wanted the tanks on the other side of the Atlantic, but in Europe, not Africa. Still, I could not see them sinking the ship to make that point."

He looked at his notes and, with his pencil, ticked off several items on his list of Matters To Discuss With Rat. "Were you able to separate any further what was his work from what was happenstance? Did the spy himself provide any clarity?"

"He killed himself," Susan said heavily. "The day we left."

Edmund shook his head in sad, silent wonderment. "Oh, Susan," he finally said, encompassing so much memory, history, and pain in those simple, empathetic words.

"I know. It's not the same as Mr. Noll and the Narnian Moles, but it is not unlike it either."

He tapped his pencil thoughtfully. "We should not be surprised. Peter has experienced the same thing this summer. And, Lucy as well. Even Eustace."

"What is that?"

"How we keep finding Narnia here and Aslan's paw print. You started it, of course, seeing the lions in the seal of the United Kingdom. You asked me before you left if I thought you were daft in assuming there must be a connection between what you did in Narnia and what Aslan wishes of you here."

She smiled at the recollection. "I did, didn't I? How prescient."

Susan sensed that Edmund was pulling in on himself, though she was uncertain as to why, and it could be his simple fatigue. He had also omitted himself from the list of those who had seen Narnia here, signaling that he did not wish to discuss it. She waited to see if he would fill the silence, but Edmund was too cautious for that ploy.

"So, tell me of how you stole the Vice President's briefcase and of America's nefarious post-War vision of Britain."

Edmund fell asleep in the middle of her description of how the exchanges to obtain information about Vice President Wallace implicated not one, but two, and possibly three American Generals.

Susan quietly collected his things from his bed and removed them to the inside of The Lieber Code.
which did seem a strange book even for Edmund. He had nodded off before she could discuss her most pressing issue – that Narnia was becoming too many things – it was a magical place they had ruled as adults and monarchs, but it had also become a silly children's story exchanged between two schoolchildren that was not silly at all, and was Rat and Crow for espionage perpetrated by the British upon their American allies.

She had gotten herself into a terrible muddle and had already and repeatedly violated her promise to Colonel Walker-Smythe to not confuse Narnia with the business of the *Irregulars* of the intelligence service. She was not confused, but that was not a distinction the Colonel would have understood if he had heard her discussion of true Narnia with Lucy and Edmund on the train. He would have been furious with her. She felt a twinge of guilt, but saw neither any alternative for the moment, nor a likelihood of the Colonel learning of her continuing indiscretions.

Mum was waiting for her in the hall.

"Edmund fell asleep in mid-sentence?" Mum asked.

"He did. I know they were up late last night putting the house in order for our return."

"They did a lovely job! It seems no one missed me at all!"

Mum's self-pity had become irritating and she did not have the patience for it this evening. Susan pulled her dressing gown about her. She wanted a clean handkerchief from her room, she wanted to hide her forged identity cards, she wanted to get Peter's gift, and she wanted to talk to him until the sun rose.

"Is Lucy going with Polly to the rally?" Susan knew it came out sounding argumentative, but really, why shouldn't Lucy go if she wished?

"It's so odd. It's a Labour Party political event regarding the War. Why would Lucy wish to go to such a thing? Why would Miss Plummer offer to take her?"

"They wish to go. Do you need any more reason than the call of conscience?"

Her mother pressed her fingertips to her forehead, then, wearily, her hands fell to her sides. "Susan, my questions were legitimately for information, not rhetorical. I was asking, seriously, if you knew the reasons behind this sudden interest of Lucy's of which I have had no inkling until today?"

"No, Mum, I really don't know, but I see no harm in them going."

Mum put a hand on her shoulder. Susan wanted to be churlish and shrug it off, but she had better control than that.

"I don't want to quarrel, Susan, and I certainly cannot fight the four of you united. Surely you see that? We have so little time before you all go back to school."

"If you do not wish for a quarrel, then Lucy should go." Susan refrained from saying *You should let Lucy go.* To her mind, if the Valiant Queen's calling was to heal the wounds of this world, and to fight as she had in Narnia, this was just where she should be, and best to get to it. Lucy did not require anyone's permission to do Aslan's will.

Mum sighed heavily and let go of Susan's shoulder. "By the by, Lucy has now made the same request Edmund and Peter made. They want me to invite Eustace to join us at the Christmas holiday. Do you have an opinion, Susan?"
Susan still could not quite fully credit this incredible tale. Yet, if Eustace was un-dragoned by Aslan's grace as her brother and sister reported, he was Narnian, too, and should not have to spend Christmas with Harold and Alberta. "They all said Eustace is much improved, Mum. If they believe it right, then yes, I do as well."

She met her mother's stare levelly, wondering what had disconcerted her.

"Just like that?" Mum asked. "Your brothers and sister agree, and so you do as well?"

"Of course."

Mum sighed again. "Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me, Susan." She sounded very brittle and Susan felt another spasm of guilt, but not enough to abate her anger over Mum's interference with Tebbitt and the deception regarding Father.

"Peter is waiting for you downstairs." Mum paused. I could join you…" But, before Susan could voice her objection, Mum shook her head. "Never mind. You two want to get caught up and didn't get a chance on the train. And you both will be there the rest of the night, I suspect."

Susan did smile at that. "Probably."

Mum pulled her into a hug and Susan relented and patted her back. "Don't wait up for us!"

"I won't keep you. Or, wake you tomorrow. Sleep yourselves out."

She accepted the kiss. "Good night, Mum."

Susan ducked into the room, hid what needed to be hidden, grabbed her present for Peter and went downstairs.

Peter was in his accustomed place, leaning against the right arm of the sofa, one leg stretched out on the upholstery, the other dangling lazily over the edge. He had adopted the identical stance in Narnia and the Dwarfs were always trying to make a divan long enough for their High King to recline upon without legs and arms all akimbo. They had never succeeded. Peter preferred this disheveled state when at his ease and always would.

He unfolded and stood, arms wide and a grin even wider when he saw what she had brought downstairs.

"Two bottles?"

Susan returned the warm, full embrace. "One is for me; the other is my gift to you."

She handed him the bottle. "I had it from the barkeep at the Embassy that this is the drink for those who wish for blindness with their spirits."

"Tequila!"

Peter awarded her an enthusiastic and grateful kiss. She was disappointed, though. "You've had it before?"

"One glass at Colonel Clark's home! It is the closest thing I've found to Lightning! Thank you so much, my thoughtful sister."

Susan sniffed a little. "I brought back three bottles for you, so I hope you enjoy it. It is very popular in America now."
"I do like it. Very much."

Peter took Susan's own bottle of aged bourbon. "If you will allow me?"

"Please do!"

There were strategic advantages to this arrangement. If Peter poured the drinks, Susan would be able to claim a place on the sofa and she would not be crammed in the corner competing for space with his legs.

Susan swiftly sat, occupied a corner, and settled her dressing gown about her.

Peter returned from the sideboard and handed her a glass. "You took my place."

"Thank you," Susan replied. "And no, you were taking up your space as well as my own and I have merely reclaimed what is mine."

Peter raised his glass, but Susan saw he was waiting for her cue and would follow the lead she set.

"To our dead who are home," she said, pleased that her voice was now steady.

With great and generous gravity, Peter responded, "Until we meet again in Aslan's Own Country."

He joined her and together they finished the final phrase of the litany to the Narnian dead, "Do not let our grief keep you from your journey home."

_Farewell, Friend_, Susan intoned.

They drank. Peter sat down and put an arm around her shoulders. Susan, finally, leaned against him. Together, in tandem, they propped their feet up on the table.

"Are you too tired?" Susan asked.

"For you, never," her brother replied. "You?"

"I will be fine. Mum said she would let us sleep all day tomorrow if need be."

Susan heard Mum's steps in the upstairs hall and so they waited. They heard the muffled sound of Mum's bedroom door shutting.

Still, they waited several more beats.

"So, my sister, you have relieved Lucy's lingering fears about her adventure with the Magician's Book of Spells, wept with her over the loss of Bardon wherein she stated emphatically that it was not your fault to fail to see what no one else did, which was then a message Edmund reiterated as you further dissected with him the Rat and Crow of your summer until, in the middle of some tall tale, he fell asleep, for which we are all most grateful."

"I am discovered!" Susan said. "And so I am as transparent to you as ever?"

Peter stared thoughtfully at his drink. "On the contrary, Susan, I hardly know what to say. With some assistance, I had concluded that Father had been drawn into something peculiar. I knew nothing of your role until I arrived in Cambridge once they had returned on _The Dawn Treader_."

"Edmund said he had you up all night."
Peter nodded and swirled his drink. "I…" He hesitated and so Susan waited. "I should not have been surprised, Susan. You are amazing and I am very proud of what you have accomplished and to be your brother."

When Edmund and Lucy had said these things, she had felt ease, gratitude and relief. But, for Peter to speak so was something of a whole other magnitude.

"Thank you, Peter, that means a great deal, coming from you."

"More than it should, Susan. You should not require my good opinion, though you have it and far more, all the same."

"Possibly," she had to admit. "But thank you, regardless."

"I have taken your skills for granted and I apologize for that."

This was all lovely and fine and well. However, "Peter, are you already drunk, or have you somehow become uncharacteristically sentimental over the summer?"

"No to both!" he said with a laugh and raising his glass.

"Then you are using this as a management strategy – being complimentary to soften the blow that is to come!"

"Now who is transparent?" He rubbed her shoulder with his free hand and shook his head. "No, Susan, there is no critique that follows. I am all admiration and such criticism I direct only to myself for failing to recognize your accomplishments years ago and for not telling you so more frequently. I have been feeling keenly the failure to see you knighted."

Susan bolted up, so startled her drink sloshed in the glass. "Knighted! Oh, Peter, not that! Not now!"

"Don't scoff at it, Susan," Peter retorted, though mildly. "I know it is symbolic at this point, but it was an honour never awarded to you and it has seemed that with England recognizing your worth, that Narnia should do no less."

Not all battles were won on the field, but it had always seemed that knighthood was more easily attained there than elsewhere, and it was awarded in recognition for a very specific sort of valor that she had never sought out.

"Goodness, you are serious! I never thought of what I did as warranting knighthood."

"Then whose fault is that?" Peter asked.

She was touched, moved even, and deeply so. Susan linked arms with her earnest, noble brother and gave his leg a nudge with her slippered foot. "For Eustace, perhaps, but not for me." Agnes had called Peter the Knight of Pentacles and that seemed so apt. "I am not the Knight that you are, Sir Peter, nor our sister, or our brother. I never shall be."

"I disagree. Do think about it, Susan. Rat and Crow is not the conventional means, but you have certainly earned it for the services rendered, both in Narnia and here."

Peter was misunderstanding her. He believed she was declining the honour out of a lack of self-worth. In fact, Susan was not certain she adhered to the same Knight's code of Narnia that her brothers and sister followed.
He squeezed her hand. "But now you are home and that business, thank Aslan, is over."

She felt a sudden prickle of irritation. "What do you mean? What business?"

Peter took another sip of his drink, maddeningly offhand now, as if confident they were of one mind. "Only that you have now concluded this work with the intelligence service and can put it behind you."

The prickle sharpened.

"On the contrary, Peter, I found it very difficult to leave the work behind. It was more rewarding than I could have possibly hoped for, and allowed me to fully use what I had learned in Narnia."

Peter could not raise a skeptical eyebrow as well as she could; even Lambert, her Wolf-Guard had been better at it. He managed a disapproving frown instead that was not yet Most Royal. "Susan, you are speaking of lying, stealing, and other immoral acts undertaken even against our ally!"

"We are fighting Hitler! The Nazis!" She kept her voice low, but her frustration was rising. "Over one million Jews are already dead, and they won't stop with the Poles!"

"I know that! I understood what you wrote and can read the papers." Peter countered, and as firmly. "Don't suggest I'm being naïve! What must be done, must be done to stop them!" She wished he had stopped there but the Knight of Pentacles continued, and returned to his familiar, rhetorical strategy. "Heroic people like you have to do these things, Susan, for which I and the rest of the world are very grateful, but necessity does not make them right."

"You had no difficulty with such things in Narnia, Peter."

From any other person, she would have heard a hypocritical denial or pomposity.

"I know," he said, so simply and so honestly, Susan could not hold on to her anger. He twisted about to face her and the conviction of a Knight was etched in his every feature. "I know what it is to give orders, Susan. And as Edmund uncomfortably but fairly reminded me, some of the worst ones I never had to give because to spare the Narnian, I did it myself, or asked Edmund to do it. Or…"

"You looked the other way and trusted me and Edmund to see it done."

Again, a lesser person would try to evade the shared culpability. But, Peter, who worked so hard to meet every expectation, to satisfy every need, and to always do the right thing, would shoulder that responsibility and so much more.

"Yes, and I mean with all my heart and honor that I will never, could never, criticise you or Edmund for the choices you made in defense of Narnia. It is our shared past, and it is past."

His words had the power of an oath. Susan did not require Peter's approval and they had certainly had his tacit blessing, which he admitted. Yet, still, this nakedly honest vow mattered – Peter was not acting the hypocrite and was not singling her out.

"And, as we've been reminded by Lucy and Edmund's return, the way forward for all of us is here, not in our past," Susan said.

"Precisely." He stared at the drink cradled in his hands. "But, just as you carry the lessons of Narnia with you so do I and what is deemed necessary to achieve national interests is one that, for me, bears closer examination. Do you understand what I mean?"
"Yes, Peter, I do."

She did understand, even if she did not wholly agree with him. She had sent Tebbitt off to seduce a harridan into revealing secrets that could destroy lives and a political career. She and Tebbitt both had done what was necessary because their shared loyalty to the cause was that great and the ends served that important. Peter had not had nor had he ever required the lesson the Colonel had taught her – that they needed the luxury of winning the War before asking these hard questions about the morality of their dodgy business. Tebbitt understood this in a way that Peter did not.

Demonstrating, again, his uncanny ability to read her every passing thought, Peter asked quietly, "So, speaking of what was necessary and inevitable, how did matters stand with Peridan when you left?"

Sighing, she took another sip of her warming drink and rested her head on Peter's shoulder. He had seen what she had felt but not said. How many times had that happened before? A dozen? A score? How many times had this conversation followed?

"Tebbitt," Susan said. "His name is Wing Commander Reginald Tebbitt."

Peter took her hand in his as she continued, "Our cover was that I was married to his CO; that we were cousins. We work very well together."

"You obviously came to admire him," Peter said quietly.


Peter gently clinked her glass, an old gesture reminiscent of Narnia. "I am very glad to hear you found someone worthy of your regard, Susan. That has happened all too rarely. He must not have known your apparent age?"

She shook her head then rested it again on her brother's shoulder, so thankful that Peter would assume the best of someone based upon her judgment and letters. "No, not until Mum told him."

Peter stiffened and sucked in a shocked breath. "Mum? That's…"

"Officious? Interfering? Obnoxious? None of her business?" Her anger bubbled forth again and Susan took a drink to steady herself. "It was awful, Peter. Tebbitt was horrified, and furious."

"Were you able to mend things with him before you left?"

She nodded into his shoulder, smiling at the memory of being found out by the Penguin in the Embassy cloakroom and Tebbitt doing battle with hats, macks, and coat hangers.

"If you really care for each other, the age difference won't matter in a few years," Peter said and, again, she felt a surge of appreciation.

She thought again of those stolen moments, by the Reflecting Pool, in the car, the cloakroom, and however ridiculous, the service lift of the Mayflower Hotel. "Have you been able to yet?"

"What?"

"Be with someone?"

Peter grimaced. "No. I barely managed to … it doesn't matter," he finished with a dismissive shake of his head.
She shifted and stretched her legs out on the table, studying her American slippers. *What slippers did women wear in France? Perhaps they went barefoot?*

"It is *maddening* to be locked in this ridiculous age," she said. "It could not go very far, of course, but even that little bit was lovely. I do think it will all be as wonderful here as it was in Narnia, once I can finally enjoy it without worrying about a scandal."

Peter frowned, but this was thoughtful, rather than disapproving. "That is reassuring. There is so much ignorance and ugliness, I was coming to think it would be otherwise." Susan received a gentle, envious nudge in the ribs. "Unlike you, however, I have not been anywhere close to such things."

"That is not what I heard!" she teased. "What was this you started to but did not say? Something you *barely managed* which I can scarce credit except to your natural modesty?" From years of observation, Susan knew Peter managed women very well.

Peter shrugged, his *that was nothing* gesture. "A nurse at the hospital in Oxford."

"Oh! A *nurse*!" Susan said. "And so yet another older woman!"

"*Another*?" Peter scoffed. She got a deserved, and sharper, elbow for that one. "Don't be ridiculous! All those predatory dowagers do not count!"

"I'm not being ridiculous!" she retorted, returning the jab to his ribs. "Dinan was at least 30 years older than you."

"What?"

She stared at him, but her brother's perplexed look could not be feigned. "Peter, you did not just say that. *Dinan.*"

He continued staring, blankly.

"The Silver Birch Dryad? Your lover in Narnia? For *years*?"

"Oh. *Her.*"

"*Her,*" Susan repeated. Honestly, Peter could be so hopelessly male.

"I remember her!" Peter protested. "I just didn't…"

"Connect the name to your lover?"

"Well, Dinan just wasn't…" Her brother floundered on the words.

"Interested in anything other than sex?" Susan offered helpfully.

"No. Well, yes. I mean…" Peter's voice trailed off with an uncertain questioning lilt. At least he had the grace to look embarrassed.

"And, really, Peter, isn't all this inarticulate flailing especially inexcusable given Dinan's apparently startling similarity to Dr. Russell?"

She received a disgusted eye roll for that one. "*That* was Edmund getting in a twist over nothing. Granted, it is odd, but our summers have all been odd in that regard, and over and over. There's no similarity between them at all."
"Lucy and Edmund did say the same thing," Susan said. "I understand that Mrs. Russell does not have a birthmark on her back."

Peter choked on his tequila and had to set his glass down to recover.

"What?" he gasped.

"Lucy asked Mrs. Russell if she had a birthmark, just as Dinan had that knot on her trunk. Mrs. Russell did not own to one."

Susan could see the precise moment when Peter worked through the causal chain of reasoning.

"How did Lucy know about that knot in her trunk?"


Peter stared at her then abruptly reached for his glass and downed it. "Which then leaves the question of how you came to know of it?"

Susan delicately sipped her bourbon, feeling very smug and not at all confiding on the subject. "I've not had nearly enough liquor for that story."

"And I obviously need another drink to recover from the mere prospect of it," Peter said. He untangled their limbs from the lumpy sofa and went back to the bar to pour a second.

"I have heard that the fourth drink of tequila renders the consumer invincible."

Peter laughed. "Dwarfs said the same of Lightning and I can personally confirm it was not true."

He settled back in the sofa, trying to crowd her and take up more room than before. Susan held her ground and together they both put their feet back up on the table. Peter's legs extended well beyond her own.

"I should mention that Edmund's baseless concerns regarding Mary are especially ironic given what he is now experiencing," Peter said.

"What do you mean?"

"Did Edmund or Lucy tell you of their journey's end, when they were at the Wall into Aslan's Country?"

"Of course. They told me of Aslan's charge, to find him here, to do his work here." His words to her and to Peter had been very nearly the same. Aslan, are you pleased with this work of your servant?

"According to Edmund, as they stood at the Wall of Water, they heard our Narnian dead on the other side," Peter said solemnly.

"Oh," she breathed. The longing she had felt for Lambert during the summer returned with a pang. He and so many others were gone. All gone. Wolf-Friend, did you hear my brother and sister and wonder where I was? Did you think we might be reunited again, so soon?

With tears threatening to fall, Susan quickly brushed them away. Peter put a consoling arm around her shoulders again.

She waited for the moment to pass, then said through a tight throat, "He said nothing of it to me."
"Edmund told me of those he heard but made no mention of Morgan. He has made it very clear that he does not wish to discuss her. I think he and Lucy might have, some, but I don't know."

"Well, they have a shared history, for all that they live with it so very differently." She lowered her voice further. Their brother and sister were both asleep but, still, this was difficult ground for them all. "Did you ever tell Edmund what we learned from Doctor Cornelius?"

"Certainly. He knew that the scant records said there was an orderly transition with the joint Regency of Morgan and Aidan. He knew what the Beasts remembered, that with Aslan's blessing, the monarchy continued with Freida, as we had agreed."

Freida had been the eldest niece of Aidan Gunnar of Archenland, Lucy's consort, though they had never completed the months of multiple Narnian bonding ceremonies.

"But after?" Susan whispered. "Does Edmund know what happened to Morgan? Or, about who it was said followed Freida?"

Peter let out a very deep sigh and took an even deeper drink. "Not from me," he said, finally and flatly. "He knew that Narnia had remained free for a very long time through a stable leadership and the succession we had secured. Anything more personal was speculation at best and …"

"Not relevant," Susan finished. Normally, Edmund would be the one to delve into the history and endure the dusty records to report on it. He had not done so here for he knew it could bring him too close to things that were "not relevant." This was so typically Edmund. She would have been shocked if it had been otherwise.

Her brother nodded. "When I did attempt to discuss it with him the night of the Bacchanal, Edmund informed me his memories of her were just fine, he knew just where they were buried, and that if I persisted in picking at his memories, I would wake up the next morning in Bacchus's arms, naked, and tied to a bed of poison ivy."

Susan laughed. It was a dire threat but if Edmund had been able to prevail upon Bacchus as a willing ally, not out of the question. "And our brother then passed into a drunken stupor before you could argue the point and it was never discussed again."

Peter sighed again and rubbed his forehead. This was, for Peter, the most painful part of the return. Not for what he had lost himself, but for what Lucy and Edmund had left behind.

"Edmund is not wrong either, to a point," Peter said. "You and I went through what little Cornelius had. It was incomplete, contradictory…"

"And for the most part wrong," Susan completed. "There was that one history that had you and I as bondmates with thirty-two children."

Peter snorted with disbelieving disgust. "That was an oral account from a very, very old Yew Dryad."

Susan sipped her drink, wondering if, with the passage of a few months, there was any greater understanding of what happened after they had left. She had to conclude there was not, unless something further had been learned while on The Dawn Treader. Or from the Dead themselves. She would have to ask Lucy of it.

Morgan had given no sign that fateful day they left to hunt the White Stag though, as Peter argued, their brother's consort had been a master of the intentional omission. For not the first time, Susan wondered if Morgan and Aidan had known that Aslan would call them back to England.
Peter was certain Edmund had left an heir behind. But the fact remained that they didn't know, couldn't know, and there were too many alternative explanations that fit what little she and Peter had been able to glean in a few, stolen hours following the victory over Miraz. Even the short meeting with Doctor Cornelius had been selfishly indulgent – they should not have been tarrying over their ancient history when the bulk of their time had to be spent with Caspian, his new advisors, and the monumental task that was ahead for the nascent Narnian-Telmarine government.

"Susan?"

His tone made her attend closely. "Yes?"

"What is it between Father and Mum?"

His question only seemed peculiarly random for she followed Peter's reasoning almost as well as he could read her thoughts. Peter had opened his arms and heart impossibly wide to shelter and provide for those under his protection in Narnia. He had been a father to an entire country. While there was less need of it here, now, for they were all co-equal adults, still, he led them all – had that not been obvious as recently as on the train with Mum? It weighed especially heavily upon Peter whenever they spoke of how Edmund might have been a father to a child of his own, for that meant their brother had had and lost a connubial life Peter had desperately wanted, for himself and for Narnia. And now their own Father continued, absent.

"It is strained, Peter. Very strained, even. Father badly managed the situation. Mum was furious when she learned that he would be in New York and she would be detailed to Washington. They saw each other twice the whole summer and that only briefly."

"Mum sounded very unhappy."

Susan linked her arm in his and sidled closer. "The War is taking its toll on families. I know people are so optimistic that with the Americans in, it will all be over soon. But, Colonel Walker-Smythe, the man I worked with, believes we will be in North Africa this year, the Mediterranean and Italy next year, and that Allied command won't try another landing in France until 1944."

"Three years already and perhaps another three years still to come," Peter murmured. "Given all the men who are deployed and dying, our parents are fortunate to have had what they did," Peter said. His words were harsher than the sad tone which reflected both the loss of their own family here and what had brought them to this painful discussion – their family who had remained in Narnia.

"I will say that while Edmund did not say anything of hearing our dead at the World's End, Lucy did not speak of it either," Susan said.

"She was open with me about it all but spoke only of Aslan, not the others. She did not mention Aidan at all," Peter said.

"If it is troubling her, I suppose she will say something."

"Our sister hears Aslan and speaks to dead people all the time," Peter quipped dryly. "So, perhaps being at the Wall was not remarkable for her or maybe it was simply like a radio programme broadcast Lucy heard more clearly."

She laughed, a little. "We are all mad."

Peter groaned melodramatically and shoved her foot with his own. "Not you too!"

"What?"
"Alice's Adventures has been quoted to me all summer. I would enjoy a respite. Please?"

Her laugh this time was heartier, for Peter did sound much put upon. "I suppose there is something very Narnian about going down the hole of a Talking Rabbit, though there was no mirror on the Wardrobe. I wonder if Lewis Carroll went to Narnia?"

"Well, not Mister Carroll, but I should report to you of another oddity in a holiday that was full of them."

"There are more! Will I need my drink freshened?"

Susan held her glass and with good-natured grumbling, Peter clambered out of the couch to fetch her bottle. He put another splash in her glass then settled back in his seat.

"Don't crowd me!" he said, with a mocking growl.

Susan pushed more deeply into the sofa and moved her legs closer to his so that Peter had to move his closer to the edge of the table. He had the arm of the sofa sticking him in the side.

"Oddities?" she repeated, prompting and distracting him. She recalled what Edmund had said earlier. "Is this anything to do with Major al-Masri? Edmund was very elliptical about him and said I had to speak to you. Colonel Walker-Smyth was complimentary of him."

"It is. I have come to know Major al-Masri very well over the summer as Asim bin Kalil. Asim told me he dreamed of a ship that, once I saw the picture in Harold and Alberta's spare room, I realized was The Dawn Treader."

Susan startled. "What?"

"He did not know of Narnia, as far as I can tell. But, yes, a man who is a Muslim, a spy, a Major in British Army Intelligence, and searches the world looking for people who are, according to Polly and the Professor, 'God-touched,' also dreamed of Narnia."

"The Hierophant," Susan murmured. Aslan, is this my Guide?

"The what?"

She opened her mouth, then closed it, the opened it again and took another sip of her drink. "It is difficult to describe, Peter, but the short, unsatisfying answer is that a woman I met in Washington insisted I would find a guide. She called him the Hierophant. He would be a man of divinity and practical experience who has harnessed the powers of both dark and light in the direction he wishes to go."

"A worldly man of God who straddles light and dark! How ludicrous, what?" Peter now did sound properly pompous and laughed at himself. "To quote Alice, again, we are indeed all mad. Except of course that I believe you completely and that Asim is among the sanest, clearest-seeing men I have ever met."

"I very much wish to meet him."

"I am sure you will, Susan, and if you seek a guide, I can imagine none better."

They fell into companionable silence, enjoying the simple pleasure of being together again, with a pleasant drink and a comfortable seat. Susan was just wondering how to broach the subject when Peter anticipated her, again.
"I assume you know already that I am intending to start the signing up process and I further assume you have thoughts on that."

"I further assume that we shall disagree on your choices with me knowing best and you heedlessly disregarding it until time and painful experience show me to have been right all along," Susan said, feeling very amiable about the prospect of the discussion.

"That means another splash for both of us," Peter responded. He rose and went back to the bar to refresh his own drink. Susan took the opportunity to put her legs up on the sofa and usurp his place entirely.

Peter returned and stared down at her in all his most MRF-ness glory. "If I might have your glass, Sister?"

All mock formality, Susan responded in kind. "My brother and High King – but not consort and not father of my thirty-two non-existent children – are you trying to get me drunk?"

"Trying?"

"I suspect verbal obfuscation. You hope that if compromised, I might divulge just how I learned of that knot in Dinan's trunk!"

"I am a Knight of the Order of the Lion and would certainly not stoop to such low and devious arts," Peter replied. Belying the point, he poured more bourbon than was strictly necessary into her waiting glass.

"And yet you continue to assert you have neither the talent nor inclination to Rat and Crow!"

"If that is so, you cannot expect me to own to it."

_Point there._

With a swift, strong heave, Susan found her legs suddenly lifted up and dropped unceremoniously to the floor. Peter jumped into the sofa with a squeak of protesting springs and reclaimed his corner and more. He awarded her a victorious salute with his glass.

"And now my sister who is called Gentle only by those who have never argued with her, let us begin."

It was even harder than she had expected, to put away Mrs. Caspian's frocks, handbags, hats, gloves, and shoes, and to pack in their stead Susan Pevensie's school girl uniform. The jacket, ties, jumpers, and flannels took up so little space in her trunk, she decided to pack one complete, proper, ensemble. The blue belted shirt dress with crossover bodice, matching pillbox hat and gloves, and the precious stockings, took no room at all and made her feel better about it all. Even if she never had the occasion to wear them, she enjoyed the secret knowledge that they were there, along with Mrs. Caspian's identity card.

What of Mrs. Ellis? Mrs. Ellis, she decided, would favor a shorter hem, shorter sleeves, and a lower neckline. That would involve taking her red dress with the princess lines and ruching to a clever, discreet seamstress. She carefully packed it as well.

Susan was sitting on her bed debating which shoes to include – she really wanted to bring the peep-toed pumps but knew she really should choose the kid oxfords – when the front doorbell rang.
She heard voices downstairs.

"Susan!" Peter called.

"Coming!"

She put both pumps and Oxfords aside to think about it. On her way downstairs, she peeked out the window but there was no car in the street.

Edmund was loitering at the foot of the stairs and flashed her a Ware signal as she passed. She nodded and as she moved toward the drawing room, Edmund fell in step next to her. So this was to be a united front.

Her brother held open the door for her and Susan entered the drawing room. Peter was standing at the mantle with a man in the drab serge and insignia of a Major in the British Army.

Even as Peter began the introduction, she knew who it had to be. No one else could possibly be so singular.

"Susan, may I introduce you to Major al-Masri?" Peter said, speaking very calmly.

The Major stepped forward and offered his hand, cool, firm, and professional.

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Major al-Masri," Susan said. "Peter and Edmund have both spoken highly of you."

"And they speak so of you," the Major said. His native accent was just noticeable over his classic, perfectly enunciated English. "To end the curiosity, I am here actually on your account, Mrs. Caspian."

If Peter or Edmund reacted, Susan did not see it. She straightened and slid into the woman she also was.

"Sir?"

Her response was ambiguous and the tilt of her head could convey either confusion or acknowledgment, depending upon how he chose to interpret it.

"I was asked by Sallowpad to inform you that the Gryphons and War Horses arrived today at the port of Narrowhaven. The High King and the Just King thank you most sincerely for your efforts to secure this important delivery. The Lord Peridan extends his compliments to you."

Her heart was pounding in her chest. She wanted to squeal and jump on the table and throw her arms around anyone close. The SS Seatrain had made it to the Suez with 250 Sherman tanks for the British 8th Army! Instead of glee, Susan forced a thoughtful look. "Thank you, Major. While I profess confusion as to your message's meaning, I will assume that this is a kindness from Colonel Walker-Smythe?"

"It is," the Major affirmed.

"Then I receive it in the spirit in which it was intended and if you would be so kind and if the opportunity presents itself, please give my warm regards and thanks to the Colonel?"

"Certainly, Ma'am."

Never had Susan been so glad of the poise she and her brothers had learned in Narnia. Peter and
Edmund betrayed not a sound or gesture. And Major al-Masri’s "Ma'am" was certainly not an accident.

Into the awkward silence that threatened to follow, Peter injected, "I am sorry, Major, that our sister, Lucy is not at home. I know she very much wishes to meet you."

"I regret that as well, Peter," al-Masri replied.

"Would you like to stay for tea, Major?" Edmund asked. "Lucy and Miss Plummer are at the Caxton Hall rally and they might yet return."

"Thank you, but I cannot." The Major picked up his beret from the mantle. "Having seen this delivered, I must return to the War Office."

"May I see you out?" Susan put in before Peter could offer. She took the risk and reinforced it with a *I will handle this* signal. The Major would certainly see their silent communication, but that was a good thing by her judge.

They shook hands again at the door. "Thank you again, Major al-Masri."

"My pleasure, Mrs. Caspian."

"Major, might I have your card? I understand through Peter that you have offered us such assistance as is in your power to provide?"

His card appeared so quickly, Susan thought she had merely preempted what Major al-Masri had already intended to offer.

"And might I write to you care of Marlhurst-Brockstone School?"

Susan managed not to wince at his reference to her school and was very impressed that his adroit phrasing could imply she was employed there rather than in school there. That settled it. Mrs. Caspian would bring both pairs of shoes to Marlhurst-Brockstone.

"Of course. Perhaps I can introduce my sister, Lucy, to you."

It was a subtle thing but she could see he wished this very much.

"At your convenience and hers," Major al-Masri said, tipping his cap.

With the door safely shut behind him, Susan let out a squeal and ran back into the drawing room. She smashed into Edmund first and so he received her first, ecstatic hug.

"They made it!"

She spun around and launched herself at Peter. Her brother caught her up and spun her around.

"Congratulations!" Peter bellowed, swinging her around one more time. As Peter lowered her to the ground, Edmund clapped her on the back.

Susan gained her footing and her sense at the same moment.

"Oh Aslan, what have I done?" she cried as the enormity of it hit her.

"What is it?" Peter asked. "What is wrong?"
She looked at Edmund and his face was now set with the same ashen anxiety she felt.

"They used the Narnia code," she told Peter.

Peter instantly saw the problem and ran a hand across his suddenly somber face. "That's not a good thing, is it?"

"No," Edmund agreed glumly. "Not at all."

Next up, School Daze and thereafter Eustace meets a crying girl behind the gymnasium of Experiment House and offers her a humbug.

A huge thanks to Autumnia who found the information for me regarding the Day of Retribution at Caxton Hall on September 3, 1942. And indeed, the SS Seatrain landed at the Suez the same day carrying the "gruphons and war horses" which Field Marshall Montgomery would use in the pivotal second battle of El Alamein and Operation Torch which followed.

Reader Hellen-K had pointed out that I needed to clarify that the Fairport would not have been sunk by the Soviets – a point which I knew but that needed clarification. The ever insightful E had mentioned that the Calormene General referred to TQSIT is, in fact two individuals – I had condensed them for purposes of the story and break out here the two of them separately though the timeframes don't actually work. General MacArthur kept the very young Filipino mistress who was offered a one way ticket back to her home country by a much younger Dwight Eisenhower and it is General Patton who struck Charles Kuhl. E also provided the anecdote about Molotov's command of English.

Several people commented on the preoccupation with young children in the previous chapter and I've been exploring these and related issues for several chapters now. One reason for the delay in posting is that I posted an excerpt of Morgan and Edmund in the Lone Islands for Valentine's Day on my Livejournal. I have now also posted Acceptance of the Terms in my Livejournal (link in my profile) that looks at the relationship between Edmund and Morgan at the very end and answers some of the questions Susan and Peter ponder here. A lot of TSG readers are not focused on that part of this story, but if you are interested in What Happens After, you can find more about it on my Livejournal in that story.

I want to thank E, Clio, and Snacky who have helped enormously as I fine-tuned the conversation between Susan and Peter. And yes, LARM, despite my dastardly inclinations, Lowrey appears to have survived this chapter. A thanks to Min who early on speculated on the significance in this vision to the fact that Susan alone is not a Knight of Narnia.

As always, my LJ is open for discussion of this further, with anonymous commenting enabled.
"I consider it a good rule for letter-writing to leave unmentioned what the recipient already knows, and instead tell him something new."
Sigmund Freud

"A Letter is a Joy of Earth - It is denied the Gods."
Emily Dickinson, 1885

"At the age of 13 I was working as a delivery boy for a baker's company called Scott's Bakery in High Craighall Road in Glasgow. ... Part of our delivery sometimes was to Abbotsinch Airport. The cookhouse there was manned entirely by black American Air Force personnel. This was the first time in my life I had ever met a black person. After making my deliveries of bread I was standing there, looking around, when I was lifted bodily by a giant of a man, an American sergeant. I was so small, he simply lifted me and put me on a table like a doll. Then he shook my hand and gave me some chocolate with a big smile and off he went."

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To: Col. George Walker-Smythe  
From: Maj. A.A.M. al-Masri  
Both messages delivered per orders

To: Maj. A.A.M. al-Masri  
From: Col. George Walker-Smythe  
Does she understand? No use N, etc.?  
Be in UK in 43; want 2 meet

To: Col. George Walker-Smythe  
From: Maj. A.A.M. al-Masri  
Yes, she understands  
want 2 meet 2

To: Maj. A.A.M. al-Masri  
From: Col. George Walker-Smythe  
Tell her again.

---

To:  
Miss Susan Pevensie  
c/o Marlhurst-Brockstone School  
Newbury  
Berkshire

From:  
Major A.A.M al-Masri  
Russell House  
Combe
Ox

Dear Mrs. Caspian,

It was a pleasure meeting you, however briefly. Having come to know your elder brother well, and having met your younger brother at the request of Colonel Walker-Smythe, I was pleased to make your acquaintance, an occasion marred only by the unavailability of your sister. I am, as you would have discerned through Colonel Walker-Smythe's office, occupied at the moment. However, I hope we might remedy the shortcoming of introductions not yet made in the new year.

At the request of Colonel Walker-Smythe, I write to remind you of your promise to him regarding the matters on which the two of you spoke prior to your departure. Do not under any circumstances infer that his communication to you via me regarding the delivery of the gryphons and war horses was a signal that all is well or forgotten. Colonel Walker-Smythe specifically asked me to convey this caution.

You and your brothers have all asked for such assistance as I might provide and so I offer it here. Be extremely circumspect. These are very serious matters and while seemingly appear to you and your family as a clever game, they are not in the eyes of those in positions of considerable authority and influence. Your own advancement hinges in no small part upon your continuing discretion. I understand the difficulties such injunctions pose but having chosen to enter this realm, you now must obey its rules, leave it altogether, or be prepared for consequences should you fail to follow our requirements. In these matters, our loyalties are tested. If you desire to discuss this difficulty in person, I can arrange for a visit to Marlhurst-Brockstone.

I understand further through Colonel Walker-Smythe that you intend to continue your language instruction with Madame Yvonne-Renee Simon. Sa réputation la précède. I understand arrangements have already been made through your school for you to meet with Mme. Simon. However, should you have any difficulty, please advise me immediately.

I look forward to seeing you again.

A.A.M. al-Masri

From: Susan Pevensie
Marlhurst-Brockstone School
Newbury
Berkshire
England

To: Gladys Gardner
c/o Embassy of Great Britain
Massachusetts Ave., N.W.
Washington, District of Columbia
USA

Dear Gladys,

I am writing of course for I have seen the reports of Dieppe and that David is still accounted among the missing. Have hope and courage, my friend. He is a good and brave and clever man and I pray that you hear soon and that he returns to you thereafter. You are both very much in my thoughts and prayers.
Our crossing was uneventful, and so very much a good thing. As you might have heard, my father did not make the crossing with us – evidently New York would not be parted with his services.

I now return to very dreary things. If you can tell me, have you been able to recruit additional help in the office? Has Tebbit destroyed my filing system in but a week's time? Do give him and the Colonel my warm regards. I miss you all terribly.

Your dear friend,

Susan

From: Susan Pevensie,
Marlhurst-Brockstone School
Newbury
Berkshire

To: Eustace Scrubb
Experiment House
Eyton upon the Weald Moors
Telford
Shropshire

Dear Eustace:

Forgive me, in advance, for being vague, but I am sure you understand. I am so sorry that I was unable to see you before you returned to school. Allow me to greet you and welcome you most whole-heartedly into our family. It is so much, much better that by the Lion's grace, we are now known to each other, where before we were strangers.

I understand that Mum shall be writing to Alberta that you might join us at Christmas. I hope to hear all of your adventures then, from your own lips, rather than second and third hand through Edmund, Lucy, and Peter. By the accounts of your cousins, you were as brave as a Lion and as true as any Knight. I especially wish to hear of dear Reep, of whom I was very fond. He claimed to be related to a very good friend of mine and knowing both of them, I do not doubt it, though it was likely in spirit only.

In the days and weeks ahead, and especially as you return to your old places and to school, we all know that it becomes harder to stay true to the Lion's call. He lays a heavy responsibility upon us and has high expectations for all whom he called and to whom he gave such extraordinary gifts. You do not walk this path alone, my cousin. We are with you and the Lion as well.

Congratulations and my very best wishes, thoughts, and prayers go to you,

Your loving cousin,

Susan tG

From: WC R. Tebbitt
British Embassy
Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

To: Susan Pevensie
Dear Mrs. Caspian

I have heard through the Colonel that your journey was of the best kind, that is, without incident. We have had no word from Lowrey, which is a wretched business. My best guess is that he is in a camp. I would like to say that as an officer and a Canadian he would receive better treatment and better conditions. I fear that such things matter little.

We have received reinforcements including a good chap who is very much of Fleming's ilk, but even bolder. By comparison, I am as meek and sober as a Parson. Parson or no, I am counting the days until the War ends.

I have thought further on what we discussed regarding your brother, Peter. While I understand your concern that he could not serve a fool, basic training is effective in beating that obstinate streak out of the most intelligent and insightful of young men. The changes in training and recruitment have, overall, increased the quality of the officer corps with it coming to be based more on merit and less on bloodline. I believe Peter will find a place, and a good one, should he chose to exert himself toward obtaining it.

Regardless, Susan, as skilled as the Colonel is, and as much as is to be learned from him, I would not want to see this duty of mine for any man. It is a sore trial. I would not wish it for your brother and you should not either.

Agnes sends her greetings and love and asks (impatiently, too) if you have met the "Hierophant."

I shall close with a long quote, for I find that the words of others are more eloquent than my own.

*Madame,* more than *kisses,* letters mingle souls,
*For thus,* friends absent speak.
*This ease* controls
*The tediousness of my life; but for these*
*I could ideate nothing which could please;*
*But I should wither in one day, and pass*
*To a bottle of hay, that am a lock of grass.*
*Life is a voyage, and in our lives' ways*
*Countries, courts, towns are rocks, or remoras;*
*They break or stop all ships, yet our state's such,*
*That though than pitch they stain worse, we must touch.*

Really, Donne writing such to Sir Henry Wotton seems a mite dodgy, for all that I have endured your tongue lashing on that subject. I find it far more pleasing to quote such to a fair Bacchante. For all his use of the humble and slimy snail as a metaphor, Donne's closing admonition bears reflection:

*Be then thine own home, and in thyself dwell;*
*Inn anywhere; continuance maketh hell.*
*And seeing the snail, which everywhere doth roam,*
*Carrying his own house still, still is at home;*
*Follow—for he is easy paced—this snail,*
*Be thine own palace, or the world's thy gaol.*
And in your palace, I would dwell there, too.

I suspect this return will be very difficult for you. Be your own person, Mrs. C, carry her with you. Do not lock her away, or the world's a gaol.

Do great things while we wait. I expect no less.

WC R. Tebbitt

P.S. Is your filing system in chronological or reverse chronological order? Also, where do you file the Penguin's memoranda? Do you file the news clippings by source or by subject?

P.P.S. I regret to say that I was attempting to file the clippings for the Colonel and the bottom fell out of the file drawer and the files with it. Hence the questions above.

From: Susan Pevensie
Marlhurst-Brockstone School
Newbury
Berkshire
England

To: Agnes Hill Bell
1800 & U Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.
USA

Dear Agnes:

As you might have heard through Tebbitt or the Colonel, we arrived well and safely and I now return to a smaller and far less interesting life. I hope that this finds you, and your family, and Legba, well.

On the journey, I read *Little Women* and really I must disagree with you about Jo's decision to marry the Professor. Marriage to Laurie might have been more romantic as you define it, but surely it was ill advised, as Jo rightly saw. In a similar vein, I find Heathcliff's behavior toward Catherine most disturbing and really not romantic at all. As my brother, Edmund, has observed, if he is not good to you, he is not good for you.

I shall write more as I learn more, but I do believe I have met the Hierophant. He is nothing of what I expected. Peter came to know him well over the holiday and he is quite the figure. He is Egyptian or, perhaps more accurately, North African or, perhaps, Arab? I am uncertain of the nuances here and so risk error. He is a veteran of the Arab Revolts and World War I, and serves in the Army currently in the rank of Major. The Colonel knows him as a man of good repute, also borne out by Peter's report. He has been known long and well by others who are acquainted with the stories of Lambert and Willa and he may, however, mysteriously, have some understanding of such stories himself. I trust you understand my meaning and how curious it all is.

If you have any further insights, I would welcome them.

Please give my warmest regards to your family.

Your friend,

Susan
From: Marjorie Preston  
Marlhurst-Brockstone School  
Newbury  
Berkshire  

To: Mrs. James Preston  
Dartford Road  
Dartford  
Kent  

Dear Mum:  

You were right! You were so very, very right! I just felt awful having said those beastly things about Lucy to Anne Featherwitch. And Lucy somehow knew and she felt just awful that she had spied on me. (I don't know how she knew, but Lucy's like that). She came right up to me the first day we were all back and we had a good talk and we both cried a little and we both think Anne is just horrid and we are not going to let her get between us.  

Thank you, Mum. I love you. I'm so happy that you were right about Lucy and made me see sense. We are in a room together and a new girl has joined us, Jane Edwards. We both like Jane very much. Alice Jones is the lowers' Prefect. I've told you about her, I think? She is very sharp, both her mind and her tongue. Still, she sees right through nonsense and sucking up so all in all Alice is a good draw for us.  

I worry a little about Lucy, though. She is very upset about the War. We're all upset, of course, and I worry so much about you all, even if the bombs aren't falling anymore and we aren't so worried about the Nazis crossing the Channel now that the Americans are here. Still, Lucy is very, very upset. She is writing a lot to politicians about things she reads in the newspapers. Also, I have heard Lucy mutter some not very nice things about the Reverend Collins. True, none of us likes him at all. Lucy, though, seems quite put out by him.  

I miss you and Father, and William and Spot. Stay safe!  

Love,  

Marjorie  

---  

From:  
Anne Featherstone  
Marlhurst-Brockstone School  
Newbury  
Berkshire  

To: Mrs. Alastair Francis Featherstone  
Elvetham Heath  
Fleet  
Surrey  

Dear Mother:  

You must get me out of this bedlam and damn the marks. I am being tortured by those utter beasts, Lucy Pevensie and Marjorie Preston. They put on airs, even though they are the most common,
unpleasant girls. I have found, since returning to school, a frog in my shoes, spiders in my bed, and a mouse nest among my jumpers.

If you do not send James to come and fetch me in the car, I shall suffer and take a train home. I swear it mother, I shall. A train! You may die of embarrassment that your daughter was reduced to a train again!

Sincerely,

Your daughter, Anne

From: Eustace Scrubb
Experiment House
Eyton upon the Weald Moors
Telford
Shropshire

To: Edmund Pevensie
Blackpool Forest School
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire

Dear Edmund:

You called it. I knew it would be awful returning, and it is. My old gang expected me to be back with Them and their old ways. Anyone not an utter rotter wanted nothing to do with me. When I tried to behave properly, the decent folk thought I was a spy and got even more suspicious. I keep telling myself what you said, that it's the work of weeks and months, and by my actions I shall be judged.

Which led to the rabbit. Carter and some of his gang had cornered the poor thing behind the gym and were throwing rocks at it. It wasn't a Talking Rabbit, of course, but rabbits aren't very far from Rats (though rabbits are not rodents like rats, they are lagomorphs due to the teeth and other anatomical features) and even if it had been a hedgehog or a snake, the thing should not have been tortured and frightened to death by schoolboys.

So, I grabbed Carter by the arm, prised, his fingers from the rock he was holding, and told him to leave off the rabbit. Which they did, and he (or she, couldn't tell) hopped away. But, then They had a go at me. It wasn't anything bad, just a few bruises.

I'm glad I'm tougher than I was, and stronger, and I keep working at it in gym.

That's a good thing, too. There was something involving another boy and a secret, and I'm not going to say his name in case one of Them get hold of this letter. But that other boy, who is a good bloke, did something They didn't like at all and They figured I knew about it. Which I did.

I was roughed up in the boys' lavatory for it. Just the usual, which I'm sure you know, with the mop handles and the flushies. It hurt, but not as much as other hurts, if you know what I mean. I didn't blub and didn't snitch.

Peter and Susan both told me that it was better to be improved and a Friend than what I was before and a stranger. I keep telling myself that and I'm looking for You Know Who a lot. I feel him
sometimes. Like with the rabbit and in the lavatory, when I really need it.

That's all for now. I don't see it getting any better but eventually I hope I won't be so alone in suffering through it.

Your cousin,

Eustace

From:
M. Anning Russell
Russell House
Combe
Ox

To: Mr. John Taylor
Science Faculty
Experiment House
Eyton upon the Weald Moors
Telford
Shropshire

Dear Mr. Taylor:

I write to take the strongest exception to the marks you awarded Eustace Scrubb on his essay regarding T.H. Huxley's comparison of *Archaeopteryx lithographica* with *Compsognathus longipes* and modern birds. Simply because you do not have the wit to comprehend Mister Scrubb's argument and anatomical analysis does not mean he is wrong. It means only that you are an idiot. Huxley's theory that small, theropods may have evolved into *Aves* is not in vogue, to be sure, but it is uncontroversed that *A. lithographica* shares numerous features with modern birds, including wishbone, flight feathers, and wings. Unless you correct your ignorance forthwith, to the benefit of Mister Scrubb, I intend to forward his essay and your stupid remarks upon it to Richard Russell and Professor T.W. Copeland, whom you undoubtedly know holds the Linacre Chair and is Curator of the Oxford Museum of Natural History.

Also, please inform your Head that if I continue to see such ignorance bandied about masquerading as scientific query, I shall reconsider her offer of employment to me and replace you.

Sincerely,

M. Anning Russell

P.S. Don't think for a moment I cannot determine which paper in the queue is yours for the *Royal Proceedings*. I can.

From: M. Anning Russell
Russell House
Combe
Ox

To: Lt. Col. Thomas B. Clark
Impington Lane
Impington
Cambridgeshire

Dear Colonel Clark:

I am writing to thank you for the very kind gift of chocolate to Major al-Masri and so to me. The chocolate was very well-timed given my husband's illness and I am grateful for it. I understand farther that we have acquaintances in common, specifically Eustace Scrubb and the Pevensee family. Should you see Eustace's parents, do please tell them on my behalf that they have an extraordinary son. His analysis of Huxley's comparison of *Archaeopteryx lithographica* with *Compsognathus longipes* and modern *Aves* was first rate.

Thank you again for your generousity.

Sincerely,

Mary Anning Russell

From: Elizabeth Pole  
Lewisham Park  
London

To: Jill Pole  
Experiment House  
Eyton upon the Weald Moors  
Telford  
Shropshire

Dearest Jill:

I hope you are settled and that your term has begun well. I know that Experiment House is not the typical school and that there are some awful children there. I know it is not easy for you; it is not easy for your father, either. But, the school was very keen to have you and others like you back and I hope that you meet some nice friends with whom you share some common ground. I know you mentioned how that awful Eustace Scrubb boy has become strangely nice this term, so perhaps he might be a place to start?

I need to tell you that I shall be very busy for the next few months and will not be living at home. If an emergency arises, send a telegram to the WRENS office in the Admiralty, London and they should be able to find me at the GCCS. Do not worry for my safety. I am in England and quite secure, just very busy and it is all quite secret.

I have just been promoted to First Officer, which is equivalent to a Lieutenant-Commander!

As to your father, his squadron is in the south and really that is all I can say. He is doing well, flying often, and doing important work that will keep us all safe.

It is hard for all of us, my lovely Jill. England has given us so much and now we of her Commonwealth of nations must do our patriotic duty and give in return or no one shall be free ever again.

With love,

First Officer Mum
Dear Mr. Holt,

It has come to my attention that the Chinese men sailing in the Merchant Navy are not receiving the same wages and war bonus as white men. In fact, the wages and bonuses of Chinese sailors may be twenty-five percent less than those paid to white men for the same duty. It seems to me that the Nazi U-boat captains do not take the time to determine whether the crews of the merchant ships they target are Chinese, Indian, English, Canadian, African or any other race. The risks of death these patriotic men bear are the same and so their pay should be the same. Please rectify this injustice immediately.

Sincerely,

Lucy Pevensie
Thank you for helping me with the letter to Mr. Holt and Viscount Leathers. I am really not accustomed to anyone caring about my spelling. Some things about Narnia were preferrable and the absence of a dictionary was one of them!

Would you please tell Mrs. Kwong that I wrote the letter? The treatment of the Chinese Merchant Navy men deeply offended me and I did wish to do something other than wring my hands and say polite, sympathetic things. I truly appreciate what you said about how feeling badly over someone’s ill treatment is the minimum standard for an ethical person and the larger, bigger, harder task is the calling to do something about it. How to translate that passion and anger I feel into something meaningful? Thank you very much for the suggestions on whom to write. Even this does not seem enough, but it is a start, I suppose. A Queen I may be, but I still felt very bold scolding a Viscount!

Thank you again for taking me to the Caxton Hall rally. It was very motivating and infuriating and I am very grateful you were there with me. I am so impressed by Miss Sutherland! Thank you for introducing me to her. I did send the note and she wrote back with a lovely one in reply. I now have a card from the National Labour Party Chief Woman pinned to my closet mirror! Susan is quite envious!

Love,

Lucy

From: Edmund Pevensie
Blackpool Forest School
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire

To: Lt. Colonel Thomas B. Clark
Impington Lane
Impington
Cambridgeshire

Dear Colonel Clark:

Thank you for the loan of the Lieber Code. I have now read it a dozen times and find something new to ponder in it at every turn. It is alternately profound and frustratingly inadequate, yet I am mindful that it was written at all. Some things seem so obvious, such as treating prisoners of war as detainees rather than criminals, yet this was plainly a radical principle as compared to what had preceded it.

Our conversation was prescient. I enclose a publication, the September 11, *Jewish Chronicle*, which discusses a rally held at Caxton Hall. You will note the headline, "A Day of Retribution." The Home Secretary, Mr. Morrison, states that "the United Nations would accept no peace offer from Hitler, unless it took the form of a promise, which guarantees, of the performance of a collective suicide pact by the whole of the German leadership."

As my Latin tutor would say, *res loquitur ipsa*. Can there be justice when the accusations are so large, passions so high, and when even the respected voices call so bluntly and unapologetically for retribution? This troubles me greatly, Colonel. At the risk of theology and philosophy, I have come to believe that we are not judged by those things with the easy answer. The measure of the man or woman is in how he or she treats the guilty and the undeserving. As you had said when we argued about your American Bill of Rights, it is not the majority that needs protection and much the same applies to assuring justice in the hardest of cases. Demanding suicide so that we might be spared the
duty of proving guilt and apportioning commensurate punishment cannot be the answer.

To less weightier subjects, Jack is doing well. Some things are easier than others but Peter and I have made sure he did not fall in with the wrong sort. For all that cricket is a "girl" game and he complains about the absence of "baseball" and "American football," he excels even at our British sport and this stands him in good stead.

Please give my warm regards to Ruby and to Major al-Masri, should you see him.

Sincerely,

Edmund Pevensie

To: Edmund Pevensie
Blackpool Forest School
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire

From: Mrs. John Pevensie
Finchley Road
Finchley
Barnet, London

Dearest Edmund:

Are you mad? There, now that I have vented my feelings, I shall be able to proceed more rationally. Darling, must you insist upon such coursework? Your Head of School wrote to me personally asking that I consent to your adding Russian and German to your French, Latin, and the upper form maths.

I admit to worry, Edmund. I see how Peter has carried the weight of your father's academic expectations and I would not wish to see you so burdened as well. You are your own man, extraordinary in your own ways. Do not take so punishing a path to obtain a dubious approval you do not need and should not want. Do not let the sorts of doubts that hinder me stop you. You have nothing to fear – your marks have been exceptional this last year. Truly, I believe the doors (or windows as you never take the easy path when a harder one beckons) that you seek will open for you.

Do not do this for anyone, my son. If you desire it for yourself, then by all means. When you catch the death and must come home to be nursed through the ague, I shall not even say, "I told you so."

From your loving and very proud Mum

To: Mrs. John Pevensie
Finchley Road
Finchley
Barnet, London

From: Edmund Pevensie
Blackpool Forest School
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire
Dear Mum:

Thank you for the kind letter. For your eyes only, I admit I was envious of Susan and Peter both this holiday. They met extraordinary people this summer while I suffered through the likes of Eustace, Harold and Alberta. Yet, Eustace improved and I came to know the Clarks – the Americans of whom Lucy and I spoke.

The languages are for myself. I had not known that the Headmaster would ask for your approval. Thank you for granting it and for trusting my judgment in this.

It is odd that you write of closing doors and opening windows for I have been contemplating them as well. I have also been considering, as you wrote, the hard roads and difficult choices to which I always seem drawn. I was not aware that I was so transparent to you.

Thank you and with love,

Edmund

ENTRY FROM PERSONAL JOURNAL OF EDMUND PEVENSIE

(translated from Rat & Crow)

My mother sent me a letter. They were her words, but I heard your voice say them. I love my mother, but it is not the same at all and I wish it had been you who had spoken to me so. She would have liked you very much.

From: Tom Clark
Impington Lane
Impington
Cambridgeshire

To: John T. Clark
Blackpool Forest School
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire

Dear Jack:

So, you will write to Ruby, but not your dear Dad? Congratulations on the cricket and football teams. I know it's not baseball and American football, but then there isn't a lot of that going in America now, either. I understand that rugby might be to your liking as well and as you know, we have rowers among your Clark uncles and cousins so you might want to give that a go when the school has try-outs.

I can sympathize with you about English spelling. I am having difficulty with it too. Why is it *centre* when it is so obviously pronounced *cen-ter* and not *cen-tre*. And, unfortunately, their coursework would be skewed in favor of English literature rather than American, so you will be reading Dickens and Donne rather than Twain and Dickinson. Maybe we'll read Huck Finn together over the holiday – Huck's relationship with Jim and how you "can't pray a lie" have been on my mind lately. I suspect it is a book that Edmund would enjoy as well.

I'm very glad to hear that your math (they call it maths, I know) is putting you so comfortably ahead.
Do the best that you can, son. Make friends, be happy, do the things you enjoy, and the rest will follow.

As for the food, it's awful. Secretly, I agree with you that it does all taste like wet dog ears. I don't understand their fascination with things like steak and kidney pie, either. On the positive side, the desserts and potatoes and bread are good and New Englanders are not any better with vegetables. I remind myself that we have to really wonder at the first person who looked at a spiny lobster and said, "Let's boil and eat it." If you need anything from the American PX, let me know and Ruby and I will see what we can do about it. I've enclosed a Hershey bar, which, if you have not already eaten it, I hope you will share.

Ruby has had a difficult time with finding work. She would like to work at the hospital at the University. At some point, they just look foolish inventing excuses for turning away a highly qualified nurse given the acute needs everywhere. It really bothers me, but I hope that our British hosts may rise above America, at least as things stand in the Southern states. If nothing else, once we start seeing Negro American units here, command will need Negro nurses to care for the men.

I understand there is also a need for qualified mechanics and you know how handy Ruby is with engines, even if she hates getting her hands dirty.

I am omitting for your sake my usual harangue on the subject of segregation in the American armed forces. Please don't tell any of your British friends. We're not supposed to talk about it and I'm the hypocrite for hating it but following the order to not discuss it.

I cannot tell you much of work, but it is going better and we are moving into what will be a very busy time.

I will see if I can spring you free for Thanksgiving, assuming I can get sprung myself. Perhaps the PX will have a turkey and maybe Ruby can manage a proper oyster dressing.

Love,

Dad

From: John T. Clark
Blackpool Forest School
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire

To: Lucy Pevensie
Marlhurst-Brockstone School
Newbury
Berkshire

Dear Lucy,

As you can see from what's inside the envelope, I'm sending you half the Hershey bar I got from Dad.

I hope you were able to spend some time with Susan and your Mum like you wanted to. I heard from Ed about your Dad and I'm sorry that he didn't come home. I know what that's like, though it is different for me with my mom gone and Ruby instead. I did appreciate how you and Ed both understood that you can have a good family even if it doesn't look like everyone else's.
Did you like going to the rally with Miss Plummer?

School's alright. It's not that different from the prep schools I attended in Massachusetts, though the food is a lot worse and I wish everyone spoke English! Really, I can't understand half of what some of the "blokes" say. The sports are good but this time of year back home we would be playing American football and I miss that. They also are putting us through this Officer Training Corps, which near as I can tell, OTC is a lot of running and marching and calisthenics while some fellow pretends to be a staff sergeant and yells at you.

Your brother, Peter, by the way, has been the talk of the school. There was a training corps competition among the oldest students (we would call them seniors; I guess you all call them the upper and lower Sixths?) from several of the boys' schools in the area. Officers from the Service Board and recruiting centres were judging. They sent the boys around an obstacle course with a pack and then had a map reading task, a signals exercise, and target shooting. Your brother was the first across the line by a mile, and broke a slew of school and corps records. There was apparently some to-do with the GSC wanting to haul him off the next day, with Peter ready to pack his bag, then everyone realizing your mother had to sign first and even then they have to wait until he's 17 next year.

I hope you are doing fine.

Your friend,

Jack

LUCY PEVENSIE'S DIARY

Dear Aidan:

I have been very preoccupied with the return to school. I have quarreled with someone who has made me cross, and learned of things in the greater world that have made me even more cross. I have reforged a friendship I thought had been broken and together we have done some very silly things to a very silly and cruel girl.

Aslan is with me, though he was not happy about those silly things I did to that cruel girl. Secretly, between you and I alone, I think he did laugh. Aslan has always appreciated a good joke, especially if it involves chewing mice and frogs and foolish girls who scream at them.

And, my dearest, I think I see something happening here that has me very confused. Perhaps it will come to nothing and with school starting, this may solve the problem, if it exists. I wish I could speak to Edmund about this because he would understand. He misses Morgan as I miss you. He is not ready to discuss it, though. So, in this I am alone.

I love you. I have things I am called to do, first. I must live and work in this world as fully as I did in Narnia. Give my love to Briony and all our friends.

Until my work is done or Aslan calls me to you,

Lucy

From: Professor Digory Kirke
Oxford University
Ox
To:
Lucy Pevensie
Marlhurst-Brockstone School
Newbury
Berkshire

Dear Lucy:

I am sorry to hear of your argument with the school vicar. He is a man of a very narrow understanding and even more limited learning. Do keep in mind that Jesus of Nazareth, when read historically, was a very radical figure and just how radical would certainly be a shock to many who purport to follow his teachings. The Nazarene was born and died a Jew and did not, as your school vicar asserted, "convert to Christianity" upon his baptism in the Jordan.

Regrettably, Lucy, these conflicts will continue and you must decide how you shall manage them. As a veteran of this war myself, it is a path I would wish you did not have to walk for it will not get easier. I include another book by Archbishop Temple and some poems by Hopkins. Both may provide comfort to you.

To avoid cynicism, do continue your study of the Archbishop's teachings and I shall exert myself to find others who may be more aligned with the direction of Aslan's call that you perceive. It also occurs to me that you would do well to meet others of different traditions. In this way, you might see better the many ways that peoples of this world celebrate divine Creation and encourage moral living beyond the confines of the Book of Common Prayer and the shallow men who purport to understand your spiritual journey but are mostly concerned with keeping you silent, unthinking, and obedient. I was delighted to hear that you met Kwong Lee and Lin Kun and Mr. Patel so recently. Both Peter and Edmund have enjoyed their time with Asim bin Kalil. This is not traditional in the slightest, my dear Lucy, but then neither are you and your singular experiences.

You are very much in my thoughts and please give my regards to Aslan,

Digory Kirke

From:
Professor Digory Kirke
Oxford University
Ox

To: Charles Brown-Davies
Head of School
Blackpool Forest School
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire

Dear BD,

Congratulations on your school's performance in the OTC games. I read of it in the local papers. I am sure you will agree that there is little point to Peter Pevensie continuing his regular coursework at Blackpool. I shall coach him through his exams this term and then he will be off for training after the turn of the year. From the reports, it seemed that the Selection Board had already packed his bags.

Please tell Mister Pevensie that I will expect him beginning Thursday next.
From: Peter Pevensie
Blackpool Forest School
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire

To: Mrs. John Pevensie
Finchley Road
Finchley
Barnet, London

Dear Mum:

I apologize for not giving you fair warning of the letter from the Selection Board. After the exercises at school, they were surprised to learn my age or I might already be in basic training. This all happened very quickly.

Thank you for signing the consent. As we discussed, I am certain this is what I should do, for a time. Please do not think it merely the arrogance and naiveté of youth when I say that I am very confident of my combat readiness and I believe I will be an asset to whatever unit I am assigned. I am called to this duty and must respond.

I will sit for my exams as planned and begin the admissions process. The Professor is seeing to all that.

Thank you again for understanding.

Your loving son,

Peter

From: Mr. John Pevensie
British Security Coordination
Rockefeller Centre
New York, NY
USA

To: Peter Pevensie
Blackpool Forest School
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire

Dear Son:

I understand through Mum that you have studied very hard and are excelling at school. This is wonderful news, though I expected no less. With the Professor's assistance and my own influence, there should be no obstacle to your admission.
There is no need at all to rush to the front. Make yourself useful, study hard, and make your parents proud. If you persist in this belief that the British armed forces cannot do without your presence, please advise. There are some excellent, highly placed men in my office and they will find something suitable for you here in America with the BSC.

Give my regards to Edmund.

Sincerely,

Your father

From: SR Patel
c/o Richard Russell
Russell House
Combe
Oxfordshire
England
c/o Consul of Great Britain, Nairobi
c/o Mary Leakey
Nairobi
Kenya Colony

Mary-

Richard dictated the enclosed for Wangari. Could you please contact her and see that she receives it? I hope that you all are well and have good luck next season. Should you be able to return to England, a visit with Richard would not be amiss. He will not travel again. I suspect, as we all do, that travel will become more difficult before it is easier.

My well wishes for the continued good health of you and your family,

SR Patel

O00OO00OO

Dear Wangari:

It is as I feared and as we discussed. What afflicted my father and grandfather now has me. Unless you are able to come here, I shall not see you again, until what adventure the hereafter holds for us.

Kioni should have had her baby by now. I hope that they are all doing well. Such love I do not give to you, I give to our children and grandchildren, little though it all is.

Continue to draw from the account as you need. The bank in Nyeri has a correspondent relationship with Barclay's and they have the details. At the advice of your friend, Sims (who also sends his regards), I had the funds converted to mostly American dollars. He seems to think that important given what state the British economy will likely be in once the war ends. American currency will be more stable, he believes. As my head for numbers is even worse than my ability to measure a lorry's load capacity, I am heeding his advise.

I never married for money, but married women who knew how to manage it. It is poor consolation
but at least you and our family shall not be in need. Should any matter arise which necessitates you or any member of our family leaving Kenya, or any other thing, seek out Sims, and Mary here in England. They will do for you what I cannot.

The blessings of Ngai upon you, who I continue to assert is a SHE. Someday, we shall solve the mystery together.

Your loving husband, Richard Gatura

From: Polly Plummer
Victoria Street
Dunstable
Bedfordshire

To:
Richard Russell
Russell House
Combe
Ox

Dear Goat:

You are an absolute Goat and a lunatic and if Mary moves to lock you up, I shall be there with the key.

Yes, I have jumped out of airplanes before and I am, as you very well know, a crack shot. I am not, however, daft and so I shall decline to mount an invasion of occupied Norway to locate breeding pairs of *Castor fiber*. I do not care that you think Asim might be able to "call in a favour." And I do beg to differ on your assessment. Asim is sensible. I am sensible. You are cracked.

Love always, Bird

From:
Maj. A.A.M. al-Masri
London

To: Maj. John Howard
'D Coy'
2nd Battalion, Ox & Bucks

Major Howard-

It was a pleasure seeing you again last week and my congratulations are long overdue to you on the promotion "back" to Major. As promised, I enclose the clipping regarding the remarkable performance by a young man at the recent OTC games for the South East counties. I have come to know Mr. Pevensie very well and can think of none better for D Company.

While still some months away, unless I hear differently, I shall recommend he attempt to enlist in the Ox & Bucks and after basic training try to join the 2nd Battalion. Mr. Pevensie is very conscious than asking for a particular assignment may be a surety of not receiving it, but perhaps indicating his willingness to jump out of planes and fly in ones that do not have engines will hurry that along.

With regards to Mrs. Howard,
By Courier:

From: Madame Yvonne-Renee Simon
Beaulieu
Brockenhurst
Hampshire

To: Vera Atkins
French Section
SOE
Baker Street
London

[Translated from French]

Dear Vera:

I have met with Mme. Caspian. I was skeptical, of course. I felt that perhaps our men in America had had their heads turned for a pretty face and nice legs even though Mme Carré was so complimentary and she praises so few. I found this collective infatuation very peculiar.

I had arranged to meet Mme. Caspian at a tea shop in Newbury. I arrived early, but she had anticipated me. When I entered, she was ordering tea in broken English and expressing, in French, her frustration at her poor mastery of English. It was a masterful performance. It was her American clothes that revealed her, a shortcoming I have urged her to begin to address.

We spoke the whole of two hours in French. She is a natural actress, charming, confident, very clever, and very pretty. Given our desperation for radio operators, I spoke to her at length about her technical skill and while she would need training, I believe this a small obstacle easily overcome given her proven facility with locks. She does not know how to drive, but professed no concern at all in learning to do so. She has some basic medical knowledge as well, binding bones, bandaging wounds and similar. We have already heard of her proficiency in defence and she discussed the Embassy incident and her role in apprehending the spy more calmly than I would have expected.

She has only been to France twice, and those were short trips, with family and with school. Her accent is, like that of her teacher, very of the Loire Valley.

I was prepared to recommend an interview with you as soon as could be arranged. She requires training and polish, but she was very eager and I felt what she lacked of France and skill might be acquired at the Beaulieu Finishing School, with placement perhaps in a support position with a native.

As we concluded our interview, I then asked to see her identity card – her true one – as I was instructed to do. She was very reluctant, even rebellious. I insisted and she finally relented.

I understand her obstinacy for surely this identity card must be a forgery. I assumed her to be at least twenty, and at times her manner and conversation seemed far older, for all that she was speaking her non-native tongue. Really, I could not begin to guess her true age.

I do not know what to make of it, Vera. We would be mad as Englishmen to fail to use this resource. She is wasted in school. I shall continue to tutor her and we can begin to work on a legend for her. If
her mother might be prevailed upon, I strongly recommend removing her from school altogether and bringing her on as an assistant at Beaulieu. We always need the help, she may continue to learn, and when the time comes, the only question will be why Mme. Caspian was not sent to France earlier. I understand that Walker-Smythe is willing to consider looking the other way by this time next year, with plans for possible insertion in 1944.

We should keep this amongst ourselves for now.

Yvonne

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From: Peter Pevensie  
Blackpool Forest School  
Tilehurst  
Reading  
Berkshire

to:  
Susan Pevensie  
Marlhurst-Brockstone School  
Newbury  
Berkshire

Dear Susan:

Thank you for the congratulatory words about the OTC competition wins. They were just games, silly really, but they mattered and I did feel Aslan's approval in it. They were not the end, but the means - a distinction which I know you appreciate. This sense of his approval has happened to me all too rarely in the past year or so - one important, memorable day with Richard, but otherwise I have felt little of Aslan's pleasure or presence in my actions. I had played the fool during these games until now and understand now so well what you meant about the relief of finally letting Narnia out, to show ourselves for what we are.

I am resolved to enter the airborne division if they will have me. This means I will decline your offer to see me situated in your old office in America and I appreciate that you have ceded this point to me so gracefully.

Father, I fear, is another matter. It is my hope that my commitment to sit for exams and achieve admission will temper his disappointment. I know you recognize that rhetorical and management strategy. He feels that if I delay to the last possible moment, the war will end, thereby rendering my service in it moot. Failing that, he would have me in the same work you so recently advocated. It greatly pains me to think I would grieve him when Father has done so much to encourage me and given so much. But, his war work is not where my gifted purpose lies, such as it is.

By Aslan's grace, this shall be the last time I disappoint Father. To do so hurts our Father and the Lion certainly expects more of me. I expect more of myself.

Now, it is late, and I shall sneak a glass of tequila and complete my reading. I shall be in Oxford frequently with the Professor so letters will find me there as well as here.

Your brother (and not father to your 32 non-existent children)

Peter
From: Lt. Col. Thomas B. Clark  
Impington Lane  
Impington  
Cambridgeshire

To: M. Anning Russell  
Russell House  
Combe  
Oxfordshire

Dear Mrs. Russell:

Thank you for your thank you note. The chocolate was no trouble at all. Major al-Masri has been an enormous help to me and I was pleased to able to show my gratitude. I am not trying to buy a favor, but I do enclose another Hershey bar and I hope that you will enjoy and share it with my compliments.

Please accept my heartfelt wishes and prayers for your husband's full recovery.

Major al-Masri suggested that I present our current problem to you. I use the word "suggested" in jest for when I resisted his idea, he stated clearly that if I did not do so, he would. In truth, I am running out of time, ideas, and patience. My housekeeper, Ruby Smith, is a trained nurse and has cared for my son, Jack in the stead of his mother. Ruby graduated from a respected College of Nursing in Boston, Massachusetts, and has been on the staff of hospitals in New York and Boston for a decade. Yet, she seems unable to obtain any employment around the Cambridge area and I regret to say that it is likely because she is Negro. The situation will probably improve in the months ahead. However, for now, I am sure you appreciate the unhappiness of a trained and talented woman with nothing to do.

I certainly do not mean to seek employment on Ruby's behalf and forgive me if it appears so. However, Major al-Masri had suggested that you might have learned of staffing shortages in the Oxford area. If so, would you let me know of it? Perhaps there is a more forward thinking, progressive hospital, or a women's hospital? Or, a hospital whose focus is serving patients who are not white?

Thank you for your time and attention and again, I hope that this finds your husband in better health.

Sincerely,

Thomas B. Clark

From:  
Mrs. John Pevensie  
Finchley Road  
Finchley  
Barnet, London

To: Miss Polly Plummer  
Victoria Street  
Dunstable  
Bedfordshire

Dear Miss Plummer:
I want to thank you again for taking Lucy to the Caxton Hall rally. Lucy spoke at length about the speakers from the Polish National Council and the atrocities being committed against Jews by the Nazis. She was very moved by the presentations and, yes, upset as would be expected. She came home and promptly sent off letters to the PM and the Home Secretary. I found it necessary to curb her enthusiastic language a little and I do hope she concentrates upon her spelling in school!

Amidst the upset, Lucy was very excited to see Miss Mary Sutherland in person. Thank you for introducing Lucy to her. I believe that as the National Labour Party Chief Woman Officer, Miss Sutherland is the most esteemed person Lucy has ever met! I do admire Miss Sutherland's work on behalf of women and children and her efforts to secure meals and milk for school children. Lucy seemed quite taken with her and with you, and I am pleased that Lucy has come to know such accomplished women.

I do wonder at the sources of Lucy's seemingly new found political passions. I thought it might have arisen during her time with her aunt and uncle. On further reflection, I believe this unlikely.

To that end, at your convenience, might we have tea and discuss this further? I would welcome Professor Kirke, of course, as well. As you both saw so much of Peter this holiday, I would like to hear of his time, too. I would be glad to meet the two of you, either at your home, or his, or somewhere in between.

Perhaps you might also be able to enlighten me on the reasons for Edmund's new enthusiasm for Russian and German?

Sincerely,

Mrs. John Pevensie

To follow, Chapter 10, Lionsgate
Chapter Summary

In which there are reports of escaped circus lions in Shropshire and Polly investigates.

Chapter 10, Apostolic Way

When last we left off, there were many letters exchanged, school had begun, and a path was beginning to open for Susan and Peter that seems to be leading to France.

This chapter is huge, but some of it is a re-tread of Under Cover, so I did not split it.

We must find new lands from which we can easily obtain raw materials and at the same time exploit the cheap slave labor that is available from the natives of the colonies. The colonies would also provide a dumping ground for the surplus goods produced in our factories.

Cecil Rhodes

The battle is going very heavily against us. We're being crushed by the enemy weight. We are facing very difficult days, perhaps the most difficult that a man can undergo.

November 3, 1942, Field Marshall Erwin Rommel

This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.

Winston Churchill, November 10, 1942, after victory at El Alamein

Things happening in tandem were, in Polly's experience, often not a good thing. Exceptions included dancing and activity at Russell House. She supposed a military invasion benefited from simultaneous occurrence, but Polly had never been part of one of those. At Russell House, the only person who was unorganized was Richard, and that was only by comparison. There were lists, there were tasks, there were assignments, there were rosters, and everyone followed them. Even Mary's habitual tardiness was built into the schedules. Everything was in choreographed synchrony – Mary peddling down the lane to pick up the grocer order while Lee finished the biscuits while Asim hung out the laundry while Patel caulked the windows while Kun picked the vegetables.

Polly had already fallen into the comforting routine by the second morning of her stay. She had taken a few days off to lend a hand with Richard's removal from the hospital to the house. An employer was usually not so accommodating, but when she'd told Gerry she needed to spend time with Richard Russell, the Whipsnade Zoo curator had been more than generous. One didn't say "no" to Richard Russell in their line of work.

She had fed the chickens, slopped the pigs, turned out the horse and cows into the pasture, walked Simon around the pond (all on the roster under "Polly"), skimmed the morning news, and had only just sat down for breakfast at the communal kitchen table. They were eating Chinese that morning. Everyone, save Richard, was up and about and Polly was fortifying herself for that summons that
would come shortly.

Two things occurred at once that were not on the schedule and so were foreboding. The newly installed telephone – there because of Asim's work (whatever it was at the moment but obviously very intense) – pealed at the precise moment there was a frantic knocking on the front door bell.

Her immediate thought was that it was a disaster in the War that was summoning Asim but the reports from Guadalcanal and Stalingrad were not any more horrific than would have been expected and might even be better.

Asim rose from his morning tea for the telephone on the assumption it was for him. On the roster, it was Kun's turn to get the door and on his way to the front hall he grabbed some coin from the kitchen till in case it was a messenger boy from the village. Anyone local and deliveries came to the back door.

Polly did not want to listen, of course, but everyone at the table held a collective breath. The telephone was very new and they still thought it only to be used in the most dire of emergencies.

"Of course," Asim said politely. "A moment please. She is right here."

There was a little gasp from Lee – a death? - but Asim shook his head. "Polly, it's the Zoo on the phone," and handed her the receiver.

What on earth?

"Hello, yes, this is Polly Plummer."

There was a crackle and the voice sounded like it was coming from the bottom of a well. "Thank God I found you, Polly!"

"Gerry?" The curator? This was ridiculous! "I hope you have a good reason for bothering me!"

There was more crunching, like the sounds of parrots cracking shells, and then Gerry's voice broke through. "I am sorry, Polly. But this is a real emergency. There's been a report of a lion loose at a school in Telford, in Shropshire. It's all nonsense, but there's an inquiry, the school is in an uproar, and the constable has asked us to send someone to investigate. Since you are halfway there…"

A lion! It was ridiculous. "I'm on holiday, Gerry and I'm not going to drive to…" Polly swallowed the remainder of her rising objections. Telford? Why was that familiar?

Kun returned to the kitchen, holding a telegram. Again, Asim reached for it but Kun shook his head and handed it to her. With the telephone still plastered to her ear and Gerry blathering on about hysterical teachers and students and escaped convicts, Polly tore open the telegram.

It was from Digory.

_Eustace 2 N. Experiment House bedlam. Closing 4 inquiry. E needs lift lodging 4 2. Will train to Telford unless u do or meet u there?_

"Gerry, shut it!" Polly ordered. "What's the name of the school?" But she already knew. _Lion my arse_, as a Narnian Otter would say.

"Experiment House," Gerry confirmed. "Eyton upon the Weald Moors."

"Got it!" Polly replied. "I'm already out the door."
She hung up and felt a thrill of excitement. Was Aslan here? Really here? Surely he was not still roaming the moors of Shropshire with Eustace and – she studied the telegram – some other person?

"Polly?" Lee prompted.

She pulled her attention back to the silent, rapt audience in the kitchen. "There has been a report of an incident at a school in Telford – an escaped circus lion and convicts run amuck and the police have asked Whipsnade for a consult."

"Telford?" Mary asked sharply. "Isn't that where…"

Polly waved the telegram. "As it happens, yes. Digory has heard from Eustace that it happened at his school, at Experiment House."

"What a load of rot," Mary said with vehemence. "The Head is a complete nutter and the Head of Sciences is an idiot."

"Who are all raving about rampaging circus lions. Digory says they are closing the school for an inquiry and Eustace needs temporary lodging until the school reopens." It was very sensible of Eustace to contact Digory. So recently returned from Narnia, Eustace would not want to be alone with his parents anymore than they would want him.

"Oh, Polly, since you are going anyway, do bring Eustace back here!" Mary said enthusiastically. "Digs' cottage is so small! We have plenty of room and I'm sure he would enjoy it."

"That is very generous of you, Mary," Polly said feelingly. It was an excellent suggestion. "Though, there may be another as well, according to Digory." That made sense, actually. Aslan would probably not have called Eustace alone.

"As long as he or she is not odious and rude, I don't think we have a problem with another." Mary looked around at the others. "Do we?"

Lee was already slicing bread. "I will make you some food to take, Polly."

Patel pulled the tin on the table to him and began consulting the rationing coupons. Polly received additional petrol coupons anyway because she worked for the zoo, but this was a long distance.

"As it is police work, you should argue for an additional allotment," Patel said, handing her a ration booklet. "Make sure you get the proper paperwork and have it signed before you leave."

With all the driving he did about the country on official matters, Patel knew all the ins and outs of extra coupons for "official" business.

Polly hurriedly washed her bun down with the last of her tea. It was going to be a long day. "Thank you, I will. I will just put a few things in my carpet bag. Do you mind if Simon stays here?"

The spaniel, looking at her dolefully, leaned into Kun and shoved his nose into the man's hand. For answer, Kun ran a hand over Simon's head.

"A lion in Shropshire with Eustace?" Asim asked, picking up his abandoned tea cup. "That would be remarkable."

"Eustace is more interested in reptiles than lions," Mary said, sorting through the file folder kept in the kitchen labeled Maps of England, Scotland, and Wales. "I cannot wait to show him the lab."
Lab was actually ballroom, but resembling a laboratory as it was filled with plaster blocks of prehistoric remains and constrictors and lizards in terrariums.

"Asim, could you get one of the packs from the boot of the Standard for Polly?" Mary continued. "It's a long way and she'll need provisions if she gets stranded." Kun was putting a paper and a pencil at her elbow as Mary set a War Office map of Western England next to a Popular Edition Ordnance Survey. Asim kept them well supplied in maps and Mary collected them the way other women hoarded Limoges boxes. Polly had learned to trust Mary's orienteering the first time they had crossed into the Tadrart Acacus together.

"No anchovy paste, if you please," Polly replied firmly.

"We will contact the school and tell Eustace you are on the way," Asim said. "And wire Digory to tell him the plan."

Fifteen minutes later, Polly was putting her bag, umbrella, and Lee's provisions in the MG. She hadn't bothered to change out of her boots and trousers – the look gave her the rough and ready air of an adventurer zookeeper and that would suit the occasion very well. She'd filled a canteen with wine – returning from Narnia, Eustace would be thirsty for it. Asim met her at the car with a pack.

"A small one," Asim said, setting it on the passenger seat. "And no anchovy paste."

"Thank you on both counts," Polly said, putting Mary's directions on the dash. "It will be a tight fit for the drive back, especially if, as Digory said in the telegram, there is another student coming with Eustace."

Asim tilted his head in the direction of Mary's larger car. "Would you like me to drive you? I do not imagine you will need a gun but I could bring one in case there really is a lion?"

Asim's look was so neutral and his tone was so wistful and bland, Polly was taken aback. She suddenly remembered what Peter had said. Asim had dreamt of the Dawn Treader. Had there been a Lion in those dreams, too? Richard claimed he had been visited by a talking Cat and he'd been far too lucid to dismiss his assertion as delusional. Did Asim harbour similar knowledge? It was all preposterous except that, as she had discussed with Peter and Digory, the peril of being Narnian was that you became so accustomed to singularity, your standards of normalcy were forever askew.

"Do you know something about this peculiar business that you wish to tell me?" Polly asked.

He shook his head. "No, not at all. But I am curious." He paused. "I also take an interest in Peter's family."

According to Peter, Asim had practically sworn fealty to him and this was, she supposed, a manifestation of that.

The practicality won out. Whatever Asim had divined, he surely did not know the full story and with Eustace only just returned, he would wish to talk of it. How long had Eustace been gone – Weeks? Months? Years?

"Thank you, Asim for the offer, but I am sure it will be fine. I think the lion is some misunderstanding because if there was an escaped lion, we would have known about it before it made its way to soggy Weald Moor. On the off chance I do need a gun, the locals will have something that will serve that is more powerful than your service revolver."

That last bit was a lie, but Polly felt excused. Jadis had thrown a metal bar at Aslan and the Lion hadn't paused a step; Polly was certain a gun would have no effect at all.
She climbed into the car. "Ma'a salama."

"Bissalama. Drive safely, Polly."

Experiment House was as dreary as every other public school and looked more like a gaol than anything else. It was damp, gray, mid-afternoon, and the fog had probably never really burned off and would just get heavier. The car park was crowded with anxious parents and Bobbies, and a few members of the Home Guard. Nothing much happened in Shrewsbury, so an escaped lion and madmen in medieval dress were the most exciting thing that had occurred since about 1403. Polly brandished her credentials and her umbrella and the constabulary parted before her, like Moses at the Red Sea.

Polly tried to undertake her examination and interviews in a very professional way. It was very difficult to do so and not burst into inappropriate laughter. She was anxious to see Eustace and firmly told a dithering faculty member and a junior constable to please inform Mister Eustace Scrubb immediately that she had arrived. She had to threaten them with her carpet bag but they eventually scurried off to do her bidding.

The Chief Constable, an elderly, sensible man, solemnly escorted her to the scene of the crime. She made a show of carefully inspecting the wall that had been broken and "Begging your pardon, Miss Plummer, but they say it was repaired as if by magic." The door to the moor was also opened for her review so she could thoroughly examine the ground on both sides of the school's wall.

To the hovering cluster of very old and very young men in uniform, Polly pronounced her findings with firm authority. "I see sheep, cow, and pony spoor and hoof prints. There is no evidence of lion." The Chief nodded his agreement and took notes in a little book. She pushed a boot into the soft turf and pulled it out with a squelch. "A male lion of the size described would have left tracks. There are none." From the thorn bush and the nearby shrubs, she plucked bird feathers, sheep's wool, and long hair from a horse's tail. "These are not lion hairs." With a silent apology to Aslan, she concluded, "In my expert opinion, there was no lion here."

Wanting to appear thorough, Polly asked to see the witnesses. She could not speak to the Head, who had been carted off to the hospital raving about men with swords, a woman with a crop, and a savage lion. Polly interviewed the "survivors" and examined their minor scratches, welts, and bruises.

"I have seen the complained-of injuries, Chief Constable, and these are in the nature of a firm spanking, not a mauling by an African lion."

Nevertheless, the marks were real, which meant that something had chosen to punish these children.

The answer came from the beet-faced, grumbling nurse. "Whining, cowardly bullies who got what they deserved and bless the ones that did it," she muttered as Polly left the infirmary.

And that was that. She harried the Chief Constable over petrol rations, and finally was escorted to the gymnasium to see Eustace.

The gym was crowded with tired children, angry parents, forbearing police, harried teachers, wooden chairs, and a lot of tea cups. Polly looked about, wondering how she was ever going to find Eustace in this crush. Her eye was pulled to a corner and she saw him the same moment he found her. Even from across a sticky, noisy gymnasium, Polly could see the glow of Narnia.

*Oh Eustace.*
She shoved and pushed her way toward him, but Eustace was faster and a breath later, he ran up and unashamedly threw his arms around her.

"Thank you, Polly," he whispered.

The scent of the Lion lingered on him and she felt Aslan's strength in his arms.

"The Lion is with you," she whispered back, and hugged him fiercely, taking from Eustace a little bit of the Narnia bursting from him.

Eustace pulled away. "You need to meet Pole. She's not been able to reach anyone. She can come too?"

There was something a little defensive in his tone, a shade of the old, un-dragoned boy.

"Of course," Polly retorted, wondering at his attitude.

Eustace turned about and gestured to a girl who rose from the seat next to the one he just vacated and stepped tentatively toward them.

Polly smiled, feeling prodigiously proud of Eustace and at that moment better disposed toward Experiment House than she would have thought possible. It was a credit to them all.

"If we're Narnian, it shouldn't matter and Pole's been a brick," Eustace muttered, his defensiveness now explained.

She gave him a reassuring squeeze. "You're quite right, Eustace." Polly held out a welcoming hand. "Miss Pole?"

The girl nodded. "Jill, Ma'am. My name is Jill."

Polly stepped forward and embraced Jill, wanting her to know that here, at least, she was completely accepted. "And I'm Polly. By Aslan's grace, it is always a pleasure to meet another Friend of Narnia."

Polly signed the forms and reports and paperwork and herded the children out to the MG.

"It will be cramped," she told them as they organized the cases, carpetbag, umbrella, and food. It was impressive how economical Eustace and Jill were about packing small things into smaller spaces and made her think Narnia was responsible. She was bursting with questions but they needed to get underway.

"We'll be fine," Eustace said cheerfully. "It can't be any worse than riding a Centaur. I can sit in the back."

"I'll do that, Scrubb," Jill countered. "I'm smaller."

"And it worked so well the last time we sent you through a space because you were smaller," Eustace replied.

"But that ended up well!" Jill insisted.

"Yes, so now it's my turn. And I'm not that much bigger."

The two of them bickered outside the MG in the car park until Polly's patience wore out. "Just pick
Sorry," they both muttered.

"I'll go in the back first?" Eustace offered. "We'll be tired later so it might be better for me in the front then?"

Jill nodded and they shook on it with great solemnity. The ease with which the exchange occurred indicated they were well-practiced at bickering, compromise, and making up. A lot of adults could learn from the alacrity with which Eustace and Jill managed conflict.

They all climbed in.

"There are sandwiches and biscuits in that pack," Polly told them as she pulled out of the car park. "And wine in the canteen. I thought you would probably have more of a taste for it than anything else. But eat first. I won't have you getting sick or silly."

The children dug in.

"So how did you come to be here, Polly?" Eustace asked, his mouth full of Lee's cheese sandwich. "The Professor got my telegram?"

"He did and that was smart work, Eustace," Polly told him. "I am staying with the Russells. Digory wired me there and, at the same moment, the zoo rang me up because the school wanted a consult on the escaped lion. Mary, by the by, has offered to take you both in, so we're going back to Russell House."

Eustace coughed and then wheezed. "We're going to be staying with Richard and Mary Anning Russell?"

"Is that a worry?" Jill injected, sounding very worried herself.

"Not at all," Polly assured her. "It's a lovely place and they will be happy to host you both."

"They're just famous, that's all," Eustace grumbled.

"Jill, who were you trying to contact?" Polly asked. One had to be careful in wartime in asking about anyone in particular – who could very easily be dead. Jill also, obviously, had a complex family history.

"My father is with an RAF squad on a base in the south somewhere. My mum is a First Officer in the WRENS. I don't know where she's stationed but she's not at home. I had the school send a telegram to the Admiralty, but I've not heard anything back. If they hear what happened, they'll be very worried."

This could be frightening for a parent and Jill did sound concerned— so this was not a Harold and Alberta situation. "We'll send another telegram straight off, Jill, to tell your mother where you are," Polly said. "There's also someone at Russell House who can help with the inquiry and the school knows where you went if she does contact Experiment House. She'll know you are safe."

Jill sniffed a little and took a sip of the canteen and passed it back to Eustace. "Thank you."

Polly glanced at Jill squeezed into the passenger seat and saw the girl was staring at her sandwich.

"Pole?" Eustace asked.
Jill sniffed again. "I'm trying to figure when we ate last or had a proper bath or slept in a bed. We had powdered eggs for breakfast at school this morning but we also had that wonderful breakfast in the cave, while we waited for the Centaurs and before that..."

She trailed off with an even bigger sniff and Eustace stuck his hand between the seats and patted her shoulder awkwardly. "The dinner with Rilian," Eustace said thickly.

"Pigeon pie, cold ham, salad, and honey cakes," Jill replied softly.

"We are starting at the end," Polly said briskly, before they got too emotional over the transition. She wondered if Aslan had told them they would never return; it did not seem so, but she would let them raise it. "I'd like to hear everything, from the beginning. But even before we do that, you must satisfy my curiosity. Digory had said there would be two of you in the wire, but the witnesses said there were three of you at the broken wall? And I found no evidence of lions. He was Aslan?"

"Yes, it was Aslan," Eustace said.

"And Caspian was the third person," Jill replied. "He wanted to see our world and Aslan let him."

"King Caspian? The one you sailed with, Eustace? Who your cousins put on the throne?"

"Yes," Eustace said.

Polly heard him take another drink from the canteen. Eustace was acting queer and quiet.

"Caspian died while we were there, Miss Plummer," Jill said when Eustace did not fill in the blanks. "That's why Aslan let him come to our world. Because he was already dead."

They were vague about how precisely they had come to Narnia. They were brought to Aslan's country and were separated and Polly suspected they'd had difficulty from the very beginning.

"We ran into trouble straight off," Eustace said. "And that was when I found out about Caspian – that he'd come back from our voyage and married the Star's Daughter, and was alive and still King."

"It was dreadful," Jill said. "I didn't understand why at first, but really it was so sad. Fifty years had gone by."

"And Caspian had a wretched life," Eustace said. "Everyone said his wife was so kind and everyone loved her and she was murdered and then their only son disappeared. So Caspian was all alone."

Eustace sounded very downcast and Polly could easily see why. From what she'd understood, Eustace and Caspian had, eventually, become very good friends aboard the Dawn Treader. It must have been terribly difficult for Eustace to see the young, vigorous seafaring King and friend as an old and lonely man suffering so many tragedies.

"That's why Aslan sent us, Polly," Jill explained, picking at her sandwich. "We had to search for Prince Rilian and bring him back so Caspian had an heir."

"So a boy and a girl are sent on a quest to rescue a Prince?" Polly asked, liking this untraditional version of the fairy tale.

"With a Marsh-wiggle," Eustace mumbled through a mouthful of sandwich.

"Puddleglum even warned us," Jill said. "I could not see beyond her beautiful dress and lovely horse,
and her laugh. I was a right proper fool."

Polly did not laugh at her manner of speech. Jill was still talking in ways that surely had come straight from Puddleglum, who sounded to be an absolutely terrific fellow ... Marsh-wiggle.

"We both were, Pole," Eustace said bluntly. "All that about hot food and baths and beds waiting for us at Harfang, and we just clean lost our senses. And that Witch knew it, too, and tried to send us straight to our death."

"Witch?" Polly repeated, startled. This was the first they had called her a Witch.

"Yes," Jill said. "She was a witch. She was a beautiful lady and very wicked and she was also the serpent who killed the Queen and then when Rilian rode out looking for revenge, she kidnapped him." Jill spoke so hotly at the end, she was practically spitting.

"She enchanted him," Eustace said. "She was going to make Rilian marry her and lead an army into Narnia and take it over."

"Rilian was the Witch's captive the whole time? For ten years?" Polly asked, trying to both concentrate on the dark road and listen to the very disturbing story.

"It was just beastly," Jill cried. "Rilian would have never even known his wife had killed his mother and used him to invade his own country!"

"Some of the Narnian elders thought she was like the White Witch," Eustace put in. "The same sort. You and the Professor met her, didn't you?"

Polly was so taken aback, she pulled over to the kerb. In the dark of the car, she could not see the children well. "Is everything alright, Polly?" Eustace asked.

Aslan killed her. Aslan killed Jadis. That's what the Pevensies had said. They saw him kill her.

"What did she look like, this Witch?"

"Pretty, I guess," Eustace said, sounding perplexed. "When she wasn't a big, green snake."

"Blonde," Jill said. "Green eyes. Very pretty, lovely figure, and a beautiful voice that could make you forget all common sense."

"Was she tall?" Polly asked. "Very tall?"

Jill, Polly could tell, would have noticed this sort of detail. "Tallish? She was shorter than Rilian, though."

So, the Lady of the Green Kirtle and Jadis were not the same physical person. But of the same ilk? Or something else, more magical? Based upon the manipulation Jadis attempted with Digory and accomplished with Edmund, capturing and imprisoning a young man in order to further her ends seemed to be the mark of the same person in a consistent and unsettling pattern. In this case, though, given Rilian's age and the children's description of how the Witch had kept him as her puppet and slave, Polly suspected something even more vile at work. She would keep this speculation to herself to discuss with Digory.

While the Pevensies might have comprehended the fullness of this evil, she did not think Eustace and Jill understood how very disturbing their report was. "You didn't say, but how long were you there? Was it for years, like your cousins?" She pulled the car back on to the road.
"No," Eustace said. "Nothing like that. Pole? What do you think?"

"Months," Jill said. "The moon rose and changed twice when we were on the moors, and we don't know how long we sailed on the underground sea."

"If you say so," Eustace replied and Polly could hear the shrug. "You're the one who learned the Stars from Puddleglum though I can't say it makes much sense when you've got a flat world."

"It felt longer," Jill said wistfully.

"That's because it is longer," Eustace said with a sigh. "Peter says that time is different there. Days are longer, weeks are longer, months are longer. I don't think we were there for as long as I was on the Dawn Treader, though."

Jill and Eustace were older than their years. Unlike the Pevensies, however, they were not adults.

Like any good play or novel, there was the climactic battle, and then the denouement. Jill whispered how proud she was that she hadn't gotten sick over the writhing, hacked-to-bits serpent. If Jadis and the Green Witch were of the same sort, or even the same person, Polly wondered if swords wielded by Prince, boy, and Marsh-Wiggle could accomplish what Aslan had not. It was a sobering thought and she desperately wanted a long chat with Digory.

"All the Witch's enchantments broke and the city was falling apart, so we rode away, on lovely horses," Jill said, "We went up a long, long road, nearly to the surface."

"When we couldn't go any further, we pushed Pole up through a hole and thought we'd lost her," Scrubb said, sounding miserable.

"I am sorry about that!" Jill cried. "I couldn't tell you! My mouth was full of snow!"

"And then?" Polly prompted before the two of them began quarreling, again.

"We were in the heart of Narnia," Eustace said. "The Narnians dug us out and the next day, Rilian rode to Cair Paravel to see his father dock."

There was a long, sad pause in the car.

"Was Caspian able to see his son before he died?" Polly asked.

There was sniffling and shuffling in the dark car.

"Yes," Jill said in a small voice. "Then Aslan came and took us back to his country."

"I was able to see Caspian again," Eustace said. "Like when I knew him and he was able to see our world and Aslan tore down the wall and then we were able to spank and swat Them but good."

There was tone of smug satisfaction in his voice.

"Then everyone panicked and the Head was raving," Jill said, sounding archly superior. "They were so foolish, Polly. Those bullies were all screaming and crying like babies over nothing. It wasn't as if a Giant or a giant green snake was trying to kill them."

"Quite," Polly managed without laughing.

There was so much more but their energy was flagging and Jill and Eustace would be telling the tale over and over in the days ahead until the school reopened. It was dark and late and Polly had to drive
slowly to avoid cows and sheep wandering on to the road and would pull aside on narrow lanes to let lorries go by. She was stopped twice – bombs weren't falling anymore and there was obviously something big brewing given Asim's reckless schedules. Even Patel had been busy with something, which undoubtedly meant transportation consultation and logistics. An old woman with two schoolchildren crammed into an MG was eccentric, but not dangerous and Polly was able to show the guards her identity card and state her business and what had them out.

She had thought Eustace and Jill might have fallen asleep but then Jill spoke up.

"Where are we going, Polly?"

"Combe, in Oxfordshire. We're almost there. It's the home of some friends, Richard and Mary Russell and ..."

Polly always stumbled trying to describe the household. The other denizens certainly weren't servants. "And some of the Russells' friends live there, too."

"Will there be any problem? I don't want to create a fuss and that can happen when I show up."

"If they don't like it, we'll just go somewhere else, Pole!" Eustace spoke very fiercely.

This stout loyalty and blunt speech had become a very endearing trait in Eustace.

"I assure you, Jill, I would be no Friend of Narnia if, after the heroism that you and Eustace have displayed, I take you somewhere where you would not be welcome. The only problem is that Richard Russell has been ill so he can be cantankerous."

Polly decided not to explain that Richard's other wife, Wangari, was Kikuyu and that the two wives got on famously. Such a story was not the reassurance she wished to convey to a schoolgirl.

She turned into the long drive of Russell House. Behind the blackout blinds, she could make out a light peeping through.

Jill stared at the bathtub. What is it? How does it work? Doesn't someone have to fetch hot water to fill it? And most important of all, when did I last have a bath?

The answer made her shudder. Harfang.

The knock on the door brought her out of her staring befuddlement. "Pole?" Scrubb sounded worried.

"I'm fine, Scrubb. Just…"

"The silver knobs," Scrubb said through the door. "One is for hot water and the other is for cold. You turn them and there will be water."

"I know that!" she snapped. "I'm not a fool!"

"I know you aren't! You don't have to…" Scrubb stopped and she heard him sigh from behind the door. When he spoke again, he sounded tired, not angry. "Pole, we're both going to be sensitive for a while – that's just how this works. It will really help if we don't get upset over every little thing."

She sighed too and brushed away the tears that were smarting in her eyes. "Sorry, Scrubb. You're right. I'll try." She had to remember that he was telling her what a faucet was because he had felt this before and might be feeling it again, this same fogginess and that you were too big or too small or
just didn't fit in everything around you.

She turned the knobs and watched the clean, hot water gush into the bathtub. It didn't look anything like the blue waters of Cair Paravel, the marshes of the Ettinsmoor, or the black sea on which they had sailed, forever and ever. Her hands looked clean, mostly. They couldn't be, though. They had fallen down the UNDER ME. They had crawled through that dreadful tunnel. They had fought the Witch and ridden for their lives and climbed through more holes and tunnels. She had had a wash – a good wash, even – later. And she had kept that lovely dress (that really needed to be laundered) and had managed to sneak into the school and hide it under her mattress before anyone had seen her.

She wanted to blub and she didn't know why. She wasn't sad, exactly. It was all just too much

The tub was full enough so Jill turned off the faucets. It was so quiet in the bathroom, just the drip, drip of the water. Quieter than anything she had not heard in months. No insects, no birds, no sound of oars on water, no hissing of green serpents. The sliver of soap was hard, thin, and rationed like everything else. She mustn't waste it, or the water.

She watched the steam curl up from the tub. It would be nice to have a bath, Jill decided. And to have a hot bath where she wasn't pawed by horrid giantesses who wanted to eat her.

The water did feel wonderful and she scrubbed and rinsed and felt, well, not like her old self. Scrubb was spot on when he'd told her one night on Ettinsmoor about turning from a dragon into a boy. Something about her didn't die exactly, but it sprouted, new and stronger, like a june plum tree or gungo pea bush that was finally in the right place in the garden, with enough light and water and properly drained soil.

She had the same sense of confusion when she stared at the tooth powder and brush. There wasn't any tooth brushing when trekking through Northern wastes with a Marsh-wiggle. The thought of brushing her teeth in swamp water made her shudder. Puddleglum had chewy mint sticks for them; he had used something smoky smelling and nasty tasting. She ran her tongue over her teeth. They didn't feel like they had rotted. What about Scrubb's cousins, who had been in Narnia for years and years? Did their teeth rot because they didn't have dentists? Or did they rot and then were miraculously repaired when they came back?

Jill looked at her face carefully in the mirror. She knew there had been scratches and scrapes. She'd had a mostly healed cut on her hand from when she'd been cleaning the eels and her knife had slipped. She could feel the cut still, feel how the skin was a little tender and pulled, but she couldn't see what had been there only hours ago.

Jill tied her dressing gown around her and knocked on the bathroom door that adjoined Scrubb's room. "Are you awake?" she whispered.

"Yes!"

She pushed open the door. Scrubb was lying on the floor of his room, with the blanket from the bed pull down around him.

"What are you doing on the floor?"

He sat up and looked just like he had all those days and nights in the North. "Bed's too soft, and it's too quiet, and Puddleglum isn't snoring…"

"And nothing smells like smoked eel and peat," Jill added.

He nodded. "It will pass," Scrubb said. "It did before. We just need to be patient. It will take awhile
but we'll feel like we can fit in again. We just won't fit the same way."

Jill sat down next to him and pulled his extra blanket around her.

"Stealing my blanket like always," Scrubb grumbled and pulled his blanket closer and protectively.

"You have one of your own," she retorted. Two blankets. With the ones on her bed in her room through the other side of the bathroom there would be four blankets between them. It was an embarrassment of riches. They wouldn't even need to fight over them.

"Are you alright with being here, Pole?" Scrubb asked. "Everyone seemed very nice."

She nodded. "Oh yes, it's..." Jill swallowed the words, not wanting to say that it was almost like being at home. No one here looked quite as she did, but Mr. Kalil, Mr. Patel, Mrs. Kwong and Mr. Lin weren't white either and she'd met lots of Chinese and Indians before. Mary had asked her very nice questions about Jamaica and no one acted oddly at all. Jill had been in too many homes where people had assumed she should use the backdoor and an outdoor toilet. Mrs. Kwong had poured her and Eustace milk into the same kind of glasses and Mr. Lin had put both glasses in the sink and washed them the same way. Sometimes, people boiled the dishes after she used them.

"Everyone is very nice," Jill said.

"These are from my cousins and the Professor," Scrubb said, rooting around in the blankets and then pushing telegrams at her. "Peter is sitting for his exams but he's going to come and see us. Susan sent a nice telegram, too."

Jill read them but with only half a mind to it. They were kind and did make her feel like she really belonged – that she was a Friend of Narnia, too. "Do you think we'll go back? Your cousins can't go back. Polly and the Professor never did."

Eustace pulled a loose thread from the cuff of his dressing gown. "Yes, I'm sure we will. He even said we would meet him again, some day, and when we did, we would stay."

He paused. "I'm not sure I like the sound of that," Jill said.

Scrubb shrugged. "You know better than anyone that Aslan's not always clear just to suit us. Point is, if Aslan didn't mean for us to go back, he would have told us."

Jill couldn't answer because the yawn nearly split her jaw. That morning she had been months and months younger. She pulled herself up and let his blanket drop to the floor. "I am going to bed. Good night, Scrubb. And thanks for the adventure, really."

"You, too, Pole."

Scrubb was right though. In her bed, it was too dark, too quiet, and too soft and worst of all, Scrubb wasn't there, at her back, like he'd been for months. She pulled her own blankets off the bed and went back to his door.

"Come on in, Pole," Scrubb said. When she opened the door, he was already spreading the blanket on the floor for them to sleep on top of. Camping out together and sleeping back to back wasn't a habit either of them was ready to give up just yet.

Jill curled up on the good, hard floor and then Scrubb put his back to hers and pulled the blankets (blankets!) over both of them.
"Thanks, Scrubb."

"You too, Pole. I'm glad you were there with me."

"Me too."

At 3:10 AM, Jill woke up, her body responding to dawn rising on Ettinsmoor. Next to her, Scrubb stirred.

"Go back to sleep, Pole."

She did, comforted by Scrubb's steady presence at her back and scratchy blankets that did not smell of travel and Marsh-wiggle tobacco.

When she woke again it was morning. Sun was filtering in and she could hear the buzz of a plane – Hurricane, she thought. Might her father be in it? He was out here, somewhere. Perhaps they were only a few miles apart. And where was mum? Polly said she would go into the village and send another telegram to the Admiralty. It felt very lonely to have had this grand adventure and not be able to share it with them.

Jill carefully rolled away from Scrubb and out from under their blanket and went to the window. It was very pretty here. The fields were browning. She really didn't know much about how to grow things in England, other than that it all had to be coaxed along and nursed through winter and the weak summers. It wasn't like Jamaica where everything was always competing with everything else for space and light and if you left your garden untended for a week, you might not be able to get back into it from the riotous growth.

The house was as big as anything she'd lived in since the plantation house mum had grown up in. She could see a sway-backed, chestnut horse and two milk cows in a pasture and beyond that a small barn and a much larger greenhouse. It would be lovely to think that inside the greenhouse it would be warm and damp with orchids and herbs, but it was probably just more dull English vegetables. Polly's MG and another car were parked in the drive in front of the house. She'd not noticed it last night but there was a fountain there, too, now drained and empty. Polly had said the grounds included a pond and a wood. Those must be at the back, away from the road. The village didn't look too far, a mile or two, at most.

Jill giggled to herself. Her notions of what was a reasonable walk would never be the same after trekking across Ettinsmoor.

She saw Mr. Lin come from around the house, wearing wellies and carrying a basket of greens. He looked up at her window and she waved. He waved back. Jill didn't recall him saying a word last night.

Scrubb groaned from the floor. "First morning back, always the worst."

"Is it?"

He pulled the blanket over his head.

"I'll see you downstairs, Scrubb."

Like the bath last night, it was just nice to have a proper wash and clean clothes to change into and a place where she could go to do so that didn't mean hiding behind a tree. Truth of the matter was that weeks and weeks camping with a boy and a Marsh-wiggle had not been very private or sanitary.
Still Jill would give up all the conveniences again in an instant for the adventure. She loved Narnia and Ettinsmoor had been hard and very exciting and she was very proud of their quest. Polly had called it heroic.

Jill liked being a hero, the way that her father was a cricket hero, mum was a hero for marrying father, and she was sure her parents would both be war heroes – but without dying. It would have been just beastly to have had to return to school and Them and their awful Head. Russell House was so much better and more interesting. They didn't know she and Scrubb were heroes, but they were very nice all the same.

She looked out the window, pretended to read *Gulliver's Travels* for class (she kept thinking on the sizes of the characters and not on the themes and social criticisms), brushed her hair (again), and was rewarded for her dawdling when there was a knock. "You ready, Pole?" The *yet* was implied.

"Yes!" She met Scrubb at the door.

"You look different!" she said as they went to the staircase.


She punched him in the arm. "You know what I mean!"

Scrubb stopped at the top of the landing and looked about. "It's *you-know-what*," he whispered. "That's why I seem different."

Jill grabbed his arm and stopped him from stepping on to the first stair tread. "It's a secret, right?" she whispered back.

Scrubb looked annoyed, but how was she to know any differently? "Of course it is. We don't want people thinking we're as daft as the Head and Them."

"Have you told your parents? About your first time?"

Scrubb's eyes widened in horror. "Of course not. Harold and Alberta would send me to a homeopath or even a psychiatrist!"

"What about your cousins? Have they told their parents?"

"No! How do you think your mum or father would react? Do you think they would believe you?"

Jill didn't really know. Mum was pretty traditional, but she *had* married father. Grandmama, Papa's side of course, knew lots about Obeah and magic, which until Narnia, Jill had dismissed as nonsense. Maybe the Kumina her aunts performed wasn't that different from the Great Snow Dance Jill had interrupted? Maybe?

"So I shouldn't say anything? To anyone?"

"The High King is coming today," Scrubb said. "I'd never say anything without asking him first."

Peter Pevensie. High King of Narnia. *Right.* All the Narnians spoke of him in reverent whispers, along with the Just King, the Gentle Queen and the Valiant Queen. It would be really hard to meet this royalty and see children who were not much older than Jill herself was. She would have to remember how to curtsey.

"Can we go eat now?" Scrubb whinged.
They followed the voices and wonderful smells to the kitchen. It didn't smell anything like England, Jill decided. It didn't smell like Jamaica, either. Or Canada or America. Or even Narnia.

"Can your ride drop me at the station?" Jill heard Mr. Patel ask.

"Not if you hope to catch your train to Glasgow," Mr. Kalil replied. "I can give you a lift to town."

"Good morning!" Mrs. Kwong said, seeing them lingering at the door. She was rolling dough out, thin and yellowish, on the table. She set the pin down and dusted off her hands on her apron. "Are you both rested? Hungry?"

"Yes and yes, please," Jill said.

"Thank you, yes," Scrubb said. "It all smells terrific."

Mr. Patel stood and held a chair out for her. "Thank you," she told him.

Mr. Patel was a very neat man; Jill thought his suit looked as sharp as what Grandfather had worn and his had always come from the nicest London tailors. Even Mr. Patel's pocket handkerchief was perfect and a very pretty contrasting orange and green.

"What can we get you?" Mrs. Kwong asked.

Mr. Kalil poured tea for them. Jill politely declined the sugar, as did Scrubb. Which reminded her, "We both brought our ration books, Mrs. Kwong," Jill felt comfortable adding a little milk instead of the sugar to her cup. With children in the household, they could get more milk.

"That is very thoughtful. Thank you, both."

In the daylight and not exhausted, Jill could study the kitchen. It was large and modern – larger than most dining rooms. There were pots and strange iron things hanging from racks and steel bins were in the corners and shelves with brightly painted bowls were in a corner. Besides the stove there was a hearth bricked into the back wall. The basket of greens she had seen Mr. Lin carry was on the counter by the sink. The back door was closed on the bottom and just ajar on top and so she had a peek of the very large garden. The table was covered with a bright red cloth. On the table were serving plates with an orange cakey sort of thing and big, yellow, flat things specked with green.

"What is this?" Jill asked, pointing at the orange cake.

"Handvo," Mrs. Kwong said. "A mixture of ground dal and rice that I have added carrot to, with spices."

"And there is no better use for carrots," Mr. Kalil said. "We are eating Indian this morning."

"If you would prefer something else, we have bread and," Mrs. Kwong wrinkled her face in distaste, "powdered eggs."

"No!" Jill said, accepting the offered plate from Mr. Patel. "I should very much like to try the handvo."

She took a piece from the serving tray. "Scrubb?"

"Yes, please. Peter has been talking all summer of how wonderful the food is from this kitchen."

Jill tried a little, experimental taste. She would never refuse home-cooked food like this even if she loathed it, and she knew she wouldn't. The handvo cake was a little sweet, a little savory, a little sour.
"You said it has carrot and dal? What's that?" Scrubb asked, gingerly taking a bit with his fork. He sniffed it, took a bite, and his face brightened and he took a much bigger mouthful.

"It is delicious!" Jill exclaimed. They had had a lovely meal in the cave in Narnia, and the sad one with Rilian. Before that it had been endless meals of smoked eel, hard biscuit, bacon, and wild birds – different than what they were accustomed to, but rationed all the same by what they could carry, catch, or hunt.

Scrubb nodded; his mouth was too full to talk.

"Dal and gram are what the English call lentils or dried pigeon or chick peas or beans. There are many types," Mr. Patel said. He was fussing with the yellow crepe-like thing and spreading curd over it.

"What is that?" Scrubb asked. "It looks good, too."

"Theplas," Mr. Patel said, folding the crepe up carefully.

"We make it a little spicy," Mr. Kalil warned.

Asim and Mr. Patel were both eating it with their hands. Scrubb took a piece from the plate in the middle of the table, took a bite, and started coughing. Mr. Patel passed him the curd.

"Very spicy!" Scrubb gasped, and took a spoonful of curd.

"I love spicy food! We used to grow Bonnets!" Jill tweaked one from the serving plate, took a bite, and enjoyed what seemed to her a nice hint of fresh, spicy heat. Green chilies, she thought. It would be better with a hot sauce.

Scrubb sipped some tea – he probably didn't know that putting liquid in your mouth could make it worse – and went back to eating the handvo.

Jill took another forkful of the orange cake on her plate and tasted it carefully. "Ginger?" she asked Mrs. Kwong. "And garlic?"

Mrs. Kwong nodded. "And haldi. Do you know it?"

Jill shook her head. Mrs. Kwong went to a cupboard, taking small steps. Under the apron, she was wearing a bright blue Chinese gown that was very slim. When Lee opened the cupboard, Jill caught her breath for it was filled, top to bottom, with jars and bottles and tins. It was a treasure of spices.

"Oh, that is tremendous!"

From a middle shelf (Jill wondered if it was alphabetical and if so what language) Mrs. Kwong removed a tin and brought it back to the table. Jill carefully sniffed the bright yellow powder within. She did not want to take any for what was only curiosity and spices were very hard to get now. "It looks and smells like turmeric."

"I believe they are the same," Mr. Patel said.

Mrs. Kwong smiled and carefully sealed up the tin. "You have an excellent sense of taste, Jill. That must be from growing up with West Indies food. Did you cook much?"

"With my Grandmama, on my father's side, yes. She's a fine cook." Jill didn't really want to explain
over breakfast how complicated it all was, white family and black, rich and poor, sugar cane money and cricket. She thought Mrs. Kwong and the others probably understood – they were all non-whites living in the Commonwealth, which still sometimes felt an awful lot like an Empire. She took another bite of the cake. "We used turmeric in curries and patties. We eat pigeon peas too, but not like this."

"We've managed to maintain stores of dal, gram, and rice in the house," Mr. Kalil said, sipping his tea. "It's finally starting to run low and in another few months, we will be reduced to potatoes, carrots, and cabbage unless I can arrange our resupply. Or the War ends, which is not likely."

The spice tin hit the table with a tinny clump and Lee picked up her rolling pin with rough force.

Mr. Patel lowered his voice in a conspiratorial whisper to Scrubb. "Lee doesn't like us to talk about it. She's already worried about how to cook for the lunar New Year feasts."

"We brought rice and pigeon peas with us!" Jill said, happy to make a contribution. "I'm sure we could share! When I speak to my mother…"

She felt a swell in her throat and stuttered to a stop. Scrubb pushed the tea cup into her hand with a worried look and she nodded her thanks and took a sip to ease the sudden tightness.

Jill hadn't meant to stop the conversation while she fretted but it was quiet for so long with only the sounds of eating and Mrs. Kwong rolling out the dough that Scrubb finally said, "What? What is it?"

"Lee is telling Asim that he had better find out where Jill's mother is," Mr. Patel said. "Asim has thoughts on where she might be and how to contact her but we cannot ask anything about it."

"I am glad my message was clear," Lee said shortly.

"You never have difficulty communicating by saying nothing at all, Lee," Mr. Patel said.

Mrs. Kwong scowled.

"I thought that was clever, Asim," Mr. Patel said. "Usually I coax a laugh from you?"

"Lee has a rolling pin and I am unarmed."

They all laughed at that.

There was a shuffling of steps and a sound Jill recognized very well – a thump of a cane on a wooden floor.

She and Scrubb both turned around in their seats.

"Good morning, Richard," Mrs. Kwong said.

Jill hadn't given much thought to Richard Russell. She knew Scrubb was nervous and excited to meet him. Her first impression was that he was ill – a look she immediately recognized from mum's father. Doctor Russell, just like Grandfather had been, was red and white, and thin and swollen in all the wrong places, and yellow besides and spotty, none of which was good. It looked like he had tried to shave himself, because he had lots of cuts on his neck.

She and Scrubb both scrambled up to stand. Doctor Russell's eyes slid over her with a nod. She could see the interest, so he wasn't being rude.

"Are you Scrubb?"
"Yes, sir. Eustace Scrubb."

Doctor Russell grinned. It would have been terrifying, but Scrubb had once been a dragon and they were both heroes now. And Jill knew all about crotchety, sick gentlemen.

"You're Peter and Edmund's odious cousin!"

"Yes, sir, though I'm trying to improve myself."

"And how is that working for you?"

"Some days are better than others, sir."

"Scrubb is being modest, sir," Jill injected. "He's changed ever so much. He's an absolute brick."

Did she imagine it? When Doctor Russell leaned on his cane and looked her over, he seemed to soften, just a little. "And who are you, young lady, besides not being afraid to speak your mind and defend a friend?"

"Jill Pole, sir. A schoolmate of Scrubb's at Experiment House. Mary invited us here since our school closed due to..." Jill found she could not stop the giggling. "The Head was raving about escaped convicts in medieval dress and circus lions. Polly came and collected us yesterday."

Doctor Russell's smile widened and he clumped over to an empty chair next to hers. Jill quickly pushed the chair away from the table so that it would be easier for him to sit. He flopped down heavily and when he fumbled and dropped the cane, Jill put a hand on it and hooked the handle over the table's edge within his easy reach. That way Doctor Russell wouldn't have to ask for it when he got up.

Once Doctor Russell sat, she and Scrubb returned to their seats.

"Did Polly find any?"

"Any what?" Scrubb asked.

"Circus lions in Shropshire. Polly would know a lion when she saw one."

Jill thought Doctor Russell was not being completely serious. He wasn't mocking them, exactly, but he was jesting, too.

"No, sir, there was no circus lion at Experiment House yesterday," Scrubb put in.

Doctor Russell put his elbows on the table and leaned forward. "Speaking of lions, do you know about animals the way that Peter does, Scrubb?"

"Not really, no, sir. I do know about dragons."

"Speak to Lee about them," Dr. Russell said curtly. "Or Mary, since she's the one who's interested in large, dead reptiles."

"He already has!" Mary said from the doorway. She looked very scientific this morning, in khaki trousers and wearing an old laboratory coat. Big, black-rimmed reading glasses were hanging from a chain around her neck and her hair was pulled back.

She was pretty, Jill decided. Not like how Mum was truly beautiful. Mum said it was unpatriotic for a lady to not appear at her very best to keep up morale. Mum always looked so smart, even in her
WREN uniform. Mary wasn't fashionable at all and Jill knew there weren't going to be any issues of Vogue in this house. Mum (and all the women in Mum's family) always said a lady might as well be naked as be seen without lipstick, gloves, and her hair done right. Mary was very blonde, fair, and broad across the shoulders, and her hair was pulled into a queue and not styled at all. She looked a little like some of the Narnian Dryads and Jill thought none of them ever wore lipstick.

"Good morning, Eustace, Jill. Good to see you both up. Polly went into the village to send another telegram to the Admiralty and…"

"Yes, Mary, I am," Mr. Kalil said, probably referring to what they all agreed he would not talk about.

"Exceltent!" Mary charged around the table and put her arms around Richard's neck. There was a little kissing, which made Scrubb look away with a grimace. She thought it was nice, but she also thought Mary was doing too much. The kiss was fine and Doctor Russell looked happy about that, but she knew that a sick husband wouldn't like his wife smoothing his wild looking hair, straightening his collar, and making him seem like a baby.

So it wouldn't get worse, Jill put in, "Doctor Russell, may I pour you some tea?"

"Thank you, Jill."

She knew to pour only half a cup and to put it very close to him but not too close to the table's edge.

"So, Eustace, are you ready to help me in the laboratory?" Mary said. "It's the ballroom, actually, but right now it's the laboratory. Peter never did agree to come; opted for Dunce Scotus instead." She sniffed. "A defect of character, really, which I am very glad to see you do not share. Are you done with breakfast?"

"Well, I…"

Noticing Doctor Russell's shaking hand moving toward the handvo, Jill slid the plate over so that it was closer to him. From the look of things, he was still able to reach and grasp, so she didn't get a piece for him. He wouldn't want anyone making a fuss and drawing attention to him, so she didn't.

"Drink your tea and finish your breakfast, Eustace. We don't tend to eat much at lunch and have late dinners," Mary continued on. "You don't mind snakes do you?"

Scrubb was chewing earnestly on his handvo. He swallowed. "Snakes?" His voice sounded smaller than he probably meant it to, but he seemed much calmer than Jill felt hearing that word.

"I have constrictors in the ballroom. Emerald Tree Boa and Green Tree Python? I mentioned them before, didn't I?"

Jill shuddered. Not just snakes but green snakes. It all seemed too much like her. "Are they huge?"

"I don't keep anacondas in the ballroom!" Mary said with a laugh.

"Are they poisonous?" Jill didn't like the sound of it and was annoyed that Scrubb seemed fine. He could be so Narnian sometimes.

"It would be venom, not poison, if they had it, which they don't since they're boas or pythons," Scrubb said, sounding too superior. It wasn't as if his sword had been much good against her! "They kill by squeezing prey and swallowing it whole."
"Some people don't like snakes. I think they are quite magnificent myself," Mary said.

Jill was able to snicker at that, as much because Scrubb looked so embarrassed. She'd heard Mary use that word several times last night and she knew Scrubb was horrified that it also described his (and she supposed her) High King. But, *green snakes*. Ugh.

Mary let out an aggravated breath. "Sorry. You too, Jill? I'm trying to not use that adjective since Peter is coming and I know he doesn't like it. Tomatoes and toast and all that."

"*Morelia viridis* and *Corallus caninus* are superb examples of convergent evolution," Doctor Russell said, in between bites of the handvo. Jill pushed the theplas closer to him and realised that Mrs. Kwong saw what she was doing. She nodded slightly and then went back to carefully shaping and folding her dough.

"They evolved on two different continents to fill the same environmental purpose," Doctor Russell continued, helping himself to the theplas and another serving of handvo. At least his appetite was still good. "They look the same, hunt the same way, and even hang on branches the same way, but one is Asian and the other South American. I used them for years to teach about Darwin's principles and environmental adaptation."

"But they're in cages?" Jill didn't want to be in a house with roving green snakes.

Lee's rolling pin landed heavily on the table. "They had better be."

Scrubb gulped down the last of his tea and stood. "Green constrictors are not a problem, Mary. Of course, I shall help."

He followed Mary out of the kitchen and there was the sound of a door slamming.

Mr. Kalil and Mr. Patel got up and collected the breakfast dishes and put them in the basin.

"You will need to adjust our roster since Asim and I will be gone and Jill and Eustace are here," Mr. Patel said.

"I'll be glad to help!" Jill said. "Should I wash the dishes?"

"No," Mrs. Kwong said, so firmly, Jill would never contradict her. "It's Mary's turn. We'll add you to the roster this afternoon after we know how long Peter and Digory will be here."

"Mustn't upset the duty roster Miss Pole," Doctor Russell said. "Chaos will ensue, locusts will cover the land, and all of England will sink like Atlantis into the sea."

"The day you run a household this large on nothing but potatoes and carrots is the day you may criticise, Richard." Mrs. Kwong carefully folded up her dough in a cloth and began wiping everything down. She was probably letting the dough rest. Jill wondered what she was filling it with.

Jill stood and shook hands with Mr. Patel and wished him a good journey. If Mary was a little like a Dryad (though she moved faster, wasn't as graceful, and talked a lot more), Mr. Patel was very much like a Dwarf. But taller. And skinnier.

When he and Mr. Kalil left, Mrs. Kwong followed to "straighten the rooms." Jill felt a little unwanted since she couldn't do the dishes and wasn't interested in being in a room with green snakes.

"I'm going out to the yard to watch the birds," Doctor Russell said abruptly. "Why don't you come
with me?"

"Thank you, sir, I would like that!"

He grasped his cane and pulled himself up. Jill held the back door open and they walked out on to the back lawns.

They passed the very large garden and she saw Mr. Lin by the bean frames. She waved and mindful of the duty roster called, "Should I come and help you later?"

Mr. Lin nodded and waved. He was picking the last of the runner beans still clinging to their wigwam supports and the frame reminded her poignantly of Puddleglum's hut.

"Without Kun's gardening, and Patel's contraptions to support it, our near vegetarians would starve," Dr. Russell said. "By the by, Kun sees and understands far more than he speaks."

His cane stuck in the soft grass. He pulled it out with a grunt and pointed it out over the lawns. "Our pond is behind that stand of trees. It's a lovely ancient wood, very typical of Oxfordshire, and extends into our neighbors' properties for several miles, with beech, oak, wild cherry and birch."

Doctor Russell sounded very fond of these things as he spoke. "It's all very beautiful," Jill said. The wind brought the smell of burning leaves and fresh turned earth. "Are you chilly, sir?"

"I am fine, Miss Pole. Our destination is right there and whoever's task it was on the roster this morning put a rug out for me."

A chair, two stools, and a little table with a blanket were set on the lawn. A short distance away, there was, on stilts, a wooden platform with a glass jar that had something inside it. It was all very curious.

"I set this all up after speaking with Peter over the summer," Richard said. Jill held the chair steady and he carefully lowered himself into it. She hung the cane over the chair's armrest. There was a footstool and she dragged it closer so he could put his feet up. "Peter said that his brother Edmund was very fond of corvids, crows and ravens, and that they had seen the birds using tools. If so, that's a remarkable observation. I wanted to see if the birds would do the same here."

Doctor Russell did not provide any details about why he said here, as opposed to there. She'd ask the High King about it later. Maybe Narnia wasn't as secret as Scrubb supposed. She sat on the camp stool next to him.

From the inner pocket of his jacket, he removed a battered notebook and a pencil. Doctor Russell set the book in his lap and began thumbing through it.

"What sort of tools did the birds use?" she asked.

"You have not observed it then?" His look was sharp and curious.

"No, sir." Thinking of the Parliament of Owls and Glimfeather, she added, "Though, it would not surprise me that some birds might use tools."

"Peter said crows would use sticks and bend wire to get food. So I had Patel set up that platform for the glass jar – it's too deep for the birds to reach to the bottom with their beaks alone. First we put meat on the platform to attract them and then Kun starting putting bits of meat in the jar so they know it is there but can't figure out how to get it. I've set sticks and wire around. I'm waiting to observe if the crows figure out how to use the tool to reach into the jar and get the food out."
"What have they done so far?"

"Fly off with the wire," Doctor Russell said laughing. "Peter warned me of that as well." He looked down again at his book. "So, I shall demonstrate for you just how dull animal study can be and wait here in the hope that the crows will oblige me on my schedule and display their behaviors."

"Would you like me to stay, sir? Or would you prefer your quiet?"

"I've had too much quiet, Miss Pole. Please stay. I think you know something about keeping sick curmudgeons company. A grandfather, perhaps?"

"Yes, sir. My Mum's father, in Jamaica." She stared down at her hands and twisted them in her lap. "I am missing it a lot and my family."

"Parents miss their children as well, Jill," Doctor Russell said. He sounded so kind, she glanced up and saw that he was wiping tears. She looked away, not wanting to embarrass him.

"I have wondered if maybe the birds need the idea of using the tool," Doctor Russell said after they had both blown their noses. "Miss Pole, something has occurred to me. Would you mind running over to the jar and putting one of the sticks in it? It would otherwise be cheating, but I don't want to wait to see if they can work this out without a little help."

"Of course, sir." She bounded up and ran across the lawn. There were sticks and wire on the platform and around it on the ground. She found a nice long stick, stood on her tiptoes and, by tilting the jar, was able to slide it in without tipping anything over.

"Excellent!" Doctor Russell called as she ran back and sat again on the stool next to his. He was writing in his book, but very slowly.

A big black bird landed on the platform. Jill held her breath and you could really see how the bird was studying the new thing. It pecked at the jar.

"They tried knocking the jar off the platform but it wouldn't break," Doctor Russell whispered. "I've heard of birds doing things like that to shatter shells."

The bird flew off and Doctor Russell continued scribbling in his book. She waited quietly and eventually he was satisfied and turned the page. On it was a picture of an owl. "With Peter and Digory coming today, I may finally get Peter to tell me what he knows about owls."

"That's a lovely drawing, sir. It looks very near to the real thing."

Dr. Russell looked up at her. "Scrubb said he did not know much about animals. What of you Miss Pole? Do you know something about owls?"

At this moment, there was nothing of the vacant and distracted old man that Grandfather had become; Doctor Russell was very attentive. He also obviously didn't think High King Peter was daft. Tomorrow, he might not remember her name or anything she said. "That's funny sir, but actually, I do. A bit, leastwise."

"You understand I do not just mean your observations about the Jamaican owl?" Doctor Russell said.

Jill nodded.

"If you would indulge me, Miss Pole, you may omit how you came by your understanding of owls. I
will just assume that somehow, magically, you are able to speak owl language, and we will proceed from there?"

She smiled. Doctor Russell was a very clever man. "Of course, sir. Now, I don't know what kind of owl he was, but he was large. Much, much larger and stronger than the Jamaican owl or any owl I'd ever seen in a zoo."

"How large?"

"Large enough to fly, and carry me, and catch a bat at the same time."

It was nice to see how impressed he was and Glimfeather was most deserving of such regard. "Remarkable. Tell me more about him."

"Well, sir, from what I understand, when they fly, you don't hear them at all. They think it's because their feathers are special and soft and different from other birds. Owls are very proud of their feathers and take good care of them." It had been nearly impossible to see in the Parliament, but Jill had heard the Owls discussing their grooming habits. It had reminded her a bit of Mum and her sisters discussing their hair styling.

"I've never studied their feather structure in any systematic way but I know from specimens that owl feathers are generally larger than other birds of a similar size and some feathers have a serrated edge."

Jill thought about some other things she had seen and heard the Narnian Owls discuss. "They can't swivel their eyes but that doesn't bother them at all since they can turn their head nearly all the way around, so they look almost everywhere without moving and giving themselves away when they perch."

Doctor Russell tilted his head back and looked away into the wood at the edge of the lawn. He fingered the book in his lap. "Of course," he said after a time. "Special feather adaptations for silent flight and ambush would not help a perching owl at all if it had to move about on a branch to locate prey. Movement might give it away before it even took flight."

"What is really special about Owls, sir, is how they can hear. It's why they turn their heads, you see."

He turned and stared at her. "What do you mean?"

Jill felt her forehead scrunch, trying to remember and explain what she had not understood. "They said they can make a map from sound. They see with their ears the way we see with our eyes. By turning their heads, one way and then another, they can tell how far away something is and where it is by how loud the sound is in each ear and how long it takes for the sound to get to each ear."

Doctor Russell stared at her then stared at the picture of the owl in his book. "In some species, the ears on the owl are asymmetrical; one is lower than the other. Some have unusual feathers about the head and there is the odd shape of the face in some species. Perhaps these adaptations are all related to this special hearing?"

She didn't know any of the things that Doctor Russell did. He asked amazing questions, she answered as best she could and he scribbled in his book. He laughed very hard at her description of how Glimfeather had caught the plump bat in mid-air and then courteously offered to catch her one.

A few times it seemed that he became emotional and teary-eyed. Jill held Doctor Russell's hand and talked of how much the Owls hated sunlight. When he nodded off, she took the book from his lap and tucked the rug around his knees.
She worried if maybe she had said too much. As she was setting his notebook down on the table and marking his place, the breeze blew it open to a page with a drawing of a lion. Jill knew she had done right.

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**To follow, Chapter 11**

**Squamates in the House of Russell**

A few notes and such. The references to "Gerry" are a nod to Gerald Durrell who was affiliated with the Whipsnade Zoo, though not in this time period.

A huge thanks to Clio as I've been working through Jill's heritage and also a most gracious nod to Miniver who so long ago suggested the possibility of Jill being of Afro-Caribbean heritage. It is, at last, realized fully here.

This is obviously similar to, but not quite the same as, *Under Cover* and this marks now the third time I have written the immediate aftermath of *The Silver Chair*.

This chapter is set right at the beginning of a very important time in the North African campaign, within days of the Second Battle of El Alamein. Operation Torch begins a few days after that.

The snakes in the ballroom and the owls have been referred to many times. *Morelia viridis* and *Corallus caninus* are indeed superb examples of convergent evolution and how two totally different species of snake, separated by the Pacific Ocean, nevertheless evolved on parallel lines to fill the same ecological niche. If you frequent reptile houses at zoos (as I do), the snakes are often displayed side by side. I am not sure when the remarkable qualities of owls' hearing became a research topic. The earliest papers I found in the (now public and free after 70 years!) Royal Society publishing archive were from the 1970s. If I'm wrong about that and the scholarship on owl hearing began in the 40s, we'll just say that Richard never made owls a study and so their ability to pinpoint prey by building an aural map was not something he knew of.

If you are still with me, I'd love to hear from you!
Chapter 11, Squamates
In the House of Russell

In which members of the order Squamata and their kin loom large

And if there were a God, I think it very unlikely that He would have such an uneasy vanity as to be offended by those who doubt His existence.
Bertrand Russell

And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:
Book of Genesis 3:14, King James Version (Cambridge Edition)

Wives are young men's mistresses; companions for middle age; and old men's nurses.
Francis Bacon, "Of Marriage and Single Life," Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral, 1625

"So you think this is it?" Eustace asked, squeezing out between ballroom wall and plaster block.

"I do," Mary said smugly. "Ganesha be praised and thank you for climbing back there to read off the label."

Eustace shoved plaster-coated hair back from his forehead. "What are you looking for?"

"A particular set of fossils from one of the Gobi expeditions," Mary replied, running her hands lovingly over the plaster block. "I wasn't sure if we even had it, and if we did, I was worried it would be in the cellar, the carriage house or the barn and we'd have to drag tonnes of rock, bone, and plaster across the grounds and floors and into the house."

Eustace grimaced. "Hard work, that."

"Which you have now saved me, Mr. Patel, and a score of Oxfordshire natives from undertaking."
Mary brushed dust from Eustace's sleeve. It felt strangely maternal and seemed to startle him as much as it unsettled her. Won't do that again. "Now that you have found it for me, I'll saw off the plaster and burlap that are covering the fossils that were dug up and preserved in the block."

"And after that?"

"I'll just remove the rock that's around the fossilized bone. Granted, saying 'I'll just remove the rock from around the fossilized bone' is like saying 'I'll just build the Pyramid of Giza with a teaspoon.' Especially with everything else, it will take a long time."

"And then?"
Mary put a finger to her lips. "That would be telling, Eustace. It's too early. But further investigation may reveal whether my theory has--" she chortled secretly to herself -- "wings."

"Oh, alright then."

He looked so sullenly disappointed, Mary felt she had to say more. "I promise you, Eustace, if this appears to take off," she sniggered again, "if this theory really looks like it might hold up, I'll involve you at first opportunity."

"You will?"

"I will. I do think it would be an area of interest to you." Speaking of wings. "Did Mr. Taylor give you any more trouble at school over your Huxley essay? I did threaten him. Mr. Taylor, I mean. Not Huxley. He's dead, of course."

Eustace smiled broadly. "He gave me full marks."

"You write me straight off if you have any more trouble. Though, with this inquiry, we can only hope that Taylor will be booted along with that nutter of a Head and you will have some proper instruction at Experiment House."

She rummaged in her pocket. "Humbug?"

"Thank you." Oddly though, Eustace did not immediately unwrap and eat it.

"Saving it for a special occasion?" Mary asked, biting down on hers with a satisfying crunch.

"I save them for crying girls," Eustace replied, very serious. "You were right about that. Candy does help."

Speech utterly failed her.

Eustace's face creased into a worried frown. "I'm sorry. Should I not save them? Or…?"

"It's a very grand gesture," Mary said. Sharing humbugs should not make me want to cry. As a cure for the unexpected sentimentality, Mary took her saw from the work table and held it above the block, preparing to cut the thing open. A thought struck her. Peter.

"Mary?"

"I was wondering if I should wait for your cousin. He was partly responsible for the idea. But…" She shrugged. "That's what footnotes are for! I say let's cut her open and see what's been locked away for 80 million years!"

The unveiling was postponed by a knock on the ballroom door.

Mary turned too quickly toward the door and Eustace had to jump nearly on top of the table to avoid the saw.

"Sorry!" Mary cried. "Come in!"

Jill pushed open the door.

"Asim says they should be arriving any time now and he's just ready to leave." Jill was eyeing the saw in Mary's hand and how Eustace was cornered against the table. "Are you threatening Eustace, Mary?"
"No!" she said with a laugh. "Only plaster blocks are at risk! I'm quite competent with sharp and pointy things."

"You and Lucy both," Eustace muttered, easing away from her toward Jill and the exit at a greater than arm's length distance.

"Yet another reason why I like Lucy so well," Mary replied.

She put the saw back on the table, closed her journal, and slid it under Roy's book. This copy of The New Conquest of Central Asia even belonged to her. The other three in their library did not.

She dusted off but really had to give it up as a lost cause. She'd take a bucket and mop to the trail she made out of the ballroom.

Asim was in uniform, again, his briefcase and suitcase were in the hall and, by all indications, it would be a long time away. Digs and Peter were arriving. She'd help Kun put sheets on the beds in the extra third floor rooms.

Rooms. Lee had said that Eustace and Jill were sleeping in Jill's room on the floor and they would probably move to the bed eventually. Mary had decided that at their age, it wasn't a concern and if they had been older, it would have been none of her business. Not conventional, but she wasn't their parents and it was their parents who had seen fit to send the children to that ghastly school in the first place so they weren't obviously very concerned with their children either.

She stepped out the front door to the stoop and shivered in the cool wind. It had been a damp, mild autumn so far, but the last day or two had taken a turn for the cold. Everything had been harvested and the farmers were getting the winter sowing in – the potatoes, barley and wheat. Plants had been moved into or started in the greenhouse. There was still some jarring and pickling to do though Mary thought they had laid in all their winter vegetables. Lee had been preserving and jarring the last of the tomatoes and late plums all week.

They ate well enough but a lot of energy and planning went into feeding a household of adults.

Mary wrapped her arms about her and saw Polly, Eustace, and Jill dawdling at the end of the drive where it joined with the main road that lead to the village and station. Jill was throwing a ball for Simon and the spaniel was chasing after it, gleefully barking his enthusiasm for the sport. The hedgerows made it hard to see much of the road but Mary could just see, coming from the direction of the village, the tops of two heads on the other side, both tallish, one gray, one blonde.

There were shouts and waves at the bottom of the drive and Simon, abandoning his ball, raced along the length of the hedgerow and squirmed beneath it, intent upon joining Peter and Digs on the other side. It would be good to see Digs again and Richard was anxious to spend time with Peter. Mary had come to terms with that over the summer – how much Richard had preferred Peter's company to any other, including her own. It made her husband happy, and so it made her happy. Really. Most days.

"Their train was only an hour late," Asim said, bringing his cases outside. "So it is still early. Il Duce did claim the benefit of fascism was timely trains."

Mary laughed, a little. Bloody war. "I always did prefer scooters in Italy. Now that we are back and Richard out of the hospital, I will be reporting to the ATS for duty. I was hoping they still need motorbike messengers?"

"It is likely," he said. "I doubt you will be with the searchlight units and anti-aircraft guns as before. 
The RAF bases around Witney also need radio and telephone operators."

"Or potato peeling," Mary replied gloomily. "I dare not volunteer as a driver."

"The motor pool thanks you for that, Mary." She noticed that he was looking askance at Jill, Eustace, and Polly. Their waves and calls to Digs and Peter on the other side of the hedge were drowned out by Simon's excited barking. "Your record with scooters in Italy and Morocco is very good, particularly in comparison to your record with trucks everywhere else."

"I can even fix a motorbike engine if I break it."

She'd rather motor around the countryside on scooter than peel potatoes or work a telephone exchange. Mary sighed. What she would rather do was not the point. She'd rather have Richard healthy, the plaster block excavated, be back in China, and the war over. As much as she had lived most of life forcing it to suit her whims, nothing she truly wanted now would be happening soon, or ever. Seeing to needs drowned out all wants. *There's no use trying, Alice said: one can't believe impossible things.*

Asim gave her a too-perceptive look. "I am not leaving you in good spirits."

"No," Mary admitted. "You and Patel are both leaving and who knows when you will return and that makes me anxious and Lee is worried about feeding us all though if you all are dead that won't matter."

She didn't really mean to end the statement with a complaint and a question Asim would not answer and so she continued, forcing cheer. "Though, Richard is doing better for the time being. Coming home was definitely the right decision. And Digs and Peter are arriving, Jill and Eustace are here, and there is something nice about having a house more resembling a train station than a hospital."

Peter and Digs rounded the hedgerow and the five of them were all hugging and Simon was running around the little scrum in circles barking. Strange, now that Mary thought on it. They did all hug a lot. It was very American.

And then… *Curiouser and curiouser.*

"Asim, did Jill just drop to a clumsy curtsey in front of Peter?" Really, the whole family was so peculiar.

"It would seem so, yes," Asim said. Mary noticed how he was wincing slightly, the way he did when the glare of the desert sand was especially intense.

"Peter, Digs, and Polly all still glowing like torches?"

"I should borrow your sunglasses," Asim replied. He turned his head to the side, again averting his gaze from the group in the drive. "It is just as well I am leaving. It is almost disturbing to see them all together, most especially with Eustace and Jill present."

"They are glowing too?" Mary had not expected this.

"They are. Quite painfully so."

"That was why you were so quiet last night? And you weren't facing Jill and Eustace at breakfast and didn't even come downstairs until Polly left!"

"Yes."
"Sometimes, even blessings can feel as curses," Mary said sympathetically.

He nodded. "It is not as vivid as yesterday but with all of them together, it is overwhelming." Asim finally looked away completely. "What is peculiar is that Eustace was not glowing before and now he is."

"Simon's not glowing, is he?" She was only half-joking.

"No, thankfully."

This was how it had always been—she would go, he would follow and where they went there would be something he sought. Now, Mary had stopped and still they came, never for her, never because of her, they just came, and bearing something that she could not see. Half a moment. "What do you mean, before? Eustace told me this was the first time he had met you. He didn't see you in August when they all came to Oxford."

Asim did not answer, which meant he probably could not, which meant Mary needed to drop this inquiry immediately. Most likely he had observed Eustace at some point over the summer. Why? Well, who knew, but Mary thought it might have something to do with the fact that the Pevensies' father was in America and certainly not giving lectures. However, it was unwise, unkind, and unpatriotic to attempt to coerce Asim into stating of what he could not speak. Curtailing interesting inquiries did not come naturally to her; she had become much better at it with the War.

She returned to presumptively safer ground and answered her own question. "Perhaps Eustace acquired the god-light when Lu, Eust and Ed went to N. and saw Casp and A." She quoted from the strange telegrams Peter and Edmund had exchanged the night Peter had hared off to Cambridge.

"I think that likely," Asim replied. "Further, I suspect that incident might be the reason for the change in Eustace's behavior which is marked."

Again, she would not ask how he knew but dating Eustace's change from that point made sense. Something had happened. "Edmund and Lucy did say that he had improved over the summer. They were very elliptical about it. It's a family trait."

Asim nodded. "Reflecting another family trait, Eustace is a very good friend to Jill."

"True." The family was unexpectedly worldly. Mary had seen Peter's friendship with Asim. Lee and Mr. Patel had told her after meeting the family in Liverpool that Susan, Edmund, and Lucy all shared the same ease; their mother had been less comfortable. "Do you still believe they meant A to be Allah in those telegrams?"

The car, his ride to wherever he was going, was pulling on to the long drive. It swerved around the hugging, huddled and curtseying group and rumbled toward the house. Asim put on his cap.

"Of a sort. Kun believes N. is Neverland."

Mary grumbled but could not dismiss it, not entirely. It stretched credulity beyond all reason but, as she had told Eustace, just because it had not been documented didn't mean it wasn't there. It just meant no one had found it who could report on it. Kun was as profoundly spiritual as Asim, though in a more fantastical way. "If they have been down the rabbit hole and through the looking glass, I shall be envious."

Asim stared at her long enough to make her wonder at his omission. The moment passed as the car ground to a stop on the gravel. "If I receive any word of Jill's mother, I shall send a wire." Asim picked up his case. "I will be living elsewhere for some time, several weeks at least. Good bye,
Mary.

Was he traveling somewhere? Might her friend die? "Allah yasalmak," she replied in return. And may your God keep you safe.

They never shook hands or embraced. She never touched Asim at all.

"We shall all be listening for the fruits of your labour, however, they come."

He tossed his bag into the boot and climbed into the passenger side. The driver, a woman and ATS sergeant, saluted.

The car pulled over at the end of the drive and Asim made his farewell to everyone else.

Mary waited on the step, thinking that the others would come in the house for a chat. But only Peter came, leaving everyone behind and jogging up the drive and steps. He was juggling a bulging rucksack, Digs' battered satchel – which she recognized because she had pilfered pencils from it before – and two small bags.

"Hello, Mary! Splendid to see you again!"

She took Digs' case and then they had to switch arms and move things about to shake hands and shuffle into the house. "Welcome, Peter. I'm so glad you and Digs could come. Do you all want to come in? We could have some tea?"

"Thanks, but Polly said I should drop these here and we are all going for a walk. She is going to show us the grounds."

He quickly shoved everything into the closet and gave a perfunctory look around the hall. "It's a beautiful home. Thank you so much for having us all. And please, leave the bags and we'll collect them when we come in. Jill said Richard was sleeping now and Polly mentioned that early evening was a good time for him? After tea? During supper?"

"Yes, and he is very much looking forward to seeing you."

"And I him. Thank you again, Mary." And with that, Peter trotted back out the front door to the others, leaving Mary feeling a little left out of it all.

Bother it all, it was time for another humbug.

Oo00oo

It was different this time. Eustace was playing the part to Jill that Peter had played to him but a few months before. It was strange, but Peter had learned delegation before and so ceded the mentoring role to his younger cousin. With the Professor and Polly also there, it became a joy shared.

"Lucy and Edmund will want to know about Caspian?" Eustace said, tentatively ending with a question. "I should write them? Tell them about how he got to come here?"

"Yes," Peter said firmly.

Their feet were crunching on fallen leaves as Polly walked them through the trees of Russell House. It was beautiful and felt very old by the standards of an English wood. Peter let his hand linger on the trunk of an oak as they walked the path around the still pond. It did not matter that this tree would not sway and bow to him. He – Peter felt instinctively that were the tree a dryad it would be male – was
still beautiful and unique. *This is what you want, isn't it, Aslan?*

"What about the terrible things that happened? About his wife? And everything?" Eustace asked. "Should I write of that? Wouldn't it just make them sad?"

"Yes, it will make them sad, but that is no reason to withhold the news," Peter replied. "None of us likes it when information is withheld. You should write to Susan as well. They will all want to farewell Caspian. In fact…" He turned over an oak leaf in his hands thinking of the trees that had woken with Aslan and Lucy and helped win Caspian his crown. "We will all farewell him together at Christmas when you come stay with us. You should know how that is done."

"I would like that," Eustace said quietly. "Especially with Lucy and Edmund since we all sailed with Caspian."

"Sir?" Jill asked in a quiet way. "May I ask you something?"

Since she was looking at him, and not the Professor, Peter assumed he was Jill's intended audience. "Of course you may, Jill. Please, no sir, though. We are all Friends of Narnia here and I am just Peter Pevensie, not the High King."

Polly snorted.

"I'll try to remember," Jill said, smiling at Polly. "But I think it may just come out if I'm not thinking about it. Everyone does really defer to you."

"Then you should spend some time with my siblings. That will cure you very quickly of the notion that everyone defers to me."

"Well," Eustace began, "from what I've seen …"

"Eustace!" Peter's correction was a little sharp but this business did have to stop.

Jill giggled as Eustace said, "See, Pole?"

Peter shook his head. "Was it Lucy who taught you how to wind me up? Or Edmund?"

Eustace grinned and shrugged.

"I should like to meet them, sir… Peter," Jill amended. "Maybe at the holidays?"

"Absolutely. They will want to meet you as well." With a quelling look at Eustace, Peter returned to Jill, "And you wanted to ask me something?"

"Well, lots of things, actually, and they're all jumbled. This wood seems very Narnian to me. Am I wrong in that?"

Peter was going to say something of what he had come to understand better that summer. Eustace, however, got there first.

"There's Narnia all around us, Pole. The *Dawn Treader* is on a wall in the spare bedroom at home. I went looking for Narnia in the Oxford Museum and it's there, too, of a sort." He sighed. "No dragons. Yet."

Peter felt his mouth twitching at Eustace's solemnity and glancing at the Professor saw that he and Polly were exchanging sly smiles as well. Peter knew he had made similar statements not that long ago that had seemed terribly profound at the time. Now, he felt thick to have not seen it sooner.
Eustace, it turned out, had been an excellent tool for administration of humility.

"It's not just the wood," Jill said. "It's the people too. Like Mary Russell and Mr. Patel. Don't you think that Mary looks like a Dryad? And that Mr. Patel is like a Narnian Dwarf?"

Peter let the oak leaf fall from his hand to the ground. Underfoot the acorns were a little slippery. "You are very observant, Jill. The first time I saw Mary, I was shocked by that very thing."

"Was that the reason?" the Professor asked, turning from his study of the branches overhead. "I had no idea. I thought it was just Mary being Mary that so alarmed you."

"Well, as you said, Professor, she can be overwhelming to the uninitiated."

"She does it on purpose," Polly said. "She likes to catch people unawares. She's much better when she's not trying to impress you with how clever she is."

Peter pointed to a rise rimming the pond. "In Narnia, that birch tree over there could be Mary's tree."

"She doesn't act like a Dryad at all," Jill said, sounding very decisive. "It's the opposite with Mr. Patel. He does not look like a Dwarf, but he acts very much like one."

Simon roused a rabbit who went bounding off into a thicket. Peter followed the Professor's gaze and saw waxwings and tits high in the trees.

"Lucy told me that when we open our eyes and hearts, we can see the best of both worlds here." His final words were drowned out as a big Lancaster bomber lumbered overhead.

"There was plenty of bad, too, just like here," Jill said, glancing up. She wrapped her arms around her and took a step closer to Eustace. "The Giants were terrible. The Witch was very wicked."

"There was some of that on the Dawn Treader too," Eustace said. "The slavers and the Dark Island. But this time seemed different somehow. Worse. Like what the Witch did to Caspian's Queen, and the Earthmen and Rilian. Then Caspian dying just when his son came home."

Peter slowed and let Jill and Eustace walk together, side by side, nearly in tandem. With the ease of practice they both swerved around a thick tree root.

Polly linked her arm with the Professor. She did not say anything but suddenly the Professor was nodding his agreement. "Quite," the Professor said. "Yes, I had the same thought."

"Would you all excuse us?" Polly asked.

"Of course," Peter said with a wave. Though, with the two of them, privacy was hardly necessary. By virtue of their long friendship, the Professor and Polly spoke in a code as unintelligible as Rat and Crow.

"We will meet you on the other side of the pond," Polly said. She and the Professor turned and began walking in the other direction, slowly, heads already bent together, Simon at their heels.

Jill and Eustace dawdled about the pond, watching the ducks and herons. Peter followed and caught up with them where the reeds grew thick and high.

Eustace nudged Jill. Jill nudged Eustace. Peter waited. Finally, with a blown breath that stirred her hair, Jill grumbled, "Alright. I'll ask."

"Yes?"
"Why didn't Aslan just go and get Rilian instead of sending two children and a Marsh-wiggle?"

The expression on Eustace's face had the sour obstinacy of the old dragon. "Aslan's powerful, so why didn't he do something sooner? He regrew Reep's tail and turned me back from a dragon. He could have saved the Queen, rescued Rilian and the Earthmen, and killed the Witch." Eustace looked around uncomfortably, as if he expected Aslan to appear suddenly and answer the charge. Eustace was expecting a reprimand and prepared to take it.

"And why did the One Hundred Years of Winter happen?" Peter asked. "Why did Narnia suffer for a thousand years under Telmarine rule?" Why did Jina die, and Merle and Leszi? Why were they sent back and loved ones separated, husbands from wives and child from parent? So many lives had been cut too short and so very much suffering, for so long.

Peter's education in this had begun the night Leszi and Roblang had gotten him roaring drunk as he mourned the four who were the first to die under his sole command. He ran his hand over the sharp reeds and cattails of the pond. "The Narnians would say it is because Aslan is not a tame Lion and he has other lands to rule."

Jill frowned. Eustace scowled.

"It does not sound very convincing or comforting, does it?" Peter said, acknowledging their skepticism.

"No," Jill said. "And that doesn't sound like something Aslan would say, either."

Peter spied a small, flat rock and bent down to pry it from the cold mud. He rolled the stone between his fingers and rubbed the wet dirt off. He needed to be honest with them and give the hard truth.

"We all struggle with this and each of us manages it in different ways. The best explanation I ever heard was from a Rat." Lady Willa was another who had died, though she had not been taken from them too soon. The Rat doe had lived an extraordinary, and for a Rat an extraordinarily long, life. "She said that mostly, Aslan expects us to solve our own problems. Lucy would add that Aslan does hear us, always, and will come when we seek him, but that we don't know how to ask him and don't listen when he does come."

Even more reluctantly, Peter conceded, "That is a particular problem of mine. Aslan will shout in my ear and I still do not hear him."

Peter drew back his arm and threw the rock, letting his anger, such as it was, go with the rock across the pond. It skipped, one, two, three, four times, before sinking.

"So it's up to us?" Eustace said.

"Yes." Peter wiped his hands on the grass. "I remember thinking something similar before I challenged Miraz. I knew Aslan had returned. I knew he would come. But I could not wait for him. He expected me to do the best I could, without him, even if it meant dying in single combat. Aslan would act, but it would be in his own time, in his own way, and I could not ordain when and how that would happen."

"Do your best and hope for the best?" Jill said, kicking a rock into the pond with her foot.

"Yes and more." Peter waited, but when Eustace did not respond, he continued. "We put our hope in Aslan, but still do what we must, ask for help when we need it, and listen for the answer."

"What if you don't like the answer?" Eustace asked, staring at the ground with a dragonish set to his
jaw. "It doesn't make sense. Either Aslan's good and doesn't have the power to stop the bad, or he's not all good because he has the power and doesn't use it."

Jill shook her head. "He is good, Scrubb. And his goodness helps us through the bad times. But it's hard work. If it were always easy, believing in Aslan and Narnia wouldn't mean very much."

"I don't see it that way, Pole," Eustace replied and he sounded angrier. "Caspian wanted to cross the Silver Sea with us and go on to Aslan's country. But Aslan wouldn't let him and said he had to go back to Narnia to be King and look what happened!"

"He was happy when we saw him, Scrubb."

"But that doesn't make up for all the unhappiness he suffered when Aslan could have done something about it."

Peter wished Lucy were here or Edmund. "Eustace, it's not like that. Aslan loves Caspian."

"He's got a rubbish way of showing it." Eustace pulled his head up and stared him down.

"Eustace," Peter began, but his cousin cut him off.

"You are my High King but this is between me and Aslan." Eustace turned to Jill. "Pole, I want to walk about, think about this some more. Is that alright?"

"That's fine, Scrubb. I've got more questions for Peter."

Eustace stalked off, leaving Peter feeling very unsettled and wholly inadequate to the job.

"I do not think I am especially suited to this sort of discussion," Peter said ruefully.

"Don't worry yourself, sir. Eustace doesn't understand these things the way we do. He'd never read a Bible until the Professor showed him one and he thought things like the creation story in Genesis were silly. His parents don't hold with God at all."

"And?" Peter asked, agreeing with her, but not following the reasoning. He watched as Eustace walked along pond's bank, pausing now and again to turn over rocks and branches with his foot and peer underneath them.

"And we know that we live in a fallen world and that God weeps with us when bad things happen." Jill sighed and pushed blowing hair out of her eyes with her elbow. "My father's family were slaves, just like the Israelites and God saved them and will save us, too. Eustace sees bad things and doesn't know how someone who says he loves us could let them happen."

"I suppose," Peter said, still feeling awkward. "I admit I do not think in these skeptical or theological terms. It's all beyond my ken. Lucy might be able to help him. Or the Professor."

Jill shrugged. "I'm not sure he needs help. As he says, it's between him and Aslan and Aslan understands that a tested belief is a stronger one, don't you think?"

He managed to nod and vowed that, next time, someone else would be the one to do this.

Jill blithely went on. "Anyways, I did want to talk with you, sir... Peter."

"Stop the sir, and please continue, though I do hope your next question is less inscrutable than Eustace's."
"Oh, it's hard in its own way," Jill said, grinning. "I was wondering why did Aslan pick me to go to Narnia?"

Peter sighed dramatically for her benefit. "And if, for your next question, you ask me why the sky is blue and why there is evil in the world, I shall wave a flag of surrender, hand you over to the Professor, and retreat into the house to nurse my wounded intellect with a cup of tea." Or something stronger, like the tequila in his flask.

She laughed.

Peter turned the question over in his mind and rolled a rock on the grass with his foot. On the other side of the pond, Polly and the Professor were walking together, arm in arm. They had been friends since childhood, had grown to adults who were very different, and yet still profoundly close and each leaving a mark on the world that branded them as Narnian. They had ridden a flying horse and saved the Professor's mother, and brought Jadis into Narnia. With luck and Aslan's paw, Peter hoped that next year he would be wearing a winged horse himself and marching to war. Eustace, the former dragon, was crouched at the pond's edge, carefully and intently watching something – a frog perhaps.

"I think Lucy was the first of us to find Narnia because she was the one who was most ready to believe it. And Edmund was next because he most needed Narnia."

"And you and Susan?"

"We followed Lucy."

"So the last shall be first, and the first last, for many be called but few chosen." Jill quoted.

"Yes, I suppose," Peter managed, suddenly drawing a peculiar parallel between verse-quoting Calormene diplomats and Jill Pole.

Jill looked apologetic. "Sorry. We were drilled in Bible verses in Jamaica. It seemed to fit."

"And I have no better explanation, Jill. I have asked the same question and I cannot say that there was anything special that made us the only four who could fulfill the prophecy and sit on the thrones of Cair Paravel."

"That's not what the Narnians would say," Jill responded.

With a tilt of his head, they began walking around the pond toward the Professor and Polly. "The hardship of the war here did prepare us for the work to be done there. The lesson of this summer for all us is that we are called to use here what was learned there."

"And maybe that's why the times are so different," Jill said as they walked. "We do and learn all those things there and then come back here just as if we'd never left but with all this knowing inside? Surely that's important, don't you think?"

"Yes, Jill, I think that is very important."

"Hello! Digs? Polly? Are you all down here?" Mary was calling from the wood.

"We are by the pond!" Peter called back.

"Something else, Peter," Jill said quickly, looking in the direction of the House. "You do know that Professor Russell knows, well, more? He said he was going to speak with you about owls, but then I
talked to him a long time about them this morning. Narnian Owls, I mean."

"So, Richard could not wait for me?" Peter said, smiling and easily seeing how this had occurred. "He posed some very clever questions and asked you to tell him what you observed and not how you knew it?"

Jill nodded. Peter waved to Polly and the Professor across the pond; they waved back and turned in the direction of the house. Mary was coming down the slope toward Eustace and asking something about lizards.

"I know it's all supposed to be a secret but from what Professor Russell said I thought you had already told him some things." Jill looked up, biting her lip nervously. Her brown eyes were wide and Peter saw Narnia reflected there. He put a hand on her shoulder, bent down, and kissed the top of her head.

"I do not speak for the Lion we both serve, but you did right, Jill Pole. And your summons to Narnia was no accident. Thank you for your service to our countries, there and here, and to the peoples of both places."

"You're welcome, sir."

This time, Peter did not correct her.

ooOOoo

It had been a good day. He was out of the goddamned hospital, Peter, Kirke, and Polly were all at the house, and that little girl was charming. Jill, Richard reminded himself, for all the good it would do tomorrow.

There had been a lion on the moors yesterday outside Shrewsbury. From the secretive looks and whispers today, Richard was sure it was the same lion that graced Kirke's wardrobe and who, as a cat with lion eyes, had visited him in the hospital the night Peter had run off to Cambridge. The carvings in the applewood wardrobe told a song of creation Richard had learned that night from Kirke and Polly.

Since the cat had been within a hundred miles of Russell House doing something mysterious with Jill and that Scrubb boy, Richard had hoped he might come by, as he had before. Dozing in the chair on the lawn, listening to the birds and Kun working in the garden, Richard thought he had seen golden lion eyes in the trees. It might have just been the neighbor's tomcat, or a fox. Richard didn't think so. The cat was near, watching over his children, and that was enough. Though he probably had chased the crows away.

Mary had interrupted his dozing with a light lunch. He had explained the crow project and remembered why his wife could be so engaging as she rattled off foods the crows would like and how some birds would drop seeds and eggs from heights to break them so this experiment was surely not mad at all. They had walked back to the house – he needed hardly any support, even up the stairs – to their bedroom. A year ago, he would have teased her about hips, they would have made love, and then spent the rest of the day with books and articles, editing each other's work. Mary would have checked his sums and measurements, he would correct her spelling.

Today, they lay together on the bed, Mary curled in the crook of his arm, and they looked at the pictures of the children and grandchildren he would not see again.

"Jill reminds you of Ngina, doesn't she?" Mary asked, tracing with a fingertip the picture of his oldest
"Yes, she does," Richard replied and kissed her temple. "Thank you."

"It was all Polly and Eustace's doing," Mary said dismissively, but drawing closer. She smelled of plaster dust and humbugs. In years past, her scents were of Saharan sand and camels, French chocolate and Moroccan spices.

"But you opened our home to them. I am certain that Jill worried about that before she arrived."

She sighed, and not happily.

"What is it?"

"Just something that occurred to me before Asim left. It sounds so deprecating, but I honestly cannot say that any of these extraordinary and interesting people ever find their way into our lives because of me or anything I've done. I would like to but I can't take credit for any of it."

"It is your generosity, Mary, and it is a great gift. Don't discount it. You welcome others, without regard to yourself." He put a shaky hand to her face. "Do continue that. I don't want us both becoming shut-ins as this progresses."

Richard thought it would be otherwise. As he deteriorated, Mary would lock them both up and away, holding on as long as she could. "Please don't give up on life, just because I have to."

Mary kissed him and his mind could still remember what his body no longer felt. Once, this was passion, and now it was grief. He tried to put his arms around her and shield her from all that was to come, but it was too late. There was no turning back from these mistakes.

"Do you want to rest now?" Mary asked, and for once the way she combed his hair flat felt tender, not motherly. "With everyone here, I know you will want to be able to enjoy tonight and have a long chat with Peter besides."

"Yes, I think so," he told her, leaning back in the bed.

Mary kissed him again, long and hard. For a moment, Richard felt the glimmer of lust for her young body, her long, smooth legs trapping his own, her firm breast full and perfect in his hands. But the desire, like his memory, skittered away.

His wife slid off the bed and gently took the precious photographs with her. "I'll just put your pictures on the nightstand. And I brought your field book in. I'll set it on top."

Richard nodded, suddenly exhausted, and not from the physical energy that this had required of him, but from the emotional toll it had taken, upon them both.

The smell of curry and the sounds of Simon barking woke him. Just as he was starting to stumble about, trying to find shoes and a belt and the lavatory in the half-dark, Kirke and Jill appeared.

It was all accomplished without any fuss – Kirke had been through years of this sort of thing after the first War to end all wars and Jill was very deft at providing just exactly what he needed, and not a thing more.

Dinner was as lively as anything that kitchen had experienced in years. Not that Russell House was ever dull, but it was very enjoyable to both have people his own age and to enjoy the merry chatter without his wife being the youngest person at table. Without the Hindu and Muslim at the table, Lee
indulged in pork, so even she was in a pleasant mood.

He was not able to talk much with Peter at dinner, except about trivialities. Assuming that Peter wouldn't be summoned summarily to deal with another crisis and race off on a train to Stonehenge or some such thing, after dinner Richard wanted to consult his field book and ask about those unknowable things that Peter knew, that Eustace apparently did not know, and that Jill knew of a little. Richard didn't like the haggard and harried look in Peter's eye and the ink stains. What a waste. He could only hope that jumping headlong into the service would cure Peter of his academic aspirations.

After dinner, Kun poured the tea. Eustace and Jill began clearing and washing the dishes. On the duty roster, they were responsible for the dishes. Lee had assigned Peter all the heavy work – the trash and composting and a lot of the cleaning.

Mary had also noticed Lee's good spirits and now was sweet-talking their cook. "Eustace has heard from all of us that you are our expert on dragons. Would you give us a story?"

"No, please, don't mind me," Eustace stammered, clutching a pot in his soapy hands.

Lee turned in her seat, sounding offended. "Do you not wish to hear of the magic of the Chinese Dragon?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Kwong. I want to very much. I only know the stories of beastly dragons and everyone has said the Oriental dragons are much different."

"Scrubb doesn't want to impose is all," Jill put in, deftly removing the pot from Eustace's hands to dry it before the boy dropped it.

"If you are the willing teller, Mrs. Kwong, we are very much your willing listeners," Peter said. He pushed the chairs out and gestured for Eustace and Jill to again sit.

"Very well," Lee said. "Mary, do you have any requests?"

"How the Four brought divine waters," Mary said. "That is a lovely story."

"Very appropriate," Polly said, stirring her tea. Kirke nodded, leaned back and put an arm around Polly's chair.

Silently, but clearly, Kun gestured for Eustace and Jill to sit. He quietly began drying the last of the glasses and setting them back on the shelf, in violation of the duty roster. It was dangerous to do so, but more than an ordered household, Lee loved telling stories and so would forgive this brief abrogation of duty.

Lee sat straight in her seat, folded her hands in her lap, and began.

"You must understand, my friends, Chinese Dragons are the very symbol of China and the Chinese. They are not the wicked creatures you know from St. George and the dragon. The Chinese Dragon, Lung, is magical, mystical and wise. The Lung controls the waters and the weather. And so I shall tell you one story of how that came to be.

"Once upon a time, there was only the land and the Eastern Sea. There were no rivers and no lakes, no streams, no ponds. In the Eastern Sea lived four dragons: the Long Dragon, the Yellow Dragon, the Black Dragon and the Pearl Dragon.

One day the four dragons were flying about in the sky, when they saw a terrible thing. The land
below was dry and the grass was brown and crops withered and had died. Many people were putting out fruits and cakes, and burning incense sticks. 'God of Heaven,' the people prayed, 'please send rain to water the lands so our children have rice to eat.'

The Four Dragons were greatly moved by the people's suffering. 'Let us go and beg the Jade Emperor for rain.' So saying, they leapt into the clouds and flew to the Heavenly Palace of the Jade Emperor.

But the Jade Emperor refused and no rain came.

The Four Dragons saw the misery of the people, how they had to eat bark and even clay to survive. But what could they do?

The Long Dragon saw the vast Eastern Sea and had an idea. 'There is water in the sea where we live. Let us scoop it up and spray it in the sky so that then the water will fall as rain and save the people and their crops.'

The others agreed with this excellent plan.

'The Jade Emperor will be very angry when he learns of this,' the Long Dragon said.

'It does not matter,' the Yellow Dragon replied. 'I will do anything to save the people.'

'As will I,' said the Black Dragon.

'And I, too,' said the Pearl Dragon.

Resolved, the Four flew to the sea, scooped water in their mouths and flew back to the sky. The sky grew dark as they flew back and forth and, soon, rain poured down and watered the land.

The people cried and leaped with joy. The wheat grew, and the sorghum and rice, and the crops flourished and the people were saved.

The Jade Emperor learned of what the Four Dragons had done and was furious. His army arrested the Four. The Jade Emperor caused the Mountain God to make four mountains press down upon the Dragons and imprison them forever.

The Four Dragons never regretted their actions. They turned themselves into the great four rivers of China, crossing the land from west to east and finally emptying into the sea. They are Heilongjiang or Black Dragon River, the Huanghe or Yellow River, the Changjiang or Long River and the Zhujiang or Pearl River.

And that is how the beautiful rivers of China came to be. The Four gave us the waters of life.

A quiet had settled over the kitchen as Lee wove her story. With her conclusion, everyone sighed. Jill broke the spell first. "Mrs. Kwong, that was wonderful!"

Eustace looked stunned and Peter exceedingly thoughtful.

Kun put a fresh, hot pot of tea on the table and rested a hand on his wife's shoulder. She put her hand over his and in the brief touch, Richard saw the tender familiarity of a 30-year partnership.

Kirke clapped his hands in appreciation. "Lee, I have heard the story of the four Dragon Rivers many times, and your telling of it is the best."

Lee inclined her head and the lacquered pins that secured her hair shined. "Thank you. I should like
to hear your stories, too, for I think you all have many to tell."

"Oh! Yes!" Mary exclaimed. "And the story we simply must hear first is from you, Polly! Tell us about your safari on Weald Moor to apprehend the lion terrorising the children of Experiment House!"

Jill started giggling. Eustace poked her in the ribs. They laughed more.

Mary looked around the table, smiling herself. His wife was very beautiful tonight. "Now, stop it!" she berated their company in high and laughing humour. "None of those secret looks! I want to hear what happened!"

"I found no evidence of lion," Polly managed to say, mouth twitching. "Perhaps it was a very shaggy sheep."

Peter put a hand over his face, shaking with quiet laughter.

"What about convicts? Armed lunatics? Surely there must have been some excitement of that sort!" Mary sounded disappointed.

"The only lunatics were the ones running the place," Polly said fiercely. Jill and Eustace vigorously nodded.

"Bedlam," Eustace muttered.

"Horrid people," Jill said.

"Mary, you are quite right, though. By all accounts, the Head of School is absolutely daft. I should not think she will be returning given her ranting about circus lions and convicts in medieval dress. There were some minor injuries to a group of children who I thought especially loathsome - the children, not the injuries – so I should be not surprised if, once this inquiry is finished, they and all their lot are sent down as well."

"They deserved every licking they got," Jill muttered.

"Oh, speaking of sheep and zookeepers, Polly, you've just reminded me of something," Mary said into a lull as everyone fiddled with tea. "Mister Cooper down the lane is having a problem with his prize ram. I told him you specialize in wild bovids, not domesticated ones, but he's quite desperate and asked if you might consult with him."

"What's the problem?" Polly asked. "We've kept some sheep and goats in a children's farm, so I know something of them."

"Mr. Cooper was planning on putting his ram out to stud to earn some money. He's sent the animal to several farms and who have all sent him back because he's not tupping the ewes."

"Why not?" Polly asked, stirring milk into her tea.

"Mr. Cooper says the ram only wants to mount other rams," Mary said.

Several things happened at once.

Kirke made a peculiar, strangled sound of horror which earned him an identically sympathetic look from both Polly and Mary. Jill and Eustace both giggled, sounding exactly like the children they were. Peter, no doubt about it, was sporting that insufferably knowing mien he affected when
something peculiar about birds or animals was stated that he knew the truth of.

Lee sputtered with offense at a discussion of sheep mating at the dinner table, Mary and Polly were apologizing for embarrassing Kirke, who was coughing fit to choke, and Jill and Eustace were laughing into their dishtowels while Kun banged pots to distract everyone.

Richard felt a prickle of memory. He lunged at it, wrestled it to the ground, and grabbed Peter's jacket, almost upsetting two tea cups in the process. "Field notes. 1935. Remind me of that later."

Peter calmly sipped his tea and asked under the din, "Richard, does your query have anything to do with rams preferring other rams to ewes?"


Peter, damn him, noticed his discomfiture and with insufferable smugness asked, "Giraffes?"

Oh God, he knew. It had been a ghastly observation when Richard had made it. It was one he would never forget. Richard reluctantly nodded.

"Why Richard, is that observer bias I detect?"

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It took a little while to get everyone sorted. Peter whispered something to Polly which Richard assumed was a promise to discuss how Farmer Cooper's confused prize ram might be persuaded to woo the fairer sex.

Mary joined Polly, Kirke, Jill and Eustace for a tour of the grounds at night. Lee and Kun puttered about the kitchen. Richard took the support of Peter's arm and they went upstairs to the drawing room.

After some poking, rummaging, and exclaiming, Peter found Richard's battered 1935 field diary on the shelf between the 1934 and 1936 field diaries. Peter was radiating smug superiority and muttering how even esteemed scientists were capable of bias.

"You have demolished my cherished views on hummingbirds, otters, and songbirds. And now you are going to…" Words failed him. Richard wasn't even able to articulate it.

"Going to confirm that many Birds and Beasts form permanent bonds with and even mate with those of the same sex."

Richard sat in the overstuffed armchair and opened the diary and found the page that was, in retrospect, hysterical scrawling. Not that he felt much more sanguine about it now. "I'd heard anecdotal reports of this behavior in the bush for years and had dismissed it as the product of too much gin. Then I observed it myself in East Africa…"

"It was giraffes?" Peter asked.

"Yes." Looking at the pages of his diary brought it all back with awful clarity.

"Two males?"

Richard nodded and stared down at the notebook and his frantic notations of disbelief. "I wasn't even sure what I was witnessing at first."
Peter sat at the desk and began removing school books from his bulging satchel. "Admittedly in Giraffes, even male-female mating is an awkward business." Maddeningly, he shrugged. "Really, this is so remarkable?"

"Yes!" Richard exclaimed. "These are heretical notions, even among us radical Darwinists. It's behavior with no reproductive purpose. Publishing such observations is out the question. In any scientific circle, you would be dismissed as perverted, possibly prosecuted for indecency. It's considered a gross, unnatural aberration, and…"

Peter held up a hand, elbow propped up on a stack of theology text, looking angry and stern. "I can imagine what would be mustered, so please spare me the hypocritical detail. I know you don't like to hear it, but in my observation, over years and years, it was very common in giraffes, sheep and many other birds and mammals."

"Birds too?" Richard stammered, feeling weak. "Why? It is totally counter to the principles of natural selection!"

"Why?" Peter repeated, sounding disgusted at the question. "I don't know. You would have to ask them!"

Next up, Chapter 12, *Ties that bind (Squamates continued)*, in which we return to Narnia, the Amazon, the codebreakers at Bletchley Park, and Peter makes a terrible admission to Mary.

A special thanks to Lady_Songsmith who gave me the idea regarding Jill and Eustace's discussion and Clio and Snacky who helped me navigate the very difficult questions Eustace poses.

*Squamata* is the order of reptiles that includes snakes and lizards – where dragons fall is anyone's guess. Kwong Lee's dragon story is heavily adapted from *Dragon Tales: A Collection of Chinese Stories*.

The discussions of the same sex pairings are from numerous sources, including some recent scholarship on Laysan albatrosses. The male-bonded African penguins Buddy and Pedro in the Toronto Zoo have been in the news lately and that story will take you to links of similar behaviors in other species. A good beginning review of the subject is on wikipedia and N. Bailey and M. Zuk, *Same-sex sexual behavior and evolution*, Trends in Ecology & Evolution, Volume 24, Issue 8, 439-446, 10 June 2009.

Links to all this and more are in my Livejournal. There is a lot here and that was one reason to split the chapter. I hope you'll let me know what you think of it.
Chapter Summary

In which we return to Narnia, the Amazon, the codebreakers at Bletchley Park, and Peter makes a terrible admission to Mary.

Chapter 12, Apostolic Way
Ties that bind (Squamates continued)
In which we return to Narnia, the Amazon, the codebreakers at Bletchley Park, and Peter makes a terrible admission to Mary.

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You can show your troops no other road than that which leads to victory or to death.
November 3, 1942 telegram from Adolf Hitler to Field Marshall Rommel

Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat.
Winston Churchill

The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.
Carl Jung

To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must cultivate our personal life; and to cultivate our personal life, we must first set our hearts right.
Confucius

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"Birds too?" Richard stammered, feeling weak. "Why do they do this? It is totally counter to the fundamentals of natural selection!"

"Why?" Peter repeated, sounding disgusted at the question. "I don't know. You would have to ask them!"
Lucy moved her chair closer to Aidan's at the breakfast table and tried to ignore Cook shrieking down the hall in the kitchens.

"I think that might be my fault," Aidan said with a worried look and then shoved a prodigious quantity of eggs into his mouth. Aidan's table manners were fine by Narnian standards – if one did not use hands to eat. As most Narnians did not have hands, this wasn't a significant concern.

"Possibly," Lucy said. "But I would not have it any other way."

"This is Narnia," Edmund said across the table, not looking up from his morning correspondence. "Hair in the butter and foul-mouthed hummingbirds. Another twelve children is of no consequence. Some Canine litters are that large and almost as loud."

"There are four children, not twelve," Morgan corrected. "And Frieda," she added, with a nod and a shy smile to Aidan's oldest niece sitting quietly at her uncle's left hand. While Morgan had probably not intended it, there was also a tacit and very kind assumption that Frieda was not in the same boisterous category as her younger sister and cousins.

There was exuberant barking – one of the Wolves, Lucy thought – and a crash and another shout. Aidan stood. "I had better…"

"I'll go," Frieda said, pulling him back down. "You've not eaten yet."

Lucy took the honeyed bun from their shared plate. "Take this with you, Frieda, and eat it or Mrs. Furner and Cook will scold me!"

The whole family had not had enough food when in Archenland, Frieda being the most sacrificing. It was hard to convince her that with the family's changed circumstances every bite she ate was not a mouthful taken from her younger relatives.

The girl bobbed a little curtsey, even though she had been told not to. "Yes, your…"

Growls, human and canine in aspect, made her swallow the word with a nervous smile. "I will, Lucy."

Was I ever that young? Younger, Lucy reminded herself. I was younger than Frieda when I first wore a crown. She is already Susan's age.

Lucy smiled. "Maybe take them all out of doors to the pasture? There are foals there now, just learning to talk." Aslan help them, what would they do when winter set it?

Frieda nodded, winced as slapping bare feet, thudding hooves and scratching claws echoed in the hall outside, and darted out of the breakfast room in pursuit.

Edmund casually reached behind and shut the door all the way, dimming the noise further.

"They are leaving the Palace," Briony, Lucy's Wolf-guard said. "And I do not smell intestines from the kitchen. Yet."

Pig intestine for dinner was Cook's usual method of revenge for upsets to her domain. They had been eating a lot of offal meats since the arrival of Aidan's family.

For Aidan's sake, Lucy wanted to deflect the presumptively negative aspersion even though the
family had been so delighted for meat they'd paid no attention at all to what part of the animal it came from. "Aidan, do you know what you wish to do today?" She was still becoming accustomed to thinking about what someone else wanted – someone she loved very much but didn't know all that well, yet.

Aidan slowed in his chewing and wiped his mouth with a sleeve. "You've been away from home for weeks, Lucy. What would you normally do?"

Lucy ticked off the usual tasks. "Visit the armory to get my mail repaired and sword cleaned, and replenish my arrows. Maybe drill a little. Get scolded by Mrs. Furner for ripping my shirts and for tearing my hair since I lost my coifs, again. And," Lucy hesitated with the last one which she very much wished to do.

"And?" Aidan asked, running his fingers through her untidy hair. His fingers were sticky from the honey and pulled on her hair a little.

"Visit."

Aidan frowned and Lucy felt her heart sink.

"Visit who?"

"Those who live around Cair Paravel, mostly. My friends…"

She trailed off and saw again this enormous gulf between monarch and common soldier. She did not want to drag him about meeting total strangers if he did not wish to do so. But she did want to visit, both as duty as Queen and because she loved doing so, and she didn't want to change that just because he would rather be in the Training Yard, but …

"Seems to me, Lucy, that telling your friends you are safe from a siege and that you brought home a husband and his large, noisy family is more important than getting your quiver refilled." Now he looked confused. "Unless you don't want to?"

"No! I do! I didn't want to inconvenience you going about with me to see Narnians you don't know!"

"Well, maybe you don't want me going with you?"

Now, Lucy felt awful for Aidan looked so hurt – he did not hide his feelings at all. "No! I do! I very much want to…"

"Oh for Aslan's sake, stop being so polite to one another," Edmund interrupted, sounding cross and good naturedly mocking them both. "You will drive us spare. Get out of here and make the visits and if it is that loathsome, come up with a compromise and make it up to each other later."

"Or we will start reading the revised sheep merchants' agreement aloud," Morgan said. "In fact…" She leaned over to look at the parchment in Edmund's hands. "This quadripartite agreement is specific to sheep raising activities, including but not limited to wool, meat, and milk, in addition to any other existing contracts and is intended to put in place systems to assure compliance with…"

"We cannot possibly endure that!" Lucy cried, laughing in response. Besides, everyone knew what happened when Edmund and Morgan reviewed complex documents together. She jumped up. "We should start with the Rookery! There should be fledglings there now!"

"Rookery it is," Aidan said, standing as well and dusting the crumbs off. The Rats would get them
"Bring a basket!" Morgan said, suddenly.

"Basket?" Aidan asked.

"Oh, yes, Morgan, thank you!" Lucy said. There was so much she was going to have to do to do this all properly and Morgan knew all of it. It was so strange to think that Edmund and Morgan would be the ones guiding her and Aidan in the Narnian bondings to come.

As with the rituals Susan and Peter had undergone that bound the Human monarch to Narnia, each group had its own way of recognizing courtship and bonding between two (and sometimes more) Narnians. How Dwarfs recognized a marriage was different from the life bond between two Wolves or Eagles and those were different from the courtship of solitary Cats and Songbirds which were different from what the herd Beasts did. It had taken Edmund and Morgan months to complete all the bonding ceremonies. She'd heard there had been wagering about the one for the Herds involving the Human equivalent of a Stallion mounting his Mare in a pasture before the rest of the band. Lucy had Narnian modesty, which meant very little, so she didn't think that one would be a problem for her; she was not sure of Aidan's reaction.

Morgan reached for the bread basket on the table. Edmund, not looking up from the contract he was reading, automatically put a hand on her coffee cup to keep it from toppling over. Morgan removed the last of the bread from the basket. She patted down her shirt, found loose threads in the cuff and began pulling them out.

"That is my shirt you are shredding," Edmund said.

"But this is our gift to Lucy and Aidan," Morgan said. She set the threads in the basket, teased a few strands from her braided hair, yanked those out with a wince, and added them to the basket.

"Anyone else?"

Harah the Crow had been observing breakfast from an overhead beam and awaiting the day's instruction from Morgan and probably hoping to steal silverware. She flapped down to the table, combed her feathers with her beak and added a black feather to the basket.

"May your nest be well-feathered!" Harah squawked and then flew back to her perch, shedding a few more feathers in her flight. Morgan delicately plucked Harah's feathers that had fallen into the bowl of preserves and plate of sausages on the breakfast table and added them to the basket as well.

"Thank you, Harah," Lucy said. She took Aidan's hand in her own and squeezed it.

"What is all this for?" Aidan asked.

"Our bonding gifts, my love," Lucy told him. "For the home we will build and the young we will raise."

"Everyone will want to give you something so you'll need to bring the basket with you, wherever you go, for a while," Morgan said. "The basket is better than trying to hold it all in your pockets."

"Especially the dung," Edmund added. "It's a lovely tradition."

"I hope you aren't allergic to feathers or animal hair," Morgan said.

"Banker Morgan?" Jalur, Edmund's Tiger Guard, had left his post in the corner of the breakfast room and came up to the table.
"Yes, Jalur? Would you like me to get some of your fur for Aidan and Lucy?"

"Please."

Morgan wiped her fork on her napkin and combed out Jalur's thick fur around his ruff. The Tiger would deny it, but his eyes half closed in contentment as Morgan scratched his chin. She pulled the fur from the makeshift comb and added it to the basket. Rafiqa, Morgan's own guard, also asked for Morgan's assistance and so Hound hair joined Tiger fur, Human hair, Crow feathers, and thread in the basket. It was all wonderfully Narnian.

Morgan pushed the basket at Aidan. "Here. You should take it when you go about and it is very nice and you should bring a handkerchief because …"

She stammered and glanced at Edmund.

"Everyone is very happy for you both," Edmund put in smoothly. Lucy smiled at him gratefully.

"Thank you," Aidan replied.

"It means a lot to them," Morgan blurted out. "That their Monarch has a bond-mate. It's very emotional." She sniffed. "We both cried sometimes."

Edmund set his contract aside and put his arm around Morgan instead. "It is special for everyone," he said, and kissed his wife.

Oo00oo

It was a very good thing they were in no hurry to get to the Rookery. Every few steps, someone would hop, step, stomp, waddle, or fly across their path, wanting to give Aidan a good look (or sniff – he smells alright to me, Queen Lucy) and offer a gift.

They also received reams of advice.

"You be sure to line your nest," Hazel, the Rabbit said, raking through her fur. "Here, take some of my mine. I've got plenty. Don't want your pups getting cold and there's no proper fur on you to keep them warm."

Aidan, a very tall man, had to get down on his knees to remove the soft gray-brown fur from Hazel's claws and carefully place it in the basket.

"Thank you, Friend," Lucy told the Rabbit.

Their presence started an argument among the Songbirds. Are you living here all year, sir? Or will you be migrating back to Archenland the way Banker Morgan did, at first? Come to think, why isn't she migrating anymore?

"My family and I are here for good!" Aidan had to bellow through the Birds arguing about whether Humans migrated. "We live here now!"

There were the expected, awkward questions about Lucy's heat with several offering to tell Aidan when she was ready for courting and mating since Humans were so poor at that sort of thing. "Rum noses you Humans have," Mac, the Bloodhound said. "Not good for much of anything."

Briony was quick to correct the implied criticisms of her competency with a growl.

Two Black Swans waddled up from the stream bank and looked Aidan up and down.
"I dunno, Drake, what do you think?" Svar said to his mate.

"He's big enough." Drake peered at Aidan. "But are you brave enough to defend your nest? Chase away predators? Protect your cygnets?"

"Yes, sir," Aidan replied. Lucy was very proud that he was able to address the Swans seriously because to the non-Narnian, they were a little comical in their severe demeanor.

"Put out your wings," Drake demanded.

"Arms," Lucy prompted.

Aidan raised his long arms and Svar and Drake schooled him in hissing and lunging at imagined enemies until they were satisfied with his ferocity.

"You'll do," Svar said finally. "And congratulations!"

Drake rubbed his Svar's neck affectionately. "We'd best get back to Leta. She'll be angry she stayed on the nest and missed seeing Queen Lucy’s mate."

"I still think she's doing it wrong," Drake grumbled.

"Tell Leta we will come see her later!" Lucy said.

Aidan watched the Swans shuffle back to the stream.

"Something wrong, dearest?"

"Those Swans, they were married?"

"Swans don't really 'marry' as in Archenland. But Svar and Drake are a bonded pair," Lucy said. "They have raised three broods now. It was unpleasant the first year as Svar mated with Leta and then he and Drake ran her off once she laid the eggs. They have all worked that out now and take turns on the nest."

"So Svar and Drake are both male?" Aidan asked. "They sounded male."

"Yes," she replied, wondering what his concern was.

Aidan's frown deepened.

"What is wrong?"

"Well, you've just told me that two male birds are as good as married and raising a family."

Oh. She finally understood. "You have not seen that before?"

"No," Aidan answered. "Does it happen a lot here?"

"It depends?" She shrugged.

"Depends on what?"

Lucy let out a breath. "It depends on the Narnian. Most Narnians don't bond like Drake and Svar. They live in a herd or family group. Or, the adults are solitary until mating, then the female mates with one or more males and raises her children alone."
Lucy knew she wasn't helping. Besides confused, Aidan now seemed concerned. She loved him so well in part because he could not conceal his feelings and spoke them so readily. "So some Narnian women have more than one husband?"

He was struggling with the correct words, so she added, "They aren't women and wouldn't call their mates husbands. Many Narnians, male and female both, have multiple partners in a single season. Females may bond with one mate and raise children together, but only for a season."

"But others, like Wolves, bond for life," Briony said. "Lambert and I have been together for many years."

"Thank you, dear," Lucy said.

"And the Swans?"

"Narnians are often in male and female pairs, such as Briony and Lambert. But sometimes it is two males, like with the Black Swans and sometimes two females, like with the Albatrosses, or a group of separate males and females, like Giraffes. And that's just the Beasts and Birds. Dryads pollinate everywhere and everything and Satyrs are much the same. Narnians have many lovely ways to raise families and organize themselves."

Aidan leaned against the trunk of the ash tree they were standing under and then abruptly pulled back. "Sorry," he said to the tree.

Lucy smiled at him. "It's not a Dryad and even if the tree was a Dryad, they don't mind you touching their bark. Except Yews," Lucy amended. In a whisper, she added, "Yews are often grumpy. And you should always ask before climbing a Dryad. They also might listen in to private conversations." Many of the Trees were terrible gossips.

He stared up at the tree. "It's so different here. Trees that talk, wives with more than one husband, two husbands raising children." He paused and looked embarrassed as he recalled it before she could delicately raise it. "Kiran and I did, but it wasn't, well, we weren't married. Or anything. Just taking care of the children because we had to because our wives were dead."

"It's not that different, dearest," Lucy said, putting a hand on his arm and looking up at his worried face. "Is this a problem for you?"

If this was a problem for him, they had a problem, for this was Narnia and there was nothing that would or could be done to change it. Aidan would be her consort and had to accept the Narnians as they were and the decisions they had made years ago. Morgan, to her enormous credit, had embraced Narnia the first night she had tried to join the Dryad Dance. But what of Aidan?

He pulled fingers through his thinning hair. "It's not like Archenland."

Seeing her scowl, he amended, "Not with my family, anyway. What the nobles do is anybody's guess but it's probably all this sort of thing and more besides."

Lucy nodded vigorously for she knew full well what sort of bedchamber politics and pairings were played there and she would not suffer a negative comparison to Narnia in that regard.

"And I know it's different in other places, like in Calormen and the Lone Islands." He ran a hand over his face. "I suppose we should've talked about this before I brought everyone here."

Lucy felt tears prick her eyes. "Aslan's charge is to love our subjects as they are. Each is precious and beautiful. I cannot not do that, Aidan. It's impossible. And if you and I are bound as Narnians,
you must accept this as well."

"But that's my problem. You say bound as Narnians and what that bonding is seems different depending on the Narnian and that's what's confusing me because of what Edmund had said in Anvard about him and Morgan."

It had been so sweet. Unsure about protocols, Aidan had asked Edmund if he was supposed to ask the King's consent first. Her brother had wisely said no, knowing full well what Lucy would have had to say about that. It would have been extra drills for a year if Edmund had usurped her prerogative. Rather than give his consent, Edmund had talked with Aidan long about Narnia and what was entailed in being bonded to a Monarch.

"See, I thought marriage was more like what I knew," Aidan said. "I didn't hear about any of this other, for them, anyway."

She nodded. "Very much so." Really, Morgan would annihilate any rival assuming he or she got by Jalur's guard, and her loyalty to Edmund was the foundation of their bonding.

Aidan put his hands on her shoulders, warm and firm. "So, what about you, Lucy? I'm not going to go running off with another Swan or a Dryad or anything. Never did and that's not my way. I'll never give you reason to regret not letting that Tarkaan kill me."

"I know that, Aidan. I love you. I will never regret that."

"I love you too. But what I'm trying to say is that I expect the same of you. Whatever cats do, or birds, or trees, or other Narnians, well, I'll get used to that and the children will learn even faster than I will. But it's just you and me, nobody else." He let out a deep breath. "If you can't..."

Lucy slid her arms around his waist and stood on her tiptoes. "That's quite enough. I am Narnian and Queen and I choose as I please. To quote from a very wise Beaver, I'm no Songbird. I choose you Aidan Gunarr and no one else, if you will take me and my country as we are."

Finally they understood each other and Lucy felt a relieved sigh around them and the release of a tension in the air she had not noticed until it disappeared. Aidan wrapped his arms around her.

"Given all this blunt talk, I guess I can do this out here in front of everyone?"

"Absolutely!" Briony said, before Lucy could respond. "As much as you wish for as long as you like. I shall keep anyone from bothering you."

Lucy laughed, stood on tiptoes and put her arms around his neck.

"I never thought I'd be happy again," he whispered to her.

They carried on for a while with mad kissing under the ash tree. Briony stopped the gift givers from interrupting them, but they still drew a crowd, including a critical Peacock who deemed Aidan's courtship display very inadequate.

"You'll never keep a worthy female like our Queen in those drab colours," the Cock scolded. "You need blues! Green! Purples!"

"So, the Rookery," Aidan said, setting her down and picking up the basket and accepting more gifts – thankfully, no dung, yet.

"Yes!" Lucy cried. "It is on the sea cliff and is a wonderful, wild place. You must meet Hanna and Tess."
"Who are?"

"Very dear friends. They both lost their bondmates during the Long Winter in battles with the Witch. I introduced them several years ago. They have been brooding Hanna's egg and this is the first fledgling they've raised together."

"Hanna and Tess are birds?" He paused again and Lucy could see him working through it all. "Bonded female birds?"

"Yes! They are the Albatrosses I mentioned! Morgan's right, you aren't allergic to feathers, are you? And you won't mind the guano? It can be very messy in the Rookery."

"No, no feathers are fine." Now he looked worried again, with frowns deepening the care lines of his face.

"What is wrong?"

"Albatrosses are very large, aren't they?"

"Their wingspan, yes. Among the largest Birds in Narnia, I think."

"I just hope they like me. Drake and Svar were intimidating enough. That Peacock was pretty harsh." He looked down at his coarse brown homespun. "Should I change my clothes so I look better?"

"Oh they will adore you, my love," Lucy said, taking his hand and leading the way up the path that climbed to the cliffs overlooking the beach. "Though they may instruct us in how to perform a proper Albatross courting dance. We may be there a long time."

"So those devoted, loving Albatross pairs?" Richard asked after a long and thoughtful silence. "Their intricate courting dances ornithologists have documented? The heart shape their heads and necks form when together? The tender relationships that last for years? All that is between females?"

"Most are probably male-female bonds," Peter replied. "But there were plenty of female bonds. I could never tell the sexes apart by appearance alone." He almost added, "unless the Birds spoke," but Richard continued to make clear he was not interested in the how. "If there were two eggs in the nest, that usually meant it was a female pair."

"I know those two-egg nests have been observed and have always been difficult to explain in any species where the female only lays one egg at time. If a scientist's best theory to explain the fact is, 'sometimes they lay more,' he should be looking to a new theory." Richard laughed. "I very much want to be at the meeting where that paper is presented."

Richard stared again at his notebook and turned the pages. "I had thought the giraffes were anomalies, except that I knew others had observed similar behaviors. None of us would own up to the observation without consuming inordinate quantities of gin first."

"Any giraffe coupling isn't something easily forgotten," Peter replied. The shy Giraffes of the Tower had kept to a remote corner of the southwestern border and the Monarchs had been glad to give them their privacy.

"True," Richard said with another snorting laugh. "And the best cure for Farmer Cooper's ram?"
Peter bristled at the implication that there was anything wrong with the ram but this wasn't Narnia and the ram's preferences were a serious economic blow to his owner. "The best solution is to fool the ram into thinking the ewes are males. They are not particularly bright and get confused." The instances of confused Narnian Rams had been as unforgettable as the Giraffes, in their own way.

"Rams, giraffes, swans, albatross, and others, by your account." Richard was scribbling in his book and his hands were shaking so much, the pages quivered. The memory of the discipline was far stronger than Richard's ability to accomplish it. "We have jested about observer bias, but truly this is a blow to a scientist. I have thought myself so objective! How many times have I not seen what I thought I had?"

Richard closed his field book and sat back with a sigh. "And now it is too late to correct my own lack of insight." Petunia immediately jumped up into his lap and settled there.

"If so, it is a bias you and all your peers share," Peter replied. "I did not know any of it was unusual until you trapped me into disclosing it."

"I don't regret it, Peter. Do you?"

"No." He had felt Aslan's approval in this. It was what the Lion had wanted him to do. Peter hauled out his Latin dictionary from the book bag and added it to the growing pile of evening work still ahead.

"Humans practice non-procreative behaviors," Richard said eventually, petting the cat. "But animals and birds? Surely there must be some way to explain these activities that still leaves evolution through natural selection in place." Petunia's purring was so loud, Peter could hear her across the drawing room.

"I never thought about why they did these things," Peter told him.

Richard grunted. "You never do, Peter. That's the problem."

Peter nodded and listlessly opened the compilation of Aristophanes' plays.

Richard glanced over and shook his head as he saw the books. "Lysistrata is far more enjoyable translated into English."

"Which does not aid me as I am reading it in Greek," Peter replied, digging out his copious notes on the translation.

"Hmmmm. I wonder. You said some of the pair bonds with the albatrosses had been broken, that the males had died, and so the surviving females bonded with each other?"

"In some cases, yes."

"You can concoct an appropriate evolutionary theory to explain at least those facts, I think." Richard leaned back in the chair, closed his eyes, and continued to pet Petunia, who was purring loud enough fit to burst. "With a species like the albatross, there is a high investment required in a single hatchling. Where there are scarce males, the females may bond to improve the chances of survival for their offspring and tend them cooperatively."

He again opened his book and clumsily scrawled something on the page. "Perhaps we would see something similar here in England with the women left behind during the war. A combination of Lysistrata and albatross female bonding."
Peter had wondered the same thing, but had not thought to tie it to evolutionary theory or Greek comedy.

"If I was not ready for such radical observations, the world certainly is not," Richard finally said, closing the book again. "Some day there will be research on it, perhaps, by those with minds broad enough to see it. Some things will be sooner than others, too. Like that observation you had about bee dancing. When the war ends, we'll see something on that." He paused and then sighed again. "Well, I will not. But you will."

Peter got up to help him as Richard reached for his cane. But Richard managed on his own and pushed Petunia to the floor and pulled himself up.

"How long are you here?" Richard asked.

"A few days. Then the Professor and I both need to return to the University."

"And you sit for your exams, have the holiday and then you are off to war."

"Yes." Peter heard the bitterness and he did not like to disappoint Richard. But he had ignored other summonses for too long and he had the expectations of his father and the Professor to meet.

Richard suddenly pulled him into a shaky, warm embrace. Peter returned it, feeling the thin back of an aging man.

"Thank you, Peter."

Peter had said good-bye to many loved ones and had never had the opportunity to farewell others who, suddenly, one day, had disappeared from his life forever. He wasn't ready to say good-bye to Richard, yet.

"Thank you, Richard. You have taught me so much about the beauty of this world."

Richard held up the field book and thumped him on the chest with it. "Remember, you take this, when the time comes. My last one. You're the only one who can make sense of it."

"I will."

"Make good use of it. Don't let this all end with me."

"I will do what I can." Peter knew he could not promise what Richard wanted. Duty called and the response owed was not found in the pages of an ethnologist's field diary.

Richard shook his head, but did not try to argue the point, again. "And wherever you are deployed, try not to die there."

"I won't."

Peter could not explain his certainty that having come so close to dying so many times in Narnia, such would not be his fate here. Not yet.

00ooOO

Richard went to bed and Peter managed studying for several hours in the cool, quiet house. Her heard voices and the occasional door shutting, then even those noises faded. The change of scenery from the Professor's cottage and University libraries helped, a little. Still, it was depressing work. The thrums of passing aircraft drowned out the normal night sounds that, were it not for Narnia, he would
He wanted the tequila in his flask. Or the brandy that was enticingly in the cabinet behind him. He wanted to sit outside in the autumn chill by the pond, look at stars filtered through fading birch leaves, drink wine, and talk all night with Polly about Africa and suffragists, coax the Professor into speaking of France and the song of divine creation he heard in a bird's flight, and listen to Jill and Eustace tell stories of Giants, lost Princes found, and Marsh-wiggles. In the short time that remained, he wanted to tell Richard of Owls and Wolves and life with a Porcupine physician.

Instead, he was spending a beautiful, magical evening with Latin, philosophy, and Dunce Scotus, again. What did it say that he was looking forward to basic training in the spring because it would get him away from declensions and Aristotelian metaphysics? Sequestered behind blackout shades and hunched over a desk, he could not even enjoy looking out the picture window to the moonlight illuminating the grounds of Russell House.

He heard footsteps in the hall, recognized them, and pushed away from the desk to stand when Mary pushed open the door.

She started a little. "Oh, hello, Peter. I should have realized you would still be up. Everyone else is in bed."

"I need to make up for what I didn't get done today." Or yesterday. Or in the last week and all summer.

Mary crossed the room to his desk, tucking her notebook securely under her arm. Her reading glasses were dangling from the chain around her neck. She shoved them on and looked down at the papers, the anthology of plays, the Latin dictionary, and the dusty tome of theology.

"I remember all that with no pleasure at all." She shook her head and a cloud of plaster dust swirled around her. "How are you coping?"

"It is going very well," Peter replied automatically, wishing he could forget how badly he had managed Eustace's questions.

Mary stepped back, leaned against the opposite bookcase, and folded her arms across her front. "Oh?"

She could see it. Mary knew the truth and understood his lie. Peter sighed and, returning to his chair, rolled the pencil around on the desk. "Reeling and writhing," he admitted.

"'Of course, to begin with,' the Mock Turtle replied; 'and then the different branches of Arithmetic-Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision.'"

"Very ugly, with a great deal of distraction," Peter said. "Lucy was thrilled, by the way that I finally read Carroll over the summer."

"Lucy is obviously extraordinary and I adore her," Mary said warmly. She gestured at the papers. "As to the rest, anything I say will only make it worse, I'm afraid. I was cramming Scotus today before you and Digs arrived."

That did give Peter a thoroughly manipulative idea. "Actually, there is something you can do, Mary."

She raised her hands in a warding gesture. "You won't want me near your translations, Peter, and I comprehend Scotus' principles of haecceity not at all. If you can read my cram notes, you are welcome to them."
"I am theorizing that perhaps your lack of comprehension is because the Professor's copy of Scotus' lectures ended up in the Amazon River?"

Mary scowled. "Now is not the time for that story."

"On the contrary, I think it would be the perfect time. Distraction, as the Mock Turtle said. I need an excuse for further procrastination and given your opinion of the dread Dunce, that's an exercise you approve of. Further, if you were the one who threw Scotus' lectures into the Amazon, I would have been the one who tied a rock to them."

"I did not throw them," Mary said firmly. "It was an accident and Digs scolded me dreadfully for it, the humiliation of which still stings dreadfully."

Peter waited, staring at her, tapping his pencil.

Finally Mary sighed dramatically. "Oh, very well. I really should tell the sordid tale over a gin or whiskey, but you've got work ahead and I won't have Digs accusing me tomorrow of complicity in your dereliction."

Peter lifted his cup. "Cold tea I can provide."

"No thank you. Do you want a warm cup, by the way? We could go downstairs to the kitchen?"

"Tempting, but I want to hear the story. I also suspect hot tea is merely your ploy to distract me."

Mary harrumphed with disgust. "Several someones gave you lessons in Mary Management over the summer."

"And yet you accused me of similar tactics?" Peter was enjoying this diversion very much. He had spent too much effort ignoring Mary over the summer which was, in retrospect, foolishness and missed opportunity – much in the same way that he had so often spoken only of Narnia with Polly. Every being in the House of Russell, up to and including Simon the spaniel and Petunia the cat, was more interesting than dead men and their languages and he should take advantage of each opportunity.

Mary's force had dimmed – he was not sure if it was a change in her with Richard's illness, or that she was simply not trying so hard to impress him, as Polly had said.

"To quote you to me, I won't be put off, Mary."

"I shall take a cue from your argumentative younger brother. If I tell you that story, you owe me a reciprocal disclosure."

Risky, but Peter could fib his way through this, if necessary. "Agreed."

Mary settled again against the bookcase, nervously dug around in her pockets, and scowled a little. He supposed she was out of humbugs. "I was about your age, and, like you, Digs was trying to coach me through exams."

So the injury upon the dread Dunce had not been very long ago, at all. "And?" he prompted.

"My father was deployed to Guiana and Polly was going that way to maybe acquire alpacas for the zoo and so I badgered Father into letting me go."

"With the promise that you would study hard on the voyage and while you were there?"
"Which I did!" Mary insisted. "For the most part," she amended, surprising him not at all.

"And the Professor loaned you his texts," Peter prodded when Mary remained silent.

"Yes," she said sullenly. "Asim, Polly and I were in a boat and, being the good girl that I was, I brought my books. I got distracted by a river dolphin, which I fancifully thought at the time was a prehistoric ichthyosaur. I thought I had found a live version of the marine reptile Mary Anning had identified in fossils. I got quite excited and my book bag fell in. Accidentally!"

"But of course," Peter said blandly. He would ask Eustace later what an ichthyosaur was – other than the obvious fish-lizard from the name. He remembered it was one of those things Mary was mad over and that, on Richard's advice, he had fibbed about seeing. Did ichthyosaurs have hips?

"Fortunately, I did hold on to Gadow's *Amphibia and Reptiles* to help identify any snakes or caimans we might see in the rain forest. The rescue mission for Scotus was thwarted by the circling *Pygocentrus nattereri.*"

"Which are?"

"Red piranhas, which I later learned have a very unfair reputation for savagery."

"But at the time, none of you would dive into piranha-infested waters for the sake of Scotus' *Questions on Metaphysics?*"

"Would you?" Mary asked.

"Certainly not, unless solely for the sake of the Professor. Remember? I'd be weighting the books with rocks."

Mary removed her glasses and absently polished them on her dusty lab coat. "It occurred to me later that, though she was very harsh at the time, Polly could have fished my bag out with her umbrella."

"I suspect she did not want to risk a good umbrella to piranhas?"

"The possible presence of *Eunectes murinus* was a deterrent as well."

"Which is?"

"Green anaconda. Along the lines of the Emerald Tree Boa I have in the ballroom but much, much larger. And aquatic, not arboreal."

"Surely Dunce Scotus would be toxic to a giant constrictor?"

"I would never mistreat so astounding a specimen to test the hypothesis – the snake that is, not the book," Mary replied smugly, letting the glasses dangle again. "And as I hope you observe, I can avoid aggravating you by refraining from that *M* adjective you don't like."

"For which I would thank you except that you are refraining only to assure my cooperation in obtaining a reciprocated disclosure that I now owe you." It really was a relief for her to not be using the *M* adjective in conjunction with giant, book-eating snakes.

Mary leaned forward from her perch at the bookcase, avid, like a Hound on the trail. "Tell me the reason for your ambivalence to camels. From that very first tea in Digs' office, you professed enough familiarity to dislike them and I want to hear why."

Peter ran a hand over his face. He couldn't very explain the real reason for it – that the problem had..."
arisen when the Archenland princes had arrived at Cair Paravel with a dumb Calormene camel. He had been laid up at the time and found it near impossible to escape the camel and her very persistent attentions. A small lie was required here.

"Whenever I've been to a zoo or animal park, the camels take an interest in me."

"Is this specific to camels? Or all even toed ungulates? Hippos? Have you ever had a problem with hippos? Deer? Cows? Giraffes?"

The thought was even more terrifying than camels. Especially the giraffes. "No! Camels only."

"And what do you mean by an interest?" Mary pressed, as she would. "Do you generate camel hostility for, if so, you do have my sympathy. It's very uncomfortable when they spit on you."

"No, not antipathy," Peter admitted. "Quite the opposite, which I assure you, is very uncomfortable as well."

Her mouth opened in mocking shock. "Your very presence induces admiration? Affection? In camels?"

"Deep, abiding, infatuation," Peter admitted ruefully. This was one aspect of Narnia he was thankful he only rarely encountered, there or here.

"Do they bat their long eyelashes at you?" Mary made an effort at imitating the mannerism and managed to look completely comical. "Do you inspire those funny grunting sounds they make? Do they follow you around?"

"Yes yes, and yes," Peter said wearily. "So, while I know that you consider them a miracle of evolutionary processes, I cannot get passed the fact that they try to lick my ears and eat my hair. And I do not recommend the experience of camel tongue on your neck."

Mary's laugh was so hearty it was a miracle she did not wake the entire house.

She finally wiped her eyes. "A fair trade, Peter. That story was well worth the price of the retelling of my humiliation. I really want that drink now, which means I must remove my distraction, and let you return to the reeling and writhing."

She pushed off from the bookcase and walked passed to the door behind him that led, he had learned from Richard, to the family's private rooms. The back staircase there went up to the guest floor.

Peter stood to see her out. "Thank you, again, for opening your home to us."

"It's my pleasure. Polly and Digs have come here often. Jill is delightful and Eustace has been a lovely addition. Notwithstanding your earlier criticisms of him, he has triumphantly overcome his narrow-minded, dull, priggish, non-mathematician parents."

Peter laughed with another recollection of the remarkable tea that seemed so very long ago. "I stand corrected, about Eustace, not his parents."

"And yet more Mary Management in how you adroitly agree with me. I would say that I hope we see more of you, but I understand you'll be off to basic training in the spring and deployment."

"Yes."

"Thank you for your service. And thank you for the time you have spent with Richard. It has helped
him enormously."

He took his seat again but then Mary unexpectedly turned back in the doorway, a hand on the door jamb. "Peter, do not be surprised if the next time you visit us, Richard doesn't remember who you are. We don't know when, but it will happen."

"I know."

"Take advantage of the time you do have." She sighed heavily and Peter could see her forcefully push the creeping melancholy away. "Things are so lively with you lot about. It's very welcome. What with circus animals and convicts on Weald Moor, Richard and his crow experiment, and Eustace and Lee going on about dragons, I shouldn't wonder if I dream of lions again, tonight."

Peter started so suddenly, he jolted the desk and knocked his Latin dictionary to the floor. "Lions?" Embarrassingly, his voice hiked. "Again?"

"It's no surprise, surely?" Mary went on airily. "There is a veritable pride of them!" She began ticking them off on her fingers. "Polly tracking a lion in Telford! Richard mumbled that there was a lion in our wood today when I woke him! And remember, there's one on Digs' wardrobe. Perhaps the lion followed Polly from Experiment House!"

Peter managed a casual and diplomatic laugh. "Perhaps the Lion enjoys the company and Lee's cooking."

"He is welcome here, so long as he stays out of Farmer Cooper's fold! Though in my dream the lion has been walking through our wood and paying no attention to me or the sheep at all. I wonder what a lion means in Jungian dream analysis? Courage? Leadership? Kingly qualities? Expression of the animus? Latent and unexpressed affect? Lying about all day and letting the women do the work? Any ideas?"

"No," Peter said, feeling discomfited all over again as Mary barged onward.

"No?" She smiled, looking very animated and gestured so broadly, she almost dropped her book. "So even with all these lions about, you don't dream of them?"

Aslan did not visit him in that way and, irrationally, Peter felt a surge of envy. "No," he replied curtly.

"Oh," Mary replied with sad frown. "No need to get shirty. Or, I suppose it's justified as I am certainly distracting you to the point of annoyance with my prattle. So I'd best be off."

"No, of course not," Peter injected, now feeling badly to have hurt her feelings with his poor manners. "I apologize for sounding rude. You are not annoying me."

"But distraction you cannot deny, and I won't have Digs' blaming me for both the lost Scotus text and your examination results. So, good night!"

"Good night," Peter replied, as she briskly turned away and firmly shut the door behind her. He heard, a few moments later, the sounds of another door shutting.

Peter bent down to retrieve the detested book from the floor and thought he might have just missed a velveted paw thwacking him on the side of the head.

ooO0oo
The night before Asim bin Kalil met Jill Pole and Eustace Scrubb for the first time, and Major al-Masri saw Eustace Scrubb for a second time, God showed him a dream. Asim and Major al-Masri were not surprised to dream, but thanked God who is great for showing the dream.

He knew immediately it was the sort of strange dream that he had come to associate with the Pevensies, dreams with green ships that had purple sails, white birds, gold and silver swords, dragons who smoked liked Mr. Patel's cigarette, rats and crows that spied and understood human speech, dead moles in sand, a gryphon in a blue sky, and over it all, a cat with eyes like a lion and golden girl who burned brighter than the sun.

And so Asim attended.

In the dream, he saw the rat. He had seen her before, behind a blue curtain, on the green ship with the purple sail, and scurrying furtively along the cobbled streets of a domed city with a vibrant souk and minarets that were not. The rat was again on a cobbled street but this street was gray and marked with petrol stains left by jeep tyres and the scratches of Nazi soldiers' hobnailed boots. He followed the rat as she ran down alleyes that seemed familiar. As with the domed city, this was a real place, but unlike that other city, this was one he had been to, one that he knew. The answer came as the rat turned a corner and darted into the famous sewer near the Avenue des Champs-Élysées and la Seine.

He followed the rat across two bridges and then through water and fire down dark tunnels worked by strange creatures with tusks and pig snouts. The rat disappeared into a chateau where monsters and giants slept. He thought he was to pursue her, but heard the sounds of battle. He followed the noise and entered the ballroom of Russell House where a dragon and a white horse fought a terrible green serpent, like the snakes in the ballroom but very wicked and large. Dragon and horse stomped, flamed, and scratched the serpent until it finally thrashed its way to an awful, bloody end. The dragon raised its head to look at him and smoke trickled from his nostril. The horse pawed the ground and shuddered and from her back sprouted great, glossy wings. She sprang into the air and flew onto the shoulder flash of the British First Airborne Division.

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

Consequently, when the summons came the following morning for Polly to drive to Experiment House and investigate a lion and rescue Eustace Scrubb, Asim was not surprised. He was frustrated because he could not stay at the House.

He was returning to Bletchley Park for the North Africa operations. He was needed in Hut 3 to assist in the analysis of the decrypted German Army and Air Force Enigma machine ciphers spitting out of Hut 6. D-Day for Operation Torch was fast approaching and he expected being at Bletchley Park at least until the North Africa campaign was decided. Patel was off to Edinburgh and the Port of Leith to assist with the logistics of moving the convoys for the British part of an Anglo-American combined invasion force of over 100,000 soldiers and their equipment with landings planned for Casablanca, Algiers, and Oran.

These things were critical and there was no question but to obey duty and orders. Still, if he had been at Russell House, he would be able to listen through the vents to the hushed conversations that would undoubtedly occur.

The transformation of Eustace Scrubb was something he should have anticipated. From Mary's report, he thought Mary had not met in the Oxford Museum the same surly boy he had observed in the Cambridge pub. Between the time Major al-Masri had seen the boy in the pub and when Asim saw him at Russell House, Eustace Scrubb had radically altered and acquired the God-light. Surely Eustace Scrubb had gone to N., to Narnia, the place of which Susan Caspian née Pevensie had written and to which Edmund and Lucy Pevensie had gone and now would not return. This was
where A, who was Aslan, and Caspian were.

With the next extraordinary summons, not Peter to Cambridge this time, but Polly to Weald Moor to investigate lions, perhaps Eustace had accompanied Jill, traveled for a second time to Narnia, and returned in a dramatic fashion that warranted zookeepers and the Home Guard. Narnia, Asim concluded, imbued those who went there with God-light. It changed the sullen and dull to brilliant and blinding.

Once they all arrived at Russell House and embraced on the lawns, Asim knew he had been foolish to doubt. God was wise and great. So he returned to War, would go where he was needed, and would not endure the inevitable headache from too much time with too many in whom the God-light burned so brightly.

If North Africa resolved, the countries secured, and the Panzer Army crushed, Major al-Masri believed it would then be the time to turn aside briefly to the other tasks the Cat had given him. He would meet with Colonel Walker-Smythe. Assuming the Colonel was a willing accomplice, Asim would see what might be done to get a rat to France and a sword to war aloft a flying horse.

00oo00

0300 – the most blessed canteen break on the midnight to 0800 shift. Asim eased into the seat. Colonel Clark slumped into the seat across the table.

"Goddammit," Clark muttered.

Asim nodded in weary agreement, knowing the unspoken cause of their shared feeling. "I do not understand it, either." They could not discuss it openly, even in the confines of the Bletchley Park canteen. The mood in Hut 3 was tense and angry. Outstanding intelligence work was pouring from the codebreakers to the Eighth Army in North Africa and General Montgomery was ignoring it. He must not trust them. That could be the only explanation.

Panzerarmee ist erschöpft the decrypt had read. It was Rommel's message to Hitler: The Panzer Army is exhausted.

Why wasn't Montgomery chasing Rommel? Why was he moving so slowly? They had intercepted Rommel's Enigma-encoded messages, decoded them, and relayed them to Montgomery. They thought Rommel had less than 20 tanks left; Monty had ten times that number, including over 50 Grants and Shermans – the very tanks Mrs. Susan Caspian had helped acquire, oddly enough.

So much waste. It could be over. They could have broken the back of the Panzer Army and the Torch landings would have been that much easier.

Colonel Clark was staring into his cup of Nescafe, another American contribution to the war effort. Asim could barely stomach it but at 3 AM he drank it anyway. He had at least 30 signals still to analyze and more would still be coming in from Hut 6.

"May I join you?"

A Wren, a Petty Officer, was standing at their table's edge holding her own cup of Nescafe.

Colonel Clark nodded listlessly.

"Of course," Asim said. She sat next to Colonel Clark. All the Wrens did. An unmarried man at Bletchley Park was as rare to the scores of young women working there as a bar of proper chocolate or a banana.
"Thank you," she replied brightly. She could not have been older than 22.

Seeing her reminded him of the other task set before him in Oxfordshire but he had not had the time to see it yet accomplished. It had been a suspicion only but a reasonable assumption based upon Jill's circumstances. "Petty Officer, I am looking for First Officer Elizabeth Pole. I have a message for her from her daughter. Do you know if she is here?"

"Liz Pole?" the Petty Officer said. "She's in Indexing and we're bunking in the same house. She's on duty now!"

The decrypts did not give him time to speak to her now and she was certainly as occupied as he was. Asim sent a message to the crucial Indexing department asking First Officer Pole to meet him in the canteen after shift so that he could deliver a letter from her daughter. With Clark's contribution, he emphasized in the note that the circumstances were not an emergency.

Five hours later, the day shift was arriving, the third shift was leaving and he blundered out of Hut 3 into the cold, weak morning sunlight. Clark spotted First Officer Elizabeth Pole in the canteen first. They were all too fatigued for pleasantries. Asim was not surprised, but did wish the Admiralty had managed to get at least one message to the mother so that he was not the one bearing the news that her daughter's boarding school had closed down due to a marauding circus lion.

"Good God!" Mrs. Pole cried, tearing open the letter. "Is my Jill safe? Is all well? Where is she?"

She looked prepared to go AWOL to recover her daughter.

"She is fine," Asim said. Hadn't he just said that? "Miss Polly Plummer, a zookeeper, was asked to Experiment House for a consult on the reported lion and brought Jill to the home of a friend in Oxfordshire."

Colonel Clark gave him a look that, were they not all so exhausted, Asim might have thought was irritated. Was there something wrong with what he had said?

"al-Masri, could you get Officer Pole a cup of coffee while I fill her in?"

He waited in the queue, fetched the Nescafe, and brought it back. Clark and Officer Pole were sitting at a table talking as she read through Jill's hurried letter.

Clark took the cup and handed it to her. Asim joined them at the table. "I told Officer Pole about the Russell family and how charming Mrs. Russell is and that Ruby, my housekeeper, had visited the House and will be Doctor Russell's interim nurse."

"I am so grateful they took her in," Officer Pole said. Her hand shook as she raised the cup to her lips.

"The Russells have been very pleased to have her," Asim said. "It was no trouble at all."

"I am just surprised that she did not contact any of my family. I have sisters in Surrey and London and she has stayed with them over holidays. I have heard such dreadful things about some of the children who were evacuated during the Blitz. It would just be horrid..." Her lip trembled and she took another drink of coffee.

Asim was wondering how to explain that Jill had likely gone with Eustace and Polly because she had had some extraordinary adventure but Colonel Clark answered first. "Eustace knows Miss Plummer and the Russells. He talked about them when I saw him before they left for school. It would be like him to generously extend an invitation to someone else's home and not think anything
Clark put a hand on Officer Pole's arm. It was a very American thing to do in how they touched one another. "Jill is safe and properly supervised in the Russells' home and I would feel very comfortable in sending my Jack there, were his school to close unexpectedly because the Headmaster had thrown a fit and claimed that circus animals and lunatics were running amuck on the grounds."

She laughed, a little, smiled appreciatively, and pulled her arm away. "Thank you so much Colonel, and you as well, Major."

"I understand completely. War is very hard on families," Clark said. "Major, do you have the number so that Mrs. Pole can telephone her daughter?"

Asim quickly wrote down the number at Russell House. "You may reach her here and speak with her yourself." He felt that somehow, the nearly same words were awkward coming from him.

First Officer Pole dabbed her red-rimmed eyes and looked at him curiously. "Colonel Clark said you live with the Russells, Major? And that was how you saw Jill?"

"Yes, ma'am. Oxfordshire is my home in England," he replied, wondering at her purpose.

She bit her lip and glanced at Colonel Clark. "I ask, Major, only because Jill can have difficulties, sometimes, in new places."

It was then he perceived her unspoken concern and on this account he hoped he could assure her. "When I last saw her, Jill was in very good spirits. She and Eustace were enjoying themselves and were as welcome in the house as I am."

With a grateful smile she took the slip of paper with the House number and tucked it in her handbag. "I shall just make off for the switchboard and phone them up now. Thank you so much, gentlemen!"

As he and Clark stumbled off to their respective barracks, Colonel Clark told him later that First Officer Pole was "a brunette bombshell." Asim had not seen anything particularly unique in her - he saw her as a spy did, dark hair, brown eyes, pale skin, about 160 centimetres and 46 kilos, give or take, and so a figure that was not fat. He did notice one critical fact that he had not known before. Unlike her daughter, First Officer Elizabeth Pole did not burn with a God-light brighter than a burning city hit by an incendiary.

ooOo0oo

Next up, the Christmas chapter, *Just like the ones we used to know*.

Oo00ooo

We get more of the myriad bonding arrangements of Narnia, with links in my Livejournal to the stories regarding black swans, albatrosses, and giraffes. Also, there's a further look at this vision's ideas regarding what happened after the Pevensies left and who was left to govern – which Peter and Susan discussed and which I address in *Acceptance of the Terms*.

The stories Peter and Mary exchange are derived from the wonderful Anastigmat who wrote in her marvelous *Flight of Fancy* of Peter's appeal to camels. I then countered with my own contributions in my Live Journal. I confess that I now "ship" Peter and camels in an OTP – one true pairing. Further, the discussion of the lost texts in the Amazon also came from Livejournal entries and the *Everybody Lives Nobody Dies Narnia AU* Livejournal community. I have since gone back and revised Chapter 2 of Part 1 to include Digory still scolding Mary about the lost texts.
The discussion of the frustration of the Bletchley Park codebreakers with Montgomery's failure to advance rapidly enough during the Second Battle of El Alamein and the line about the Panzer Army comes from *Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park* by Sir F.H. Hinsley. The information about the shifts and the canteen come from various entries on the BBC's website, WW2 The People's War.
Chapter Summary

War is women's business. Christmas Eve is celebrated, bugs are jittered, and a candlestick becomes a weapon.

Chapter 13, Apostolic Way

"Never in history has the navy landed an army at the planned time and place. But if you land us anywhere within 50 miles of Fedela and within 1 week of D-Day, I'll go ahead and win."
Major General George Patton, November 1942 (On the Operation Torch landings)

Captain Renault: "What in heaven's name brought you to Casablanca?"
Rick: My health. "I came to Casablanca for the waters."
Captain Renault: "The waters? What waters? We're in the desert."
Rick: "I was misinformed."
Casablanca, released in the United States in December 1942 to coincide with the Operation Torch landings

"But he would only look at me askance and say: "Just weave your web, please; else your cheeks will smart for hours. War is men's business!"
"Is there a man left in Athens?"
"No, not one, not one…"
"Then take this basket; put on a girdle, card wool, munch beans. The war shall be women's business."
"Lay aside your water-pots, we will guard them, we will help our friends and companions."
Excerpts from dialogue among Lysistrata, Magistrate, and Cleonice from the play Lysistrata by Aristophanes

"But when that day comes, may I be the one to tell him that you did indeed scold Aslan for him? … And that you coshed him over the head with a candlestick?"
Sir Jalur to Regent Morgan, Deny the Child, by Anastigmat

To: Mrs. John Pevensie
Finchley Road
Finchley
Barnet, London

Dear Aunt Helen:

I'm writing to thank you for letting me come to your house over the Christmas hols. Did you hear about the to-do at the School? We've only just reopened and it is much different and a lot better. The
work is a lot harder, and I'm finding all that I didn't know about history, maths, and literature. I am enjoying sciences, though. We have new faculty in that department and they are not idiots and are at least willing to listen to ideas about avian evolution from theropod dinosaurs.

I wanted to write and beg for another favour. My friend from school, Jill Pole, is in a fix. Her father is in the RAF and her Mother is a Wren and won't be getting the holidays off, or even Christmas, and especially since Operation Torch happened. Jill knows her mum is staying at Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire but it's hard to reach her. There is a funny coincidence that I will tell you about when I see you, but Woburn Abbey is the home of the Duke of Bedford and the Russell family holds that title.

I was wondering if you would mind if Jill came and stayed with you, too? Peter, and the Professor and Miss Plummer met Jill when we were staying in Combe while the school closed and Edmund, Lucy, and Susan want to meet Jill. She could stay with her cousins but they aren't very nice to her and she has offers in the Oxford area but that would be lonely since the rest of us will all be together. If you say 'yes,' thank you very much and I will tell her. If you say no, I understand. It's hard to feed and house people now but I know Jill will bring her booklet.

Your nephew,

Eustace Clarence

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To: Mrs. John Pevensie
Finchley Road
Finchley
Barnet, London

Dear Mum:

I understand that Eustace has written you asking if Jill Pole might join us for Christmas. While it is easy for me to say, as I will not be sacrificing my room to her (more on that below), allow me to enthusiastically endorse her joining us, if possible. While I do not speak for all of us, I believe we all share the sentiment that all of us together more than compensates for less on the table and in our Christmas stockings. Truly the more, the merrier as the saying goes.

You were right and I have caught a chill, but it is not so severe that I must return home for you to nurse me through a proper ague and tell me what I right fool I am to take on so much all at once. In truth, the sneezing aside, which is no worse than what I typically suffer in the spring, I am enjoying the work very much. I have developed an unfortunate habit of speaking French in German, German in Russian, and Russian in my sleep – or so my dormmates report. My languages master assures me this is temporary.

I have abandoned fencing. Mister Jones, our athletics instructor, is most irritated to lose both me and Peter. Though I am a lazy sot, I am focusing renewed energy upon our OTC, which I have shockingly neglected. There is silly target practice, pointless orienteering, and running from one end of the green to the other. I do not have the patience for the team sports, though my friend, Jack Clark, is on me to stay with rugger.

I shall miss Peter when he leaves, though he is hardly ever here now.

Jack, who Lucy and I told you of, is another reason for this letter. His father, Colonel Clark, like Jill Pole's mother, is heavily occupied with Operation Torch and so Jack will be spending Christmas with their family housekeeper, Miss Ruby Smith. They will be alone and far from their families and
traditions in America. Jack has not asked, but I thought I would ask you if Miss Smith and Jack might join us for Christmas Eve and Day. I will speak for Peter here – and you be sure to tell him I did so – that we will happily share our room and beds with Eustace and Jack.

Miss Smith and Colonel Clark were very kind to Lucy and to me over the summer and we would like to reciprocate.

Thank you and with love,

Edmund

To: Mrs. John Pevensie
Finchley Road
Finchley
Barnet, London

Dear Mum:

THANK YOU EVER SO MUCH! You are lovelv and I miss you very much. I am sorry you had that note from Headmistress Bell but I can't abide our vicar. Even the Professor says he is man of very narrow understanding and even more limited learning. He is beastly and I loath him. The vicar, not the Professor of coarse.

Susan is off for another French lesson with Miss Simon, but she says thank you too and that we will help with all the extra people and work.

Having everyone come is the best Christmas gift we could have and the only one we want.

Love,

Lucy

From: Mrs. Michael T. Pole
## House
******shire

To: Mrs. John Pevensie
Finchley Road
Finchley
Barnet, London

Dear Mrs. Pevensie:

I have but a moment before my &&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&& arrives to &&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&. Thank you so much for taking in my dear Jill for the holiday. You are the very spirit of generosity. Your children and nephew have been so very kind and welcoming to Jill.

I convey also the thanks of Colonel Tom Clark, father of Jack, who, through happenstance, is &&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&.

I regret that I am unable to be with Jill but &&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&
&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&
I hope to meet you at a time more convenient and peaceful in the future.

With my sincere gratitude for your goodness,

Elizabeth Pole

From: Miss Ruby Smith
Impington Lane
Impington
Cambridgeshire

To: Mrs. John Pevensie
Finchley Road
Finchley
Barnet, London

Dear Helen:

Think nothing of the shopping list you gave me. Jack, Tom and I are so thankful that you have opened your home to us. I would've been ashamed if you hadn't let us add things. Jack had a hard time until he met Edmund and Lucy and they've been really good friends to him.

You have growing boys and I know Jack is always looking for third and fourth helpings.

I took your very small shopping list to the Army PX and added to it. For GIs eating in English homes, we get rations to bring that include fruit juice, evaporated milk, peas, bacon, sugar, coffee, lard or shortening (I took lard), butter, and rice. With our household PX coupons, I can also bring chocolate bars, chewing gum, and other candy for the children, canned fruit and sardines, flour, cheese, and potatoes. Also, I noticed that soap is now being rationed and I haven't seen much bathroom tissue at our store in Impington, so I'll bring some of both. We have rum in the house, so I'll bring that for a punch.

You asked about a pudding because you couldn't find one in London? The PX had some boxes of Jell-O pudding and flavored and unflavored gelatin. I will sometimes make a single pie crust to save on flour and fat and add a flavored pudding or gelatin filling to it. But I don't think that is what you had in mind at all since you don't add suet, dried fruit, or liquor to Jell-O. I saw a recipe from the Ministry of Food that suggested carrot, bread crumbs and prunes for a steamed Christmas pudding. So using that as I guide, I got prunes, currants, and raisins, so maybe you can make a pudding?

As for the Christmas cake, I couldn't find any icing sugar. I had to ask at the grocers what it was. We call it powdered sugar. The PX doesn't have the home baker in mind. I know how to make a boiled icing so if you save your egg ration and I combine it with my ration, and the butter and milk from the PX, we should be able to bake a cake and frost it.

Were you able to find a turkey or a goose? If not, write me right away. I know some of the cooks on an American base and they will put one aside for me.

You had asked about our favorites and we've got it all except that a proper New England Christmas meal has to have oysters and cranberries. I got cans of both.

I know the Army has mighty logistics, but trying to plan a Christmas meal in wartime is as complicated, if you ask me.

Also, right now the PX has more things for men than women. Americans are only just starting to see
women in service (the GIs are told to be polite when they see an English woman in uniform!). If your young men need razors or other items for their kit, I can get them. There was some face cream and hand lotion and I snatched those both up. They might be a lovely Christmas gift for yourself, Mrs. Goodwin, or for your girls. There were many comic books. Jack enjoys those, so I got some. The PX did have some nice jackknives, so I got one for Lucy so she does not always have to borrow Edmund's.

Thank you again and I look forward to meeting you, Susan, Jill, and Mrs. Goodwin.

Sincerely,

Ruby

Edmund missed supply wagons.

He was feeling very much that he was the put-upon younger brother. It should not have been easier in Narnia to have accomplished all this. There had been no railways or motorcars in Narnia. He had been the expert in logistics and procurement. Journeys had taken days and weeks in Narnia. Why was he so irritated by a trip of hours?

School recessed for the Christmas holidays. Peter would be going straight from the Professor's home to London. Eustace and Jill met Lucy and Susan at the sleepy junction. The girls went on to London; Eustace waited for him and Jack to arrive and then the three of them were off to Impington.

Over the summer, a train trip with Eustace and Jack would have been akin to confinement in a barrel with a romp of Narnian Otters. Now, it was fine. A little tense, a little awkward, but fine, helped enormously by Jack rattling on about the latest reports of North Africa and Eustace being uncharacteristically quiet. Still, without Lucy or Peter to help maintain the equilibrium, the trip felt far longer than it actually was.

Edmund would have just done something else – surely some other option was more efficient. Send Jack and Eustace to Cambridge and have Eustace return to London, or he and Eustace join the girls and send Jack home to Ruby. Except Mum was fretting about starting the pudding, which meant going home with Jack, and the one thing on which Eustace was stubbornly implacable was stopping by Harold and Alberta's. So he and Jack lugged their books and packing from school to the junction, joined Eustace and his books and packing, then it was from the junction to Cambridge, from Cambridge to Impington, calling on Ruby, dropping off Jack, and picking up the food from the American PX. A surly and tasteless dinner with Harold and Alberta followed.

It was an uncomfortable evening. Peter had warned him that Eustace was angry at Aslan and asking some very difficult questions. Edmund was not really in a mood to discuss such things and was relieved when, for politeness's sake, he asked Eustace of it. His cousin said merely and quite rightly that it was a matter for him and Aslan to work out, and so that was that.

Finally, they were on their way to London with many schoolbooks, a suitcase each, and a prodigious quantity of dried fruit and cooking supplies. Edmund was sorely tempted to sneak the brandy Ruby had included. After lugging everything around Cambridge, Edmund wired home and demanded that several someones meet their goods wagon in London and help them negotiate the transfers to and walk home.

He and Eustace were crammed, cheek to jowl, in a seat in the very back of the dirty train. Sweating and cranky, Edmund finally leaned back with a sigh and propped his legs up on the crate filled with prunes, lard, and cans. The train lurched and they were on their way. He closed his eyes.
"You said you were a traitor, once," Eustace said.

Edmund bolted upright and sent a tin of peas rolling into the aisle where it banged into other passengers' shoes and boots. It came to a clanking rest at the puffy ankle belonging to a smiling grandmother.

"Thank you, ma'am," Edmund muttered as she leaned over, rescued the wandering can, and handed it back to him. Edmund put the tin back in the crate, wedging it between bags of rice and flour.

"Sorry," Eustace said, glancing around them and squeezing tighter into the corner.

"It's fine," Edmund replied, though he did not mean it.

Eustace, not daunted by rolling peas, pressed on. "It was her, wasn't it? Her cause?"

"It was." Edmund tried to not be angry at Eustace, for his cousin did not understand and did not know the history. He was not, however, going to volunteer information, either. He wished he could say, "Let's not discuss it on a train," but this course seemed preferable – he would not have to endure excuses, empathy, and sympathy from his siblings, it was already loud, and the public circumstances would give him the ready excuse to cut Eustace off if necessary.

"I was going to say, 'she made you do it,' but that's not right, is it?"

Edmund shook his head. "No."

Eustace was silent for long enough that Edmund hoped his cousin might have moved on, but then he spoke again. "The Professor and Polly think the Green Lady might have been related somehow to Jadis. They didn't look anything alike, but they thought the methods were similar."

Peter had shared that gruesome speculation with him. Jadis had appealed to a greedy, needy child's desire for affection, revenge, and rationed sweets. Rilian had been ensorcelled by seductive beauty, lured by power, and probably raped. Jadis' enslavement of a boy had been mere days; the Green Witch had kept her toy for years.

"There are some similarities, yes," Edmund said. "There are important differences as well. I don't know if we will ever know for certain."

Eustace looked out the grimy window at the muddy lanes of south Cambridgeshire chugging by.

"I understand," Eustace eventually said.

"Thank you, but if you say that, I'm not sure you do," Edmund replied, trying to curb his welling irritation. He did not want to degenerate into a woe-filled contest of who had done the greater harm, who had most needed Aslan's grace, and who had received the greater gift. He had not deserved it and nor had Eustace and that was irrelevant. No one deserved such goodness – except Lucy – yet, Aslan gave it. This simply was. It was a ghastly thing of the past and a challenge every day to make it meaningful.

Eustace shrugged. "The Green Lady saw our weaknesses and knew just how to target me and Pole. If Jadis was anything like that, it would have been really hard to refuse her."

"Her persuasiveness is not an excuse for what I did."

"I didn't say it was. But I was older, I knew better, I'd been to Aslan's country, and still, I believed her lies. Twice. Pole did too, and even Puddleglum, for a little while. It doesn't excuse us, but it does
show just how good she was." Eustace shrugged again. "At least that is how I see it."

And with that extraordinary statement, Eustace, opened the book in his lap, *Dragons of the Air*, and was immediately engrossed in a detailed picture of a skeleton that looked like a giant prehistoric bird.

Edmund knew better than to ask what it was.

So, in addition to all of their other odd habits and manners, it seemed that her children had acquired sophisticated, modern views of race. There had been Susan's close friendships with Mr. Hill and his family in Washington, that whole peculiar greeting party in Liverpool, and now Susan and Lucy were sharing their room with Jill Pole. Jill was charming. With her children setting such an example, Helen could do no less, but she was, once again, left wondering where in blazes this had all come from.

And then there was her nephew. The change to Eustace Clarence Scrubb was as profound as Edmund's had been after being evacuated during the Blitz. Helen went back and checked her diary, just to be sure. She looked at her sad, worried entries about Edmund's sullen good-bye and read of her shock when they returned. She frequently re-read those entries from the first weeks of her children's return from Professor Kirke's home; she made a point of always re-reading them whenever her children returned home after a long absence.

As expected, dinner was merry, everyone was helpful, and the undercurrents enough to give her a headache. Tonight, Peter was a little withdrawn. He looked exhausted, rumpled, ink-stained, and very relieved to finally be done. And then, by March, he would be gone, off, for training and deployment. The scathing, condescending letter from John berating her for her poor mothering and decisions she had not bothered to answer. Her husband could go hang himself as far as she was concerned. She swept the ugliness under the rug. Everyone who mattered was here and it was a blessed pleasure to have proper soap in the house.

When Peter was having an off night, one or more of the others would rise to the occasion and fill the significant space he left – tonight it was Susan. Her eldest daughter graciously held court and carried the conversation, with special attention to Eustace while Lucy and Edmund were both making a kind effort to Jill who, Helen thought, actually didn't need any help getting on.

To the untrained eye, to her husband, it would have been a normal dinner. Helen knew better. There were fewer of the veiled asides and inside humours. There were no comments about offal meats and hair in the food or dumping juice into the blouses of unwanted guests. These were the things that made no sense to her but were part of the secret history her children shared and to which she was not privy. Helen thought that whatever experience bound her children, Eustace and Jill were part of it, but in a newer, different way. Still, there was something strange going on, as when you instinctively knew someone was in a mood and gave him a wide berth.

She didn't identify it until dinner's end.

Edmund stood and began to collect the dishes. "If I clear, I won't have to wash."

Eustace pushed away from the table, plate in hand, but Jill took the plate from him. "You helped cook, Scrubb, so I'll help Edmund."

Something passed, a hand signal, a glance, and some slight frisson.

"Thank you, Jill," Edmund said, with a look at Peter who suddenly seemed more alert. "We'll make Susan and Peter wash." His words had an edge and those who were on the edge of their seats, sat
"Eustace, tell us more about what has happened at Experiment House," Lucy said, which sounded perfectly natural, except that it was to break up whatever had just occurred.

"The Head is gone, and half her faculty," Eustace said, oblivious. "We're all in remedial maths, languages, and history. And to keep us on the straight, there is a new physical education requirement. We're running four miles at night, after studying." Eustace handed his glass to Jill. "Thanks, Pole. Still, it's all much better than it was."

"He's not having to hand out near so many humbugs to crying girls," Jill said.

They all laughed and Edmund followed Jill into the kitchen.

Helen waited, pretending to and mostly listening to Eustace, and watching Edmund and Jill as they went back and forth, chatting quietly and removing dishes. They then disappeared into the kitchen.

Eustace talked of the number of students who had not returned and how this meant there were no Prefects, or a Head Boy and Girl, so there was even less supervision than before, but that everyone was much better behaved. He was caught out after curfew and as punishment, was assigned thirty pages of worksheets and had to write I will not venture out of my dormitory like a thief in the night 1,000 times. In Latin.

Jill and Edmund did not return. Feeling the conversation turning tense with their continued absence, and Susan and Peter both exchanging looks in the direction of the kitchen, Helen decided to take matters into her own hands. "I will just go and make sure the leftovers are put away, and then you all can do the wash up."

She was walking to the kitchen door before Peter or Susan could try to waylay or countermand her. Surely other parents did not have these difficulties.

Helen pushed open the kitchen door with no ceremony and suffered confusion so profound, the swinging door smacked her in the backside before she could recover.

In a light more dazzling than anything their poor, dimmed, electric bulbs could manage, she blinked and beheld Edmund, with his hands on Jill's shoulders. He was, very solemnly, bending down to kiss her on each cheek.

They pulled apart at her entrance. Jill looked a little embarrassed and Edmund looked a little flummoxed. If it had been surreptitious kissing, such as what Susan and Tebbitt had been doing behind the pillar at Union Station, she would have felt better able to cope. Instead, she had interfered with what looked more to be King George's grave benediction of a loyal subject.

Helen decided to ignore whatever inexplicable ceremony she had interrupted and moved to the counter. "Jill, dear, could you see if there is anything else on the table that needs to be stored?"

She knew there was nothing left on the table. "I need to put the leftovers away and Edmund will start the tea."

"Of course, Mrs. Pevensie. I'll tell Peter and Susan to give you a few minutes to sort it all?"

"Thank you, yes. It is very tactful of you to recognize that we really don't have room in here for four or five people."

Jill was very clever. She laughed and pushed the door back into the dining room.
Helen busied herself with the leftovers. She pushed the cooked carrots into a small bowl and covered them with a plate. She would turn them into a soup for lunch tomorrow, flavored with the sausage and gravy leftover from dinner.

Edmund went to the sink and filled the kettle. And then as predictable as a clock, Peter was at the door.

"Everything is cleared from table, Mum. Edmund and I could…"

The kettle clanged on to the hob, loudly expressing Edmund's views on Peter's interference.

"It isn't polite to leave our guests," Helen told her eldest. "Edmund and I will put things away, get the tea ready, then you and Susan will wash up."

With a reluctant look at Edmund's stiff back, Peter retreated again into the dining room.

"Really," Helen said with a mock huff. "Your brother can be thick sometimes."

"Like Gibraltar but not as flexible," Edmund retorted.

She moved around her son to the icebox. He was still staring at the kettle.

"A watched pot will boil," she said. When he did not answer, she set a hand on his shoulder, relieved when he did not flinch. "Edmund? You're…"

"Fine," her son said firmly.

She thought about that and his behavior all evening and since coming home with Eustace. "Yes," Helen agreed. "You are fine. So why are your brother and sisters dancing about as if you are not?"

He glanced at her, sideways, with a scowl that turned wry. "They think they are being very subtle."

"Oh, they are. But I've had a lot of practice decoding what you all are about."

Edmund turned quiet and inward; he was very skilled at hiding what he thought and felt. She waited.

Finally, he said, "Do you know what it is like when everyone is anticipating that you will react to something, and skulks about in a way that succeeds only in irritating you, and you end up reacting, not because of the thing, but because you are so irritated with them for thinking that you will?"

She sorted through the reasoning that was unusually convoluted for Edmund. "They think you should be reacting in some way to Jill joining us and you are not?"

He scowled, but not in anger. "And we assume we are so clever."

"You are, but your wit did not all come from your father." She felt her heart lighten as it had after the blunter conversation with Peter. One did not have blunt conversation with Edmund. Speaking to her younger son was akin to shadowboxing. "And so…" She paused and let him complete her sentence.

"I fear that in trying to rein in my temper, I will tell them to sod off, which they will consider proof when it was their own conduct that drove me to it."

Helen wondered what it was about Jill that Edmund said was not there but that his brother and sisters were all in such accord that they recognized it, unspoken, and thought it concerning. If she asked, this rare moment of candor would disappear. She must take such gifts as they were given.
"You have acted no differently than Lucy, apart that little tableau I interrupted."

She hoped Edmund would proffer an explanation, but he did not. It was typical and Susan and Peter would have employed the same tactic. "You are showing good manners to Jill who I don't imagine always gets the kindest reception."

"It is good manners, truly," Edmund replied. "It isn't easy coming into our family as a stranger and an outsider. I understand that. I wanted her to feel welcome."

"Your behavior is appropriate and gracious," she said. "If your brother and sisters wish to make more of it, the problem lies with them, not you."

He smiled and she saw the tension leave his shoulders. "Thanks, Mum."

She opened her mouth, wanting to say more, hesitated, and got an upraised eyebrow. Edmund did not do the mannerism as well as Susan did, but her daughter had learned it from her mother. Again, in the queer dim light behind the blackout shades, she thought she saw something else in her son, some quality that made it look natural when he kissed a girl on the cheeks, just as heads of state did in the newsreels.

"I told Peter on the trip from Liverpool that I wanted to find some place in the middle? I will try to not pry, but like with your languages, it is better if you tell me a little more. At least give your poor mother the illusion that she has some say in your life? Sometimes, I might be able to help?"

It came out as a pitiful plea, but that was easy to forget when Edmund hugged her. He was the least demonstrative and most reserved and so that made his embrace all the better. "I'll try, Mum. There were…" She waited out his hesitation, understanding that owning up to any vulnerability cost him. "There were some whose opinions I valued, once."

_How? Who? When? Never mind. _Peter was called to war. Susan's calling, terrifying though it was, also was becoming clearer. What of Edmund? On what path would her brilliant son walk and how could she remove the stones that he might stumble upon?

"And Peter is leaving and I would not count on Susan being available much longer, either," she finished.

Edmund nodded, and she wondered if the sharpened look when she mentioned Susan was real or imagined.

"I can't take their place, Edmund, but you aren't alone. I will try to help, if you let me."

He looked at her steadily, old, wise and so solemn. "Thank you. I will try."

The kettle took their fleeting moment of understanding to sing.

Helen shouldered him out of the way and pulled the kettle off the burner. "Get you gone," she scolded, louder. "Be the proper host and send your brother and sister in here!"

She got a kiss on the cheek for that. But that kiss was as a boy to his mum, and nothing like what she'd seen earlier in the impossible pool of light in the kitchen emanating from a man who seemed a king.

Oo00oo

Helen had actually lied to her children. She had told Peter, Edmund, and Susan that she had not pried
into their secrets. That wasn't true at all. Children sent away and then returned so drastically altered, at War, living in a war zone, alone, husband dismissive and gone, and with vague, evasive, and highly unsatisfactory responses – not answers—from Professor Kirke and Miss Plummer, she had resorted to the only option left to her.

After tea, and the final wash up, she stayed in the kitchen to go over the foodstores and ration coupons everyone had contributed for the next week. She made up menus and shopping lists for each meal. With all the people, at least there were plenty of hands for queuing.

The pudding would not have aged nearly long enough by Christmas Day, but by stretching the ingredients Ruby had found, she had made two, so what was wanting this year would be made up for next year. From everything she'd heard in Washington, the War would not be over by next Christmas. First, North Africa in 42, Southern Europe in 43, then Fortress Europe in 44. Stalin wouldn't see his second front in Europe until 1943, from the memoranda she had typed for His Lordship the Penguin.

Perhaps the Christmas after, in 1944, the War would be finally end. She wondered where her husband would spend it.

The children all came crowding in, each offering to help. It was kind but Helen knew they really wanted to be alone. She shooed them back into the dining room and by the time she rolled out the last scraps, picked up the last bits of shredded carrot and potato, and washed the last bowl, the downstairs of the house was quiet.

They were, fortunately, all in the girls' room, which was slightly larger and usually neater. She knocked on the door and went in. The girls were all on Lucy's bed. Edmund was lying on Susan's bed and tossing one of her shoes in the air, Eustace was sitting on the floor with a book about dinosaurs, and Peter was holding up the bookcase and looked like he'd either be up all night, or collapse on the first horizontal surface.

The good night hugs and kisses were nice and then Helen left them.

She went to her cold room, and for a guilty, naughty moment, missed Beatrice. She couldn't work out how something that was so terribly wrong seemed so lovely, while her relations with John were right in the eyes of God and the law, but horrid. Her husband used her like a chamber pot, and lately not even that. There certainly wasn't room for his wife in her husband's New York bed. Not the time for this now, Helen told herself firmly, blushing even at the thought of it. Not with the children about and especially not her children who were so very, very perceptive of adults.

She turned off the lights, took her blanket to the floor, lay down, and very quietly removed the pillow from the opened grate. This only worked when they were in Lucy and Susan's room. She'd had barely heard anything of the conversations the night she and Susan had returned from America. By crouching in the upstairs hall, and pretending to shut her door, she'd managed to catch Susan tell Peter of Tebbitt and there had been some nonsense about Susan bearing Peter 32 children, which was obviously an old joke between them.

She had been very concerned about Susan's candor with Peter regarding their Washington business. Her daughter did not understand the perils of loose talk. They were both bound by the Official Secrets Act and Susan should not be discussing her espionage work with others.

At some point in the last year, Helen thought Edmund had caught on to her eavesdropping because the conversations she listened in on became more muffled, as if someone put a pillow over the grate on the other side, in the girls' room. This evening she heard the conversations fairly well and wondered if Edmund had forgotten (unlikely) or if her son was, in his own subtle way, trying to give
Confirming her guess as to the reason for all the holiday invitations, Jill and Eustace were obviously in on "it." She heard that Caspian had died. This made her wonder of Susan's reaction, given that her daughter carried the name as an alias and had the faked identity cards – those Helen had found in Washington in Susan's handbag.

Tonight there were new names – Rilian and Puddleglum. A witch. Giants. She'd heard before of a dragon, a ship, and a star.

They talked a long time and she was dozing off when there was movement and the sound of Eustace's heavy footsteps.

"Let me get it," her nephew said very clearly. She heard Eustace leave the girls' room and go across the hall to Peter and Edmund's room.

"Well that explains all the fuss about going to Harold and Alberta's," she heard Edmund say. "It was very thoughtful of him," Susan replied. "I very much wished to see her but was not going to suffer Harold and Alberta to do so."

"Scrubb said they'd never miss it, either," Jill added.

Doors opening and shutting and that uniquely heavy tread meant Eustace returned, presumably with it. Helen squirmed closer to the vent.

"Oh!" Susan said. "She is lovely!"

They were all talking at once and it was very confusing until she realised what they were speaking of. It was the painting of the ship that had hung in the spare bedroom of Harold and Alberta's house. Her sister in law had complained bitterly about the picture after the wedding and Helen had suggested she just hang it in the spare bedroom and be done with it. Harold wouldn't care or notice and that was the room he slept in usually.

"I was worried they might do something to it when I wasn't there," Eustace said. "I brought her here to show everyone and so we can decide what to do with it."

Helen felt badly. She would have said, of course, if her children had just asked, "Mum, there is a picture from Harold and Alberta's that is very important to us, can we please keep it safe here in the house?" Harold would have given it to her if she had asked.

Instead they discussed hiding it and where and with whom.

"Peter?" Susan finally said. "What do you think?"

"I think we should ask Lucy."

There was a pause and Helen wondered if her daughter had gone to sleep. Then Lucy spoke clearly and firmly with a mature certitude that made a mother's heart ache. "We should give the painting to Asim. He is on this journey with us and should not walk it in the dark. He should know that his dream was real."

Asim? Who was Asim? Helen lost the thread of the conversation as they all talked over one another. There was an explanation being given to Jill and discussion between Susan and Lucy and Edmund and Peter. She was also hearing the name Major Almazri? Was this, perhaps, the same person? And
this person was dreaming of the picture that Harold and Alberta had received as a wedding gift? And they had all met Major Almazri before, except Lucy who proposed giving him a queer picture of a boat?

It was in conversations like this one that she knew her children had profoundly altered and saw what set them apart from others, children and adults both. By common accord, they looked to Peter who described the goal and guided the discussion, Peter, in turn, would often look to someone else, in this instance, Lucy, who made the decision, and that was the end of it.

"I will send it to Polly," Edmund said. "I will write a short note and she'll see that he gets it."

There was shuffling and the sounds of rising and movement.

"Lu, will you get us up when it is time?"

"Of course, though if anyone grumbles at me, I'll just leave you to sleep and we will farewell Caspian without you."

Within a few minutes, after doors opening and closing, and water running in the bathroom, it was quiet. Helen crept into her own bed. She slept fitfully, and in her confused dreams, the ship that hung on the wall in Impington sailed through a real sea, and there were dragons flying above the ship and stars in a constellation in the shape of a lion. Her children often spoke of lions, and sometimes a lion did walk through her dreams.

Helen woke to whispering and steps on the creaking stairs. Lucy must have roused them? She did not pity her daughter trying to get Peter up given how tired he was last night. She lay in bed, listening, wondering where they were going and then heard the back door squeak open. Leaving the house? At this hour? She slipped out of bed and went to the window. She had to be careful and, standing to the side, was able to lift the blackout shade just a little to peek into the backyard.

It was just barely dawn and still mostly dark outside. Lucy emerged first, and then Edmund. Jill and Eustace were in the middle, then Susan and Peter. Lucy put something on the grass and bent over it. There were sparks from a match her daughter deftly struck and then after a few moments, there were small tongues for flame.

They all stood around the fire in a circle and held hands. The fire flickered at their feet and tendrils of dark smoke rose into the cool, gray air. Helen could not hear their words but she felt the rhythm of them. She recognized the solemnity of the ceremony, for she had been to too many of them in the last three years. Nor was it their first time in such a ritual and she understood what they had meant by a Farewell. From the window, she watched as children who were not children presided over a funeral for their friend, Caspian.

They settled into a pleasant holiday rhythm. Lucy liked Jill ever so much and she and Susan got on with her splendidly. Eustace sometimes grated on Edmund. At times it seemed they were trying too consciously to have a lovely time. It was like the Ministry of Food insisting that bowls of carrots, parsley, and beetroot were just as nice as platters with Christmas fruits, nuts, mince pies, and chocolates.

With everyone crammed everywhere Lucy did have to, occasionally, remind herself that she had told Mum having all these people come was the only Christmas gift they wanted.

They brought out the old decorations from the attic – the china dolls and glass globes, candle holders (but no candles for them), nutcrackers (but no nuts), lace doilies, and velvet bows. Decorating was
given over to Jill. Susan was better at motivating and supervising creative people to do things for her than doing those artistic things herself. Lucy's decorating involved piling objects in stacks in corners and declaring them *done*. Jill dug through boxes, climbed ladders, strung up garlands and chains, and strewn things about on every surface. With Eustace and Edmund, Jill trekked out for boughs and hollies, clipped and shaped them, then dipped them in Epsom salts so the greens looked frosty. It was festive. Truly. Really. And salty.

Mum eked out gingerbread, shortbread, and biscuits. From the supplies Ruby sent, they were able to decorate the shapes with bits of dried fruit and sugar coloured from, of course, carrots and beets. Jill and Eustace were both very handy and Mum trusted them to help with the cooking. Everything that came from the kitchen was decorated. It was all festive and frightfully earnest and at some point, Lucy really wished she could have a slice of toast that had not been sprinkled, garnished with a sprig of something, or adorned with a carrot flower or radish rosebud Jill had cut with a paring knife.

Every day was a treasure hunt adventure and Edmund assumed responsibility for logistics and planning. Her brother took the lists and ration books, mustered the forces, divided the army and ordered the troops to fan out into London for supplies. One morning, Lucy sallied forth with Peter and Eustace and, after traversing one end of the City to another, they triumphantly returned home with a Christmas tree.

They paid a taxi driver to let them put the tree on the hood of his cab and, with their arms stuck out the windows, they held the tree in place for the drive home.

Peter pulled and dragged the tree up the walk. "Felling a giant was easier," he muttered.

Lucy and Eustace both agreed.

They spent mornings and evenings engrossed in the newspapers and listening to the wireless reports of Operation Torch. Asim had given Peter a very large map of North Africa. Peter spread the map on the floor and they all tracked troop movements with push pins, scraps of paper, and tiny, metal Army men toys Edmund and Peter had played with when they were boys.

One night, after dinner, Susan was scribbling on a notepad she had been carrying with her since the Second Battle of El Alamein.

"What is that?" Jill asked.

"A tally of the Sherman and Grant tanks left in the 8th Army," Susan said absently, ticking off the counts from the news reports of that evening. "I am tracking how many Monty has lost since September."

"Why are you doing that?" Eustace asked looking over her shoulder.

"That is quite enough!" Mum said crossly. "Susan, put that away!"

Mum had become very tetchy whenever she thought their talk was too focused upon military operations and the combined Allied forces' strategies. To Lucy, it seemed Mum was being needlessly delicate about it all.

"No, that is not it at all," Susan whispered to her that night while Jill was in the bathroom. "Remember, Mum was the secretary to Ambassador Halifax, even when the Prime Minister visited and during the meetings with President Roosevelt. She knows more even than I do and weathered some terrible leaks coming from the Embassy. She is very aware of security." Susan sighed heavily. "I should not be discussing it at all, and especially not with Eustace and Jill."
"She doesn't know that you told us of all of it?"

"No, unless the Colonel told her and he had said he would not." Susan nervously fingered her notebook and shoved it under her pillow. "I am keeping my notes in Rat and Crow, but even that's a problem since Colonel Walker-Smythe thinks all of Narnia is an elaborate cipher to describe what I did in Washington. It's a frightful muddle."

And then Jill came back into the room and they had to stop speaking of it. Lucy noticed that the more critical Mum was of Susan discussing the War, the less Susan would discuss Narnia when they were alone. Susan would listen and nod, but she did become more circumspect. The annoyance was that they knew Mum was right. There were signs everywhere warning of loose talk. Susan had written Narnia into British espionage and given that she wanted to leave school and join up with something (that part was vague and even Susan didn't know) it was smart and proper to be careful. They knew the difference, of course, but others who might overhear them, and who might report to Susan's Colonel, did not. The oddest thing was that they could not really even tell Eustace and Jill why Susan would become queerly quiet about Narnia when they talked of it.

It was a frightful muddle and sapped some of the enjoyment out of discussing Narnia with Jill and Eustace when Susan was there.

Jack and Ruby arrived on the morning of Christmas Eve. Edmund, Peter, and Eustace had gone to meet their train. They trundled up the walk looking like an Army supply line, especially given how Edmund was directing everyone. Ruby had her handbag and still more groceries. Jack was sporting a black eye.

As Mum and Ruby shook hands, Lucy watched closely for any difficulty. But if Mum was surprised that Ruby was Negro, she hid it well.

"Ruby, you are truly the Three Kings come!" Mum cried, peering in a box of what looked to be tissues and soap. "Epiphany has arrived early this Christmas!"

I will watch, Susan signaled. Lucy nodded. Edmund and Peter were positioning themselves as Jack's keepers.

"Happy Christmas, Miss Smith!" Susan relieved Ruby of the bulging bag. "It is such a delight to meet you after all the wonderful things I have heard from the others. You are generosity itself!"

Peter helped Ruby out of her coat and there was a crush in the entry of people, Christmas shopping and parcels, coats and luggage.

Mum managed to school away the smile as Jack enthusiastically pumped her hand. Jack gawked at Susan who, while warm and welcoming to Ruby, was in her full, regal Queen style with Jack – kind but distant. Susan was very deft at keeping boisterous young men in their place.

"Jack, make yourself useful and get our coats hung up and our bag stowed." Ruby teetered a little under the weight of the bag she hefted.

Jill jumped forward. "Let me help you with that, Miss Smith."

"Call me Ruby, Jill. Please. Everyone does."

"Lucy has told me you are a nurse?"

Jill and Ruby, herded by Susan, and following Mum, all disappeared into the kitchen, with bags and boxes and it was like Father Christmas coming to town but with soap, bathroom tissue, and liquor.
Lucy turned down the wireless. *White Christmas* was playing. *Again.*

Jack shed his coat and tossed it over the divan. Peter tossed it back at him and Ruby's as well. "The closet is *right there,)*" he said, pointing.

"Yes, Sir!" Jack retorted.

"And don't forget it," Peter said mildly.

"Yes, Sir!" It was amusing to see. Jack would provide the sarcastic rejoinder but he followed Peter's instructions automatically, without asking why Peter delivered them so authoritatively or why he seemed compelled to obey them.

Lucy helped him with the coats and hangers as Jack banged them all about. The coat kept sliding off the hangers and they kept laughing about it. It was fun to see him again and be with someone who was not so very serious. She had missed their time from the summer. Jack was so irreverent and open and Lucy very much liked his honesty.

"That is quite the frightful shiner," she told him as they joined the others in the drawing room. Tea and biscuits would emerge shortly. The biscuits would be festively sprinkled with something – Nutmeg? Black pepper? Carrot curls?

"Who did you antagonize?" Edmund asked. "Or did you run into a lamppost?"

Jack planted his feet and put his hands on his hips, the cocksure, swaggering braggart. "I told some boys that they should be grateful the Americans are here to rescue you all, just like we did before."

Eustace shook his head and walked away. Edmund asked Peter, "Would you like to go first? Or shall I?"

"You take this round," Peter said. "I will handle the next."

And suddenly Jack was flat on the floor, rubbing his backside and bruised shin after Edmund knocked his legs out from under him.

"You are in an English home and we've been fighting for three years already. Be polite and stop acting like a child."

Jack stared up at her from the floor, grinning and utterly unrepentant. "Lucy, I hope your brother didn't break the chocolate I have in my pocket!"

Lucy laughed and held out a hand to haul him up but he bounced to his feet like a rabbit.

"How about you show me the tree in your yard you said you like to climb so much?"

"Well that went very well – much better than I expected," Susan confided to her after their lunch. They were moving the dining room chairs into the drawing room for the King's College concert.

"Oh yes," Jill agreed, glancing at Mum and Ruby still sitting at the dining room table with cups of tea Eustace had poured for them. There was a loud, metal bang from the kitchen. Mum rose nervously, but Ruby gently pulled her back down.

"The boys will be fine," Ruby said. "Edmund manages Jack very well."

"What do you mean?" Lucy whispered back to Jill.
"Not all queens share domain as you two do," Jill said softly. "But your Mum was very gracious and Ruby was very sensitive to being in another woman's kitchen."

Susan nodded with a smile at Jill and counted the chairs. "I think she has had practice sharing her realm with our neighbor, Mrs. Goodwin. They take a lot of their evening meals together since Mum works during the day and Mrs. Goodwin is home with the baby. With Father gone and especially since Mrs. Goodwin's husband was killed in action, I think having a helpful friend has been pleasant for them both."

Dishes done, the boys all tromped back into the drawing room, promptly upsetting Susan's seating organization. They had to rearrange again when Mrs. Goodwin arrived with the baby just woken from her nap and then they quarreled over whose lap Margaret would sit upon. Jill and Edmund won that round and they removed to the floor, so Lucy took the seat next to Eustace that Jill had vacated. Jack sat on the floor, very near her chair.

"So what are we all doing here?" Jack asked.

Eustace shrugged. "It's a Christmas thing."

"It's the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols," Lucy told them. "The choir of King's College, Cambridge, sings it every Christmas Eve. They have had to take the stained glass down from the chapel and there have been spotters on the roofs, and when the Blitz was on, you could hear the planes over the broadcast. Still, they have managed to air the concert." She shoved Jack with her toe. "It is a very important tradition for us, so please be polite."

Mum shushed everyone and turned on the wireless. The broadcast did not say it was coming from King's College Chapel, but that was where it was. The beautiful sound was unmistakable. Lucy sighed, leaned back in her chair, and listened as the boy soprano began singing and just as had always been done before,

*Once in royal David's city,*
*Stood a lowly cattle shed*
*Where a Mother laid her baby*
*In a manger for his bed;*
*Mary was that Mother mild,*
*Jesus Christ her little child.*

"I've never heard it before," Eustace confided to her in between the lessons. He was mouthing the words to carols he did not know and closely following the readings he was hearing for the first time.

"I live in Cambridge and we never listened to it."

This year the rumble of the RAF and Luftwaffe didn't interrupt the concert. For the Ninth Lesson, they all stood, just as the congregation did and Jack didn't gripe.

*And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*

Her own name was *Light*. Lucy wished she understood better what that meant. It must be important.

*Aslan?*

*You are light and lioness both, Lucy.*

*But what does that mean? Here?*

That question, the Lion did not answer.
Lessons and Carols closed, as it always did, with *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. They all sang along. Ruby and Jill both had lovely voices. Jack did not. Father was the only one who ever listened to the postludes. Mum switched off the wireless.

Lucy stood and stretched and everyone began moving about. Ruby, Mum and Mrs. Goodwin were already plotting on feeding the army.

"I say we turn them loose to forage," Ruby said, laughing at something Mum said. "The boys eat like horses anyway."

"We can lock the doors and eat the pudding!" Mrs. Goodwin said, putting her arm through Mum's.

"And drink all the rum Ruby brought!"

It was jolly to see Mum enjoying herself with the other women. The three of them disappeared into the kitchen, and Lucy suspected they probably were going to help themselves to a glass of some spirit.

Susan and Jill were collecting up paper and scissors to make decorations and crowns since there weren't crackers. Mum hadn't found any in the stores and Ruby had brought a box of salty, savoury "crackers" only to learn English crackers weren't something you ate. Jill was drafting Eustace to either help cut or keep baby Margret away from the scissors.

Peter wasn't going to be able to fall asleep in the armchair as he obviously was planning to do since baby Margaret was trying to crawl up his trouser leg. Edmund was still humming *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* and tinkering with the ornaments on the tree.

Jack looked at her expectantly. Lucy managed to smile at him and then retreated into the kitchen. Ruby and Mrs. Goodwin were staring at the pantry. There were three glasses on the counter with a splash of something brown in them.

"Mum, do you need any help getting supper started?" Lucy asked, fervently hoping the answer was *no*, though *yes* would be acceptable as well.

Mum looked over her head into the drawing room and then looked down at her. "No, Lucy, if anything, I have too many willing hands and unfortunately cannot send you on an extremely urgent errand as everything is closed."

Lucy smiled and meant it this time. Mum understood.

Mum raised her arm, and gave Lucy a shove on the back toward the door. "Who should I sent out with your coat?"

"Edmund, please."

"Give me a few moments to occupy the others, will you? I don't think you'll catch your death in the meantime."

Lucy gave Mum a quick squeeze and then darted under her arm toward the back door.

Behind her, she heard Jack saying something and Mum respond, "Jack, I do not care if you don't wear crowns. At Christmas Day dinner, we do, so you'll help Susan make them and you may wear a crown of laurels, for all I care!"

The thought of Jack, crowned with laurels, in the company of Bacchus, was enough to rouse her
spirits. Lucy raced down the back steps and out into the yard. It was too chilly to be out without a coat, but she kept moving and buried her hands in her pockets and soon enough Edmund appeared.

"I come bearing gifts," Edmund said. "Not as valuable as gold, but more useful than frankincense and myrrh."

"Thank you."

Edmund helped her into her coat and then slid his arm into hers. "Shall we walk, my sister?"

They took a turn about the yard, further from the house and prying ears. Lucy felt the wet of the grass seep into her shoes. She was not paying much mind to where her feet took her and let Edmund guide her to the street. It was chilly and gray and the houses lining the road were warm with Christmas. Edmund was still whistling carols, now Ding Dong Merrily.

She drew a breath. The whistling stopped.

"Edmund?" Lucy asked in a small voice. "I know you try to not talk about them, but I very much need to. May I? Please? A little? To you?"

"So that's what this is all about?" Edmund finally said, sounding queer and hollow.

"It's beastly of me, but…"

"But Peter and Susan don't really understand and I do."

"Yes." She could see the tension around his eyes and in his shoulders, and feel it in his arm linking with hers.

"That's rotten luck for you, Lu, because you should recall that I'm really rubbish at this sort of thing."

"That is nonsense, Edmund. You were more successful than any of us." Yes, it had been awkward, inexplicable to the outside observer, and so very ironic given Edmund's mistrust. But her brother had been married to a woman who loved him very much and the thoughtful man he had grown to be was in part due to her influence. It had been the mark of a relationship Lucy had herself eventually sought, one where a person was not changed, exactly, but bettered through the joining with another.

"So, may I?"

"You may, Lucy. A burdened shared is one lessened."

They crossed the street to a little park given over to a vegetable garden, now brown and withered. Even the carrots would all be dug up by now. He gestured and they sat side by side on a damp bench.

Edmund began peeling the paint off of the bench then stopped. He looked at her.

Lucy opened her mouth and all her anxious fretting came out in a rush. "I'm worried about Jack. Well not just Jack exactly, but all that Jack means. Could mean. Eventually. Aidan is dead. He has been dead a thousand years. People remarry. I would hate to think that Mrs. Goodwin might be alone for the rest of her life because her husband died. Mrs. Beaver said I'd never be a Songbird about it and she's right. I'm not saying Jack is or isn't. That's impossible to know now. But I don't know. If I did want something, later, would I be unfaithful? Can I do that? Can you give that sort of love to two people?"
She paused for a breath and the pain eased in her chest. Even if Edmund said nothing more than *let's go home and get drunk on rum punch* and *it's not relevant*, just blurring it all out helped

Edmund did none of those things. He put an arm around her shoulders. "Better?"

"Yes. Thank you."

From a nearby home she heard *O Come All Ye Faithful.*

"You are still grieving, Lucy," Edmund finally said as the song entered the third verse. "Aidan has been dead a thousand years, but for you it has not been that long. As for Jack, he is young and he likes girls and this may be just a passing fancy."

"So you see it too?"

"That he is smitten with you? Oh yes. I have not said anything to him." Edmund sighed. "This is when it all gets so complicated. I could say, 'Lucy is still missing someone who is important to her. Please let her grieve.' But it makes no sense and he'll want details I cannot give."

"I do like him very well, but he is a boy and…"

"You are not a girl, Lucy." Here Edmund paused, and she sensed his search for careful, precisely spoken words. Lucy squeezed his arm. She respected that Edmund had his own way of managing, even if she did not agree with it and did not think that Aslan would let up on him until her brother understood what he was supposed to do.

"Assuming that you do complete your grieving and are ready to fill that part of your life again, some day, I do not think it will happen until you can be with adults, with peers. Even in Narnia, Aidan was over ten years older than you were. You did not have the patience for adolescent romantic games when you were an adolescent. I do not believe that has changed now that you are an adult."

"Yes, I suppose," Lucy said. "In that light it is not surprising at all that Susan fell in with Peridan. The Peridan here, I mean." In Narnia, Susan had appreciated Lord Peridan's skills as a diplomat although his less savoury habits had greatly irritated their sister.

Edmund shook his head. "Susan's judgment has never been particularly good in this regard. She and Peter both did better with Dryads."

Susan's one exception had been in her relationship with the Director of the powerful Lone Island banking House of Linch. Rafe Linch had been a respectful and respected partner and foil to the Queen Susan; he had also been Edmund's father-in-law.

"What about the future, Edmund? When we're older? What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

She hesitated, wondering if she should mention it, which meant she would. "And Jill?"

The irritated look Edmund shot her answered most of the question. His sarcastic tone covered the rest. "Jill is a girl, as Jack is a boy, and Jill is from Jamaica, not the Lone Islands. You might as well ask why not Ruby? Or Adelaide Hall?"

"Put that way, it is silly," Lucy agreed. "Except you were so worried for Peter you spent two weeks this summer combing through back issues of the *Proceedings of the Royal Geography Society* to invent a problem with Mary Russell that did not exist."
Edmund grimaced with embarrassment. "I think we should declare a moratorium on this foolishness."

"Certainly," Lucy agreed. "Jill is the first Narnian girl who isn't family. I suppose that is an adjustment for us all."

"Precisely. And you and I both know how difficult it is for an outsider. Things are challenging enough for Jill without her bearing the weight of our collective memories and expectations. I have been trying to help her fit in, just as you are."

"That's fair," Lucy replied. "I apologize for suggesting otherwise."

O Come All Ye Faithful ended and White Christmas began. It was such a popular song, and so melancholy, Lucy had become thoroughly sick of it. Edmund began whistling along, which did make the song less dirge-like, and picked again at the bench's peeling paint.

She had gone this far. "Edmund?"

Again the whistling stopped and Edmund flicked the chips away with his fingertips.

"Yes?"

"At the wall of water, at the end of the world, did you hear her?" Lucy asked softly. "Morgan? Did you hear her so close and clearly, the way I heard Aidan?"

She was aware of Aidan and Briony both, even here, when she concentrated. At the border of Aslan's country, it had been different. Aidan's presence and voice had been clear and sharp, as if he were right next to her and not separated by worlds and ages.

Edmund was quiet for a very long time. "Yes," he finally said, staring ahead and Lucy wondered if he saw, as she often did, the water, if he could still smell the lilies and still hear the distant song and voices of their dead.

"I'm sorry," Lucy said. "I know it was hard for you when we returned, and…"

He covered her hand with his. "It is well, Lucy. The shock of it was terrible, at the time, but like you, I better see the wisdom of it now. I was not ready to go over the wall." He paused then added, "And it was very fortunate that I did not have to explain to her that I was staying." Unexpectedly Edmund laughed with genuine mirth that was not forced.

"What is so funny?"

"You asked if I heard her, and I did. Though, she said that she could not talk to me because she had to go find a candlestick."

Of all the odd things that might be said, but then Morgan had been odd in life. "Candlestick?" Lucy repeated.

"Yes. I assume that at the border of Aslan's Country, at the very edge between life and death, the exchange with your husband was as mind to mind, heart to heart?"

Lucy nodded, wondering why she was smiling and realizing it was because Edmund was.

"In contrast, for our tender reunion, my wife runs off to look for a candlestick. From Jalur I learned this was because Morgan coshed Aslan with one after he told her I was not returning to Narnia."
Lucy stared at her laughing brother in shock. "Morgan hit Aslan? With a candlestick?"

"And was so angry that I was just on the other side of the wall and still not joining her, she decided to go find another one and whack him again."

Lucy burst out laughing and threw her arms around her brother.

She and Edmund sang merry, happy carols all the way back to the house. But when they skipped up the walk, it was not Christmas music pouring from the phonograph or wireless.

"Is that…?"


They went into the house and stood together at the threshold to the drawing room. The music was very loud. Lucy had never seen the like. Well, she had, of a sort, but certainly not here, and never in her parents' drawing room.

*What would the Reverend Donald say? Or the school vicar?*

The others had shoved all the furniture up against the wall. Susan and Jack were dancing, very vigorously, to *One O'clock Jump*. They were holding hands, facing each other, and stepping, very quickly to the fast beat. Peter, it seemed, was already learning — he was twirling Jill around under his arm. Ruby was teaching Eustace — who was lighter on his feet than Lucy would have expected. Mrs. Goodwin was doing a quick step with Margaret in her arms.

Mum helped them out of their coats.

"What are they doing?" Lucy shouted over the din.

"It's the Jitterbug!" Susan cried.

"Triple step, rock, back," Edmund muttered, watching Susan and Jack. "It's a six count?"

He counted out the time as Lucy nodded. "It's a little like a Swing. Slides and taps more than steps?"

Really it wasn't easily describable.

"They all danced that way at the clubs Susan went to in Washington," Mum said. "It's how all the American GIs dance."

Jack swung Susan around and back so fast, her skirt twirled out like a ballerina's.

Mum covered her eyes, pretending to not look. "It is also quite lewd. Very Bacchanalian, really."

"We're not drunk enough for a proper Bacchanal," Edmund replied.

"And we're wearing too much clothing," Lucy answered. Satyrs and Fauns would love the Jitterbug.

"Oh stop it, both of you!" Mum said, giving them both a mock swat. "You were not supposed to understand my reference!"

Lucy giggled.

"Lu?" Edmund asked, holding out his hand.
"Mum first! I'll play the phonograph!"

Edmund swung Mum out on to the crowded drawing room dance floor.

"Cab Calloway next!" Jack shouted. "Or Glenn Miller!" He and Susan were holding hands and doing a complicated over and under, back to back manoeuvre.

Tapping her feet in time with the quick beat, Lucy restarted *One O'clock Jump* and began searching the cabinet for another record. *In the Mood* was so much better than *White Christmas*.

At over 20,000 words, this got way too long to reasonably be read in one sitting. I couldn't edit it in one sitting without falling asleep. So next shall be Chapter 14, *Just Like The Ones We Used To Know - Christmas Day*, in which many gifts are given. I will post that on Christmas Day, though it is likely to get lost in the Yuletide and other exchanges.

Thanks to Adaese and Wellinghall for advice on the Christmas traditions in the UK during the War. Why yes, Jell-O really was available in 1942. I have also relied on numerous entries from the BBC, including a webpage on Christmas during the War which suggested dipping greenery in Epsom salts and the Ministry of Food insisting that jewel-toned carrots, beetroot and parsley were as festive as traditional sweets and fruits. I also looked to individual entries from the BBC's Peoples' War. Lady_Songsmith provided valuable information as well.

The history of the Festival Of Nine Lessons and Carols, King's College, Cambridge, is available in several places. One site included notations and records of carols sung going back to 1918 and I used that reference for the carols here. I was not sure of the timing of the King's College concert. I have seen information indicating it has traditionally been broadcast at 3 PM on Christmas Eve. Links are in my Live Journal.

*White Christmas*, from the film *Holiday Inn*, was one of the most popular songs of 1942. The American GIs introduced the Jitterbug to Britain. There's a fun 1944 instructional video on the dance on my Live Journal. Casablanca was rushed into release in December 1942 to take advantage of the patriotic swell of Operation Torch. One version of the script had Rick and Louie watching from the deck of a boat as the Americans landed at Casablanca.

I once again return to the work of Anastigmat. The reference to Morgan coshing Aslan with a candlestick comes from *Deny The Child*, on her Live Journal (links in my profile). *Deny the Child* is her take on what follows after my *Acceptance of the Terms*.

As *Lysistrata* instructs, when there are no men left on the streets of London or Athens, war is women's business, too. This War took a serious toll on marital and interpersonal relationships and absent parenting and unconventional families are recurring themes of *The Stone Gryphon*. I have relied upon the data gathered in 1949 by the University of Sussex Mass Observation Project as support for what is presented here. The research of the Mass Observation project indicates that private lives of a very significant percentage of Britons in the 1940s were far less conservative than might be assumed today. The line about being used as a chamber pot comes from these research interviews. The researchers' findings, in the so-called "Little Kinsey" report, were deemed so shocking, they were suppressed for over 50 years. Further links and discussion are in my Live Journal.

In addition to the aforementioned, my thanks to Doctor Dolly and H_dash_H who have shared thoughts on what this Christmas story should look like. Metonomia and Anastigmat have provided wonderful insight into Eustace and Jill.
Chapter Summary

In which gifts are given and received.

Chapter 14, Apostolic Way

Just Like The Ones We Used To Know – Christmas Day

In which gifts are given and received.

It is always impolite to criticize your hosts; it is militarily stupid to criticize your allies.  
*Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain, 1942*

The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories.  
J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*

Ilse Lund: I wasn't sure you were the same. Let's see, the last time we met...  
Rick Blaine: Was La Belle Aurore.  
Ilse Lund: How nice, you remembered. But of course, that was the day the Germans marched into Paris.  
Rick Blaine: Not an easy day to forget.  
Ilse Lund: No.  
Rick Blaine: I remember every detail. The Germans wore gray, you wore blue.  
*Casablanca*, released in U.S. in December 1942 to coincide with Operation Torch

Yes, Sir, I regret to have to inform the House that reliable reports have recently reached His Majesty's Government regarding the barbarous and inhuman treatment to which Jews are being subjected in German-occupied Europe. … German authorities, not content with denying to persons of Jewish race in all the territories over which their barbarous rule has been extended the most elementary human rights, are now carrying into effect Hitler's oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe.  
Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden to the House of Commons, December 17, 1942

On the return for the new term, however, he and Pole discovered that the outer door to his hall had a new lock. This proved to be no obstacle to Pole.  
"I thought this might happen so I asked Susan to show me how to pick locks," Pole explained. "And Edmund found me a set of picks."
Eustace couldn't figure why a King and Queen of Narnia had learned how to open locks without keys or knew where one would buy thieves' tools.
From *Under Cover* by rthstewart

Lucy's feet had not hurt so much since Narnia! The dancing, the rum punch, a light supper and more dancing made for a long, late, very fun Christmas Eve. Before bed, they hung up stockings even though there would not be much to put in them.

It seemed she had hardly been asleep a moment when she heard noise. The front door chimed and there were loud, excited voices.

*Unless I hear sleigh bells and Mister Beaver saying 'It isn't her,' I shall ignore it,* Lucy decided, pulling the pillow over her head.

"What's that?" Jill asked.

"Someone downstairs," Lucy muttered. "Go back to sleep."

Jill, however, ignored this command of her Queen (Lucy did not assert her royal prerogative very often but this was an exception). Jill sat up in the bed they were sharing, taking the covers with her. She suddenly gasped, let out an ear piercing squeal, threw off the bedclothes, and bolted out of the bedroom.

Susan sat up, looking as grumpy as Lucy felt. "It is not even 6 o'clock and Jill just came back to bed! Why can't she stay in it?"

"I'm not getting up unless it's Father Christmas," Lucy griped.

"The Witch kept him out; surely Hitler would," Susan replied, throwing herself back into the bed which protested with a squeak of abused springs.

There was pounding on the stairs. Then they heard Jack shriek, "DAD!"

"Mother!" Jill cried.

She and Susan met Edmund and Eustace on the stair. "I'm not going to try to wake Peter," Edmund said, rubbing his eyes. "Last time I tried that, he choked me."

It wasn't Father Christmas delivering magical gifts, but Lucy found herself a little teary. She had to borrow one of Susan's handkerchiefs at this wonderful Christmas Day present for Jill and Jack.

First Officer Pole was very glamorous and looked fresh, neat, and pressed in her Wren uniform, for all that she had surely been up all night in it. Jill was jabbering to her mother and hugging her tightly.

Colonel Clark, in contrast, looked as rumpled as Edmund did. Jack kept punching his father in the arm. Colonel Clark shook everyone's hand, gave Ruby a kiss on the cheek, took more pummeling from his son, and gave some back. Jack was ecstatically grinning from ear to ear.

They were all deliriously happy. Lucy sniffed again and put her arm around Mum's waist. Seeing them together made her appreciate Mum all the more. When Susan blew her own nose, Mum tried to include her in their embrace as well. For a moment, Susan stiffened in a remnant of her old anger. But then she relented and the three of them stood together, arm in arm.

"How did you come to be here?" Ruby asked, helping them off with their coats.
"A slow night," Colonel Clark said. "We got off at midnight and there was a special train to London for anyone who could pack a bag."

"We were both granted additional leave," First Officer Pole said. "So we are not on shift until 8 o'clock tomorrow morning!" She hugged Jill again and smoothed her daughter's hair.

"Why don't we move into the drawing room," Mum said, directing the scrum. "Edmund? Susan?"

"Coffee," Edmund said, yawning. "Lots of coffee. Come one, Su." He shuffled off to the kitchen. Susan had learned to make coffee in America. Mum had also discovered that Edmund made the best coffee of anyone – Lucy knew it was due to his stay in the Lone Islands during the times when the bankers subsisted on nothing but coffee, tea, and accounting ledgers. Even Ruby would drink Edmund's coffee – and everyone knew that Americans hated British coffee as much as British hated American tea.

Jill sat with her mother and Jack sat at his father's feet. Over coffee and toast, they listened to Christmas carols and opened their presents. Ruby and Mum had performed miracles and the stockings were all stuffed with wonderful things. They had American candy, gum, nuts, and oranges – from Florida, Colonel Clark said. Ruby had brought little bottles of something called Coke which Susan said was fizzy, sweet, and delicious. Lucy even got a new pocketknife and everyone else received compasses, pens, and notebooks. First Officer Pole brought fashion magazines; Jill moved from her mother's chair to Susan's and they sat together and pored over the pictures.

Colonel Clark gave Edmund some strange books about the Hague and proceedings in Leipzig. They seemed very odd but Edmund was delighted to receive them.

Mum got a new lipstick from Mrs. Goodwin and was so happy she started to weep and then cried even more when Peter gave her the card they had made for her. It was getting very damp and melancholy so it was obviously time to dress for church.

However, getting ten people ready for church in a three-bedroom home with one bath was complicated. No one let Edmund organize them on a roster, so it was very chaotic.

Lucy got dressed and got out of the way as quickly as she could and decided to wait out everyone else in the relative peace of her bedroom. Jill was sitting on the bed next to her, paging through an American Vogue magazine. Susan was still in her slip and staring into her closet.

"Do you want to look at the magazine, Lucy?" Jill asked.

"No thank you."

Jill looked up from the pages of the posing models. "Are you not interested in fashion?"

Lucy shook her head. "Not especially. I like pretty, swirling skirts as much as the next woman, but otherwise no."

"Why not?"

Lucy did not really wish to explain this. It was complicated. She glanced at Susan who had of course been listening in even if appearing completely absorbed with the contents of her closet.

"My sister, the Queen Lucy, usually expresses her beauty in ways other than simple dress, Jill." Gentle though it was, Susan's words were also a reproof.

Susan always knew the best way of describing things.
"I apologize, Lucy," Jill muttered, again staring down at the magazine.

Lucy patted her hand. "It is fine, Jill. You did not know of it." Her failure with Coriakin's spellbook had made her even more cautious of the lure of beauty. "I enjoy pretty things for their sake alone."

"I do that as well," Susan said, bringing out a blue dress and hanging it next to a somber gray suit. "Some," she amended with Lucy's joking scoff. "Truly!"

"My sister, the Queen Susan, on the other paw, is very adept at using beauty to further ends."

"You make it sound so manipulative, Lucy. Appearances serve purposes and I make them serve mine." She studied the blue and the gray and Susan's hands fell heavily to her sides with a sigh. "What do you think? I really cannot decide what to wear. I would like to wear one of my American outfits, but would that be misinterpreted? I want to show solidarity with our allies, not put on airs."

Lucy thought Susan often worried too much about these things even if she understood why Susan did so. "We are bringing an American Lieutenant Colonel and his family to church," she replied. "I think we show solidarity in doing that."

"True." With a little distaste, Susan removed an old brown dress that looked like it had been made from a First Lieutenant's second-hand Army uniform. "So maybe something representing Anglo-American cooperation?"

"Not that one," Jill said decisively. "I understand what you mean about appearances and dressing nicely is very important for morale. It makes people see what we are fighting for. You should dress as well as you can."

"Even with stockings? Would I not just be flaunting them at women who can't get them?"

"Of course stockings!" Jill sounded horrified.

There was a knock on the door. "Girls?" It was First Officer Pole. "May I come in and freshen up?"

"Please do!" Susan said.

First Officer Pole cracked the door open and slipped in. "Thank you. It is bedlam out here and there isn't anywhere else to go!"

From the hall they heard Colonel Clark bellowing. "Ruby! What did you do with my pants? They were right here and now they're gone and I know it's your fault!"

"I'm ironing them so you don't embarrass me and the U.S. Army!" Ruby called back. "So keep your shirt on!"

"I'm a Lieutenant Colonel! You can't just…"

"And I'm the Brigadier, remember?" Ruby shouted back.

Lucy had to bury her head in a pillow to keep from laughing too loudly. One of the best parts of the summer had been seeing how Ruby managed Colonel Clark. She shouldn't laugh, but they did talk funny sometimes, too. Why was Ruby ironing his pants?

"He means trousers," Susan said, still staring at the outfits. With the blue, gray, and brown, maybe she should add khaki, green and black, and then she could cover every colour in the services. "To Americans, pants are trousers."
"Colonel Clark is not wandering your mother's home stark naked," First Officer Pole said, smiling. "Ruby is obviously a saint to put up with him."

"Colonel Clark is very handsome," Jill said. "He's like one of the American movie stars."

"The girls where we are stationed think him quite the catch," her mother replied. "It is very tedious. I do wish he would just pick one and then I would not have to listen to all their gossip. We can't get a cup of Nescafe without them hanging about."

Lucy giggled again and exchanged a look with Susan. They both knew exactly how dull that was. Would the High King like dress better or this one? How ever does the King Edmund manage all those books?

"Susan, do you mind if I use your vanity?" First Officer Pole asked.

"Please do so. If I do not make up my mind shortly, I shall be attending church in my slip."

"I think the blue shirt dress with the midriff belt," Jill said, pointing to the one hanging on the closet door. "It is an excellent colour for you and a very nice fashion."

"Oh that is lovely!" her mother said, admiring the dress. "It was featured in the spring Harper's Bazaar, wasn't it?"

"Yes!" Susan replied. "I purchased it in New York over the summer."

"It was shown with a red dress, wasn't it? With princess lines? A back panel? A little tie in the front?"

"I bought that one too!" Susan removed a pair of shoes from her closet. On the subject of shoes, the sisters did not agree. Lucy truly preferred to not wear shoes at all.

First Officer Pole lifted the blue dress off the door and held it up to Susan. "Jill is quite right, as usual. This would look very smart on you. Why don't we compare it red one – that colour would be very nice for Christmas Day."

"Thank you but unfortunately I don't have it anymore!" Susan said, removing the dress from the hanger and carefully stepping into it. "It was very American in styling so I traded it for several older dresses that were more continental." She sighed. "Not a fair trade, but a necessary one."

"But why…" First Officer Pole stopped. "Oh, I see." And suddenly, Lucy saw that the conversation had turned from fashion to something else much more serious. She could tell that Susan sensed the shift as well.

First Officer Pole hung the hanger back in the closet. "I understood through Major al-Masri that you have met him before?"

"Briefly, yes," Susan replied. "Peter knows him well."

"I am so grateful to him; he is the one who told me about the dreadful business at Experiment House and where Jill was. He mentioned Madame Simon was coaching you in French?"

"She is."

"Please give her my regards when you see her."

"I shall," Susan said, matching First Officer Pole's casual tone and belting the dress.
As First Officer Pole went to the vanity and opened her handbag, Susan silently signaled her confusion. *Something is happening here.*

Lucy nodded.

"Jill, dear?"

"Yes, Mum?"

Her mother removed a comb from her bag and began picking through her hair. "After Boxing Day, could you take Susan to the house and help her find some of my old French clothes? From when I lived in Paris before the War? You used to play dress up in them, remember?"

"The ones all boxed up in the attic?" Jill asked. "The Chanel dresses? And the Schiaparelli suits?"

"Yes. I am embarrassed I did not think of this sooner. I don't think those Vionnet evening gowns are of much use, but Susan's French tutor could find a purpose for the daywear and suits. There are some coats and capes, as well. You and Susan can sort through the clothes and then she can box them up and send them on?"

"Certainly, Mum."

Susan went over to Jill's mother and rested a hand on the woman's shoulder. "Thank you. You are very kind and generous."

First Officer Pole popped the top off a tube of lipstick and began lining her lips, watching every movement carefully in the mirror. "Better that then to have them sit gathering dust. I hope they are useful to you. I am delighted to assist in your efforts, Miss Pevensie."

Preparing for the walk to church was like the most solemn of Narnian royal processions, but without all the animal hair and bird feathers. Lucy was trying to be patient – she did understand the importance of appearances and all. Usually she just let Susan handle such things. How Susan had conquered the Lone Islands on the strength of a grand and perfectly timed entrance was the stuff of legend that had grown considerably in the re-telling. Eustace had even asked her if the story was true about how Susan had sailed the Narnian fleet into the Lone Islands, vanquished Narrowhaven, and rescued the imprisoned King Edmund without a single sword raised or arrow fired.

Lucy hung back with Eustace and Jack while Jill's mother and Ruby went down the line inspecting everyone's pocket squares, brushing lint off shoulders, and straightening flyaway hair. The women kept fiddling with who would escort whom and in what order and Lucy was beginning to feel irritated with being told what to do.

Once Mrs. Goodwin joined them, everything else became trivial and Lucy felt guilty for ever feeling put-upon. Peter held baby Margaret and it was poignantly appropriate that U.S. Army Lt. Colonel Thomas Clark take the arm of the British widow and escort her to church on Christmas Day.

Lucy found herself dreading the service as they queued up to enter the church. Usually, she would chat with the women in the neighborhood who they knew and ask about children in school and sons and husbands in combat. She had done this as Queen, she did it now, and it was appropriate and a comfort. This morning, First Officer Pole and Colonel Clark attracted the attention of Father Donald and everyone else. Thankful for the reprieve, Lucy grabbed Eustace.

"Follow me," she whispered. They darted around the receiving line on the front steps and through a side door to a pew at the very back of the church.
Eustace was looking around in fascination as they sat. With the stained glass windows all boarded up, it was dark, stuffy, cold, and smelt of burning wax and dead flowers.

"Why are we in the back, Lucy? There's plenty of room up front."

"Because we'll be closer to an exit," Lucy replied.

"Oh," Eustace said, looking thoughtful. "So I could leave if I need to?"

"Yes," Lucy said firmly. "I am sorry your first experience will be the likes of Father Donald, but there's nothing we can do about it." If Eustace made it through the Gospel, she'd be surprised – which was just as well. If her cousin had to sit through the likely sermon, he would probably never enter a church again.

When the others came in, Lucy was grateful that Peter stepped up and whispered something to Mum. He probably told her that Lucy was there to keep Eustace company and to answer his questions. That would serve to cover the other reasons that were her own. The rest of them all went in and occupied a whole pew near the altar.

The beginning of the service was lovely – especially the parts where someone other than Father Donald was speaking. The carols were familiar and Eustace was beginning to learn the words to *O Come All Ye Faithful*. They did not sing *White Christmas*. Father Donald introduced Colonel Clark and First Officer Pole and the other men and women in uniform and everyone applauded.

Then the prayers, lessons, and Father Donald's instruction began. As he invoked the Almighty and lectured on what the Almighty expected of a pious girl, Lucy kept wondering who the Almighty was. This Almighty did not sound like a nice person at all. He – and he was definitely a He – was fiercely judgmental and cruel and, remarkably, shared all of Father Donald's narrow opinions and prejudices. The Almighty and Father Donald were on very good terms and Lucy's dislike for both intensified the longer she sat in the dark church.

During the Psalm, Eustace muttered, "Excuse me." He squeezed out of the pew and left. Lucy saw a glimpse of pale winter light as her cousin cracked open the side door and slipped outside.

She remained. The dark was stifling and the only warmth she felt was kindled by the infuriating words being spewed at her.

*Aslan?*

*You are light and lioness both, Lucy.*

*I can't shine here, Aslan.*

*You can't?*

*It's too dark. I'm afraid. It's so big and I'm so small.*

*You are light and lioness both, Lucy.*

Lucy could not be a light or a lioness sitting on a hard pew passively listening to Reverend Donald and his ilk force her into a small, dark cupboard. Lucy followed her cousin and left the church.

She wandered about the church yard and found Eustace amid the holly trees. He was studying the sharp, dark green leaves and fingering the bright berries.
"Holly Dryads are very festive," Lucy told him. "They become very silly and flirtatious when they drink wine."

"Sorry about leaving," he said. "I'm just not sure about all of this."

"Do not fret over it, Eustace. Or, at least, don't fret about not being sure about it all."

Uncertainty was a very reasonable reaction in her opinion.

"Between this service and the Lessons and Carols, I have heard more religion in the last two days than in my entire life." Eustace shrugged and pricked his finger at the pointed tip of a holly leaf. "You listen for a while and you realise they are just stories, the same stories, told over and over, like fairy tales."

"Just stories?" Lucy countered. She understood why he would question, but she didn't think these were the right questions to be asking. "Like the stories you heard about me and Edmund on The Dawn Treader? The ones of Peter and Susan? Those are just fairy stories?"

"Those are different," Eustace said.

They began walking the path that circled the church. "Even you said that there was plenty of exaggeration in them, Lucy. Like how Susan conquered the Lone Islands and saved Edmund. And Pole and I heard one about the Prince of Archenland being rescued by a Narnian Horse and how he and a girl stopped an invasion and a Lord of Calormen was turned into a donkey."

"You heard the story of Cor and Aravis, Bree and Hwin?"

"Yes," Eustace paused. "You mean that one's real?"

"Of course. I was there." She had been there, at the siege. She had sat at the table as Aslan turned Rabadash into an ass. She had killed a Tarkaan bent on slaying the man who would become her bond-mate and husband.

"I thought it was a very good story," Eustace said, sounding a little apologetic. "I just didn't think it could be true."

"Eustace, the greatest stories are the true ones." She thought though about all the ways the true stories had changed over one thousand years of Narnian history. "Maybe it's better to say that the greatest stories aren't true, necessarily, but they tell us truths, or parts of truths. The story of Lord Eustace the Undragoned and Lady Jill is being sung in Narnia even now. You might be taller or older, they might leave out the part about eating the Talking Stag by mistake and flubbing the Signs, but the truth of your bravery and your rescue of a Prince of Narnia, that will be told. It will be told in the halls of Cair Paravel. Mothers will tell their young the story in dens and nests. It will be told over and over, a thousand years over."

"I'd not thought of it that way." He looked embarrassed. They took another turn around the church yard, by unspoken agreement, avoiding the path that would bring them to the graveyard. Lucy heard the assembly begin singing Hark! The Herald Angels Sing. It was strange. She could sing all the verses of every carol, even the old and odd ones, to the very end; Eustace was just learning them.

"Peter probably told you," Eustace said. "About how I am trying to work it all out with Aslan." He scraped the wrought iron of the encircling churchyard fence. It was rusty and damp and grimy flakes came off of it.

"That is very understandable, my cousin," Lucy told him. "You need to do this in your own way, in
"Aslan understands, doesn't he? I think he does? He doesn't seem angry with me, but…"

"He understands," Lucy said, smiling. "I have it on good authority Aslan understands even if you hit him on the head with a candlestick."

"Hit Aslan!" Eustace looked horrified.

"So long as it is done for love, yes," Lucy replied. "He does understand when we are angry and frustrated, even when we're angry and frustrated with him."

The verse rang out, Born that man no more may die, Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.

Eustace cocked his head, listening, then shrugged and turned his back on the church. "Aslan I believe in. He's real. But Harold and Alberta never did hold with religion and listening to some of what was said in there this morning and in the lessons yesterday makes me think that they've got the right of it."

Prove all things. Father Collins at school had preached on that passage from Thessalonians during Advent. That was what Eustace was doing.

"You aren't going to argue with me?" Eustace asked. "Peter tried to."

Lucy shook her head. "No, of course not. But you are a kinder, stronger, better person because of Aslan. Don't forget that either, Eustace."

"I won't. I don't."

She sighed and looked at the forbidding doors of the church. Oh Little Town of Bethlehem began. She had always loved that carol and began humming along.

"If the great truths are being told inside, why are you not in church, Lucy?"

"I love the stories, Eustace. I believe they are true. I believe they tell truth. It is the people who tell them that I have very little patience with."

She felt tears pricking at her eyes and with a sniff impatiently wiped them away with her mitten.

Eustace fidgeted and stuck a hand into his pocket. "Humbug?"

"Thank you." Lucy took the offered candy from his palm. "Aslan's blessings for you, my cousin."

"Happy Christmas, Lucy."

Christmas dinner was so abundant, it was almost embarrassing. Susan saw a few belts being loosened and with the rum punch and wine, the laughing was louder and most welcome. The pudding had been too "fresh" and carrot was a new flavor in it, but the fact that they had had one at all was a testament to Anglo-American cooperation and home cook ingenuity. Mum, Ruby, and Mrs. Goodwin had outdone themselves.

Jack had protested the paper crown vociferously and had only relented when everyone else donned one. In past years, it had felt odd and unpleasant to wear a crown of paper on Christmas Day when they had once worn beautiful circlets of gold and silver.
Peter unfolded his very carefully and solemnly set it upon his own head. "I cannot imagine wearing a better crown today."

Edmund clapped Peter on the shoulder and she and Lucy had both kissed him for saying the truth they all felt.

They had feasted better at Cair Paravel, but this had been very special, both for the effort that had gone into it and the company with whom it was shared.

"Let me put the food away," Mum said. "The dishes can wait until after the King's speech."

"I'll help, Helen." Mrs. Goodwin juggled the peas and the stuffing and followed Mum into the kitchen. Susan hoped they kept leftovers separated. Ruby had flavored some of the stuffing with oysters and Susan had not liked it at all. Fresh oysters brought to you by Mermaids tended to spoil you for anything else.

"We'll move the chairs into the drawing room," Peter said, rising as Mum did.

"Why are we listening to the King?" Jack said, sounding mulish and pulling off his crown. "Dad, you always say that…"

"That's enough, Jack," Colonel Clark said curtly, looking embarrassed.

"But…"

Edmund interrupted before Jack could say something truly rude. "Don't you know that while it is impolite to criticize your hosts, it is militarily stupid to criticize your allies?"

"And doubly so to criticize our King," Susan added, feeling a surge of patriotism in the face of this disparagement. The King and Queen had narrowly escaped dying when a Luftwaffe bomb landed in Buckingham Palace. The same could not be said of the American President and First Lady.

"You've read the book!" Colonel Clark asked Edmund.

"All of England has read Instructions for American Servicemen in Britain, Colonel!" Edmund was very much enjoying their guest's discomfiture. "Children returned to schools with it in their rucksacks. It was tucked into Christmas stockings all over England. Dramatic readings of it have replaced A Christmas Carol in the West End."

"I obviously need to speak to the U.S. War Department about adding a section on responding to the British schoolboy who is all brag and bluster without decking him."

"I shall query my acquaintances to see if such a British schoolboy might be located," Edmund replied.

Edmund and Colonel Clark had a very competitive friendship. It had struck Susan as peculiar; the closest she could come to anything like it from Narnia was Edmund's complex and very combative relationship with Sir Leszi. Fortunately, the spite that had marked Edmund's association with their sword master was absent here. It was all very lawyerly, which was tedious for the rest of them to listen to.

"We'll listen politely to King George in the same way that our hosts politely listen to Roosevelt," Ruby said, ending the argument. Ruby was indeed the Brigadier in that household and she had no qualms about including Edmund and Eustace in her corrections when warranted. Susan liked her very much.
"And I can't move the chairs so we can hear the speech if you are all still sitting in them," Peter said, making to pull Edmund's chair out from under him.

Susan quickly stood. "I'll take the dishes into the kitchen, this time." She did not want to wash again.

"May I help?" Flight Officer Pole asked, beginning to stack the plates near her seat.

"Certainly not!" Susan replied. They would not dream of having a man or woman in uniform help in the kitchen today. And especially not with so many other willing hands.

"You should be enjoying your time with Jill," Lucy said, rocking Margaret against her shoulder. "We'll make Jack do all the dishes."

"Hey!"

"Is what horses eat," Edmund said. "Now be useful and help us with the chairs or we shall let Lucy practice using her new knife with you as target."

Laughing at the raillery, Susan pushed the kitchen door with her hip, hands full of the delicately painted, gold rimmed plates and the good silver.

Mum and Mrs. Goodwin were standing very close to each other at the sink and pulled apart suddenly as she entered the kitchen. It was odd – Susan knew what she normally associated that sort of guilty-looking behavior with but couldn't credit it here.

"Thank you for clearing, dear," Mum said.

"I will just go see if Margaret needs a change, before the King's speech," Mrs. Goodwin said, and left the kitchen in a hurry. It all seemed very inexplicably awkward.

"I'm sorry, Mum, did I interrupt something?" Susan had to carefully push dishes aside to set the plates down on the crowded counter.

"No, of course, not, dear. It's fine." Mum vigorously brushed crumbs from her apron. "Beatrice and I were just discussing that I will sleep at her house tonight and then Elizabeth and Ruby may have my room for the night."

"Our guests will not want to put you out of your own bed on Christmas Day, Mum."

"It is not an imposition at all. I often sleep next door when you lot are away to help her with Margaret."

Susan had heard more and more of this as the War had dragged on. Others girls at school had spoken of it in their families, how their mothers, older sisters and aunts were bunking up with other women. There were so many women in England who were alone, with their men gone or dead, and their children either very young, or sent away, or in school. Susan felt a swell of compassion for the women steadfastly carrying on through what was so very anxious and difficult.

"I am glad you have each other for company; I am sure it is very lonely here when we are all gone," Susan replied.

There was a bang. Peter bellowed and Lucy shouted, "Jack! Not again!"

"That was Edmund this time, not me!"

Mum smiled. "It is certainly much quieter when you aren't here."
"And with our friends. And their parents," Susan added. "Who toss you from your own bed on Christmas Day!"

"It has been worth every effort, Susan. We've not had so merry a time in a long time."

"Well, it is kindness itself that you and Mrs. Goodwin are willing to do that for our guests. First Officer Pole did say they have to be up very early to be back in time for their shift."

Neither she nor Colonel Clark had said where they were going or how they were getting there, only that they had to be back and provisions had been made for it. This ignorance was maddening.

Susan pivoted, intending to go back to the dining room to finish clearing.

"Susan?"

She turned back around. "Yes?"

Mum stepped forward and opened her arms. "I never told you, Susan, how proud I am of your accomplishments in Washington. You were so angry with me over what I told Tebbitt, I never was able to tell you how remarkable I think you are."

In fact, she was still angry over Mum's interference and almost pulled away as it came surging back. "You should not have said anything."

"But your partner always learns the truth, Susan. Always," Mum repeated, and took a step closer. "I'm surprised you don't know that already my not-so-young-daughter."

Susan was going to snap that Tebbitt would not have known if Mum had stayed silent. But she had felt the chill between Mum and Father in New York and heard the gossip about John Pevensie from office girls who did not know she was his daughter. This was, Susan sensed, advice her mother had learned the hard and painful way.

"I usually think I can manage it," Susan admitted, feeling ashamed.

"And you do, my dear, brilliantly."

Susan finally let go of the last of her anger so that Mum could draw her in. For the first time in months, she felt the comfort of being in her mother's arms.

"It was awful, Mum. He was so angry."

"But you both patched it up. Don't think I didn't know who set off that fire alarm by mistake at the Mayflower."

Susan giggled against Mum's shoulder. "That was so embarrassing."

In her ear, Mum whispered, "I am sorry, Susan, but given what will likely happen next year for you, it is better that Tebbitt learned it before you left Washington, and heard the truth from you. Surely you see that he could be a part of that business. They aren't going to let many people know your real age."

Startled, Susan pulled back and stared at her mother. "What? Are you saying…"

Mum nodded and put a finger to her lips. "Quietly. You do need to learn more discretion, dear. It's why I've been so harsh with you this holiday. I don't know what you've told your brothers and sister but it is surely not proper."
Mum's voice dropped even lower and it was a wonder Susan could hear her over the fast beating of her heart. "I had a letter from Colonel Walker-Smythe and another from someone in London. I'm not sure who she is with. It is very irregular but that is how they do things. Once you turn sixteen, they want you to leave school and the Colonel will manage the rest. Where this leads is up to him and you. I am furious that the War will take my son and my daughter next year, but I cannot in conscience keep you from it when you have shown how much you can contribute."

This embrace was long and fierce and heartfelt. "Thank you, Mum."

"Susan! Mum!" Peter called. "The King's speech is starting!"

Everyone else was already sitting around the wireless. They opened the circle and Mum sat between Peter and Ruby. Susan quickly took the empty seat between Mrs. Goodwin and Lucy. Margaret was asleep on her mother's shoulder, tiny fist curled in her mouth.

King George began speaking.

*It is at Christmas more than at any other time that we are conscious of the dark shadow of war. Our Christmas festival today must lack many of the happy, familiar features that it has had from our childhood.*

Mum put out her hand and touched Ruby's dark one. "Thank you," she whispered to the woman who had given them so much this holiday. They truly were allies.

*We miss the actual presence of some of those nearest and dearest, without whom our family gatherings cannot be complete.*

Jill put her head on Elizabeth's shoulder, mother and daughter together, for a day, while Michael Pole flew missions with the RAF Photographic Reconnaissance squadron. They held hands and Elizabeth dabbed away Jill's tears.

*But though its outward observances may be limited, the message of Christmas remains eternal and unchanged. It is a message of thankfulness and of hope – of thankfulness to the Almighty for His great mercies, of hope for the return to this earth of peace and goodwill.*

*In this spirit I wish all of you a happy Christmas. This year it adds to our happiness that we are sharing it with so many of our comrades-in-arms from the United States of America. We welcome them in our homes, and their sojourn here will not only be a happy memory for us, but, I hope, a basis of enduring understanding between our two peoples.*

Jack elbowed Eustace in the arm, not very hard, and Eustace shoved him back, grinning. Edmund reached over the boys' heads to shake Colonel Clark's hand.

*The recent victories won by the United Nations enable me this Christmas to speak with firm confidence about the future.*

*On the southern shores of the Mediterranean the First and Eighth Armies; our Fleets and Air Forces are advancing towards each other, heartened and greatly fortified by the timely and massive armies of the United States. Blows have been struck by the armies of the Soviet Union, the effects of which cannot yet be measured on the minds and bodies of the German people.*

*In the Pacific we watch with thrilled attention the counter-strokes of our Australian and American comrades.*
India, now still threatened with Japanese invasion, has found in her loyal fighting men, more than a million strong champions to stand at the side of the British Army in defence of Indian soil.

We still have tasks ahead of us, perhaps harder even than those which we have already accomplished. We face these with confidence, for today we stand together, no longer alone, no longer ill armed, but just as resolute as in the darkest hours to do our duty whatever comes.

Many of you to whom I am speaking are far away overseas. You realise at first hand the importance and meaning of those outposts of Empire which the wisdom of our forefathers selected, and which your faithfulness will defend. For there was a danger that we should lose much, and this has opened our eyes to the value of what we might have lost.

You may be serving for the first time in Gibraltar, in Malta, in Cyprus, in the Middle East, in Ceylon, or in India. Perhaps you are listening to me from Aden or Syria, or Persia, or Madagascar or the West Indies, or you may be in the land of your birth, in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa.

Wherever you are serving in our wide, free Commonwealth of Nations you will always feel "at home". Though severed by the long sea miles of distance you are still in the family circle, whose ties, precious in peaceful years, have been knit even closer by danger.

Throughout the King's message to the British and Commonwealth troops throughout the world, Peter listened somberly, stooped at the shoulders, staring down at his hands clasped in front of him. Where would he be next year during the King's Speech? Would he be alive?

Susan was certain her brother would survive this and return to them.

Where would she be next year? Surely it would not be in this drawing room.

*The Queen and I feel most deeply for all of you who have lost or been parted from your dear ones, and our hearts go out to you with sorrow, with comfort, but also with pride.*

Lucy gently put an arm around Mrs. Goodwin's shoulder, careful to not disturb the sleeping baby cradled against her. Susan held her hand as Mrs. Goodwin wept quietly for her Robert, called up and dead not a year later, in the Atlantic.

*We send a special message of remembrance to the wounded and the sick in the hospitals wherever they may be, and to the prisoners of war, who are, enduring their long exile with dignity and fortitude. Suffering and hardship shared together have given us a new understanding of each other's problems.*

*The lessons learned during the past forty tremendous months have taught us how to work together after the war to build a worthier future.*

*On visits to war industries in every part of the country the Queen and I have watched with admiration the steady growth of that vital war production, the fruits of which are now being used by every branch of our forces. We are thankful for the splendid addition to our food supplies made by those who work on the land, and who have made it fertile as it has never been before.*

*Those of you who are carrying out this variety of duties so willingly undertaken in the service of your country will, I am sure, find new associations, new friendships, and new memories long to be cherished in times of peace.*

*So let us brace and prepare ourselves for the days which lie ahead.*
Victory will bring us even greater world responsibilities, and we must not be found unequal to a task in the discharge of which we shall draw on the storehouse of our experience and tradition.

Our European Allies, their Sovereigns, heads, and Governments, whom we are glad to welcome here in their distress, count on our aid to help them return to their native lands and to rebuild the structure of a free and glorious Europe.

Colonel Clark looked thoughtful and shared a look with Edmund who nodded, as some understanding passed between them.

Susan felt the warmth of purpose within her. Narnia had trained them and now, by work and will of the Lion, she and Peter would serve.

The Allies would prevail, eventually, and the War would end. Then new work would begin. Susan, her sister, and her brothers had the storehouse of experience and tradition of which the King had spoken. The Four had rebuilt a nation before and led her to a Golden Age; they were called to do the same again. Narnia was not the end, but only a marvelous beginning.

On the sea, on land, and in the air, and in civil life at home, a pattern of effort and mutual service is being traced which may guide those who design the picture of our future society.

A former President of the United States of America used to tell the story of a boy who was carrying an even smaller child up a hill. Asked whether the heavy burden was not too much for him, the boy answered, "It's not a burden, it's my brother!"

So let us welcome the future in a spirit of brotherhood, and thus make a world in which, please God, all may dwell together in justice and peace.

Christmas dinner always required a Venn diagram and spreadsheet at Russell House. Mary wasn't any sort of cook in a kitchen that wasn't also a campsite. In their household, Mary was the tactician and organizer and she took orders from Kwong Lee. Supervision, however, was required because sometimes Lee, in her irritation, became a little careless and would slip fish sauce into the vegetables Polly ate, or bacon into the dressing Asim ate, or beef into the samosas Mr. Patel ate. They could have just gone completely vegetarian for Christmas dinner – it would have been easier – but poor Digs always came away looking alarmed and half fed unless there was something dead and bleeding on the table.

Never mind the fact that a full third of those sitting at the table did not celebrate the nativity of Jesus of Nazareth at all. Granted, it wasn't as if anyone actually knew the birth date of the Jewish carpenter turned rabbi and prophet. The early Christians just co-opted a slew of those Roman and pagan celebrations and plugged Christmas into – oh blast what was the name of it – that festival associated with the winter solstice. Emperor Elagabalus introduced it. Or was it Aurelian?

They had the right idea though, one festival to celebrate all the different sun gods everybody worshipped in the third century. It was Latin. That was why she couldn't remember it. Well at least Peter wouldn't know it either. Deo Invictus?

Digs would know. But, if she asked, then Digs would know she didn't know, and that would be embarrassing.

Everyone was feeling a little misty from the King's speech. The family circle, the King had said, whose ties, precious in peaceful years, have been knit even closer by danger.

This was certainly their family circle and as precious and close as it could be.
They were in the drawing room. Having just demolished the Christmas cake, more a carrot cake, really, everyone was peacefully going about his or her appointed tasks from the duty roster. Mary had removed the plates to the kitchen; Patel was enjoying a smoke and helping Kun with the washing; Lee was warming up the coffee cups.

Polly and Digs were exchanging their gifts. It was always the same. All year, they each scoured everywhere looking for something with a flying horse – books, drawings, figurines. She had been with both Polly and with Digs when it had happened. They would be in some shop, or city or another, and if either spotted a flying horse, it was purchased, stored, and literally trotted out months later at Christmas. They really had some ghastly specimens. They did the same thing with lions, come to think of it. That was doubly odd given that a pride of lions seemed to have taken up residence around Russell House.

Richard was on the sofa and, at his invitation, Mary joined him, though she did so a little warily. He had not had a very good day and they were feeling the absence of Ruby's management. Richard had taken to Ruby very well. He kept trying to flirt with her, but Ruby was having none of that and would tell him so. After discussing it, candidly, she and Ruby agreed that adding Jack to the household over the holiday was not a good idea and so Ruby had returned to Cambridge and would come back once Jack returned to school. She would stay until the U.S. Army opened a hospital for the Negro GIs – a ridiculous requirements, but it wasn't politic to criticise the Americans now.

Without Ruby's deft management, it had taken most of Richard's energy and all of his good humour to get from the bedroom to the dining room table. He had tried to eat most of the Christmas dinner with his knife and Mary could not tell if it was because he was being ornery or because he really could not tell the difference between a fork and a knife. He had refused to let her cut his food, but allowed Polly to do it without a protest. He had yelled at her when she would not let him drink wine because of the medicines. Patel had poured water into a wine glass and then Richard had been happy and had not spilled it at all. Perhaps it was because Patel had offered. Mary sniffled a little and pushed the grim thoughts aside, enjoying the moment of peaceful accord with her husband.

Richard was smiling now, watching Digs and Polly coo over the ugliest piece of statuary (it was a purple flying horse) Mary had ever seen.

"Richard, do you recall the name of the Roman festival at the winter solstice co-opted by the Christians to become Christmas?"

"Dies Natalis Solis Invicti – the birthday of the unconquered Sun. Other sources suggest Christmas as the celebration of the Christ's birth comes from counting forward from the Conception, at the Spring Equinox. Of course, that is speculative as well. The whole of the Christmas celebration is a hodgepodge of pagan traditions."

Mary blinked back her tears. "Yule comes from the Norwegians, I think. The gifts and greens from Saturnalia, perhaps?"

Richard nodded. "Though a true celebration of the god Saturn would have us eating children rather than giving them gifts."

His hands rattled the coffee cup so severely, Mary started to reach over and take it from him.

Richard grimaced and snapped, "I'm not a child!"

Lee magically appeared with a tray. "May I warm your cup, Richard?"

"Yes, damn it! It's too cold!"
Lee gently took the cup and saucer. "I'll see to that right now."

Mary knew the cup would not reappear. Richard settled back with a satisfied glower, mute and resentful, again.

With a welcome and well-timed distraction, Asim slipped in and took a seat next to hers. They had not seen him for weeks, since the Second Battle of El Alamein and then Operation Torch. He had surprised them all by arriving just as dinner began and was leaving early tomorrow. He was very tired.

Mary could not ask how he had spent his time or where, or if he was satisfied with it. Instead, she said, "It is wonderful to at least have you with us for dinner."

Asim grunted wearily and stretched out his legs, cradling the cup in his hands. "Thank you, it is good to be here, for however short it is."

With a wincing nudge to Digs' ribs, Polly exclaimed, "Asim! You are finally here!"

Digs rubbed his side and shot Polly a look of amused annoyance.

"Was my arrival so eagerly awaited then?" Asim asked them dryly.

"Yes!" Polly said. "Digory, would you?"

"Yes," Digs replied, rising from his seat. "But don't steal my port, Polly."

Digs walked back out of the drawing room as Polly explained. "We have a gift for you, Asim."

"Oh?"

His trepidation was warranted. Mary could not imagine Digs and Polly coordinating on any gift save one involving flying horses or lions. Whatever Polly and Digs gave together would be something that you would really loathe, but as a gift from two dear old friends, you would have to graciously accept and display.

"Take that skeptical look off your face!" Polly scolded, taking a sip of Digs' port. "It's not actually from us."

Digs returned the room, now carrying a flat, brown wrapped package. "I saw that, Polly. Put the port down. You get very silly when you drink it."

"Amorous, too!" Richard said. "Or is that just with gin?"

They all laughed, except Digs who pretended he didn't hear a word and handed the package over to Asim.

"It is actually from the Pevensies, Eustace, and Jill," Digs said.

"Best read that first," Polly said, smartly tapping the card.

Looking confused, cradling the package in his lap, Asim pried open the envelope.

Digs and Polly were both looking over his shoulder.

"Is that Lucy's writing?" Polly asked.
"It is too well-spelled," Digs countered. "I think it might be Edmund's."

Curiosity burning, and disgruntled that she couldn't see the card, Mary asked, "Can you read it aloud?

"For a friend on the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Isa," Asim read.

Isa was the Muslim name for Jesus.

He continued, "There follows a quotation, 'No, no! The adventures first,' said the Gryphon in an impatient tone: 'explanations take such a dreadful time.'"

Mary smiled. "They are quoting Alice!"

"Indeed," Asim said, prying the paper off what looked to be a wooden picture frame.

The paper slid away to the floor with a rustle and crunch.

Asim turned the picture over to look upon it and froze. His face blanched in what Mary could only assume was shock. She had never seen such an expression on him. His hands, gripping the edges of the frame, shook as Richard's did.

Mary leaned over to look at the painting he held. It was simple and a little strange, a small wooden boat, painted green, with a dragon carved on to her bow, and a purple sail. It seemed peculiar and wholly unremarkable to her.

Fingers tracing the ship's outline, Asim stared up at Digs and Polly, standing shoulder to shoulder. They both looked solemn and serene.

"How…" Asim stammered.

Mary had never seen Asim so unnerved.

"Her name is The Dawn Treader," Polly said.

"Peter thought she was familiar to you," Digs added quietly.

Asim nodded, leaving Mary ever so unnerved.

"Her name is The Dawn Treader," Polly said.

"Peter thought she was familiar to you," Digs added quietly.

Asim nodded, leaving Mary ever so confused. Again. Why did this always happen when those bloody Pensenvees were involved? Without doing anything, she somehow always ended up the outsider, a step behind.

"But how?" Asim repeated, staring again at the painting.

Digs shrugged. "You ask us?"

"Nor is it our story to tell, Asim," Polly added gently. She handed Digs' port back. "And explanations take such a dreadful time."

After being on top of one another, it was a miracle no murder was done by Saint Stephen's Day. Some quiet came to the house for the ones who most appreciated it. Jill was writing a letter to her grandmother in Jamaica – Edmund had checked. Susan was reading French magazines taken from Jill's home when they had gone there after Boxing Day.

Finally, Edmund was able to settle on the drawing room sofa and enjoy the reading Colonel Clark had provided. Not enjoy, precisely. The accounts of the Leipzig War Crimes trials were fascinating.
So much effort and yet so little punishment was meted out. He wondered why, even as he admired that it had been done at all. The most severe sentence was, as near as he could tell, about four years to two naval officers who sank a hospital ship and attacked the survivors. He should write to Colonel Clark and ask him of it.

Before they went back to school, he and Lucy needed to apportion the news clippings of Foreign Secretary Eden's statement to the House of Commons earlier in the month about how the Nazis were systematically exterminating the Jews of occupied Europe. There had been a day of mourning in all synagogues and Lucy had risked being expelled from school to attend one. That was an episode Mum did not know about. Probably. Edmund wasn't confident of anything with regard to Mum anymore.

He sighed a little and stared out the picture window at the gray street – no lights, no street signs, no gardens, and the perpetual buzz of planes overhead. The King had spoken of rebuilding Europe, the St. James Declaration from the governments in exile had assumed a judicial accounting for war crimes, yet the Home Secretary had suggested collective suicides. The prospect of trying to do to the architects of the Third Reich what had been attempted at Leipzig was so daunting.

The reading was grim but he found it helped bring the burdens of Narnia into sharper relief. Edmund could see more clearly where they had erred with Jadis' remnants and how he had carried those lessons forward, learning and improving, failing with Noll and the Mole traitors, and later succeeding with others, like Seth Stanleh. The most difficult decision he would have ever faced, Rabadash's fate, Aslan had taken upon himself – it was a punishment that Edmund could not say he agreed with for all that it was both deserved and that Rabadash had truly chosen for himself. Edmund looked at the august backgrounds of the jurists involved in the Leipzig War Crimes trials and felt frustration at how much better he could have been during those trying times, and a small, tiny satisfaction in having managed as well as they had. He had been so young.

Tinsel on the tree caught his eye. Edmund toyed with the glittering strands with his fingers. From Jadis, to Noll, to Seth and Calormen, and his memory ran on, ending at the first day he had met her. She had worn a dress of Linch green with pretty silver thread only a Crow could see. She had bartered the thread and her own hair to gamble in the beetle racing. The gown had been in tatters by evening’s end, and pollen-filled, and, finally, tossed into the corner of his room. The Crows had saved every strand, for such had been their loyalty to her, and in turn, her loyalty to him. Not father, brother, or Peter, they had joked. It had not been a joke at all, for from the very beginning, she had valued something in him she saw as greater than Valiant, Gentle, or even Magnificent. It had taken him far too long to fully appreciate that generosity and faith.

Aslan?

You are doing as you should. I am well pleased with my Just King.

You are?

Do not be so surprised, Edmund.

Could you tell me what I am doing well so that I can continue doing it?

He felt the Lion huff and tinsel fluttered on the tree.

I didn't think so. How is your head? Any more candlestick injuries?

Not today.
Susan's voice unexpectedly broke into the reverie. "You are not slipping it by me," his sister said, speaking to Jill. "I know you have been sleeping here in the drawing room with Eustace every night since you both arrived."

Jill looked up from the letter she had been writing, eyes wide with worry. She glanced over at him. Susan must be very annoyed that she was willing to confront Jill about it. Edmund had not decided if he was going to say anything to Eustace about the subject.

"Eustace is far noisier than you are," Edmund said, adding his support to Susan and reminder that they had not slipped by him, either. "He has awoken me every night when he sneaks downstairs and has awoken me again every morning when he returns." They had been fortunate that Eustace and Jill returned to their beds on Christmas morning before the parents had arrived. Edmund closed his book and set it aside for later.

"It's because of Narnia," Jill said, voice thick. "We slept back to back together for weeks and now we're so accustomed to it, we can't sleep otherwise."

"How did you manage it in school?" Susan asked.

"It started when we stayed with the Russells. Once we went back to school, with so many students sent down and withdrawn, Eustace had his own room, so I was able to sneak in at night after curfew. If I didn't, we'd never be able to sleep and I'm so worried about it."

"That you will be caught?" Susan asked.

"No, I can blub my way through that," Jill replied.

Edmund could see that being true. Jill had been able to get by the Harfang giants on the strength of her acting.

"The Head's gang all had keys and so they've been changing the locks and putting on new ones. If they put a lock on the hall doors, I won't be able to get to Scrubb's room. Jill pushed back her hair and rubbed her eyes. "I don't know what we'll do then."

He could sympathize. It had taken some time before he had learned to sleep alone again. "It is very difficult to change, Jill. But you can. And you must," Edmund told her. "It will be far worse if you are expelled because then you won't be together at all."

"We have tried!" Jill insisted, voice hiking.

Susan quickly rose from her seat and went to put an arm around Jill. "Don't worry. We can find a way."

Jill sniffed and sounded just miserable. "How?"

"I can teach you how to pick locks so if they do put a lock on it, you can get in," Susan told her. "Getting through the door shouldn't be hard once you know how."

That was true enough. Susan had a master set of picks hidden in the bottom of a handbag, sized for both American and European locks, gifted to her by a first-rate cracksman at the British Embassy in Washington.

"Eventually, you can steal a key and you can have a copy made," Edmund said. The Crows and Rats had been masters at stealing keys; he and Susan had both learned how to take impressions and
the Dwarfs had been terrific at making duplicates. It was complicated, but all very manageable.

"You can open a lock with wire and pins in a pinch, but to do this properly and quickly you really need a proper set of picks to take back to school with you when the holiday ends." His sister looked again at him. "Edmund? Do you have any ideas in that regard?"

"As it falls under procurement, yes, I think I can find a way for two schoolchildren to acquire thieves' tools in London over the Christmas hols."

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To: Major al-Masri
Russell House
Combe
Ox

From: Susan and Edmund Pevensie
Finchley Road
Finchley
Barnet, London

Dear Major al-Masri:

On behalf of us all, you are most welcome for the gift of the painting. None of us can explain the curious coincidence but Lucy entreats us earnestly to write that you do not walk alone on your journey. As our sister is the most authoritative on such matters, we heed her advise. To that end, should you wish for more elucidation, it is to her that we recommend you make your appeal.

We ask a favour of you in return. We are in need of acquiring a set of lock picking tools. Might you refer us to such an establishment that has them available and would sell them to us? A basic set should be sufficient, such as would be effective for simple English locks. The set should include a torsion wrench, a pick, a hook, and a rake.

We await your reply.

Sincerely and with wishes for a joyous New Year,

Susan and Edmund Pevensie

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Edmund had hoped the locksmith Major al-Masri directed them to would be a seedy, bombed out place in the East End. He could then dress the part of a hooligan and look menacing with a club shoved under his jacket. Susan had complained that such a charade would have been difficult for her to manage.

The address though was in Marylebone, off Paddington Street. As he and Susan studied the London address Major al-Masri had given them, Susan's finger drew a line from Marylebone Road down to Baker Street.

"That explains it, then," she mused aloud.

"What?"

"The Irregulars are there."

"The Irregulars? You mean Sherlock Holmes? 221B and all that?"
"Of a sort, yes. The Colonel told me that's what they call themselves. Their London offices are on Baker Street."

Edmund leaned back in the chair and studied the address again in light of this information. "Major al-Masri may be sending us to a locksmith who does work for them on the side." That's what he himself would have done in Narnia – keep it all close and in the family, so to speak.

Susan nodded. "I think this could also be a test for me." She tapped her finger on the map. "But how to play it?"

She disappeared upstairs and the length of time Susan was in her bedroom meant it was going to be quite the production. There was no point donning a persona of his own until he knew what she was doing. Edmund settled on the sofa with the Leipzig war crimes account and waited.

An hour later Edmund put aside the fiasco of trying one individual for crimes against all Belgian civilians during the German occupation. They'd only bought a few hours of solitude in the house and if Susan continued dallying with her hair style, they were going to waste it. The telltale clip of high heels on wood floor forestalled drastic action. When she appeared, Edmund suffered a moment of profound disorientation as he wondered who the woman was coming down the stair. She looked like Mum, but younger, and Mum didn't wear anything with a fox fur collar and he didn't think she wore anything that long or in that colour.

He whistled. "Su, that is quite the transformation."

She looked confused. "Bonjour."

So, his sister was playing it French, in clothing Jill's mother had donated to the cause. "Hello," he replied, coming to meet her at the bottom of the stair. His French was rubbish, but they could manage the charade.

"Salut. Je m'appelle Jean-Louise Ellis."

"Miss Ellis?" he repeated.

She shook her head and held out her left hand. "No, je suis Madame Ellis."

Edmund wondered where Susan had acquired the well-worn wedding band on her hand. "Mrs. Ellis?"

She nodded. "Est-ce que vous pouvez m'aider?"

"You need help?"

"Oui! Où est..." and she thrust the slip of paper at him with the address of the locksmith.

"You want me to take you there?"

"Oui, s'il vous plaît!"

It was rotten luck that Susan got to do all the play acting, but he could do the part of the local English guide for the confused French lady. No change of clothing was required and no scrounging about for a club or knife.

From the Underground station, he took Mme. Ellis' arm and nattered about Regent's Park, Sherlock Holmes, and the sights of London's West End. The respected locksmith of J.M. Walker & Sons, est.
1865, did not look to be the sort of establishment where one would purchase a set of thieves' tools. But as Mister Walker and his sons worked for spies, the veneer of respectability was sensible.

A bell tinkled as Edmund held the shop door for Mme. Ellis. She walked into the dim little store hesitantly, looking around with interest at the displays of locks and keys.

"May I help you?"

Mr. Walker (or one of his sons) was old, bald, bent, and had huge, round, black-rimmed glasses that perfectly mimicked the shape of his face. Over his perfect white shirt, he wore a heavy apron, smudged with grease.

Mme. Ellis walked up to the counter and began speaking rapidly in French.

"I'm sorry," the proprietor said, looking askance in his direction. "I don't understand French."

Edmund took this as his cue and he joined Mme. Ellis at the counter. "I don't understand much of it either, unfortunately. This is Madame Ellis, a family friend, now here in England. She requires a set of lock picks and was told by another friend that she could acquire them here."

"Oui!" Mme. Ellis said enthusiastically. From her handbag she removed a small, thin parcel wrapped in an old handkerchief, unrolled it, and set out three picks from her larger set. "Voilà!"

Mr. Walker was surprised, but not shocked, Edmund thought. If he helped spies with their lock picks, the Free French had likely been customers here. He glanced between the two of them. "Do you know the nature of the lock to be opened?"

What followed was a complicated game in which Mme. Ellis talked in French and Edmund and Mr. Walker tried to understand her. Things went more smoothly when Mme. Ellis went about the shop and identified the lock likely to be on the door of a boys' dormitory. With much pointing, nodding, and gesticulating, they settled on the picks Mme. Ellis wanted.

Mr. Walker disappeared behind the curtain to the back of the store. There were voices, two, but so muffled Edmund could not hear what they said. He was just edging closer to the curtain for a listen when he heard a door shut. He quickly slipped back to the front of the counter. Edmund had gone over an escape route with Mme. Ellis when they walked from the station but he hoped they would not need to use it. His sister would not be able to run very well in high heels.

Mr. Walker shoved aside the curtain and returned to the counter. "My apologies." Ominously, Edmund was prepared for a stalling, "I'm sorry, but we do not carry those items."

Instead, the locksmith unrolled a square of felt on the counter containing a set of five picks. "Here is what I have. I believe they will serve your purposes, Ma'am."

Mme. Ellis carefully picked up each pick, examined it under a light, and hefted it in her hand. Edmund was impressed. Mme. Ellis knew what she was looking for and how to use the tool. She nodded smartly. "Perfect!"

The price seemed high, but he supposed the proprietor assumed the War Department was paying. He helped Mme. Ellis count out the coin. English money was hard to hear how the Americans complained of it.

As they left the store, Edmund was certain they picked up a man who followed them all the way up Baker Street. He felt the tension in Mme. Ellis' arm and, from the slight shake of her head, concluded that Mme. Ellis saw him as well and did not recognize him. Edmund continued with his tour
instruction and helped her with English. Their follower did not pursue them into the crowded station.

It was full dark when they walked the familiar street to home. It was busy with the normal activity of the afternoon turning into evening, children playing, women returning from work. Everyone would be at the house and, hopefully, Susan would be able to sneak upstairs without too many questions about why she was dressed as a French matron in a suit and fox-collared coat.

"Did you get what you needed?"

"Oui!"

"It was an impressive performance, Madame Ellis."

"And you, too," she responded, which was kind and he very much appreciated it. It had been very good fun. While some daredevil part of him wished for a little more thrill, he also knew that excitement was very much over-rated in such an exercise. For Susan's sake, and whatever was waiting for her in the new year, a simple success and job well done was best.

"Why Ellis?" he asked, curious. "It is not French, is it?"

"Ellis is the name of my husband," Susan said, in an impossibly thick accent.

"And your maiden name?" Edmund asked.

"Mon nom de jeune fille est Lambert."

Edmund stared at his astounding sister. Pronounced as Susan said it, lamb-aire, was French. The same word, in plain Narnian, lam-bert, had been the name of Susan's Wolf Guard.

He took his sister's arm and they went up the walk of the house. It was dark on the outside, but inside, it would be warm and light. They could hear the wireless playing White Christmas.

"Aslan and Lambert are both with you, my sister."

"Oui."

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Next chapter, Stepping Stones, in which there are many meetings, and new stories begin. To be followed by Rat and Sword Go To War.

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The film, The King's Speech, deals with the Christmas message of George VI two years earlier, in 1939, after England declared war on Nazi Germany. King George quoted from God Knows by Minnie Louise Haskins.

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."
And he replied:
"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."
So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

I was not sure of the timing of the Monarch's annual Christmas message. The very first Christmas message was delivered by King George V at 3 PM on Christmas Day, 1932, from Sandringham.
The General Post Office was used to reach Australia, Canada, India, Kenya and South Africa. That time was chosen as the best time for reaching most of the countries in the Empire by short wave transmitters in Britain. I believe the practice has remained consistent.

The French may be a little off. If it is, please message me and I'll fix it.

I felt I was cheating here, both in including that huge chunk of the King’s Christmas Message and the segment in the House of Russell. I really did not feel I should edit the King’s speech. The Russell House part was originally in my Christmas story of two years ago, *It's the thought that counts*, and has been edited to better fit where TSG has taken us.

The *Instructions for American Servicemen*, 1942, is a delightful book, recommended to me by Adaese.

The many conversations that occur here, particularly between Lucy and Eustace and Susan and her mother, are very much the product of excellent commentary I've received from folks, including Doctor Dolly, Anstigmat, H_dash_H, and FelipeMarcusThomas. My sincere thanks.
Stepping Stones

Chapter Summary

In which there are many meetings, counsel given and counsel received, and long-anticipated steps are taken on the journey.

Apostolic Way
Chapter 15, Stepping Stones

In which there are many meetings, counsel given and counsel received, and long-anticipated steps are taken on the journey.

As explained in the author's note below, the beginning of this very, very long chapter repeats Chapter 1 of *Rat and Sword Go To War*. Thereafter, it departs from the story of Peter and Susan -- which is told in *Rat and Sword Go To War* -- and focuses upon upon Edmund, Lucy, and their mother.

_Sometimes a lover of God may faint_
_in the presence. Then the beloved bends_
_and whispers in his ear, "Beggar,_
spread out your robe. I'll fill it with gold._
_
…
_The Friend breathes into one who has no breath._
_
…
_A deep silence revives the listening of those two who meet on the riverbank._
_Like the ground turning green in a spring wind,_
_like birdsong beginning inside the egg,_
_like this universe coming into existence,_
_the lover wakes and whirls in a dancing joy,_
_then kneels down in praise._

Excerpts of *Birdsong From Inside The Egg* by Rumi, *The Book of Love, Poems of Ecstasy and Longing*, (Translated by Coleman Barks)

_ooOooo_

_I have lived on the lip_
_Of insanity, wanting to know reasons,_
_Knocking on a door. It opens,_
_I've been knocking from the inside!_

Rumi (translated Coleman Barks & John Moyne) (suggested by Syrena)

_ooOooo_

_Act, and God will act._
It had been a long, grueling flight over the North Atlantic for them both. First the British Embassy in Washington to New York, then from New York to Glasgow with stops in Gander and Prestwick. From there, Wing Commander Tebbitt had gone on to London to see his mother and sisters for a late Christmas and New Year's holiday. George found his wife in Edinburgh working at the shipyards and their daughter had left school in Carlisle and joined her there. It had been almost two years and seeing them was probably worse than just exchanging letters. He was a stranger to his wife and adolescent daughter.

Three days later with everything said that could be said and no reason to stay, he reported to London.

His reunion with Caterina was longer by two days than that with his own wife, and infinitely more satisfying. They were fortunate to see each other at all. Their tender talk between the sheets was all about the upcoming campaigns in southern Europe.

He also tried to understand what had happened to the Walker-Smythe family and what he had always felt had been a happy marriage. Caterina understood; she had her own difficulties and perversely sympathised more with his distant wife than with him. The war had changed them all though they would carry on in the stiffest British tradition of pretending that everything was well. Caterina thought that once the war ended, when it ended, this domestic discontent would be repeated all over Britain. Churchill might state that the family was the basis for all that was noble and worth fighting for in England, but in this battle, George wondered if it was the war that would win.

Then Caterina booted him out of her frigid flat, warm bed and warmer arms and she was off to Sicily as part of the intelligence gathering in advance of the action.

He checked into temporary, shabby rooms off Portman Square whose only advantage was their vicinity to the Special Operation Executive's Baker Street offices and that he did not have to share them with three other men. George knew that in the apartment at Orchard Court, where SOE agents for the F section stayed while awaiting their final orders, the quarters were sometimes so cramped, briefings could occur in the art deco lavatory where you could, if you wished, conduct an interview seated upon a black onyx bidet.

At Baker Street, he spent a week getting firsthand briefings, which was a very pleasant change from his long stint at the Embassy. Libya had fallen; Hitler had recalled Rommel from North Africa; it was only a matter of time in Tunisia. With the agreement of the Casablanca conference between Churchill and Roosevelt, it would be Southern Europe come summer and, finally, the second front and retaking of Europe in 1944. It made the SOE’s F section work of inserting agents into France all the more important so things were very busy.

Seeing the opportunities open up, he sent Tebbitt off to Thame Park for a refresher in wireless training that would keep him occupied for a week – two if the latest agents there for training were attractive, which they invariably were. He did have to wonder if striking looks and trim figure were on the intake sheets Selwyn Jepson used when interviewing female candidates for insertion into France as SOE spies.
Finally, now, the meeting could take place that George had wanted since realizing that Susan Pevensie, working name Mrs. Susan Caspian, and her brother, Edmund Pevensie, had run a complex cipher for three months that fooled the espionage establishment in two countries. George had taken to personally calling it *Operation Narnia*.

He summoned to Baker Street the man who had cut off and tied up all the dangling bits of that security breach on this side of the Atlantic. Major al-Masri arrived so promptly from Bletchley Park George concluded the impatience to meet was mutual. George had read al-Masri's file and seen the official, grainy, black and white photograph. al-Masri was shorter than he expected, very neat, and obviously not English. He would assume the man had checked on him as well.

al-Masri offered his hand. "Colonel Walker-Smythe, it is a pleasure to meet you."

"And you, al-Masri. Sit, please. Should I have one of the girls get us some coffee?"

"I am fine for now but we may require fortification later," al-Masri replied. The office was big enough for a desk and chair and a separate table and chairs. The Major sat there rather than on the other side of the desk. The man was certainly confident to assume this was to be a working meeting rather than an interview.

George took the seat across the table from him. They sat in silence, staring at one another. George finally cleared his throat. "I have wanted to meet you for some time now."

"And I was about to say the same thing. So which of us shall speak first into this billowing silence?"

George knew just where to begin. "Someone who worked for me once used to say that given a silence, most people have the desire to fill it."

al-Masri nodded. "I understand that lesson concludes, 'And the trick is knowing the impulse exists and training yourself to patience in its place.'"

"It seems we have had access to the same personnel, Major."

"And that the Pevensies all had the benefit of the same wise teacher."

George hoped the man's desire to exchange information would be stronger than the reticence. Being forthcoming was not a natural trait in a spy, though certainly curiosity was.

"You have the advantage on me, al-Masri. I know Mrs. Caspian well, but have not seen her the better part of six months since she left Washington with her mother. I have not met either of her brothers. You have, and your knowledge is more current. Tell me the situation."

The Major leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs, making himself comfortable and taking it as an invitation rather than near order. "Addressing Mrs. Caspian first, I have only met her once, though we have exchanged several letters. I have reiterated to her that she must not discuss the espionage work of last summer in Washington or she would jeopardize her future with us. Further, I have been monitoring her language instruction with Madame Simon and ensuring that her school does not interfere."

"And?" He knew that Madame Simon had written to Vera Atkins in F Section about Mrs. Caspian and through that channel had assumed all was proceeding without interruption.

"She makes excellent and diligent progress. Her other classwork suffers but I deem that of no consequence."
"Thank you."

"There was also the matter of the locksmith, of which you might not have heard."

"Locksmith?" George repeated. "What did she get herself into?"

"At Christmas, she and Edmund wrote me that they required a set of basic lockpicking tools and asked if I might know where a set could be obtained."

Of all the cheek, though credit to them for being discreet in making the inquiry. "She's a first rate cracksman as our resident burglar is fond of saying. He gave her a full set of picks before she left America. What the devil does she need another set for?"

al-Masri shook his head. "I do not know but I assumed she wished to teach the skill to someone else in need of it."

"And she did this all with Edmund? Her brother is still in on it all?"

"I think you should assume so, yes. I did direct them to one of our establishments and set up some modest surveillance to observe what they would do."

He wished he could have observed it himself. "And?"

"Mrs. Caspian presented herself, quite convincingly, as a French woman with Edmund acting as her interpreter and guide. She dressed for the part, having acquired a dated continental wardrobe through a Wren assigned to Bletchley Park and the acquisition of the picks was handled very neatly."

al-Masri looked very smug. "I did speak with Mr. Walker, the locksmith, afterwards. He assumed Mrs. Caspian was in her mid-twenties, at least. I, of course, did not enlighten him as to the truth. He was impressed at the dissembling in both Susan and Edmund, which surprised me not at all."

George was not surprised by any of this, either. Here was the opening he had wanted – someone else, a fellow hand, who could confirm that it had not been invention. Tebbitt had been fooled, but the man was in love and George had wanted a more jaundiced eye.

"So you have seen it?" If he had to explain of what he spoke, there was no purpose to all of this.

al-Masri was silent for so long, he wondered if it was another ploy to get him to speak unwisely. He opened his mouth to challenge the Major on the stalling tactic, but al-Masri held up his hand. "I am not using the ploy the Pevensies do. To answer the easy question first, yes, Colonel, I have seen what you do."

"I've not shared my observations with anyone else," George admitted. "After I confronted her about that damnable Narnia cipher, I theorized that Mrs. Caspian’s inexplicable talents were shared with her siblings, though not the parents."

"I cannot speak to the youngest sister, as I have not met her." The Major sounded uncommonly wistful. "But your theory was correct. I have observed the same in Mrs. Caspian’s older brother, Peter, and, though I have seen him only a handful of times, Edmund as well. To respond to your unasked and harder question, I know no more than you do as to what can account for their remarkable maturity and skills."

"al-Masri, you say it is a familial trait yet you reported to me after buttoning him up that Edmund Pevensie was a loyal English schoolboy!"
"And so he is," al-Masri replied calmly. "But that is not all he is."

"Well that's a damned clever nuance, Major." He should have known better. al-Masri had done what George had done himself in the report regarding Guy Hill's murder. He'd left out Mrs. Caspian's role in coshing the murderer with a flower pot and attempt to stab him with a letter opener. An accurate report would come across as completely daft unless one experienced a Pevensie firsthand.

"What about Peter? I know he's in basic training now. His father has pushed very hard to bring Peter on and Mrs. Caspian said he might suit. I'd very much like to take him back with me to Washington."

From the sudden, guarded expression, George didn't think al-Masri had anticipated this. Were they going to tussle over talent? Finally, the Major said, "I have come to know Peter Pevensie very well, Colonel. Peter's will is at least equal to that of his sister. He is as determined to enter the Airbourne Division as Mrs. Caspian is determined to enter the SOE."

"But with her recommendation? Their father's request? With your…" George let the sentence dangle. "No?"

"No," the Major repeated firmly. "You will have to forgive me for sounding fanciful, though surely you understand knowing Mrs. Caspian so well. Peter is like a shining sword, sharp, bright, and true, and he is not one who is comfortable in the shadows."

It did sound fanciful. Ridiculous even. But George had seen visions of the Queen of Pentacles in the half light of his office one evening. Mrs. Caspian carried herself with a regal authority and confidence that even the thirty years or so he thought she had lived already could not wholly account for.

"So Peter's not a spy?"

"No," al-Masri replied.

"Then what is he good for?" George pressed. He was not going to let talent go untapped.

"For all his commitment to serve, Peter knows he would be a very, very ill fit in many typical postings. Once he completes basic training, I hope to see him transferred into the Ox & Bucks, Second Battalion. They've been retooled as part of the Glider Corps."

"And no officer training? Won't he be wasted as a common private in the infantry?"

"I do not believe so. Peter observed himself that assurance of competent command and some autonomy under that command are more important than the particular position. I concur with that assessment and believe he will do well under D Company's CO, Major Howard."

"What of Edmund? He's what, 14 now?"

al-Masri frowned and for the first time, looked uncertain. "I do not know, Colonel. Edmund has already sought my advice on how to position himself to enter our service which he is pursuing with the zeal I would expect of him. Unlike Peter and Susan, he is too young to finesse his way into service. And I have misgivings regardless."

"Misgivings?" he retorted shortly. "Mrs. Caspian believed his talents were even greater than her own."

"I do not disagree." Again the silence lengthened between them.
"al-Masri, you got your way with Peter. You can't have Edmund, too. That's not sporting."

"What would you have him do? What could he do?"

"Take him back with me to Washington for a year. Pass him off as a nephew if I need to. If he's anything like his sister, I'll put him in a Private's uniform and he can work as my clerk and secretary."

"Edmund would jump at the opportunity," al-Masri said heavily.

Edmund couldn't do what Tebbitt had done, but he could use someone with the same insights Mrs. Caspian had. George didn't want to cross al-Masri when he wanted the man's support with Mrs. Caspian, but he didn't like to lose, either.

"Would you oppose that?" George asked.

The long silence was concerning but finally al-Masri said, "Even if I thought it a bad idea, I would not oppose you, Colonel."

"But Edmund will ask you and you could warn him off."

"Yes, and Edmund would listen, carefully consider his options and my advice, and probably go anyway, though be far more guarded about it."

"That's not a bad thing," George pointed out.

His phone began ringing. His secretary would pick it up and take the message.

"I think maybe that coffee now." George got up, went to his door, and bellowed out into the corridor, "Coffee for two!"

He returned to his seat. "You know, al-Masri, I was able to keep an eye on what Mrs. Caspian got up to in Washington and I'd keep Edmund from getting in too deep. I'll use him, but I won't corrupt him."

He seemed to relax. "Colonel, you raise excellent points and do reassure me. I think Edmund would benefit from some wise oversight."

"Good. I'll speak to Edmund's mother and see what might be done. It won't be that long; I'm sure I'll be back here by year's end for the second front. As to Mrs. Caspian, I've asked Selwyn Jepson to interview her."

"An excellent idea. I will be curious to hear what your most skilled talent spotter makes of her."

The Wren arrived with the coffee. They both tried to dissolve the Nescafe crystals in the tepid water and George indulged in a little sugar to make it palatable. Major al-Masri took his black.

Once the Wren left, al-Masri asked, "I assume you will not tell Jepson her age?"

"No," George scoffed. "The fewer who know, the better. Her mother has already consented. If she impresses Jepson, I'll have her pulled from school and sent on to Beaulieu."

Major al-Masri paused in stirring his cup. "Straight to Finishing School? What of the preliminary training at Wanborough? Granted she probably does not need most of what they teach, but omit it entirely? She will need Morse Code and wireless training, and she'll need to qualify for parachute jumps at Ringway. And what of the guerilla course in Arisaig?"
"She will be at Beaulieu as staff, not an agent in training. I think she would benefit from time in that environment, learn to be the woman she is, and let them see her for themselves. They won't leave her untapped for long."

The window rattled as a plane flew overhead – a Spitfire from the sound.

al-Masri nodded. "True. And Mrs. Caspian is not French so she does need considerably more grooming by those who are. Also, I cannot yet see what type of position would best suit her talents, which would come into clearer focus with more time there."

"I am glad you approve, Major," George replied, though al-Masri ignored the sarcasm. al-Masri's choice of words was peculiar in how he would see something for Mrs. Caspian. It was very much the sort of thing Agnes would have said. Agnes, the astonishingly gifted amateur psychologist and maid, had predicted last year in Tarot cards that Mrs. Caspian would find a special guide – the Hierophant who had shackled the Chariot's competing forces of darkness and light to do his bidding. Mrs. Caspian had written Agnes that she believed she had met this Hierophant; before he had left America, Agnes had exhorted him to learn the details about this strange guide. It was all completely inexplicable to anyone who did not know Agnes and Mrs. Caspian, but George suspected both women believed al-Masri to be the looked-for guide.

Confirming George's speculation, al-Masri said, "Where the Pevensies are concerned, you and I are of the same mind. In fact, should Mrs. Caspian enter the SOE, I intend to accept an outstanding offer to teach guerilla tactics at the Scotland facilities to better keep an eye on things."

"They finally see the benefit of having someone teach killing who has actually done it?"

"And who has not gone to prison for doing so."

He could finally laugh at that. George knew al-Masri's history and had seen the blanks in the man's file. He had a few blanks in his own file, though not nearly as many as al-Masri. "It does put me more at ease for her to have an ally there who knows the truth of her age. I've decided to send Wing Commander Tebbitt into the SOE training school as well, as instructor, not agent."

"Is he the Lord Peridan in her cipher? The agent she managed in Washington?"

"The same. He needs a change and will be useful to them. The man's a poet and very good with codes."

The SOE had discovered too late that while using well known-poems made for ciphers the agents could memorize and use easily in the field, all the Nazis had needed was an anthology of English verse to break them.

"And if Mrs. Caspian does go active, he'll be in place to serve as her conducting officer. Tebbitt will keep an eye on her."

Tebbitt would probably have both hands on her as well, but George couldn't worry about that.

They exchanged pleasantries and cards and George felt better about having someone here keeping an eye on his protégé while he was back in Washington.

"So, tell me something, al-Masri."

al-Masri looked up from the train schedule he was contemplating. "Colonel?"

"You said Peter is the sword. What then is Mrs. Caspian?"
"What do you think?" al-Masri countered, as a spy would.

Anyone who hadn't seen it would consider him barking mad. "I saw something of a royal mien in her. It does as you say, sound fanciful, but I thought her like a Queen."

"It took me all summer to come to a similar conclusion about Peter."

"A King among mere men?"

"Very much so."

They were daft, both of them. They were also spies and trained to detect the falsehood and they both had realized that the paper, cover stories, and youthful appearances were lies. Peter and Susan Pevensie were not schoolchildren. al-Masri put on his cap, tucked his railway table in his valise and picked up his coat.

"In answer to your question, Colonel, if Peter is the true, straight sword of the King, in Mrs. Caspian I see the clever and subtle cunning of the rat."

ooOOoo

From:

Selwyn Jepson
Hotel Victoria
Northumberland Avenue

To: Vera Atkins, F Section; Col. Walker-Smythe
Baker Street

I have, at your request, interviewed Mrs. Susan Caspian for purposes of assessing her suitability for the SOE and possible placement in France. Given her exemplary work in 1942 for Col. Walker-Smythe at the Embassy to the U.S., I recognize that this was little more than a formality. Indeed I am curious as to why you are so insistent that I meet with Mrs. Caspian and why she should not be immediately sent on to Wanborough for preliminary training.

I am usually concerned when a candidate speaks so enthusiastically of espionage and the possibility of death by torture and hanging at the hands of Nazi captors. We do not wish for those who seek us out to in turn seek vainglory and romanticise of fantastic and glorious ends. I came away perplexed as to the source of her certitude that this is where she should be, indeed, must be, and there is about her near the air of an Apostle on the road to Rome, or of the zealot making straight the way.

Mrs. Caspian has great affection for her brothers and sister. One brother recently completed basic training and is awaiting a hoped-for transfer. The younger siblings are still in school.

We spoke of her absent husband. She gave a very clear-eyed and unsentimental view of it. He was, she said, injured during the Malta air operations and recuperated in Surrey and is staying with his mother. They hope he shall be returned to unit by the summer. She emphasized he was fully supportive of her decision and of course we will have to assure that he has given his consent for his wife to be engaged in such hazardous activities.

Other than her husband's injury, and unlike other candidates, she has not, as yet, suffered personal loss which accounts for her passion. She speaks ardently of the plight of Jews and of the oppressed nations of Europe. She was steadfastly insistent that this was work she was qualified, nay, destined to do.
There are, fortunately, no children.

As Mrs. Caspian already knew our many family secrets, I deemed it appropriate to discuss her time in Washington. She felt great sorrow at the murder of their office's driver, killed by the apparent agent Walker-Smythe believes was a Soviet. Walker-Smythe had doctored the reports to keep her out of the business so I wished to hear the full of it in her own voice. She retold the tale calmly but insisted that she bore some responsibility for failing to foresee the calamity of Guy Hill's death. Her guilt is disproportionate to the clues that were available, which is concerning if it makes her too cautious. That she saw the clues at all is remarkable for it demonstrates a subtle and perceptive mind not usually seen in a woman prior to training, and often not even then.

She was justifiably proud of the theft of the documents from the American Vice President's valise. I had not known that the stolen case had required her lockpicking skills, and under extreme pressure, as well. It was not, she admitted, a complex lock, but that she was able to accomplish it at all and without supervision showed verve and initiative as well as suitably flexible morality.

She expressed satisfaction with the business involving the creation and planting of the fake map and believed that these and other efforts were justified to assure the delivery of the Sherman tanks and other materiel to Monty in advance of El Alamein and Operation Torch.

I asked if she had any regret, apart from the murder of Mr. Hill. I wondered at her long and careful pause, a needless concern on my part. She apologized in advance for offending my sensibilities but admitted that the most difficult part of the work was that she ordered Wing Commander Tebbit to the boudoir of a newspaper woman in order to accomplish an exchange of information regarding Vice President Wallace. She had no regrets, again believing the information obtained worth the price exacted, but regretted it nonetheless.

Mrs. Caspian is cautious, carefully spoken, intelligent, and we already know that she can think quickly and decisively in dangerous, stressful, and combat situations. Assuming that she can master the language and challenges of living in France under occupation, I have no reservations in recommending Mrs. Caspian's further assessment at Wanborough.

My one misgiving is her appearance. She is a prodigiously attractive woman, but one must look beyond those arts we use to hide our true selves. Beneath her very careful coif, Mrs. Caspian appears younger than her 24 years. In some settings, this will be of no concern and might also be used advantageously. While she professed comfort with and enthusiasm for "living rough," as our people must, her very youthful mien may disadvantage her credibility in some circumstances.

S. Jepson

ooOOoo

To: Col. G. Walker-Smythe
From: S. Jepson

Good to see you on this side of the pond. Saw your Mrs. C today. Don't understand your misgivings. She's first rate. Pity about her husband.

ooOoOoO

Colonel Walker-Smythe's request to take Edmund back with him to Washington was the final straw. Helen wired Professor Kirke and Miss Plummer. She had waited long enough for their convenience and they could now jolly well accommodate her and answer some hard questions about her children.
The response took so long, she was prepared to fire off another request (might as well call it demand), that was even more pointed. Professor Kirke, however, finally, did say that, yes, of course, he and Miss Plummer would be delighted to meet her. His Oxford College office? Saturday? For tea?

Helen knew the two of them wanted to plot strategy before her arrival, but there was nothing for it. They were waiting for her when she arrived, Digory behind his exceedingly untidy desk and Polly in a chair with her cat, and dog at her feet. The pair of them were so very eccentric.

_Pot meet kettle_, as Susan would say.

They cordially shook hands (Digory was nervous). Helen's attention was arrested for the moment by an extraordinary wardrobe that completely dominated the room.

"What a remarkable thing!" she said. "May I?"

"Of course, Helen," Digory said, stepping to the side.

"I have never seen the like," Helen said, examining the glossy wood. "It's beautiful. The woodworking is extraordinary."

The doors and sides were covered with carvings of animals and mythical creatures. A lion occupied the front panel.

"How odd," she murmured, touching the warm wood.

"What is?" Polly asked.

"I dreamt of a lion last night and here he is again."

"Did the lion talk?" Polly asked.

"No," Helen replied, with a scoff. "It never says anything. It just walks away."

"So you have dreamt of a Lion before?" Digory sounded a little queer and Helen turned to look at him.

"Oh yes, for several years now." She wasn't sure when it started.

"Perhaps you should follow him, next time," Digory said at her shoulder. "Or try to speak with him."

Helen laughed. "So you interpret dreams like the Jungians do?"

"Mention Freud and Digory will start coughing and moving papers about on his desk, Helen."

"Yes, Polly, why don't you make yourself useful and pour the tea?" Digory said with a huff and quelling look softened with a smile. He held out a chair. "Helen, will you sit?"

She took the seat and for the first few minutes it was all fussing with cups and spoons and soggy little sandwiches. As this was at her prodding, Helen had to take the initiative.

"I wanted to talk to you _again_ about my children," she said briskly, putting her cup down and asserting her prerogative as mother. This was her right, by God, and Helen had had quite enough of the evasions from these two. "I warn you, I am quite put out and I expect some franker discussion than what occurred the last time we met."
Digory was appropriately and gratifyingly serious. Polly's mouth was twitching.

"Is my insistence amusing?" Helen challenged.

"Only that I had not realized before how much Peter sounds as you do." Polly said. "I think myself a great fool if I do not obey him."

It was a better beginning than she had hoped for. Helen began her speech, having had far too long to rehearse it. "Peter has entered basic training."

They both nodded and so Helen pushed on. "Susan will be leaving school in April to formally join the unit she worked for before and now Edmund has had an offer to go to America to work at the British Embassy, doing the same work Susan did last summer."

Polly and Digory both stared at her and Helen faltered. This was not the reaction she had expected.

"You are surprised?"

"We knew of Peter's decision, of course, to hurry things along and leave school," Digory said.

"Are you the one who suggested he ignore that enthusiastic Officer Cadet Training invitation and enlist in the regular ranks?"

John was furious – his eldest son was rushing into service, was eschewing offered positions in intelligence and in the officer corps, and was signing up as a common infantry soldier. John's rebuke for her parental failures had been scathing - he had not raised their son to be a scholar only to die alongside the lower class as fodder for German guns. Helen had paid the rant no mind and used the paper it was written on to wash the windows. Her husband had no idea what he was writing of. If he thought he could move Peter from his chosen course, John was damned well free to try. As Edmund would say, you would have better success trying to move Gibraltar than getting Peter off his mark.

Digory shook his head. "On the contrary, I was as surprised as you. I agreed with Peter's assessment that he was at risk of insubordination, which is why he has been, wisely I think, reluctant to move forward unless something appropriate was found. As you would expect, we discussed his options and Peter presented his decision to me."

"That does sound like him." Helen laughed a little, though weakly, for insubordination was no laughing matter at all. "Peter is very set upon transfer into the paratroopers, and the Glider Corps specifically."

At this, there was a significant glance between Digory and Polly and a secret smile as well. Honestly, this was so tedious. What was and was not secret appeared so utterly random!

"So Peter informed us of his plans," Polly said, speaking up once the two of them had concluded their private conversation with Helen sitting right in front of them. "But what is this of Susan and Edmund?" She looked to Digory but this time it was for confirmation, not secretive consultation. "I had assumed they had all returned to school."

"I had as well," Digory said. "You say they are leaving? What is Susan doing?"

"And Edmund is going to America?" Polly echoed.

Their seeming ignorance made her queries so much more difficult. Helen had assumed Polly and Digory were complicit. "So you do not know about this business Susan and Edmund have both been drawn to?"
The two of them stared at her and then at one another. "What business?" Polly asked. "Is there a problem?"

"Is this something recent, Helen?" the Professor asked, looking genuinely concerned. "We've not seen Susan since…"

"A year ago, at least," Polly interrupted. "Over their Christmas holiday, in '41. We missed her completely this summer since she returned from America and went straight back to school."

"And we only saw Edmund, briefly, at the end of the summer, of course," Digory added. "It was chaotic, just a few days, all crammed into my cottage."

"Once it started raining, they couldn't kip in the gardens and went back to Cambridge," Polly put in. "Is everything alright? Are Susan and Edmund well?"

Helen stared at them, feeling uncertain and confused. So they really did not know? She had to be so cautious here; the Official Secrets Act certainly applied. Could her children have truly kept this to themselves? Susan had been much too free about it all over Christmas, but she supposed they might not have been so glib with others outside the family. Come to think of it, even Eustace had not understood why Susan had been so interested in those North African Sherman tanks.

She tried a different tactic. "Over the summer, did you hear anything from Susan, or about her, through Peter? What did you suppose she was doing?"

Digory looked thoroughly flummoxed. "I recall Peter saying Susan was visiting Washington and New York? Sightseeing?" He shook his head. "I'm afraid it was uninteresting to both of us, Helen, and I paid it very little mind."

"Shopping," Polly said crisply and with a hint of disapproval that put Helen's back up. "Peter shared Susan's letters with me when I asked and she wrote me once or twice. Susan was excited about attending a formal dinner at the Embassy when Churchill visited. She told me what she wore and where she bought her shoes."

Oh Susan, you clever, clever girl. Helen knew for fact a great deal more had occurred during even that state dinner. Her daughter and Colonel Walker-Smythe had negotiated the sale of a fabricated document to a Washington muckraker and Susan had shoved Tebbitt into the bedroom of a vile Congresswoman to "soften" the woman's anti-British sentiment. Helen knew all this because she had taken his Lordship the Penguin's dictation the next day and sent Walker-Smythe's cables to Intrepid. The Official Secrets Act be damned, she had to ask at least one question, though the answer already appeared plain. "So you do not know any reason why Susan or Edmund would be drawn into espionage?"

"That's preposterous!" Polly said immediately.

Digory glanced at her, removed his glasses, polished them absently, and shoved them back on.

Happily, Helen did not have to press the query with Polly there to do it for her, which lent further credibility to the fact that they were genuinely surprised at this news.

"What is it, Digory?" Polly demanded. "I know that look."

"Well, it is only that I know that Peter was concerned about his father," he finally said. "We both concluded that there was something odd about John's summons to America and the timing of it."

Polly's mouth formed an Oh. "You never said anything," she said. "Nor did Peter."
Digory arched an eyebrow. "Of course not. Peter mentioned his suspicions and that he thought his letters should be circumspect and I agreed."

"An academic discussion surely given how poor a correspondent Peter is," Helen said.

"Quite," Digory agreed.

"It was astute of Peter to realise something was peculiar with John's posting to America," Helen admitted, and that was all she would or could say of it. She let out a breath and refrained from the nervous urge to wring her gloves in her lap. "To be clear though, you have seen no past leaning by Edmund or Susan toward spying or espionage?"

Polly and Digory both shook their heads. "Absolutely not, Helen," Polly replied firmly. "I find it incredible."

"No," Digory repeated. "We've never heard any such thing."

She felt a flutter of superiority – that in this, she did know her own children best. For all that Polly and Digory had so very much replaced their mother in her children's lives, still there were things she knew and saw that others had not.

This, though, led to the next question. "Can you tell me where Edmund and Susan might have acquired such an interest?" She would not say talent, though talent they undoubtedly had or Colonel Walker-Smythe and the SOE would not be beating the Pevensie doors down to get her to sign dodgy consents. "Or when?"

And so, two steps forward, three steps back. There it was again. The guarded expression, the covert look, Polly avoiding her eye and Digory polishing his clean glasses. They did not know what Edmund and Susan had been doing, but they knew how they had acquired the inclination and skills. Helen sighed for what would surely follow.

"You should raise this with them, Helen," Digory finally said.

"Because it is their story to tell, not yours?" Helen repeated their often-repeated adage bitterly.

"Your children are remarkable individuals. You can trust them," Polly said.

"Yes, they are remarkable," Helen replied. "And singular. I suppose I should be grateful you do not insult my intelligence by pretending that they are not and trying to convince me otherwise."

"Of course not!" Polly said.

Still, that was the tactic they had both tried to take with her two years ago when she had quizzed them about the strange changes she'd seen when her children had returned from the Professor's country home after the Blitz. Everyone, Polly and Digory included, had dismissed her concerns as baseless and fanciful, even hysterical. This was progress, Helen supposed.

They filled the awkward pause with cups and refills, the clinking of faded china and the dabbing of the dripping spout of the chipped tea pot. Helen was certain Digory would have holes in his socks and a pantry of canned beans.

"I did also want to discuss Lucy," Helen said.

This reaction was better. They both looked properly concerned, putting cups down and leaning forward in their seats.
"It will be terribly difficult for her when the others leave. She's having conflict in school. And there is all this letter writing, about the Jews, about the Chinese merchant navy, and I don't know what else. I just don't know what to make of it all. It came on so suddenly."

There was another silent exchange between Digory and Polly, though this did not seem as secretive, and more about who would speak first.

"You understand what I mean, then?" she pressed.

"Oh yes," Digory replied. "Lucy discussed this with us when they visited at the end of the summer and both Polly and I recognize the symptoms. We feared Lucy was headed for difficulty, and that was even before learning Susan and Edmund would not be available to her."

Helen sighed. "Thank you for your candor and for helping her. I don't really know what to do. I do not want to discipline her, especially because she is in for such a lonely time. I should expect problems, I suppose."

"Lucy will not stay silent if she sees injustice, Helen," Polly said, with a gleam Helen didn't like much. "She is like an apostle after Pentecost, off to spread the good news and perform miracles! Lucy brings light and…"

Polly looked far too enthusiastic about the prospect of enlisting another acolyte in her political schemes.

"Do not compare a young, lonely girl to the Apostles, Polly," Helen interrupted. "They were all martyred. Murdered. And I shouldn't have to remind you that suffragists died for their holy cause, too." The last was a direct blow to Polly but really the woman needed to remember that what she romanticised was dangerous and deadly. "I don't want that for Lucy."

"Well, yes, but…"

Digory put up a hand. "Polly, please desist with the attempts at theology. You do it and everything around you too much damage."

Polly snorted and rolled her eyes, and Helen found herself smiling at the pair of them.

He fiddled with his tea cup and the handle on his desk drawer. Helen always had the urge to tidy his office when she visited. "I am not a parent, Helen, so I can but imagine your situation. However, inartfully she puts it, Polly does have the correct concept, if the too enthusiastic expression of it."

"Helen, if he starts quoting Scotus, just cut him off, and we'll go have a sherry," Polly said.

If Polly and Digory had been standing together, there would have been elbows to ribs, in addition to the rolling eyes and amused snorts. They were like very close, constantly squabbling siblings.

"Do you know the story of Saint Francis of Assisi and his calling?" Digory asked.

Helen shook her head. "No, not especially."

"Francis argued bitterly with his father when he began his vocation. It culminated with a terrible confrontation before the Bishop of Assisi. Francis renounced his family, returned to his father the very clothing he wore, and walked out naked."

It was amusing; it was terrifying. "Are you saying Lucy intends to renounce us? Become a hermit? A zealot?" She became more shrill with each question.
Digory shook his head. "No, not at all. It is rather a cautionary tale for you, for all of us really, as we help Lucy through this time."

He took a sip of his tea and continued. "We do not burn these gifted individuals anymore, or crucify them upside down, not literally at least. But in all my readings of the lives of these extraordinary people, I have never thought them comfortable for the rest of us to be with. I feel great sympathy for the parents of children who perceive a calling so clearly and who are fearless in their pursuit of it."

He paused, looking so compassionate Helen felt her throat constrict. "I believe Lucy will pose such a challenge for us all."

They were all silent for a moment and Helen wondered what Joan of Arc's parents must have felt.

"Do you see it this way, Polly?" Helen asked. "I wondered whether Lucy's political sensibility was coming from you after you took her to that rally."

The sleeping dog at her side made a wuffling sound. Polly reached down and patted his side, quieting him.

"I learned of it only a few days before you did. She began her letter writing this summer after seeing articles in the papers about the persecution and murder of Polish Jews. The disparate treatment of the Chinese Merchant Navy men upset her after meeting a family while waiting for your ship in Liverpool. I thought taking her to the rally would provide a way to express her enthusiasm. Though…"

"Yes?"

Polly stroked the Tabby cat curled next to the dog. "This isn't just about Lucy feeling injustice so intensely and needing a way to express it."

"What else then?"

Polly straightened in her seat and glanced at Digory. He nodded briefly. Whatever it was, they both shared it and had discussed her daughter.

"Think about all that women have had to do, Helen, since the war started. How we've worked in factories and as land girls, been driving cars and wearing uniforms, manning anti-aircraft guns and spotlights. We've only had the full vote for less than twenty years."

"And?" Helen asked, feeling frustrated at the seeming irrelevancy.

"Imagine what would happen if, once the war ended, women suddenly were prohibited from doing all the things we'd been doing."

"But that's preposterous!" Helen sputtered. "The government could not turn the clock back so! The horse is out of the barn!"

"Imagine that they tried. Imagine that they succeeded," Polly said, sounding very, very serious.

"Well, it would be nice if we didn't have to do everything. But…"

"To go to nothing?" Polly pressed. "To lose your vote, the option of driving, the freedom to work if you wished, to be permitted none of the things to which you had become accustomed, simply because you are a girl, or a woman?"

"It would terrible," Helen agreed. "I would be so frustrated. And angry. Furious. But what does this
have to do with Lucy?"

Polly looked at her, long and sorrowfully, with the same compassion and sympathy that Digory had shown.

Helen choked on her sob.

What had given Peter confidence and courage to enlist in the infantry, turned Edmund from a sullen, angry child to a thoughtful and compassionate adult, and permitted Susan to credibly move among spies as a competent, desirable woman, had given something equally precious and extraordinary to Lucy. Her youngest, though, was trapped, as her siblings were not.

*Oh my brave Lucy. I am so sorry...*

She could not stop the tears

Digory got her a glass of brandy, Polly gave her a fresh handkerchief, her dog woke from his nap and was pushing his nose into Helen's legs, and the cat jumped into her lap and wouldn't leave off, purring so loudly, the windows rattled.

Digory and Polly would not explain how or why Lucy had fallen into this terrible predicament that the others were spectacularly circumventing in order to pursue their passionate gifts. This time, Helen did not even bother to ask. It was enough that she understood.

ooOOoo

The night before Major al-Masri was to meet Edmund Pevensie for the third time, Asim was unsettled. Dreams had preceded every such meeting with the Pevensies, their cousin, Eustace Scrubb, and his friend, Jill Pole. They were always strange dreams, of green ships and purple sails, white birds, gold and silver swords, dragons who smoked liked Mr. Patel's cigarette, rats, crows, and flying horses. The dreams of the rat sneaking into the Paris sewers and the King's sword in the talons of a great gyrophon he had come to associate with Susan Pevensie and Peter Pevensie. He had not seen these dreams in some weeks, which led him to conclude that all was proceeding appropriately, Susan eventually to enter the SOE, Peter to D Company.

Edmund was another matter. From the first, he had seen that the God-light burning in Edmund was very different from that within Peter and Susan. For Edmund, the God-light had been hard-fought and won at a price. The light had come after Edmund had conquered darkness in his not-young-man's past.

And so before bed Asim humbly asked for guidance and God who is great showed him a dream. As before, he saw the mole, its life blood pouring out on to sand. Black crows circled over the corpse.

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

On the slow drive to Reading by motorbike, he reflected upon the brief, stark dream. The Cat had warned him before that seeing and understanding were not the same and his understanding was too limited to pierce God's meaning. Still, what he saw was not comforting which, he supposed, was no small thing in preparation for the meeting to come.

This time, he was the one who arrived first and selected a corner table in the tea shop. Edmund arrived a few minutes later on a bicycle from school. The outward appearance was so deceptive. Edmund was dressed like every other schoolboy but as he walked into the shop, his bearing drawing looks and causing others to step aside, Asim saw that Colonel Walker-Smythe's plan was not foolish. Put him in a uniform or a suit and Edmund's poise could carry what his seeming physical maturity
might not. Two or three years was not so much when, by his judge, Edmund had lived some twenty years more than what his lying birth certificate stated.

"Major, it is good to see you again," Edmund said, offering a hand. The sense of the schoolboy appearance being the lie intensified as Edmund casually tossed his cap on to the next seat, shrugged out of the jacket, and pulled off his tie. "Coffee, please, if you have it," Edmund said to the waitress, polite but also a little peremptory. "Tea, otherwise."

Asim reclaimed his chair and Edmund sat across from him, glancing about.

"You took the better seat this time, Major."

"Surely you expected that."

"If my schedule was my own, I would have gotten here first." With a short scowl, Edmund rolled up his shirtsleeves. "As it is, I have barely an hour and I very much appreciate you coming and I won't waste the time with pleasantries. As you know, Colonel Walker-Smythe has invited me to return with him to the States. He wanted Peter, of course, and is settling for me."

Edmund was not being deprecating and did not sound angry, merely factual.

"This is not the position for Peter and I told Colonel Walker-Smythe so," Asim replied. "Peter is not for that world at the Embassy, at least not in the capacity Walker-Smythe envisions."

"Very perceptive, and I completely agree," Edmund said. "To me, Colonel Walker-Smythe has made the duties sound so unglamourous, I suspect he is hoping I will refuse."

"No, not at all," Asim replied. "He wishes to manage your expectations."

"That is useful to know, thank you." Edmund looked about and caught the eye of the loitering waitress, a reminder that his request was, as yet, unmet. He tapped the table expectantly then turned his attention back to their discussion. "As it happens, 'living the cover' as he presented it would not pose any difficulty for me. I have a lot of experience working in humble positions for prickly personalities."

There was no point in probing where such experience might have been obtained. Perhaps at school, perhaps in that place called Narnia to which they had somehow gone and returned. "My misgivings aside, such experience would stand you in good stead," he told the not-boy.

"Yes, about those misgivings." Edmund straightened in his seat and his words turned subtly sharper. "With your assistance, my brother hopes to be transferred to the Glider Corps, and my sister is to something so secret we cannot speak of it. Yet, you have misgivings of seeing me in America as a clerk? How do you explain this?"

Asim heard the cawing of a crow.

"I do not know, Edmund," he finally replied.

Edmund pushed further, asking the question Asim had wrestled with since Walker-Smythe had posed it. "Do you think I should not go?"

The blood of the dead mole in his dream was very like the colour of the napkin the waitress set down on the table.

"If you go, it should be cautiously, Edmund. While you will certainly chafe at them, I recommend
you accept the limitations Colonel Walker-Smythe sets upon you and that you work closely with him."

Edmund fingered a matchbook cover on the table. "I did see this as a valuable opportunity to learn from Colonel Walker-Smythe, who has been so helpful for my sister. Colonel Clark has, in an effort to sway me to American jurisprudence, urged me to spend all available time at the United States Supreme Court. And I had intended to take advantage of the language instruction at the Embassy."

"I think those are all worthy pursuits." He had come to know and respect Colonel Clark during their months at Bletchley Park and, apart from the Wrens who were always trailing in the American's wake, and which Clark did not discourage, Asim had a high opinion of the man.

The waitress arrived with Edmund's coffee; the cup and saucer slid on to the table with a clatter. Edmund stirred the sludge and took a sip without even a grimace.

"I've been curious about something, Major. The first time we met, you told me that I should work to continue my languages, so long as it was not at Cambridge. For all that Peter has been with Professor Kirke, my father is a Cambridge man."

Black wings flitted by the window and crows settled in winter-bare trees outside.

"Why did you warn me off of an entire and esteemed university?"

Asim had not thought on this for some time but the question was relevant and now deserved an answer. "I have no useful knowledge, Edmund. All I have is a sense, an instinct, of unease."

Edmund was not deterred by his vagueness and pressed his query. "Which is?"

Asim stalled, stirring his own cool tea, trying to order his thoughts for an honest response that would inform and persuade, rather than alienate. "My discomfort arises from dealings with elements of the intelligence community, some who come from that university. Most of these men are talented amateurs, at best."

"And at worst?"

The crows huddled on the branches, silent and watchful. Asim made the ugly accusation. "Do not assume that white men of a certain class and education are also loyal and competent."

"Walker-Smythe?" Edmund asked sharply.

"Is one of the honest competents. If he were not, I would strongly urge you to not go at all." Asim leaned forward, finding that the probing questions were helping him put disparate, inchoate concerns into something, if not clear, at least more coherent.

"Admittedly I have my bias. A certain Cambridge mob has been encroaching on my own grounds in North Africa. I do not like them and those gentry Rajas and I do not mingle."

Edmund frowned and took a careful sip of his coffee. "Biases aside, do you think something may be amiss and that I could be wading headlong into it?"

"Perhaps," Asim replied. "There are unsavoury elements. Walker-Smythe can shield you, but not if you seek a confrontation or attempt to circumvent him." He did not want to be alarmist, and it was difficult to explain, but he was concerned about the dreams, the circumstances, and Edmund's interest. "I am sorry that I cannot advise you more plainly, but..."
"Do not apologise, Major. Consider our Christmas present to you. We have been granted a valuable guide and I would be a great fool to do anything but heed these instincts of yours, however unformed they might seem. You are not advising me to not go, but only that I go cautiously and not test the limitations of the position?"

He nodded, wondering if Edmund had at some point in his not-young life faced a similar conundrum – the certainty of unease and the uncertainty of its source.

"Very early in my friendship with your brother, I perceived that, your father's work notwithstanding, spycraft would never be Peter's business. However, I was equally certain that a time would come when I would need to warn those close to him. And so I make good on that promise now. Go carefully in this world, Edmund; there are those who will be drawn to a young man of your obvious talents and even if trustworthy, which I would not assume, they may still be fools."

"And I might be too naïve to see it until too late."

"Yes."

Edmund drained his cup and pushed it away. "I appreciate your candor and counsel, Major, and that you are not concealing paternalism. I assume that when the time comes for Susan, you will advise her as well?"

"Absolutely." He would be keeping a very close eye on Mrs. Caspian as she entered the SOE agent training programme.

"Very well." Edmund tossed a few coins on to the table and began the motions of straightening himself back into the disguise of an English schoolboy. "Thank you for making the trip, Major."

Edmund shrugged into his jacket and began straightening his tie.

There was one other thing it was his duty to address. "And Edmund? About those limitations?"

The man was just putting his ridiculous cap on. He looked up. "Yes?"

"You should expect intense scrutiny of your communications." He would not explain why. Edmund knew and they should not speak of it directly. "Do not try to be clever. You must learn discretion and you will be very much alone. That is our way, and if you cannot accept that, you should not go."

"I understand, Major. Colonel Walker-Smythe discussed the issue with me extensively."

They hurriedly shook hands and Edmund was out the tea shop door. Asim saw through the window that Edmund paused as he mounted his bicycle to study the crows roosting in the tree across the street. As he pedaled away, back to the school, the crows flew off.

ooOo0oo

Edmund arrived back in London from school on a Friday night. Helen met his train and they negotiated the transfers and lugged his baggage (a relatively small item) and books (much heavier) back home.

"What are these American legal texts that are breaking my back?" Helen griped as they hauled it all up the stairs of the Underground station.

"Loans from Colonel Clark," Edmund said, taking a firmer grip on his suitcase handle and shrugging a strap back over his shoulder.
"And here I thought we had done his family a favor in having them join us at Christmas. What have you done to earn his ill will? Is this Jack's revenge for your departure?"

Edmund laughed and removed the *United States Supreme Court Reporter* from her bag and put it in his own. "Jack is reconciled or would have surely beaten me to death with an oar. As it is, he and his mates were delighted to have the extra room in our dormitory."

"Are they the good sort of boys?" Edmund could not decline this opportunity to work at the Embassy for the sake of Jack Clark, but her sons were the reason Colonel Clark had sent his son to Blackpool Forest School and Helen knew they felt some responsibility for the American boy.

"They are. It will be well, I'm sure."

She had to stop and set the bookbag down, massage her arm, and then pick it up again.

"My deepest apologies, Mum, especially as we get to do this all over again on Monday when I meet the Colonel at the station."

"No, we do not," Helen retorted. "Colonel Walker-Smythe has the decency to send a car to pick you up, though it is at an ungodly hour."

Sweaty, even in the brisk winter wind, they finally hauled everything up the front walk into the house, deposited it all in a heap in the foyer, and collapsed, side by side, on the divan.

"Your travel documents are over there," Helen said, with a wave of her hand, once circulation had returned to her fingers. "The office dropped them by. Also, the disclosure document, about the Official Secrets Act, is on top. You should sign it immediately."

Edmund pulled himself up and looked at her. "Now? So soon?"

"Of course," Helen replied. "I signed one myself, in Washington, and again when I returned. You'll do the same. We can't really talk much about your trip until you do."

His eyes widened and Helen gave him a mock shove. "Do not look so surprised, Edmund! I was the Ambassador's personal secretary for three months. I daresay I may know more than even your father in some areas. Regardless, I have some information for you, but you won't hear it until you sign."

Helen pulled herself out of the divan. "I will fix us some coffee, you read through the papers, sign the disclosure agreement, and then I need you upstairs for a dreadful, painful ordeal."

ooOooo

"The Colonel wants you to have two suits, though I don't think he has decided how he will present you," Helen said, talking around the pins in her mouth. Edmund was standing on a chair and she was circling about, marking hems and seams with chalk and pins. "You can requisition uniforms at the Embassy if that is how he decides to proceed."

"That is unlawful," Edmund said, dutifully raising an arm so she could measure out the length with the tape strung around her neck.

"You are going to work for the Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare," she replied. "It exists by secret order and Colonel Walker-Smythe and the rest of that outfit are not accountable to anyone. He'll do as he sees fit."

Edmund's arm fell and he gently squeezed her shoulder. "It will be fine, Mum."
"The Colonel will find some credible cover story," Helen replied, tamping down her fear. She nudged his arm down to his sides, tugged on the sleeve, and turned the cuff up on the jacket an inch. He had gotten so much taller in the last year Helen would hardly need to alter the lengths at all. Though, Edmund had her family's slimmer build and she didn't think he would ever be as bulky as his father or brother. She'd be taking in seams all weekend.

It made her long for the days when they could just go out and buy things like a new suit and be done with it.

"Did you see where you will be staying?"

"There was a note about Miss Gardner's flat?"

Helen tacked the sleeve and turned him on the chair slightly so she could pin the other side without crawling about on her knees. "Housing is scarce in Washington. Colonel Walker-Smythe is already sharing a room with three other men and I think they rotate who sleeps in the two beds. Gladys Gardner is his secretary. Susan knows her."

"And?"

"Miss Gardner is charming, a little flighty, but very competent. She wouldn't work for Walker-Smythe otherwise. Her fiancée is a Canadian commando, David Lowrey. He was captured during the Dieppe raid."

Edmund slowly pivoted, keeping his footing easily on the rickety chair. "That is a terrible strain, surely," he said sympathetically. "It might be good for her to have some company."

"She will help you adjust to life there without being smothering," Helen said, smoothing a crease. "You're being very patient about this, Edmund. Thank you." She would be sewing all weekend.

"Years of practice," he replied, adjusting the lapel and critically examining his reflection.

Their eyes met in the mirror.

These sorts of odd statements had become part of his language with her, a peculiar reference to things that seemingly had happened or would happen. It was, she had thought, her most reserved child's efforts, promised at Christmas, to be more forthcoming.

Edmund looked away first, glancing down to brush away some chalk dust. "If I am in suits, I shall need to buy some shirts in Washington."

"Miss Gardner can help you with that. And I hope you remember how to get ink stains out," she told him. "Shirts don't grow on trees."

"It is remarkable how much more careful I am when responsible for my own laundry," Edmund said. Again, one of those ambiguous statements.

Helen again looked at her son in the mirror. The dark gray suit was John's – one that Peter had not yet inherited. It gave Edmund a very serious mien.

"It fits you well," she told him, keeping her voice brusque. "Use that good posture you all have and scowl a lot and you can pass for seventeen." She stood up from the crouch, trailing the measuring tape and stuck the extra pins in the cushion on her wrist. "I set out some ties on the bed that match the suits, so pick your favourites."
Edmund nimbly hopped down from the chair, quickly righting it before it toppled over. She watched as he carefully shrugged out of the suit coat with all its pins sticking everywhere and then draped it on the clothes rack. Edmund studied the ties and took four, two green, two red.

Edmund’s preference for those colours had appeared after returning from Digory’s, after the Blitz.

"I need to get supper started and the alterations…"

"Don't worry about supper, Mum. I shall manage it for us. Thank you." He gave her a peck on the cheek.

The scent of cooking, not-burned SPAM roused her from the sewing machine and brought her downstairs. Edmund had made good use of his time, the tins that Ruby Smith kept her supplied with, the can opener, and the potato peeler. He’d also bought a small pitcher of beer off-licence.

Supper was a quiet affair. Peter would fill a room with his presence, Susan would carry on a gracious conversation, and Lucy would chatter and laugh. With Edmund it was subdued. He was reading through the documents Colonel Walker-Smythe had left for him, not a polite thing to do, but Helen understood how much of an adventure it (probably) was.

Did he know how lonely he would be?

"How is the sewing?" he asked politely, getting up to clear their dishes. He had not eaten much – a sure sign of Edmund’s excitement and nerves. He was not like Peter who would fuel his engine with a single minded intensity and could lay waste to a table the way locusts scoured a field.

"Fine." Helen flexed her fingers and drew her glass of beer closer. "I shall not drink too much or it will seem as if a drunken tailor did your mending."

"Before you return to it and I wash up, may I ask you something, Mum?" Edmund said, sitting back down and pushing his papers to the side.

"You may ask," she replied, drawing a smile from him for he recognized she was using his own rhetorical ploy.

"Given the speed of the mail, I know that father will probably learn I am coming within a day or two of when I actually arrive. Is there anything I should know in advance of that, other than that he will be disappointed that it is me and not Peter darkening the American doorstep?"

She reached across the table and squeezed his hand, wishing she could hide better her disgust with John’s behavior. For the sake of her children, she had to try. "Edmund, I am sorry that…"

He returned the squeeze and shook his head. "Do not worry on my account, Mum. Envy of Peter and anger over Father partly fueled some terrible times and even worse decisions which I have fortunately left well behind and am in no danger of repeating." Edmund paused searching for words more gracious than what Helen would supply if her son had asked. "I would like to see him and to try to bridge the distance, but if he is not prepared for that, well, I shall have plenty else to occupy me."

She managed to nod. It was difficult to not rage about her husband to his nobly compassionate son. "I think that wise, Edmund."

Helen would not mention the women in John's New York life, for she had her own secrets, even more shameful. She had to assume that her husband would have the sense to clear the girls out before his son arrived. Regardless, Edmund would be in Washington, not New York, with people who
wanted him there, and that was all for the best.

She took a sip of the bitter beer. "Edmund, I know Peter has this way of drawing the eye and commanding attention."

Edmund snorted. "Especially the feminine. Lucy and I would joke that we should just follow in his wake with a broom and dustbin to sweep up the swooning carcasses."

Helen could laugh, most especially because it was spoken with true humour and no bitterness. "I only want you to hear, Edmund, that you have your own strengths and are outstanding in your own right." She leaned forward and patted his hand. "I'm sure some of those pretty girls will see your integrity and quite sensibly pay your brother no mind at all. Then Peter may do the sweeping up!"

A strange shade darkened her son's face and the good spirit evaporated.

"I'm sorry," Helen said, feeling the floor tilt with the sudden uncertainty. "I meant to be…"

"It's fine, Mum," Edmund said hurriedly. "It's…"

Her children could wait; so would she.

He smiled, a little, crookedly, wistfully. "Sometimes I hear your words and voice, but it is as if someone else is speaking."

He stared at his beer, swirling the amber liquid in the glass.

"It is obviously someone very wise," Helen said, trying to lighten the mood and feeling her way through yet another something. If she did not proceed delicately, Edmund might close up again.

He nodded. "I have been thinking back to that time a great deal. The circumstances are not dissimilar and I certainly gleaned significant experience as clerk, secretary, and bag carrier. It should stand me in good stead with Colonel Walker-Smythe."

Helen caught her breath, a little gasp, and Edmund looked at her.

"I…"

"Yes?" he said quietly, eyebrow raised.

It was an invitation. Surely he meant this as an invitation. "How?" Her voice dropped further, to a whisper. "When? I don't understand." Helen felt something snap and ease in her chest as she openly acknowledged the years of lonely confusion to one of those who had caused it.

"No?" Edmund asked. "Can you not guess? After all, we did not all get our acumen from Father alone."

It was a line she had used on them herself. Helen chewed on her lip. "It happened at the Professor's," she said, voice quavering a little.

"It did." Edmund nodded, encouraging. "Mum, I want you to think hard about all the odd things since then that you've noticed and," he grinned, "overheard."

She felt colour rise in her cheeks. He knew she'd been listening to their conversations. "If I tried to recount them all, we'd be here all night, Edmund."

"I know. And now, this is where it is complicated."
He slid the glass into her hand.

"I want you to imagine Alice and her adventures in Wonderland. Or, Wendy, John and Michael going to Neverland. Or Dorothy in Oz. How long do you think those children were there, in those places?"

"The stories are all different," she said, thinking it over. "And the time is different in them, between here and the other places. They might have been gone days. Maybe even weeks."

"Imagine it is years. Many, many years. Imagine Wendy or Michael or Alice grew up there, to become an adult, a warrior, a leader, a queen, and did battle with pirates, witches, giants and wicked men with swords and knives."

Helen felt rising skepticism. Was he having one on her? But no, that wasn't right at all. Edmund was very serious. And kind. She quelled her irritation and he took her hand and rubbed her clenching fist.

"And then imagine that the adult John, Michael, Alice, and Dorothy came back, but it was as if no time had passed at all."

"But these are just stories! It's ridiculous! It's…"

"Mad?" Edmund interrupted. "Oddly, Peter and Susan said the same thing about Lucy the first time it happened. And you know what the Professor told them?"

Her mouth twitched. "I can imagine."

"That logic dictated that one of three things must be true. Lucy was mad, which she plainly was not. Lucy was lying, which we know she does not do. Or…"

"Or?" Helen prompted.

"Or she was telling the truth."

There was a long, long silence, broken only by the sounds beyond them – the ticking of the clock, the buzz of the light, the drone of a Lysander.

It was… she couldn't believe it. It was impossible. Helen couldn't think. It was too much. Except…

Helen saw the truth in the light shining from within her son. Edmund looked serious, relieved, happy, serene… This was no lie, it could not be a lie, not when presented so and in such a gentle way. It was impossible, yes, but it had the sincerity of truth.

She took her glass of beer and raised it to her lips and took several deep sips.

"You might have had second thoughts, misgivings, about letting me, and Peter, and Susan go so young, as seeming children walking in an adult world."

He put his hand over hers again and it felt so so rational. Of course this was the explanation. There wasn't anything else that could explain it.

"Never doubt that decision, Mum. Trust what you saw and felt. Because you did see we were different, didn't you? You saw it years ago."

Helen found she was nodding, weakly, and had to pull her hands out of her son's so she could brush her falling tears away. "I thought I was mad. Everyone told me I was imagining it. It was just the war, they said."
"It wasn't. And if you are mad, we all are. You did not imagine it. We already were adults. We have
done this all before. And we are called to do it all again."

They left the dishes in the kitchen, undone, finished the beer, opened a bottle of brandy, and talked
longer. She restrained her raging curiosity, for Edmund was quiet, tired, and excited for the new
adventure ahead of him, not the ones of a past she could not begin to comprehend in a single night.
For every measured sentence he provided, of Kings, Queens, Talking Animals (and that damned
wardrobe of Digory's she now realized), surely there were twenty more things Edmund did not say.
Eventually, he was nodding off over their brandies and she sent him to bed. Helen fell asleep a few
hours later, slumped over the sewing machine, in the middle of altering the shoulders on the second
suit coat.

She dreamt of the Lion. This time she followed him along a strip of silver beach; she thought it might
have been the Devon cliffs where they had once gone for holiday, before the war, but there were no
marbled castles in Devon that she recalled.

"Will you watch over them?" she asked the Lion.

"I will, Helen," the Lion said. "They are my children, too."

ooOOoo

His Royal Majesty's Army

To: Peter Pevensie

Your request for transfer has been approved. You are ordered to report immediately to Bulford
Camp, Wiltshire, for assignment to Major Howard, D Company, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire
Light Infantry, 2d Battalion, Air Landing Unit, 6th Airborne Division.

ooOOoo

The problem with God who is great showing him dreams was that Asim did rely upon them. Dreams
from God were a gift. They were important, he attended to God's words, and they prepared him for
the challenge that was to come. In this way, he was never caught unawares.

The fault was within himself, to expect consistency of a gift of God. As with any great gift, there
would be a reckoning and the fault was his own for forgetting so fundamental a lesson.

Several years ago, Richard and Digory had, over too much whiskey one evening, decided that the
God of their imperfect understanding liked good jokes. Asim had listened with interest and a secret,
smug smile for it seemed that these Christians understood God poorly. Though this did presume both
men were Christian, which was probably not a reasonable conclusion. Richard was Christian if a
Christian could think God was a she. This was obviously absurd. God was God, limitless and great
and not so confined by a mortal's poor comprehension, Richard's insistence regardless. Digory's
views were apparently beyond neat classification for the Professor described himself as a very good
theologian and a very bad Christian. It was not a distinction Asim understood.

"Truly," Richard had said, raising his glass. "Think about it, Kirke. Assume for the sake of argument
it was God's son in that tomb. The empty tomb is God's great joke on death."

Digory had shaken his head and poured them both another glass as if whiskey would make the
argument coherent. "But very much not humorous at all for those who believed God was scourged
and died on a tree as a Roman criminal and then had an agonizing three day wait for the revelation
that it was all just a joke."
Listening to the discussion, Kun had become very irritated and banged the pots about in the kitchen. With all the noise, Digory and Richard went upstairs for more whiskey. Digory had been explaining how, at best, the tomb "joke" was another example of God as Trickster.

Once Digory and Richard left, Kun brought out his own well-worn Bible and insisted that Asim read part of an account of the prophet Issa attending a wedding celebration with his mother. When the wedding ran out of wine, the prophet changed the water into wine.

Kun thought it was a very funny story; Asim found it further proof that while Issa was certainly among the greatest of the prophets, God would not behave so. Certainly Asim did not conclude from any of the argument presented that God had a sense of humour.

Years had passed since that conversation and Asim wondered if he would have to re-evaluate his earlier conclusion about God not appreciating a good joke.

The evening ended that night as every other did that had gone before it. Once the sun had fallen below the horizon and the red thread disappeared from the sky, he went to his room and recited the isha'a, the ṣalāt he had performed each nightfall since he had become a man. Tonight he performed his ritual ablution in a "stately 'ome of England" in Hampshire – where he was staying for the moment at the invitation of the SOE.

His thoughts as he fell asleep were hopeful. He was going to Mrs. Caspian's school to pick her up and deliver her, secretly, to the SOE's Beaulieu establishment. Surely he would meet her tomorrow. Surely God who is great would show him the way. He had dreamed of this so many times and imagined their first meeting so many times. Tomorrow, it would have to be.

But that night, God was silent. He did not dream of rats and crows, swords and dragons, or ships with purple sails. He was not shown the girl with golden hair who walked with a lion. Asim dreamed of planes patrolling, the boiled carrots at dinner, and the smells of SOE agents smoking in the halls of the great house they all shared on the Beaulieu grounds. These were not dreams of Prophethood. These were not dreams from Shaytaan or from Allah. They came from the boring details of a busy day that intruded. These were not the dreams that had preceded every other encounter with the Pevensies and their place called Narnia and the talking cat.

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

It was some 50 miles to Mrs. Caspian's school from Beaulieu. Walker-Smythe had asked that he undertake the job personally. They did not want to explain to anyone that in fact they were removing a girl from her boarding school and inserting her into the SOE training facility as staff. The less said, the better, and once she was among the Beaulieu personnel, things would take their logical course.

He requisitioned a car and petrol and would be able to black out the rear windows so that Mrs. Caspian would arrive, as all new agents did, blind. He was expected at Marlhurst-Brockstone at some point that week and there would be some business involving sorting through Mrs. Caspian's belongings and bringing the proper wardrobe with her and sending the inappropriate things back to her mother. Insofar as women's fashion was concerned, Asim took no interest in the matter at all. He was, however, deeply interested in assuring that Mrs. Caspian presented a credible cover and he could identify European from English tailoring as well as the next spy.

The drive to Newbury was slow and uneventful, with frequent stoppages for checkpoints and allowances for passing convoys. It was near noon when he finally pulled into the car park of Marlhurst-Brockstone. The grounds were pretty; the school was not. The buildings were modern-looking, terribly clean, and smelt of vinegar. Girls in dumpy uniforms of maroon and grey were all lined up in neat, quiet, obedient rows. Under the watchful, critical eyes of monitoring teachers, the
girls were marching about, as regimented as any platoon in the British Army. The looks he received from the adult staff were shifty and suspicious and the girls pretended to not see him at all.

He was challenged by three separate women, each more forbidding than the last, as he made his way to the office of the Headmistress. In this sterile, cold room his papers and credentials were inspected for a fourth and fifth time before he was finally shown to the alarmingly neat and ordered office of Headmistress Bell. Even a Major's uniform and signed orders weren't enough to satisfy her deep mistrust of his dark skin.

"This is all highly irregular," the Headmistress sniffed, looking down her nose and over her rimmed glasses at the stamped and inked documents. Her hair in its bun was as tight as her disapproving lips.

"The papers are in order, the authorizations are signed," he repeated patiently.

"Yes, yes, I can see that. It is still irregular." He extended his hands for the papers and she reluctantly returned them, either not wanting to relinquish control of something she mistrusted or not wanting to touch him at all. "And Miss Pevensie of all people. Not that she's much of a student. Pretty girl, but not committed at all to her studies. Her sister is highly disruptive. A most impious and disobedient girl. At least Susan was able to control her. On her present course, Lucy Pevensie is headed for a sticky end. It is unfortunate you are not removing the pair of them."

With another disapproving sniff, the Headmistress barked out, "Mrs. Park!" in a tone as commanding as that of any drill sergeant.

"Yes, Ma'am?" The older, kinder, better-humoured secretary in the anteroom stuck her head into the office.

"Please go to Miss Martin's class and have Miss Pevensie dismissed. Escort her to her room, and have her collect her baggage. The summons she has been expecting has arrived. Tell her not to dawdle."

"What of Miss Lucy?" Mrs. Park asked. "If her sister is leaving, they will wish to…"

"The odds of Miss Lucy Pevensie being where she is supposed to be are remote. Their farewells are not our concern and if Lucy cannot be bothered to be found, so be it."

"Of course, Headmistress." Mrs. Park scurried off to do her master's bidding.

"You may wait here, Major." The Headmistress spoke as if conferring an honour.

He no more wished to wait in this depressing place than Headmistress Bell wished for him to be there.

"Thank you, Headmistress, but I will wait outside, in the garden." He had seen fruit trees beginning to blossom on the grounds and the out of doors would be far more comfortable than this room of hard edges and harder discipline.

On his way out, Asim was only stopped twice, for Marlhurst-Brockstone was more concerned with getting him out the door than permitting him admittance in its hallowed, sterile halls.

The garden was a relief. The spring planting was underway and the very ample garden smelled of good earth, not antiseptic. The dew and fog had burned off and it was all bright and pleasant, a very different feel than the cold school. He turned a corner, came around a large tree, and nearly trod upon a girl sitting on the other side.
"Pardon," Asim said, lightly stepping aside. "I apologize. I did not see you."

"Oh, that's quite all right," the girl said, closing her book and pushing glasses up her nose. "People overlook me all the time. I take no offense at it." She looked him over, shrewdly rather than coldly. "Lucy has been saying for weeks this is coming. You're here to collect Susan?"

"I am a friend of the family's," he replied, lying easily. "Miss Susan Pevensie is being transferred to another school."

"So you say," the girl said. "Your rank, cap badge, decorations, and staff car you drove say otherwise, but we shall be patriotic about it and just ignore the inconsistencies." She climbed to her feet, tucked a tome under her arm, dusted off her skirt, and thrust her hand out.

"I'm Alice Jones, by the way."

"Major al-Masri." He reluctantly shook her hand, English custom warring with cultural propriety.

Her book looked to be the sort of thing Digory carried about—that is, theological.

"Collected works of Hildegard of Bingen," Alice said noticing his interest and stuffing her book in a bag. "You're Muslim, aren't you? Lucy mentioned that. Our library is thin on the subject of Islam. If you could jot down a few reference texts and send them on, I'd be grateful."

It was always unusual to find someone interested. "Of course," Asim replied.

"Thanks." She tilted her head. "This way."

Curious, he followed the confident girl down a lane of trees. "I should not go too far, for I am waiting for Miss Pevensie," Asim said, glancing over his shoulder as the school building disappeared behind a screen of hedges.

"No worries about that. Susan will look for us here regardless," Alice replied.

He would never be clear of the precise chain of events that would change the rest of his already eventful life forever. He saw a pair of small shoes lying at the base of a tree and Alice said, "Major al-Masri is here to collect Susan, so you'd best come down."

God gave him no warning. There had been no prophetic dream, no vision. A lifetime of waiting and he was caught totally unawares.

A horn blew, a lion roared, and a thunderbolt dropped from the tree above and exploded at his feet.

Angels were not corporeal; they had no will apart from God. But what else could this being of pure light be? He was blinded and struck dumb. Fire danced before him. He stood in the presence of the sun, if the sun could walk the earth and not burn mere mortals.

"Major al-Masri!" Lucy Pevensie cried. "Finally, we meet!"

A small hand stuck out, reaching for his own. It was too much, too close, too hot, too brilliant, and bright.

A curtain of darkness fell.

Asim woke to the pain of a dull headache and the feel of cool sheets. Someone was holding his hand. He squeezed the small hand and then withdrew his own.
He heard a little sigh. "Oh good, you are awake."

Still keeping his eyes closed, Asim took stock of his surroundings. The feel of the bed and the smell denoted a too small cot in a nursing station.

"Is that you, Lucy?" he asked, eyes still closed. Surely it was. With consciousness returning, he felt warmth on that side, as if standing close to a banked fire.

"It is, Asim. I may call you Asim? Though since you are in uniform now, I understand you might prefer Major?"

He whispered a prayer, of thanks and for courage. "You may call me whatever you like," he managed. "How long was I unconscious?"

There were footsteps and the sounds of a curtain being pushed aside, a scrape of metal rings on rusty rod.

"About 30 minutes," a woman's brisk voice said.

Cool fingers picked up his wrist; he restrained the urge to pull back from the nurse's touch.

"Your pulse is fine," the nurse said. "How do you feel? Are you prone to fainting spells? Should we contact your unit and have someone come and collect you?"

Asim opened his eyes, hoping that Lucy would not be in his line of sight. Fortunately, it was the face of a gray-haired matron peering down at him. The nurse carefully probed his brow.

"I know who I am, I know that I am at Marlhurst-Brockstone, that Winston Churchill is the Prime Minister, that it is the twentieth day of April in 1943, that we have been at war with Nazi Germany since September 10, 1939, and I know that I am here to collect Miss Susan Pevensie pursuant to orders and consents that are in the inner pocket of my jacket on the left hand side."

He had been treated for potential concussions before.

"It was the sun," Lucy said. "The sun came out from behind a cloud and I landed on top of the Major when I fell out of the tree. It startled him and he stumbled against a tree branch."

"You? Fall out of a tree?" the nurse replied, with a rough kindness.

"It is as Miss Pevensie states," he said firmly and sat up, keeping his eyes fixed on the nurse. "I shall be fine but I do thank you for your concern." He did not want difficulty; he certainly did not want an unexplained fainting episode reported. An aspirin and a glass of water would be ideal, but he did not want to betray even that weakness.

"Shall I just assume this is another of those peculiar things that occur in your presence, Miss Pevensie, now extending even to men in uniform?"

Lucy laughed and it was music, spring wind, bird song, and pipes across crystal sands at midnight. "If that will let you leave off Major al-Masri, then yes, absolutely."

The nurse gave him another once over. "And you, Major? Have you a better explanation?"

"I do not, and thank you."

She shrugged and smiled. "Very well. I'll just leave the two of you here and go get word to Susan that now she really must finish her final packing!"
He quickly turned to the side when the nurse withdrew. As she left, she pulled the curtain back around them for privacy.

Slowly, he turned his head back to Lucy. If he could not even look at her, this was going to be impossible. Asim went carefully, putting his hands over his eyes, slowly opening his fingers, and letting the light of Lucy Pevensie come upon him gradually.

Lucy said nothing, but just sat quietly in the chair by his bed, making no remark upon his odd behavior.

At last, he lowered his hand and let his inner and outer eye adjust to the sight.

"Better?" she asked.

"Yes. My deepest apologies, Lucy."

"Oh, do not worry yourself at all, Asim. I am sorry to have dropped upon you so. My enthusiasm does get the better of me and I have felt keenly and for some time the lack of meeting you."

"At least on our first meeting you did not attempt to draw on me, as Peter did."

She laughed and then leaned forward and whispered, "Do you know that you glow, like a torch?"

Never, not in all his years, had anyone ever seen in him what he saw in others. The end of this long wait was very sweet, unlooked for, and again he thanked God, for all that he wished it had been more dignified than falling at the feet of the one who had walked through his dreams for so long.

"You, Lucy, are brighter than the sun or stars, and I do not speak metaphorically."

"How odd," she replied, smiling. "I met a Star once. Two of them, actually. Neither glowed at all."

"Why not?" he asked, curious.

"I am not sure. Ramandu was very old and becoming a young star, again, so perhaps he would shine more as he aged." She paused, "Well, youged, I suppose would be more accurate, as he was growing younger, not older. And the other, Coriakin, had done something very wicked and so was, more correctly, a former star."

"A wicked star?" How was such a thing possible? "What was his crime?"

"Oh, I am sure I do not know. Aslan said that was his story, not mine, which he sometimes means in a very profound way because he wants you to figure it out for yourself and sometimes I think Aslan says it because he just won't be bothered at the moment to tell you."

Aslan. A thrill of excitement moved through him as he heard her speak the word he had only so far read in stolen letters.

"Is Aslan the cat of my dreams?"

"That probably depends upon the dream, don't you think?" Lucy said, smiling widely.

"It was last summer. The night Peter caught the train to Cambridge to see you, Edmund, and Eustace. A cat sat in my window and spoke to me. He asked me to be a guide to your family."

Lucy looked down at her grubby hands folded tightly in her lap and twisted a crumpled handkerchief.
"And so you are. Aslan told me so and I have seen your hand in all that has happened. Thank you, I suppose. Edmund is in Washington, and Peter is in the Glider Corps, and now, finally, Susan is off with you." She looked around and her eyes darkened with anger and frustration. "But it is very unpleasant to be left behind. And here. That's not how it used to be." She sniffed a little.

"I know, Lucy, and I am sorry for your loneliness. I do believe that your siblings, doing what they are, are all part of important things that will help end the war sooner. And we may not keep a bird caged for our own pleasure. That is hard consolation, but also truth."

"Thank you, that does, help, a little, to know what they do is important. It is selfish of me." She leaned forward again. "Once, when I was lonely and frightened, Aslan sent me a great friend. I know you are terribly busy, but might you be such a friend to me?"

"Lucy, you know as well as I that this was to be and it was only God's…" he had to pause. He refused to call it whimsy and amended. "It was to happen but in God's time, and now it has. As surely as I am to be the friend to you in your need, you are the promised companion on my own journey."

"So there shall be adventures!" Lucy cried enthusiastically. "I do so love adventures! Yes, Asim, I will certainly be a companion on your journey!"

Asim glanced at his watch and with the day moving to afternoon, it was time to collect Mrs. Caspian and go. They were both expected at Beaulieu. He pulled himself off the little cot and stood.

Lucy bounced to her feet. "It is just as well you fainted, Asim. Susan and her packing would have kept you waiting regardless. I know why my sister does this, and truly, I do approve of it. But if she asks me one more time if she should pack the blue suit or the gray dress, and the pumps, the Oxfords, or both, I shall chuck the whole of her wardrobe into the pond and she can go wherever you are taking her in naught but her slip."

They met Susan as she was coming down the school's front steps. Alice was helping her lug an uncommonly large suitcase. Susan had acquired a pre-war, French haute couture wardrobe from Wren officer Elizabeth Pole at Christmas. Asim knew that the F Section of the SOE had a fleet of tailors developing appropriate Continental clothing for the agents. The packing might seem vain or obsessive, but it would not go to waste at all.

"Thank you, Major," Susan said as he took the case from her.

"I will just put this in the boot."

"Are you feeling better, Major?" Alice asked, flexing her fingers and looking sourly at Susan's large suitcase.

"Very much so. Thank you for your assistance."

"Just write me with some suggestions on Islam and where I might them?"

"Of course.

"Thank you!"

A gaggle of girls thumped down the front steps of the school. Asim hefted the suitcase and went to the car, leaving the girls to make their farewells. He would put up the blackout shades that would line the car's back windows for Mrs. Caspian's secret journey once they left the school grounds.
Susan and Lucy came down the steps together, arm in arm, and while it was not comfortable, he was able to look upon them both. Lucy's star was burning bright and hot; Susan's light was gentler, like the title she had borne in the letter ciphers. Asim wondered what Lucy's title had been. Mary had said Lucy called herself Valiant and that Edmund had been "just Edmund."

He assumed there was more to the names.

The sisters hugged and Lucy was trying very hard to not cry.

"Will you bless me, Lucy?"

Asim watched, fascinated, as Susan bowed her dark head to her sister's blonde one.

"Of course." He was glad Lucy's voice was steadier.

Lucy placed her hands on Susan's shoulders and began to speak.

"Aslan, thank you for the gift of our sister, Susan. She leaves us to enter the wider world to do your will and work. Watch over her as she embarks on this journey. Let her always hear your voice. She goes with our love."

Susan leaned down a little and Lucy kissed her on both cheeks and the forehead. They hugged again and then separated.

A year ago, he would have thought it all peculiar. Now, he simply waited, as observer and guide. He held open the car's rear door. She arched an eyebrow. "Not the front? Isn't it strange for you to be driving me like a chauffeur?"

"It is military business and orders, Mrs. Caspian."

She straightened, taller and more regal. "Of course. Will I be able to change clothes en route?"

Mrs. Caspian's accent was a little flatter. There was a hint of American in it. She was still wearing her school girl uniform disguise but must arrive at Beaulieu as Mrs. Caspian.

"I will insist upon it."

Mrs. Caspian hugged and kissed her sister again and climbed into the back of the car.

Lucy sniffed and waved her handkerchief.

To the valiant woman left behind, he said, "Lucy, I will visit as often as I can. I am difficult to find."

"I understand." She held out her hand and after staring at it a moment, he, gravely and very briefly, shook it.

"But if you have need of me, ask your Aslan. Surely, I will hear the summons and will come."

She laughed. "I used to ask Aslan to bring me a pony at Christmas. He never did."

"Were this a test, I would agree," Asim replied, taking the keys from his pocket. "In your case, however, it is an act of faith."

END
Here ends Apostolic Way, where paths diverge. Peter and Susan are off to war, and Edmund and Lucy set out to make the peace.

The next book in the Stone Gryphon is the completed Rat and Sword Go To War, posted here, which tells of Susan in the Special Operations Executive and Peter in D Company of 2d Battalion, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.

The two chapters that follow here are now excerpts of Heart and Crow Make The Peace, the story that now will follow Rat and Sword Go To War. Those two chapters, as well as the posted Black, White and the Gray Wolf In Between will constitute the first 1-3 chapters of Heart and Crow Make the Peace once I begin posting that story in full. The posted story, Hound and Nag, is also part of Heart and Crow and will ultimately be reposted, in substantial part, in that story. Thank you and let me know if you have any questions.
Heart and Crow Go To War

Chapter Summary

Crow and Heart go to war and there are looks back in order to move forward. Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go. Part 3 of The Stone Gryphon.

Chapter 16
Apostolic Way
Heart and Crow Go To War

This begins a new arc within *The Stone Gryphon*. When chapter 15 of *Apostolic Way* ended, Peter had enlisted and entered D Company of the 2d Battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry where he would go on to become a paratrooper in the Glider Corps. Susan entered the Special Operations Executive (SOE), with the goal of entering occupied France as a spy. Susan and Peter's story is told in the separate *Rat and Sword Go To War* and concludes with a reunion at D-Day in the shadow of the Caen Canal Bridge in Normandy.

Susan's SOE mentor from her stint in America, Colonel George Walker-Smythe, meets with Major al-Masri (Asim) and recruits Edmund to return with him to America to work in British intelligence. Before his departure, Edmund discloses the truth of Narnia to his mother, Helen, who has come to understand better that there are troubles ahead for Lucy with all of her siblings off doing War-related work. Major al-Masri arrives at Lucy and Susan's school, intending to remove Susan so that she might enter the SOE. Lucy flies out of a tree, lands on Asim, and he faints dead away.

It is at this point that we begin this new, multi-chapter arc within *Apostolic Way*, in which Crow and Heart go to war and we learn of the black, the white, the gray in between, and the story of the Mole spies. Edmund finds that skills learned as a bag carrier and secretary are very useful. Queen Lucy the Valiant finds her cordial, knife, and purpose in England. This arc will conclude with VE Day and the reunion of all the Friends of Narnia.

When at last she was free to come back to Edmund she found him standing on his feet and not only healed of his wounds but looking better than she had seen him look—oh, for ages; in fact ever since that first term of horrid school which was where he had begun to go wrong.

...  

*And they made good laws and kept the peace and saved good trees from being unnecessarily cut down, and liberated young dwarfs and young satyrs from being sent to school, and generally stopped busybodies and interferers and encouraged ordinary people who wanted to live and let live.*  

The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe, Chapter 17, *The Hunting of the White Stag*

ooOoo

Being a Queen or a King of a brand new country was hard work. Lucy had come to Council late
because she'd spent all morning out in the fields with the Herds. With the Witch defeated and Spring for the first time in over 100 years, there were lots of children being born - Pups, Kittens, Piglets, Lambs, Calves, Foals, Cubs, Kids, Kits, Chicks, and Babies. Usually birthing was fine with the Narnians remembering how to do the things they were supposed to, the way Aslan made them. But sometimes it wasn't fine at all. Nervous parents were asking, if it please her, could the Queen Lucy and her Magic Cordial attend the birthing?

So it had been a busy morning and there were now two lovely Kids and a new Colt and thanks given to Aslan and to Epona (Lucy didn't know who Epona was, but the Herds did).

Then she'd run back to attend Council and managed to miss luncheon. Now, she was peckish, tired, and her legs were weary from swinging over the edge of the too-large chair. Mr. Hoberry, who was such a kind Faun and great friend of Mr. Tumnus, had found a little stepstool to prop her feet up. She had to listen carefully during Council and try to remember everything. There wasn't much paper or ink. Lucy loved Narnia but she did sometimes miss things like pencils and notebooks.

She suspected Edmund was feeling the same as she because his eyes closed every now and then.

A big map was spread out on the Council table, weighted down with rocks, and they were discussing with a Gryphon how they might herd dumb game down into Narnia from the North for the Carnivores. Lucy was glad they were finally addressing the problem; she had been hearing from the Herds around Cair Paravel for days that they were worried about the Wolves and Great Cats being so close to their new Children. The Spring had been warm and wet and everything had been growing like mad after the long Winter, so there were plenty of foods for the plant eaters. It was still pretty lean for the meat eaters. Game was scarce and they had all been eating a lot of fish at Cair Paravel.

"Wolves would be good for this, your Majesties," the Gryphon said. Lucy had not learned her name. She wasn't sure if the Gryphon had a name or maybe it was General like how some boys were called Major. Or maybe it was one peculiar Narnian word, Thegeneral? Or maybe she was the General and that's why everyone always listened to her and did what she said. "With support of Raptor and Gryphon overflights, we can locate herds and drive them across the Shribble."

Peter and Susan looked at each other. No one around the table said anything. Lucy could see they were all waiting for one of the Kings or Queens to speak so she said, "Bringing wild game here for the meat eaters would make the plant eaters feel better." Under the table, she nudged Susan's shin with her toe.

"This seems a sound plan, General," Susan said.

Peter nodded. "I agree."

Edmund leaned forward on his elbows and stared at the map. "Good, we have a goal. My question is how do we do this?" He looked up. "Orders and things. Who goes? Who decides who goes? Who leads?"

There was a very long, awkward pause. Finally Leszi, who was a very saucy Satyr, broke in and pointed at Susan and Peter. "You order someone competent to do it, reward them if they do it right, and punish them if they do it wrong."

Peter and Susan exchanged another look and Lucy felt terribly sorry for her brother and sister. They were not accustomed to giving orders to anyone; they followed them. Before Narnia there had been a great many persons who gave them orders—Mother (and Father when he had not been at War), air wardens, policemen, Home Guard, Vicar Donald, Professor Kirke, Mrs. Macready, the Heads,
Matrons, and Prefects at school – they were just children and at war and that meant taking orders.

Peter let out a big breath. "General, we all accept your proposal. Please…"

As her brother fumbled, Susan stepped in. "As Edmund, King Edmund, suggested, could you please select the Narnians who you think should go, that is, if you think that is a good idea…"

When Leszi made a funny, disgusted noise – Lucy supposed he thought Susan sounded too nice – Peter stepped in and finished, sounding stronger, "General, Leszi, and Master Roblang, we ask you to recommend and present to us the overflight and herding teams for the mission. We will review your recommendations and participate in the briefing. Two of us will join the team on horseback."

They would get better at giving orders, Lucy decided. They all just needed more practice.

"I will see it done, your Majesties," the General said.

And that was that.

Edmund fidgeted in his seat and Susan looked at him and smiled. "I think we are almost done for the day."

What Susan really meant was that she and Peter would keep working and Edmund and Lucy herself would be free.

Her sister turned back to the fifteen other Narnians standing at, seated at, seated on, or perched near the Council table. "Closer to home, what further reports are there of improvements to Cair Paravel?"

Their castle – Lucy still felt a little thrill at the thought of it – had had a thorough cleaning and quick repairs for their Coronation and she knew that Aslan had had a hand – paw – in the initial supplies and furnishings. Loyal Narnians had been so generous in returning many things they had kept hidden away from the Witch during the long Winter. Ransacking Jadis' castle had also turned up many treasures the Narnians had thought gone forever. It wasn't as if the Witch had needed or ever used tapestries, silver plate, and a bejeweled armoury; she had just kept anyone else from having them. In all, Cair Paravel was much improved and almost comfortable even if at first it had been more like kipping out than the splendour of Windsor Castle.

"The repairs and furnishings for the south tower room have been installed," Mrs. Furner, their housekeeper, said.

"The books are being moved in even now, as you may have heard," Mr. Hoberry said. A loud thunk rattled the windows and a spider drifted down from the shaking ceiling. Lucy caught the spider and tossed it in the direction of the Raven who was perched on the arm of Edmund's chair. The Raven caught the spider in his long beak, swallowed it, and nodded his head in thanks.

"We should have a library ready for your Majesties' use within a day or two," Mrs. Furner said.

"Thank you, Mr. Hoberry and Mrs. Furner," Edmund replied and they all nodded. A library had been Edmund's project though she'd helped him root through the crates of books that had been found in all sorts of odd places. It was interesting to see the funny titles and writing – Is Man A Myth? and Men, Monks, and Gamekeepers were two of the many books that Mr. Tumnus' family had kept safe for if Human Monarchs ever returned to Cair Paravel. There had been other books, too, The Life and Letters of Silenus and Nymphs and Their Ways. Susan wouldn't let her read those because she said the words were too big but Lucy had seen Edmund sneaking looks at the book about Silenus - whoever he was- and she'd seen the Nymphs book in Peter's office.
"And with a proper library, we four will need to find tutors and begin our own schooling again," Peter said.

What?! School?! Here?! But before Lucy could do more than open her mouth, Peter continued, "Come to think, what do Narnians do about educating their children? Shouldn't we be doing something about schools?"

As soon as Peter said the words, it turned nasty and stony cold in the Council room, as if her brother had said something terribly foul.

Hearing only faint growls, claws on stone, and snapping beaks, Susan finally asked, "Don't children go to school in Narnia?"

The Narnians were all looking at one another and they seemed angry and unhappy. Wrasse's eyes were narrow slits and she was lashing her black tail, the fur was standing up on the backs of the Canines in the room, and the Birds were rustling their feathers.

Master Roblang, the Dwarf, finally spoke when the silence was becoming unbearable. "Whatever you have in mind, your Majesties, best not to be calling it school in Narnia."

It took some time to smooth the feathers and fur. Lucy went about the Council room and listened to some of the Narnians go on about how they did not want a school and would never send their Chicks, Cubs, Pups, or Kittens there, ever, and she told them that it upset her too and that they weren't going to be the sort of monarchs who would do anything that the Narnians didn't want. She promised she would bring their concerns to her brothers and sister.

Once things were calmer, Peter excused everyone so they could discuss what had happened but Lucy asked Master Roblang to stay because she thought the Red Dwarf was very wise about Narnians. The Narnians really respected the General (that was what Lucy decided to call the very serious Gryphon since everyone else did) and Leszi and followed their orders, but she had noticed that everyone took their problems to Master Roblang.

Once the five of them were all sitting, Lucy spoke up first so they would all understand how very serious this was.

"School would be dreadful, Peter! We mustn't make the Narnians go!"

"So I learned," Peter said, sounding frustrated and rocking in his chair so the legs made a thump on the stone floors. "Of course I would have never made the suggestion if I had known the Narnians were so opposed to it."

"High King, no one blames you for the error," Roblang said kindly. "These are things we learn about one another."

"Some of those things are very different, Master," Susan said. "Where we come from, all children are required to go to school."

Master Roblang looked very surprised. "Really? Why?"

"Why?" Peter repeated, still sounding irritated at the exchange. Lucy wondered if maybe Peter was taking it very much to heart – he had very high marks in school and Father and the Professor were certain Peter would go on to University and do very well there, too.

"Education is necessary for self-improvement and service to our country," Peter said, and it was like she was hearing Father speak. "We read books and write essays about what we read. We learn
languages, science, history, and Algebra."

Lucy completely agreed with the skeptical way Master Roblang asked, "Algebra?"

"A type of maths," Susan said.

"Well, Narnians that have the need are a dab hand at numbers; you can't build, craft, or mine if you can't figure. Centaurs use complex formulas in their stargazing. But most of our learning is oral, your Majesties. Many Narnians don't have the eyesight to even be able to read." Master Roblang wriggled his fingers. "And they don't have hands to write."

"What I would like to know, Master Roblang, is why even mentioning school was cause for such alarm in our Council," Peter demanded.

"Because that's what she called it, High King," Master Roblang said.

At the mention of Jadis, Peter and Susan both glanced worriedly at Edmund, who shifted in his seat and hunched up. Lucy knew that Edmund hated being singled out this way. Edmund and Aslan had it sorted, her brother had been cured and healed, and she trusted them both. Edmund was sensitive and rightly so, but pretending it didn't exist and then stepping around him like he was surrounded by broken glass just made it worse.

Briskly, Lucy interrupted all the long looks. "The Witch had a school," she said, repeating what the other Narnians had told her. "And Narnians went because they would get extra food and nicer places to live. And once she got you, you were hers. Just like Edmund had been, Lucy thought fiercely. No wonder the Beavers had warned about the Witch's food.

Master Roblang clasped his hands together and leaned forward in his seat. "The thing to remember, your Majesties, is we all came from Aslan's Song. No Narnian was ever born bad. But the Witch's school turned the very best of us bad."

The meeting didn't last much after that. Master Roblang left, Susan and Peter wanted to talk about it all, and Lucy couldn't bear to be inside a moment longer when it was so glorious outside.

Once Susan and Peter were off to Peter's office, Lucy decided to follow Edmund. Her brother went through the kitchens, out into the garden, and down the back path to the beach. He might think she was being a pest, but they both needed to get out and, from his scowls, he felt the same way about it all as she did.

The sand was still warm under her feet though the shadows were already getting long. She waited while Edmund pulled off his boots and socks and rolled up his trousers. She'd left her slippers in the Council room (Or the breakfast room? Or maybe she'd never put them on that morning?) and hiked her skirt up and tucked it into her belt.

"I know you probably want to be alone after all that time in Council," Lucy began. Edmund was looking down and digging his toes into the soft, white sand. "But we can't let Susan and Peter start a school that the Narnians don't want or need just because they go to one." Or went to one? Lucy wasn't sure about that. Aslan hadn't told her how long they would be in Narnia.

"It's alright, Lu."

They started walking along the beach. Sometimes the sea was cold and dark; today the water was warm and the waves were soft. Side by side, their feet left soft prints in the wet sand that the incoming tide gently flooded and rubbed out. As they walked, dumb gulls scattered and sandpipers scurried away with tiny crabs in their beaks.
The birds made the point for her. "See? Narnians don't need schooling to learn how to feed themselves, build their nests, or raise their families."

"True, but we don't just learn what we need to know," Edmund bent down and picked up a flat stone. "There are lots of things I'd like to learn – science and astronomy from the Centaurs, geometry from the Dwarfs, and languages from the Birds."

"But not in school," Lucy replied.

He shook his head. "At least not any school we know about. That's…"

"What happened to you," Lucy finished.

He nodded.

She could still see it all so clearly. Edmund had been so terribly wounded at Beruna, as badly as anything she'd ever seen when the bombs had been falling in London and those people had been dead. Edmund was going to die until she and her cordial saved him. "When I saw you again, after the battle, after I'd healed you, you hadn't looked so well in months and months, Edmund. You looked like you used to, before you went to that horrid school."

"I don't think it was all school, though," Edmund said slowly. He was worrying the stone between his fingers. "I knew Father was very proud of how well Peter was doing." He shook his head. "And I was such an ass about it trying to get some of that attention for myself."

"None of that," Lucy said firmly. "We've all forgiven each other and Aslan and I healed you."

Edmund smiled a little and again Lucy had that glimpse of what she'd seen at Beruna - her brother whole again and not the way he'd been before they found Narnia, all full of sharp, dark, nasty edges.

"I am trying, Lu. I don't want to be an ass about that, too, and waste Aslan's gift. Or yours."

That was better. "And don't forget that I saw it all, Edmund," she reminded him. "I think our family squabbles would have come to naught but then you went to school and that's when it turned spiteful. School makes worse whatever troubles a person has going into it."

Edmund weighed the rock in his hand and then flipped it into the ocean. It skipped, one, two, times and then sank. He wiped his sandy hands off on his trousers. "Master Roblang's got the right of it. We aren't bad, at least not at first. But the wrong kind of school can twist even the very best sort of person."

ooOOoo

Edmund stifled the yawn and stretched his legs again. Travel in Narnia had usually been very dull. Not that there was anything wrong with dull travel. If traveling became exciting, it was invariably because someone was trying to kill you.

Having now flown both Gryphons and in a military aeroplane, he could safely say that the chief advantage to both was that one wasn't walking the distance, or swimming it. Five days out of London and now their train was finally crawling into New York City. The window was too grimy to see much – the white and green of Quebec and the rural American northeast had given way to cities and dirty snow as their train chugged south. The biggest surprise for him was the lack of damage. Nothing had been bombed and burned in America, yet.

Telling Mum about Narnia in the days before he departed for America was maybe not one of
Edmund’s wisest of decisions. He’d not consulted with the others before doing so. Still, he had discerned Aslan’s paw and felt it to be the right decision. From her letters and veiled asides, Mum had been piecing the puzzle together for some time. He’d known for several years she’d been eavesdropping through the grate to their conversations in Lucy and Susan’s room. At Christmas, he’d decided to forget the muffling pillow and just let her listen. Mum had trusted her judgment and her children and then been willing to see Peter off to basic training, allowed Susan to leave school for the SOE (which Mum would only identify after he’d signed the Official Secrets Act papers), and altered the suit he now was wearing for his own journey to work for spies in America. Mum was entitled to the truth.

Moreover, a long line of females would thoroughly berate him if he had continued to discount Mum’s own keen intelligence.

So much of the preparation, journey and now the bag-carrying for Colonel Walker-Smythe felt very like the time he gone undercover to the Lone Islands Bankers’ Conclave with her, Morgan, he told himself firmly, even as he still shied from using her name.

Edmund was trying to look back to look forward, just as Susan had said. Work undertaken and skills learned in Narnia were relevant to the tasks that lay ahead here. That meant, among other things, finally heeding Aslan’s nudging and trying to get sorted where a fifteen-year-old mentally (and yes, emotionally) slotted one’s wife.

Edmund opened his journal and stared again at the page he had written last night, somewhere between Halifax and Boston. It began with a verse from the second book of Calormene erotica he and Morgan had exchanged at Yule.

_In your light I learn how to love_
_My old self is a stranger to me_

_Morgan, my old self stayed behind when we left for the Lone Islands. So it is here, though I embark on this new adventure without you._

In the next seat, he sensed Colonel Walker-Smythe turn his attention from his novel – Kim – which the Colonel had been reading on and off the last three days. The Colonel was probably looking for parallels.

Edmund did not try to hide the journal page from his superior. Colonel Walker-Smythe had undoubtedly tried to read it at some point and likely succeeded in doing so without Edmund noticing. It was the hazard of working with spies.

"Pevensie, I was going to scold you for keeping a written record, but I can't make heads or tails of your code," Walker-Smythe said. "Your sister had a similar shorthand and I couldn't read it, either. It looks to be similar to hers?"

"It is and it isn't, Sir. It's idiosyncratic to the person. I don't think that even Susan could make out more than one word in five of what I've written." Peter and Lucy had been hopeless.

_Morgan could read his codes._

"I'm going to remind you, though, about only recording those things you could tell the world. None of our business is to be in there, even if it is coded. Am I clear?"

"I understand, Sir. I assumed as much. This isn't anything like that."

"No? So it's a love letter to a girl, then?"
Edmund couldn't stop the scowl as the Colonel kicked his sore spot. But lying wasn't going to help him here and being truthful and aggressive might. "As a matter of fact, yes, Sir," he managed to say. "It's just a bit of doggerel we were both fond of – from when she was alive."

It was War. Everyone had lost someone or knew someone who had.

"My condolences on your loss," Walker-Smythe said, sounding thoroughly sincere. He'd undoubtedly had practice.

"Thank you, Sir," Edmund replied evenly and firmly shut his journal.

"By the by, there will be girls interested in helping you with your grief. That's your own business but don't make it mine. Follow your sister's example – she received a lot of attention but was always properly respecting of her marital vows and decorous of her husband's ill health. I expect the same from you."

Edmund was taken aback and thoroughly confused – Lucy had been married, not Susan, and in Narnia, not here, Morgan wasn't a fiction, she was very real…

Of course. The Colonel was testing him and his cover.

He mentally steadied himself and answered levelly, "I understand, Sir."

"Romancing the many ladies underfoot is the business of certain chaps within the Embassy and you aren't part of that. We've got enough to do."

Walker-Smythe closed his own book and leaned back in the seat with an air of satisfaction so Edmund presumed he'd managed the test. "Mrs. Caspian says you're more adept at this business than she is. I've not yet had the opportunity to observe your acumen but you do have a knack for disappearing into the background when you chose to, Pevensie. You've played the part of secretary and batman well enough the last few days that I'll keep you on in that role. Can you drive a car?"

A skill set most certainly not learned in Narnia. "Not yet. Can someone teach me?"

"Yes, though you'll have to learn on the wrong side of the road." The Colonel pulled the cigar out of his pocket and began chewing on it. Susan had said she'd never seen him actually smoke it. "Seeing a young, fit man in a suit raised too many eyebrows even on the journey here so you're enlisting as a private. We'll requisition some uniforms in New York and I'll have our Shoemaker make you a first rate set of papers."

As he politely repeated, "Thank you, Sir," Edmund was again forcibly reminded of his undercover stint in the Lone Islands as clerk to Morgan and her father, the Director of the banking House of Linch. For months, Edmund's stock phrases had been, "Yes, Sir," "Thank you, Sir," and "I shall correct my shortcoming immediately, Sir."

He wondered if the Colonel suspected sarcasm when he added, "You'll go where I do, Pevensie, and I'm not going to let you wander very far off leash. Not even as far as Mrs. Caspian did."

"I understand, Sir. Thank you." Edmund might be chafing at the restrictions but he remembered Major al-Masri's warnings. Coming from a less credible person, he would have taken the cautions as silly paternalism to be mocked and circumvented; from a man who dreamt of the Dawn Treader and had sworn a sort of fealty to the family, Edmund would heed the advice and act accordingly. Susan's own time in Washington had ended with a man's murder. He knew he was on a path Aslan had set and the Lion had given him guides; Edmund would attend to them.
The Colonel glanced again at the journal in Edmund's hands. "So, I understood the code is what you and Mrs. Caspian refer to as Rat and Crow; Major al-Masri thought Mrs. Caspian was the Rat. Are you the Crow?"

_Private Pevensie_
Clerk.
Bag carrier.
Secretary.
Lackey.
Courier.
Driver.
Celibate as a priest.
And Crow

"Yes, Sir," Edmund replied. "I am."

_ooOOoo_

"Morgan and Rafiqa are here, your Majesty," Jalur said from the other side of the closed door.

Edmund pulled up from his slouch over his library desk. "Come in, Morgan!" he called.

The library door swung open, admitting his bondmate and a lot of noise from the great hall two floors below.

"I had hoped I'd find you hiding here," Morgan said.

"I'm not hiding!" Edmund protested. "Jalur needed to escape the festivities!"

Fur bristling, Jalur snarled, "So did you."

_Uppity Guard contradicting his liege! In a false whisper, Edmund said, "I worried that if we did not obtain a reprieve from the relentless good cheer, murder might be done."

"At your hand or my paw?" the Tiger asked.

_Poor Tiger._

"Do you want to continue napping in the hall with the noise and no people, or nap in here with the people and less noise?" Edmund asked his cranky Guard.

"You two stay in the library, and shut the door," Jalur replied. To Rafiqa, the Tiger magnanimously said, "If you do not speak, you may remain in the hallway with me."

"I will try to remember," Rafiqa replied dryly. The Hound pushed the library door closed with her nose and the din of the downstairs party quieted.

_In truth, Edmund was feeling the negative effects of so much joy and goodwill as much as Jalur was. Cair Paravel had always seemed large and comfortable; it had become much smaller when both Peter and Morgan's father, the Director of the House of Linch, were occupying it. With the addition of the dignitaries and delegations witnessing the Human part of his and Morgan's Narnian bonding ceremonies, Cair Paravel had become positively cramped. Edmund was tripping over well-wishers, kisses, hugs, bows, curtsies, gifts, and sung and recited verse composed in their honour every time he left his - now their- room. Fortunately, Jalur was even more disturbed by it all than he was, so the Tiger was giving significant advanced warning and they'd learned how to dart into cramped closets._
and empty rooms to avoid heartfelt congratulations - the ones likely to express their joy in impromptu
song were most especially avoided.

The Human and Dwarf bonding was a straightforward ceremony by Narnian standards – fully
clothed and no nest building, ritual combat, posturing, or ceremonial dances that other Narnians
groups had asked their Monarch and his consort to perform to publicly commemorate and recognize
the pair-bond. \textit{That} whole process had taken them weeks and weeks but at least those ceremonies
had been only among other Narnians – especially the naked parts.

And then Susan and Master Roblang had found the bonding for Humans and Dwarfs in the \textit{Regalia}-
the most gods-awful, dull book of protocol and manners in their library. The \textit{Regalia} called it the
\textit{Gretna Green Bonding} though no one knew why, other than that it dated to the days of Narnia's first
King and Queen, Frank and Helen, and involved the bonded couple exchanging oaths of fidelity
over a smith's anvil.

Believing that the simple \textit{Gretna Green} ritual was insufficiently grandiose for so important an
occasion, Peter and Susan had decided on a full Narnian State ceremony. It had become the largest
event they had hosted since their Coronation.

Morgan's father had embraced the whole thing as well, apparently deciding to make the best of the
opportunity since his daughter, the most highly valued, and highest-earning, asset of House Linch,
had decided to throw her lot in with a grubby junior King of a minor land. Knowing that Narnia was
putting her best hoof forward for the occasion, Linch had invited colleagues from the other Houses,
significant clients, and, importantly, \textit{prospective} clients whom he hoped to impress and steal from
competitors on the strength of his House's official ties to Narnia.

"It really is not polite that the two in whose honour the celebrations are being held are hiding in the
tower library," Edmund said.

"I'm not hiding," Morgan said. "But when you didn't reappear after the third set of dancing and
entertainment, I thought I'd better make sure you didn't sneak off to the Western Wild and live off
Faun wine."

"Tempting but I know I'm stuck here for the duration with my family, your family, and a hundred
others." With true feeling, he added, "Thank Aslan everyone else in our families seems to enjoy
carrying on delightful, witty, and engaged conversations with doorknobs for days on end." The
relentless society had made Edmund feel more and more like a doorknob himself. He'd not been so
much the center of unwanted attention since their first arrival in Narnia and the memory of that time
was very \textit{complex}.

Morgan crossed the room to the desk she had occupied before an office had been given over for her
use. "I had no idea my father and your brother got on so well."

"At least they are slapping each other's backs in self-congratulation and not mine," Edmund said.
Peter's hearty thwacks were chest-clearing and Morgan's father also had a bone-crushing handshake
he employed at every opportunity. "I'm finding Peter's enthusiasm for \textit{our} bonding truly exhausting."

"Your brother and my father are having a wonderful time," Morgan said, with a touch of asperity.
"They are really being marvelous hosts."

Edmund nodded dully. "Bully for them."

"It's so much easier with them, too. They are both so tall and impressive and everyone is trying to
impress them, so if I stand next to one of them, I don't have say anything except accept someone's
congratulations and remember to say thank-you. I wish it was always this easy."

"Perhaps you should return to it, then," Edmund muttered.

"And you missed it!" Morgan rattled on. "I was even able to dance with your brother and he didn't let me fall down or crash into anyone."

Edmund's irritation blossomed to true anger. Morgan had never danced with him despite repeated overtures; she always preferred the company of Crows to his own once the dancing began. "Well why don't you go back and bask in their collective glow and leave me alone!"

He was immediately ashamed; he should not begrudge her this time. He rubbed his forehead, trying to will away the headache. "I apologize, Morgan. I don't know why this comes over me."

She crossed over to his chair and rested a hand on his tense back. "Oh Harold, you can be so stupid sometimes."

Whatever remorse he felt evaporated and he shrugged her hand off. "If all you are going to do is criticise me for my shortcomings, just leave me be, Morgan." Edmund did manage to curb his annoyance enough to avoid saying something hurtful about his partner's infuriating insensitivity.

Her hand returned and she threaded her fingers in his hair. "You don't remember, do you?"

"Remember what?" He wanted to pull away but the feel of her fingers was unexpectedly soothing and if he moved too suddenly, she'd probably pull his hair out.

"You don't remember Jalur correcting me for calling you Sir? Here. In this room. The first day we met."

He looked up at her. Morgan closed her eyes and began spewing words back at him. "You said 'Edmund and Ed are reserved for my Royal siblings, usually accompanied by long suffering sighs, cries of outrage, and very occasionally the word 'brilliant.' You were 'King Most Abused By His Irascible Guard.' You said you were 'Ass and Brute with my former lovers; any current one, well, that's no one's business but our own, and I don't much care, so long as it isn't brother, father, or Peter.'"

She opened her eyes.

The recollection lightened his sullen mood and he put an arm around her waist. "It is incredible you ever spoke to me again. Ass and brute, you know."

"Ahh, but those would be the epithets by former lovers, usually accompanied by tears, smashed pottery, thrown boots. I am not former, have been your only ever since that night, am current and will be forever."

"Should any former loves wander by, I wouldn't hold out much hope for their survival, either," Edmund said. Morgan did have a possessively vindictive streak when directed at his person.

Her eyes met his for a moment and then slid away. "And father, brother, and Peter are all downstairs in your ballroom."

"And yet you are here despite those myriad attractions they pose?"

Morgan swayed at the armrest of his chair; she was trying to kneel but was usually too unsteady on her feet to accomplish it smoothly. He steadied her against his side.
"Always. You are not father, brother, or Peter, and I'm grateful for that every single day."

Edmund let out a sigh and rested his cheek upon her waist. "The younger brother, once a traitor, taciturn, moody and unsociable, ass and brute, and, in your father's view, the overvalued asset or risky start-up venture who is miserable at all Banker sports?"

Morgan bent over and kissed him very gently. "You're Edmund and you are shining, brilliant, and magnificent in your own way and that's why I love you."

ooOOoo

Saint Augustine, Alice decided, was a toad. An insufferable, incomprehensible toad. The monk should have never left his concubines and then she might have been reading something more Rabelaisian. Or, she'd be able to finally really dig into *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, a loan from Major al-Masri. Unfortunately, her extra-curricular reading would have to wait. Instead, she had to wade through *De civitate Dei* and the way Augustine preached on the Christian life made Alice want to sign up with the pagans.

She almost did not hear the timid knock over the noise of pounding her head into her battered desk.

"Yes?"

The door cracked open and two nervous girls in diaphanous dressing gowns peeked in.

The wellies were the give-away.

*Oh not again.*

"It's Lucy Pevensie," Marjorie Preston whispered.

*But of course it was.*

Through tears, Jane Edwards sniffed, "She's gone off. Again."

*And the sun shall rise tomorrow and Cook shall again murder perfectly innocent vegetables in their sleep.*

Alice set her reading glasses down, pinched the bridge of her nose with her fingers and cursed, in the most colourful Welsh she knew, the Communion of Saints, the Roman pantheon, the Hindu avatars, and the Yoruba deities for her utterly half baked decision to become Prefect for the lower forms in this utter asylum. There was an American General - 19th century - who had something to say about it… *If nominated I will not run; if elected I will not serve.*

"Alice?" Jane said through frightened tears. "It's already past curfew."

"Matron will cane her again," Marjorie choked on a sob.

Alice pushed back from her desk, shoved her feet into her own boots, and shrugged into her Mac.

"What was it this time?" She did the calculation in her head and answered her own question. "Lucy quarreled with Reverend Collins, didn't she? After Evensong?"

In Alice's opinion their school vicar was earning himself a very special place somewhere between the sixth and eighth circles of Hell for his continual desecration of sacred text. The Carpenter of Nazareth did not convert to the Anglican faith at the moment of his death on the Cross and Reverend Collins' insistence did not make it so. The thing about facts was that it didn't matter what your
opinion of them was.

"She said the most dreadful things," Jane said in hushed tones of awe.

"Lucy said something about how having a penis did not make the vicar more qualified to preach on Eve's sin, didn't she?"

Jane and Marjorie giggled nervously. They were good girls, bright, sweet, and very loyal to Lucy. Lucy Pevensie, though... Well, Lucy was, Alice had to admit, probably the reason she decided to become a Prefect - that and the room to herself. Their grim, dull school shined much brighter with Lucy in it and Alice would do everything she could to keep the girl there, despite Lucy's best efforts to do otherwise.

She pulled from her bookshelf her massive text on European sacred art - oh sweet gods above and below, why so many Madonnas Con Bambinos?

She set the book on her bed, along with her Bible and French-English dictionary. "Both of you, stay here, on my bed, be very quiet, pretend to be very pious girls learning about divine incarnation and conjugation of French verbs, and don't touch anything in my room or I'll have Lucy cut your tongues out with a penknife. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Alice grabbed her torch and tucked under her arm the Decameron she had borrowed from the school's library in case she was caught and needed an excuse. She knew just where to look. Lucy was probably in a tree again.

It wasn't that she herself should necessarily be creeping about the school at night, either, but Alice's excuses would be believed; Lucy's would not. Lucy had shown her which doors gave way most easily and silently to the rusty key Susan had pinched.

Susan Pevensie was not the quiet, well-mannered girl everyone assumed. Quiet, well-mannered girls did not steal keys from janitors, keep a full set of lockpicks, and have a wardrobe of French haute couture clothing. Then Susan had left, driven away by a Major in British intelligence in a car that had papered up windows and Lucy was left here alone. It was all very dodgy.

Alice let herself out the back door near the gymnasium and crept down the dark path to the school's gardens. Her boots crunched on the gravel that was still a little slippery from the icy rain of earlier in the day.

She heard words that turned into a song that grew louder as she neared the orchard.

Mother took me to the meadow
and she set a duck to rock me
a summerbird to move me.
the duck sang near me many songs
the summerbird did speak.

The clear sounds of Lucy's voice floated through the garden, cutting through the dark, a stronger beacon than Alice's own flickering torch.

From them I, a child, many songs did learn
I, a crazy little thing, came to know words
For this reason, in me there are many words
For this reason, in me there is an abundance of song.

"Lucy?" she called, stopping at the foot of what appeared to be a large fig tree. Of course it was a fig
"Oh, hello, Alice." Lucy's head swung down from a thick tree limb, upside down and with her hair tangled and loose. Her skirt did not flop down over her head because, as expected, Lucy was wearing a pair of trousers.

"Lucy, dear, I hear that you have been upsetting Father Collins again with your outlandish ideas."

Lucy scowled and flipped over to drop to the ground; her footing slipped only a little. Alice had seen evidence of this nimbleness many times - Lucy was very quick on her feet and as sure of herself as the finest athletes in the school.

"He's no right to say that women are inferior, or sinful temptresses, or any of that nonsense. Especially not when I saw him with that maid two nights ago."

Alice filed that information away as a circumstance to avoid if she had to go creeping about the school again. And she knew just which maid had attracted the Reverend's sacred attentions.

"Yes, well, the good Father has been lecturing my form about Saint Augustine. He's full of medieval ideas about the evils of sexuality and the worthlessness of the temporal world at the moment."

"That's just my point!" Lucy cried. "He's the worse sort of hypocrite, blaming us for what he cannot control in himself."

Alice was left to wonder, again, how a girl as young as Lucy could be so very perceptive and sophisticated about such things. Even Alice's own upper form classmates would be merely giggling over some boy in the boarding school on the other side of town.

Lucy stomped her foot and gravel skittered away into the dark. "And people, least of all Reverend Collins, shouldn't claim to instruct on God's will when it is their own wicked prejudices they are trying to push upon the rest of us."

Alice scrubbed her eyes. Yes, the fierce righteousness that burned in Lucy Pevensie warmed the cold stone of Marlhurst-Brockstone and reminded her of the saints in Butler's treatise. She had learned long ago not to question the gifts that came to her, and Lucy was undoubtedly a gift.

"Let's get inside," she said, offering Lucy her hand. "We can talk more but only somewhere where we aren't in danger of earning a caning."

They fortunately managed to sneak back to Alice's room before Jane and Marjorie burned it down trying to light a fire in the grate to make toast. The girls had brought Lucy's nightdress to help complete the fabrication that the three mates were merely meeting for a late night tutorial with their Prefect, toast some bread, and drink a glass of black currant cordial.

Alice had never gotten to the bottom of what had happened over the summer hols amongst this merry band, but she suspected that the meddlesome shrew Anne Featherstone was at the bottom of that sewer. She also thought Lucy was the one who had arranged for the spiders in Anne's bed and the mouse nest in her jumpers. Odd how no one had cared enough to investigate. It had been good riddance to a very meddlesome and nasty snob when Anne flounced off in her family's long sedan.

The girls were all lumped together on her bed with the textbooks and their nightdresses tucked around their feet to ward off the chill.

"I suppose it is not entirely Father Collins' fault," Marjorie said in between contemplative bites of toast.
"Why ever not!" Lucy retorted.

"He is a man," Marjorie began. Alice quickly swallowed her drink. Something outrageous was sure to follow.

"My mum always says that it's their penises. It makes men stupid. They can't help it."

Marjorie's mum was a nurse and her father a doctor, which explained a lot about her selective sophistication.

Lucy had not been prepared for Marjorie's insight and began coughing on a mouthful of toast.

"Spew on my bedclothes, Lucy Pevensie, and next time I shall leave you in the tree to Matron's tender mercies!"

Jane looked up from her careful study of the pictures in Alice's book of Titian's Adam and Eve and Ghiberti's doors on the Florentine Baptistery. "I think Marjorie's on to something. Maybe that explains why Adam took the fruit without asking questions. I always did think it was rather unfair to blame Eve for his stupidity."

The art book was good for another half an hour of muted laughter and Lucy was showing an alarming interest in the depictions of Bacchus. When Marjorie and Jane started yawning into their hands, Alice bundled them up and escorted them back to their dormitory. She didn't say anything, but by unspoken accord, Lucy remained behind.

By the time she returned, Lucy had thoughtfully returned the theology, art, and French books to their place on the shelf and, unfortunately, found Alice's collection of *Letters to Peace Lovers*. Alice was always careful to hide her anti-war and socialist propaganda. Really, why couldn't the girl have found something more explainable and acceptable, like the illegal copies of *Fanny Hill* and *Well of Loneliness* that her mother had given her for Christmas?

"Please keep this between us or I'll lock the door on you the next time you yearn to feel the wind in your hair in the middle of the night," Alice said crisply.

"Why?" Lucy asked, pulling her nose out of Vera Brittain's newsletter. "What's wrong with these? They are very well-written."

"It's the message. Peace is not patriotic."

Lucy narrowed her eyes in that way that Alice knew usually meant something un-girl-like would follow. "Maybe. I would need to think about that more. I think it's brilliant that she's also arguing that there is a moral obligation to take care of the victims of war."

"As I said, that's not a popular view. The position of our government is total war, total victory and the civilians who have the misfortune to live on the wrong side of the border are the responsibility of the occupier." *And so the Greeks and the rest of Europe can just starve.*

Lucy frowned and looked down again. "Ordinary people shouldn't be punished because they got occupied or because their government is irresponsible or backed the wrong side."

Alice yawned. "No argument from me but, as I said, keep those views quiet. Get too vocal about it and people get prosecuted for encouraging disaffection amongst the troops and providing aid and comfort to the enemy."

"Victims of war are not enemies," Lucy replied, so firmly Alice could but wonder at the source.
"If you let me borrow these, I won't demand you return Archbishop Temple's books," Lucy said.

Fair enough. Alice put out her hand and they shook on the trade. "Now, budge over, Pevensie. You might be able to stay up all night, and sleep through morning chapel but I still have to listen to the not-so-pious Collins drone about Augustine in a few hours."

Lucy's eyes went wide and, for that moment, she looked like the girl she appeared to be but really wasn't. "I can stay?"

"For what is left of tonight, yes. I know you miss Susan and I'll miss her before term ends if you keep running off like this."

Lucy scooted over closer to the wall, squirmed under the scratchy sheets and lay down; Alice turned off the light and climbed in next to her. She wadded up her dressing gown for an extra pillow and shoved it under Lucy's head. She pulled the wool blanket up over both of them.

"I'm sorry, Alice," Lucy said, for the first time sounding like she really meant it.

Alice felt real fear for where Lucy was headed. "I know it's dreadful, Lucy. Places like Marlhurst-Brockstone aren't good for people like you. I wish you could just keep your head down and your ears shut when idiots like Reverend Collins open their mouths."

Lucy sniffed. "I'm not very good at that. I can't just sit by and say and do nothing."

Alice rolled over and kissed her on the temple, just the way her own sister had before she went off to work at the Naval Combined Operations in Liverpool and died there in the Christmas Blitz two years ago.

"You have to get better at it, Lucy, or you won't be here for long."

Chapter 17 to follow, Crow is not Peter and goes to Washington; Heart goes to a meeting.

This part with Alice first appeared several years ago in a comment fic begun by Animus_Wyrmis. It includes a few lines modified from lines written by Animus, Metonomia, or Lady_songsmith. The song Lucy sings is provided courtesy of OldFashionedGirl95. It is an Estonian composition, Lauliku lapsepoli, composed and arranged by Veljo Tormis.

The Total War doctrine and its impact upon the starving civilians of Europe will be appearing in subsequent chapters. The Wiki entry on "total war" gives examples of the doctrine and refers to Winston Churchill's speech, The Few, delivered to the House of Commons on August 20, 1940.

The characters mentioned in Edmund's flashback with Morgan are featured more fully in By Royal Decree and Harold and Morgan:; Not A Romance. My thanks to Heliopause who some time ago mentioned the significance of Gretna Green and the Scottish marital rites that were practiced. It became commonplace (and still occurs today) that couples exchange vows over an anvil in the presence of a blacksmith - it's a bit like a Las Vegas Elvis wedding, I think. I've taken the liberty of suggesting that Frank and Helen had a Scottish wedding.

Links and notes are in my Live Journal.
On a more personal note, wow, yes, it's been a long time. I am sorry. I have done some fic writing - I wrote *Rat and Sword Go To War, Narnians Assemble*, a lot of *Harold and Morgan*, and some of the TSG AU where everybody lives and nobody dies because the inexorable march to the train crash became too depressing, one reason for the long delay here In those AU stories, I married Peter off to Mary Russell and turned him into an MP, killed Tebbit, Asim, and Richard, married Lucy to Jack, and introduced Edmund's partner, his wife, Miriam. I've had lots of writing work that pays the mortgage, too.

I promise more regular updates as I bring Lucy and Edmund's story to where Susan and Peter's story left off in *Rat and Sword Go To War*.

Through this dark time, I have been buoyed by two things. First, I have been deeply inspired by the occasional kind words heard from a new reader or an old reader who goes back and comments or reviews. It helps to know that some people still are interested even as fannish interests move on to other things and the tenor and complexion of this site becomes increasingly hostile to those who fail to adhere to particular view of the *Chronicles*. Second, Starbrow and OldFashionedGirl95 have been unstintingly generous in their support and have held my hand as I gingerly picked up the story again. My thanks.

If you are still interested and reading, do let me know. Thank you for your patience and support.
Kiss me like a soldier headed for war

Chapter Summary

Col. George Walker-Smythe dines with two Pevensies: one is a Crow; the other is an Ass. Edmund begins a tale for Morgan.

Apostolic Way,
Chapter 17, Kiss me like a soldier heading for war

Col. George Walker-Smythe dines with two Pevensies: one is a Crow; the other is an Ass. Edmund begins a tale for Morgan.

"The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it."
Ernest Hemingway

"Promise me you'll never forget me because if I thought you would I'd never leave."
A.A. Milne, Winnie the Pooh

Chapter title from Joking by Indigo Girls

Note: The chapter includes, as much of this arc will, a look back. Chapters 20 and 22 of The Queen Susan in Tashbaan and Chapter 4 of Apostolic Way have had flashbacks to a day and night in the immediate aftermath of Horse and His Boy: Peter and Susan meet and discuss Rabadash and the death of their sword master, the Satyr, Sir Leszi; Peter coaxes Leszi's son, Cyrus, out of a tree; Peter and Edmund talk of Leszi's farewell and Aslan's charge to love those you don't like very much; Morgan attends the farewell for Sir Leszi, her first since Jina's death, and speaks on behalf of those the soldiers leave behind; Edmund tells Morgan a little of the mole spies and the death of his first Guard, Merle.

This chapter begins and concludes with another look back to the evening of Leszi's farewell. In between, there is a very awkward dinner and because people tend to forget (I know I have to look it up), Colonel Walker-Smythe's first name is George.

Harold said that the dancing and drinking at Leszi's Farewell bonfire had a sharp edge. She didn't really have anything to compare it to as Morgan had avoided the ceremonies for the last three years, ever since she had died. Morgan had not even gone to Wrasse's Farewell, and she'd known and liked the smug Black Leopard.

After the speeches and Farewell, she and Cyrus raced beetles with the Crows and she tried to help the boy with his father's death. Then the Crows started to eat the beetles and Morgan decided it was time for Cyrus to spend the rest of the evening with the other children.

The other children.

That was a change for the better.
Overnight, Cair Paravel had filled with the Archen children who had arrived with Aidan – his own son and daughter and his niece and nephews. Being around children wasn't unusual for Morgan as the Banking Houses had been similar, with generations living together and youngsters educated communally. She had frequently taught classes.

It was a lot noisier with children about. They ate a lot though that was in part because Aidan's family had never had enough to eat before. They never slowed down. Most of the Narnians didn't have much experience with Human children, so that was fun, too, seeing how they would try to herd them, ask if they needed to nurse, or try to carry them around in their mouths. And best of all, the Narnians were really shocked to learn, *They are like this for years?!*

She walked with Harold about the bonfire and together they gave their thanks to the Dwarf and Faun musicians for the wild, haunting music, to the Dryads who gave their dead wood for the fire, and to the Satyroi who had lost one of their own. The Satyroi had returned Leszi's body to his mother in the Trees and that night Pan would come and take the body and some day remake a Satyr in Leszi's likeness.

Many thanked her for how she had spoken at the Farewell for the small, the weak, the young and the old who stayed behind worrying for those who had gone to war on their behalf. Morgan had stood with those who had prepared to make their own fierce but frail last stand at Cair Paravel if their loved ones failed against Rabadash's raiders at Anvard or fell to Ettins on the northern border as Leszi had.

She and Harold skirted around a screeching little mob at the base of a kindly Oak. Cyrus was perched in a branch and exhorting the other children to *just jump* – which was easy if you had the agility of a Goat, or a Satyr.

"I wouldn't trust one of them to fetch a bucket of water," Harold grumbled.

"Frieda is very responsible," Morgan countered, speaking in defence of the eldest of the Archen children. "I'm sure she's been taking care of all of them. Briony likes her very well."

Harold steered them, arm and arm, away from the blazing heat and light of the fire, the shrieks, wild music, and hysterical laughter. It felt cooler and calmer; she wriggled her bare feet and felt lush grass between her toes. He was angling in the direction of the Palace and Morgan knew his purpose. They'd not had time to do more than skim the verse and illustrations in volume 4 of the book he'd scrounged in Tashbaan. Efforts at performance had been truncated, at best.

"I think I am feeling my age," Harold said and ran a hand through his hair. "Riding to a siege has a way of prompting self-examination."

Morgan shivered and put her head on his shoulder. "Yes, it does."

His arm tightened around her. "I know it was difficult, but it is what we must do to defend our country," Harold said softly. "We've been fortunate that such things are far less common than they once were."

"Knowing doesn't make the doing any easier," she replied.

He leaned in and kissed her temple. "For my part, I think sitting and waiting as we rode off is far worse. By all accounts, you were indispensable."

"I didn't like it, Edmund." Morgan had learned when she should use his real name and she knew he liked it when she remembered to do so.

"And yet I hear you were an admirable inspiration and leader through this crisis."
"It was what had to be done," she replied, conceding his ability to elicit from her what he had also admitted.

It had been terrible. The day Harold and Susan had sailed to Tashbaan, the High King and most of the Army had ridden north to beat back the Ettin incursion. Morgan had remained with Lucy at Cair Paravel. Morgan had assumed responsibility for sending and receiving the regular, and increasingly dire, messages from both quarters. Lucy responded to the rising crisis by wearing her chain mail, strapping her sword to her back, lashing dagger and cordial at her side, striding about, tall and firm, giving orders, and instilling confidence wherever she went.

"Put a fighting face on!" Lucy had exhorted. "If you look brave, everyone will think they can be brave, too."

Morgan had been terrified but, with Mrs. Furner's help, she'd found boots and tough leathers so she looked the part of a leader - well, second to Lucy's command. She made an effort to speak very clearly and give opinions about personnel and orders about supplies as decisively as she spoke on finance.

The reports of Leszi's death in the north and Susan and Edmund's flight from Tashbaan in the dead of night arrived the same day. She and Lucy both thought reprisal from Calormen for the insult to be a real threat. With most of the standing Army with the High King and Narnia not equipped to fight on two fronts, Lucy called up the reserves and organized their defence.

Morgan took charge of the preparations to lay in for a siege. Every Narnian with a nose knew she was frightened and anyone with sense was as well. But Morgan knew what the Palace needed day to day, knew how many would likely shelter there, and knew what their needs would be. She could count jugs of oil, barrels of grain, nuts, roots, and water, and see that tinder; forage, herds and flocks were brought inside the Palace walls. If she said that there would be enough fodder for every Narnian within Cair Paravel (and refugees as well) for a month (and there was), it was so. She realized her confident assurances helped the Narnians, too, in a way. What she did was different than what Lucy did or what the Army and the High King were doing, but it was important nonetheless.

The Splendour Hyaline was sighted, and no sooner had she docked, then Chervy had burst in warning of the attack upon Anvard. They'd disembarked, Edmund and Lucy rode off to war, and Morgan could do nothing but wait and prepare for what happened if their pathetically small fighting force fell to Rabadash and his 200 horse.

"Why don't we go inside?" Harold murmured, a simple soldier returned from war and wanting nothing more than to return to his own bed and make love to his wife. Morgan followed her husband into the Palace.

Having known the sister so well, George didn't make the same mistakes with her brother. George assumed from the outset that Edmund Pevensie's identity card and passport were lies. George had concluded that Susan Caspian née Pevensie was in her early 30s. After careful observation on their first day of traveling, George thought her brother was, perhaps, a few years younger.

Brother and sister were cut of the same fine, rich cloth, had the same quality of mature self-possession, and carried themselves with the same confidence and certitude. There were important differences, too. Mrs. Caspian dominated rooms with her presence; even when sitting in a corner taking her strange shorthand, she would draw attention. Mrs. Caspian had been helpful, efficient, organized and, yes, proud, so much so that one had the sense that she was deigning to do the task at hand. Crowds parted before her.
If Edmund Pevensie possessed the same commanding presence as his sister, and he likely did, George had not seen it, yet. More notable, in part because his sister had not acted so, was Edmund's remarkable knack for disappearing into the woodwork. Your eyes could slide right by him. Edmund could move silently; more than once, he had been startled to discover Pevensie reading over his shoulder and George hadn't even known he was there. He slipped without comment or instruction into the role of courier, bag carrier, coffee-fetcher, door opener, and notetaker. He could become practically invisible, except that he was always there.

Edmund Pevensie was a natural spy.

At the moment he was doing a damnable impression of George's longtime batman and junior aide. Their train crawled into New York's Grand Central Station and it was a mad crush of humanity in bulky coats, blasting heat, freezing cold, dirty stairs, poor signage, and shins banged on errant suitcases and steamer trunks. Pevensie handled the whole of the chaos with easy aplomb. He tipped the porter, carried their luggage, and found the taxi stand without George directing him.

"You've not been here before, have you?" George finally asked as they queued up outside in the snowy cold, jostling uncomfortably against the many people and their many, many precious possessions.

"No, Colonel," Pevensie replied, tilting his hat back and looking in the direction of the Chrysler Building. "I am, however, a very good logistics man."

The most ridiculous thing about so conceited a statement was that Pevensie was absolutely correct.

Steam billowed up around them from beneath the pavement – George always thought it made New York look like it was built on hell. The heat melted the snow into grimy pools. "New York City usually elicits a greater reaction from the first time visitor."

"It is very impressive, particularly the lack of damage and the sense of normality. You would hardly know there was a war on." Pevensie straightened his fedora, flexed his hands in his gloves, bent down, and picked up their cases. "Given the queue for a taxi, should we just walk, Colonel? Rockefeller Centre is only eight blocks north."

One of the benefits of being preceded by Mrs. Caspian was that the office girls at the British Security Coordination offices were happy to assist their much-admired friend's brother when he arrived. George left Pevensie in the care of the exceedingly competent secretarial pool with instructions on the clothing and paperwork he needed to acquire and then directing him to a training session with the drivers who operated the BSC motor pool.

A series of interminable meetings began about the just-completed Casablanca Conference between Churchill and Roosevelt. George briefed the SOE staff and Stephenson on what he'd learned in London. With the Africa campaign concluding, it was time to begin inroads into Fortress Europe. Churchill had prevailed and convinced Roosevelt that securing the Mediterranean and proceeding through the soft, vulnerable underbelly of Southern Europe should be next – Italy. Operation Husky was laid in for the summer and the planning for the invasion of Sicily begun.

The Combined Chiefs would continue meeting in Washington and devise a plan that would be submitted to General Eisenhower who was charged with implementing the invasion. In the meetings, George reviewed the latest, and to date, wildest, ruse the Twenty Committee had approved – Operation Mincemeat contemplated rigging a corpse to wash ashore in Spain with faked battle plans. Even assuming the Odysseus in Room 13 could pull it off, diverting Nazi attention from Sicily would require more than a later day Trojan Horse. For their contribution, the SOE could make use of Hitler's Balkan paranoia and would try to devise other ways to send the Nazis haring off toward...
Greece and away from Sicily.

All war was deception and the SOE, with enough resources and time, could bamboozle the Nazis into thinking the Allies were tunneling their way into Berlin like moles.

They were just concluding meeting number four, which involved maps of the Mediterranean and North Africa and a lot of coffee, when George received a note that Pevensie had completed his assigned tasks in the offices, spent two hours behind the wheel of a car in New York City traffic without a citation or casualty, had collected their luggage and checked them into the adjacent hotel. The envelope included the key, room number, hotel telephone number, and information on dinner, where they were both invited to be the guests of Lieutenant John Pevensie at 8 o'clock at the Rainbow Room. If the Colonel required anything further, he was to send a note to the receptionist, Virginia, who knew to forward the request on to Edmund, now Private, Pevensie.

Pevensie's handwriting was as beautiful as his sister's.

George excused himself as the ice was being fetched and the cocktails stirred, citing a long travel day and a dinner obligation. Their hotel was a privately run inn, just across the Plaza, all very discreet and anonymously hosting foreign nationals doing dirty work in violation of American law and sovereignty.

He didn't bother to knock and just used the recently oiled key Pevensie had provided.

"Good evening, Sir." Edmund was sitting at the desk, bent over an American driving manual, and stood to help George with his valise and overcoat. The room was Spartan, small, green, and with two tiny beds shoved under a perfunctory window that looked out onto the brick wall of the adjacent building.

"The hotel has a safe, Sir. Should I have your bag removed there?" Pevensie asked, while using a towel to whisk rain droplets away from bag, coat, and his own shoulders.

"That's well thought of, but there's no need."

George could see Edmund had made good use of his time. Their clothes were hung up, kits were in the washroom, and there was a thermos and coffee cups and a bottle of rum.

A worn Private's uniform hung from a hanger over the door. There were crisp, new uniforms in the BSC inventory, so Pevensie must have deliberately chosen an old one. The man was excruciatingly, exhaustingly clever.

With Pevensie claiming the desk, there wasn't anywhere else to sit so George tested the far bed and was pleased that the mattress did not sink all the way to the floor. A decent bed was rarer in the War than good Scotch or genuine chocolate. His accommodation in Washington was ghastly in that regard.

"I thought one went to school to not be a valet, Pevensie. Where did you collect this set of talents?"

"Careful observation of those skilled at it, Sir."

Mrs. Caspian had referred to the mysterious Cook and Edmund had experience with the manservant of an Officer and Gentleman, as well as a logistics and supply officer? This fleet of personal servants was not consistent with the family's middle-class life. He had to just accept the Pevensie mystery and mercilessly use its fruits. This did not mean, however, that his curiosity had abated. He was looking forward to having Agnes read Edmund Pevensie's Tarot and discussing Jungian archetypes with her.
"And how were your meetings, Sir?"

Pevensie could not contain the sharp gleam of interest in his vague, polite question. Well, it was why George had twisted rules into a corkscrew – if all he wanted was a batman, he would have plucked one from the regular enlisted ranks.

"There's work to be done in Washington but I wouldn't be surprised if we end up back in London by summer's end. No need for the long looks," George added as Pevensie's countenance drooped.

"We'll be going back because that's where the real work will be."

"So I would not have to…"

"I'll have to send you back to school next January, but not until then. Torch was the beginning of the end; or the end of the beginning. There are two big operations to come in the European theater – securing the Mediterranean this year and then what will be the final, big drive in '44. You and I will be in the middle of the first and in the planning for the second."

George reached over to the nightstand and grabbed the bottle of rum to inspect the label of what was actually a decent Jamaican brand. Pevensie must have tipped someone in the hotel or asked a member of the motor pool where to find the bottle.

Pevensie began re-tying his tie – a silent reminder that dinner was approaching. George thought he caught a wistful glance at the Private's uniform.

"Why continue wearing the suit and not the uniform?" George asked. Given how well he'd been living the cover, it was surprising and it would be good for him to get accustomed to the uniform.

"Ironic, isn't it?" Pevensie replied, fastening his silver cuff link. "A fighting fit man my age wants nothing more and now the opportunity is here and I'm in my father's altered suit. I had thought, however, that for this evening, the uniform would simply invite more distracting questions."

George tilted his head back on the bed and considered the situation. He'd hoped to meet Lieutenant John Pevensie in advance of dinner but the man had been out of the BSC offices for the day. Other than a brief aside before they left England and the note that afternoon, this was the first comment Pevensie had made of his so-far absent father.

Lieutenant Pevensie had made very persistent efforts to bring his son, Peter, to America but had been curiously silent on both his daughter's previous activities and her and Edmund's recruitment into the SOE now. He'd assumed silence was acquiescence but perhaps that had been unduly optimistic? Would Lieutenant Pevensie kick up an embarrassing fuss now that his son was already here even though he'd apparently expressed no particular interest before?

George had done his research and most singular was how so apparently unremarkable a man had fathered Mrs. Caspian and Edmund Pevensie. Gladys Gardner, his secretary at the Embassy, knew all about Lieutenant Pevensie through the office girl network and provided more colour to the gray SOE file.

"Bottom-pincher," Gladys had said. "He's generous, good-looking, talks a lot about his work, and will buy a girl drinks and a nice dinner at the Rainbow Room or Delmonico's. He's a very good dancer."

"But it's not altruism?" he'd asked for confirmation. Gladys had laughed.

"No girl has been let go for saying no to Lieutenant Pevensie, not that they say no very often, to hear the gossip," Gladys had said. "He doesn't wear his wedding ring in the office but can forget to hide
the pictures in his rooms of his wife and children. He will pay for a girl's taxi home."

With Glady's insightful reporting, George had felt an uncomfortable prick of unaccustomed guilt. Catarina, his lover, now doing advance intelligence work in Italy, sympathized more with his wife, which he'd always thought prodigiously unsporting. He did not like to think on how his daughter might view the matter.

So, he was walking into a dinner with a young man and his disinterested, philandering father? How much did Edmund know? George watched as Edmund carefully inspected his father's suit coat and dusted off a day's lint and city soot. Mrs. Caspian had managed men with superb and subtle sophistication – she knew how to flirt and, more importantly, knew when to do so. His brief observation of Edmund Pevensie that afternoon had shown a well-mannered man who was polite to the women of the BSC secretarial pool, without being condescending. This was not surprising, he supposed, as Mrs. Caspian would certainly not tolerate such behavior from a younger sibling. Edmund probably knew a fair bit about his father, and suspected far more.

George cleared his throat. "I did try to track your father down at the office but he wasn't there today. I had thought it best if I joined you for dinner so I could answer any questions he might have about the arrangement and your duties. If you would rather…"

"No, Sir," Pevensie said quickly. "It is best if you come. I don't think he would challenge your decision, but…" He paused. "But you should know my father may be disappointed, or angry."

George stood up and held out his arms so Pevensie could help him into his overcoat. "Don't worry. I'll be damned if I'm sending you back before I've gotten full use out of you. If your father is difficult, I can pull rank on him. He is only a Lieutenant."

ooOOoo

Lieutenant Pevensie was late.

He had booked them at the very posh Rainbow Room, which was on the 65th floor of the RCA Building and afforded spectacular views. As "Oh yes, of course, we are so glad to welcome any personal guests of Lieutenant Pevensie," he and Edmund were shown promptly to a very nice, private table. They jostled a little for the prime seat but having come all this way, George made Edmund take the seat by the window. George took for himself the better view of the restaurant's interior though it was so dark and the atmosphere was so smoky, he could barely see across the table.

"I would have thought we'd have to be in an airplane for a sight like this," Edmund said, staring out the window at Manhattan below.

A waitress appeared for their cocktail order and didn't even blink when Edmund asked for a rum, neat. He was polite, but spoke in a clipped, authoritative way that assumed compliance would follow. Edmund had abandoned the silent, observant, invisible clerk role and assumed the regal air and bearing his elder sister possessed – which was presumably the same kingly mien that Major al-Masri had said he had seen in Peter.

George indulged in a glass of good American whiskey. Depending upon his dealings with Lieutenant Pevensie, he might need another two or three. Or, he and Edmund could get drunk on the bottle of rum back in the hotel room after the dinner.

"I know rum is easy to come by here on the East Coast of America. Still, with your proclivity for it, maybe we should have enlisted you in the Navy," George said after the waitress returned with their drinks.
"That did occur to me for several reasons, not the least of which was the grog ration and historically lenient enlistment practices." Edmund swirled the drink in his glass, took a sip, and set the glass down again. "And, unlike my elder brother, I do have sea legs. However, the Army did seem easier under the circumstances."

Edmund turned away from the window and looked about the restaurant. He was fiddling with a matchbook, the only obvious sign of nerves.

"The train is probably late," George said, though it irked him to make excuses to the man's son. "Or maybe he could not get a taxi."

A jovial voice rose above the low conversation and clinking dinnerware in the restaurant. "Thank you, Margaret; I'll see myself to their table!"

Edmund's head snapped about. He swiftly rose from his seat and wiped his hands on his – his father's – suit trousers.

The man himself strode toward them, revealing to George what the file had not about a 41-year old editor at a publishing house turned SOE functionary. Lieutenant John Pevensie was tall, trim, and carried the athlete's physique from his Cambridge crew and hurdler days. He was blonde, which for some reason, George had not expected.

In the way he was moving his hands, George saw that Lieutenant Pevensie was hurriedly sliding his wedding ring onto his ring finger. He was therefore also an idiot if he thought his perceptive son would not notice such a manoeuvre.

Rising, from his own chair, George's doubts about the man settled to firm dislike. He didn't proffer a hand to shake and forced Pevensie to give him the proper salute owed his superior officer.

"Sir, Lieutenant Pevensie, Sir."

"Colonel Walker-Smythe, Lieutenant, and I'm very pleased that your son agreed to be my personal assistant for the next year."

Edmund moved out of the shadows in his seat by the window and stuck out his hand. "Hello, Father. You are looking well."

"Edmund," Pevensie said, not quite a question but definitely not an endorsement, either. There was no embrace or joy in this reunion. The handshake was lukewarm at best. In what was surely one of the most misdirected attempts at humour George had ever witnessed, the man quipped, "Well, you certainly aren't Peter!"

"No," Edmund replied evenly. "I'm not."

Lieutenant Pevensie turned to George, looking confused and, as Edmund had predicted, he sounded angry. "I do not understand this. What is Edmund doing here? When I saw the wire two days ago, I assumed it was just a mistake. I thought Peter had changed his mind and was coming after all."

They were all still standing, which leant a confrontational air to the whole exchange.

"No mistake, Lieutenant. I extended the invitation to Edmund, not to Peter, and he accepted."

"But he's only thirteen!"

"Private Edmund Pevensie is eighteen." George was certain Edmund had lived almost twice that
long. And, come to think of it, the current — and false—passport said Edmund was fifteen, which meant Lieutenant Pevensie did not know how old his own son was even by the standards of the lying birth records.

"This is all highly irregular," the Lieutenant said.

"It certainly is," George agreed. "But given for whom we work and the charter under which we operate, I assure you such things are not unusual, either."

George spoke the lie confidently. It wasn't that it was necessarily untrue – it was, more accurately, unknowable as those who were party to such arrangements didn't speak of them.

"I can't imagine what possessed my wife to sign whatever consents were necessary to part with her precious children." The man was speaking as if one of his precious children was not standing right before him. It left George wondering if one of his precious children had come from the mother. Helen Pevensie knew her children were remarkable and understood why he had sponsored and recruited them. She had seen it as her patriotic duty to permit her three eldest children into the War.

"I requested it and it was done," George said, daring the man to counter the order. "Are we clear, Lieutenant?"

Finally, there was a look of grudging acceptance in the Lieutenant's mien. "I see. Yes, Colonel, I understand."

"Again, allow me to say it is a pleasure and honour to bring your son to Washington with me. Shall we be seated?"

ooO00oo

There was not enough rum and whiskey in New York to make the dinner anything but painful. The conversation moved readily enough when they stuck to the War. The Casablanca directive and Stalingrad lasted them through the cocktails, ordering and first course. George was holding Guadalcanal and North Africa in reserve for coffee after the plates had been cleared. Before a lull could become truly uncomfortable, Edmund skillfully put questions to his father that elicited long-winded explanations about his propaganda work with U.S. publishers and writers.

It was exceedingly dull, except for the remarkable fact that British spies were manipulating American public opinion in favor of Allied war policy.

There were three excruciatingly awkward instances when attractive young women approached Lieutenant Pevensie, asked to be introduced to his dinner companions, and inquired whether the men would be staying for the dancing at the nightclub later.

With effort, George was able to avoid covert glances to see how Edmund was managing the women's blatant flirtation, which was plainly occurring now because his father had reciprocated in the past.

The third time, even Lieutenant Pevensie was embarrassed when a pretty blonde pouted at the news that they would not be staying and sashayed back to the bar.

"With so many men deployed, this happens," Pevensie muttered, glancing at his son.

"Yes," Edmund replied. "It does."
Into the uncomfortable pause that followed, Pevensie suddenly pointed at his son's dinner plate, and said loudly, "And I see it's the same as always with you, Edmund! You've hardly eaten your dinner!"

The effort was so falsely jocular, Lieutenant Pevensie surely was trying to deflect undesirable attention from himself by belittling his son. Edmund looked down at his meal and opened his mouth to say something, but Pevensie went on.

"It was just like that, even when he was a baby, Colonel. Edmund was always fussy, always too hot or too cold, didn't want anyone to touch him or change his soiled nappy. He was a dreadfully picky eater. It was utter chaos in the evenings. And great Scott, his sleeping! His mother didn't get more than three hours a night for the year after he was born!"

A dreadful pall fell over the table. George knew that if he had spoken so condescendingly to his own daughter, she would have, justifiably, thrown water in his face and stomped off.

Edmund pulled his eyes up from the stirred food on his plate and George made note of the expression in the hope that he never saw it again. "Fortunately, my mother forgave me for the faults of infancy, as any parent must."

George burst into laughter at the sharp riposte.

"And speaking of children," Edmund continued with a grace that surely was practiced and most assuredly not deserved by its beneficiary, "Father, would you like to hear of Lucy, Susan, and Peter?"

Edmund began spinning little tales of Christmas crammed to the rafters with friends and family, a very fresh pudding, and a lewd dance called the Jitterbug. It sounded rehearsed to George's ear and his esteem for the young Private rose another notch because Edmund must have been mentally preparing scripts for this ordeal. Edmund cajoled photos from his father's wallet and George was treated to tender familial recollections from before the War. Peter, who bore a striking physical resemblance to his father, or Susan, usually held Lucy who, in the oldest pictures was still in a nappy; in the most recent, she had a doll. Edmund was usually scowling at the restraining hand on his wrist or shoulder.

"I used to hate standing still for pictures," Edmund said, neatly deflecting another critique before his father could utter it. "I still dislike being the focus of attention, whether in photographs or elsewhere."

"It's a highly commendable quality in our line of work," George said, complimenting Edmund when his father did not.

"I've always thought so," Edmund replied, looking pleased nonetheless.

His father was holding a candid family picture from the Lake District. "This was our last holiday together before the War, Lucy went everywhere with that dolly. We gave it to her when she was five. I am certain I could find a new one here and send it to her."

"She gave that doll to another London evacuee we met whilst at the Professor's during the Blitz," Edmund said.

"So she does need a new one?"

"Not a doll," Edmund said kindly. "Lucy is very fond of pocketknives."

Lieutenant Pevensie shook his head, whether in disagreement or disbelief, George could not say.
"And Susan? How is my big girl?" Pevensie turned toward him. "You met her, didn't you, Walker-Smythe? She's absolute rubbish in school, but, by Jove, she's pretty enough to marry well."

Edmund's eyes narrowed – the man was having difficulty letting slights upon his sister's competency go unanswered. George felt his own equanimity giving way. His own daughter had felt to be a stranger when he'd seen her at Christmas but how could Mrs. Caspian's own father be so fecklessly dismissive of her? Was the man blind?

George set his glass down hard enough to rattle the silverware and water glasses. "Lieutenant, your daughter rendered outstanding service to our offices last summer and I think very highly of her acumen. It was in part upon her recommendation that I invited Edmund."

Pevensie laughed. "I'm sure she will be quite the head turner, Colonel, but as her father, I insist that Susan is too young for that sort of thing!"

George was furious that Pevensie was again trying to foist on to others the same shortcomings of character and understanding he possessed. But before his severe reprimand formed, George felt a sharp pain in his instep and an even sharper look from Edmund that said as plainly as if shouted, "Let it pass."

Instead of giving Lieutenant Pevensie the dressing down he deserved, George signaled their hostess for coffee. It was time to get out of there and get into that comfortable bed at the hotel and pretend that this ghastly ordeal had never occurred.

Lieutenant Pevensie's hand shook as he raised his drink to take another deep swallow. "And about that invitation to come here, Edmund, please, can you explain, why did Peter enlist? If he had just waited two years, the War would be over. And if he wanted to serve so badly, why didn't he come to New York? He has such a bright future ahead of him. Working here would advance his career prospects. It makes no sense!"

Pevensie had had one rum tonic too many because he was becoming maudlin and very discursive.

Edmund reached across the table and pushed a glass of water into his father's hand. "With all respect, sir, Peter wants to be a paratrooper and he wants to fly in the Glider Corps. It's a good place for him and he'll be under good command."

"But as a common RO?!" His slurring voice rose, high-pitched, even above the noise in the restaurant. Edmund tried to shake his father's arm and quiet him but Lieutenant Pevensie was having none of it. "Peter had invitations to Officer Training! He broke four records in the OTC games!" The Lieutenant stared again at the picture on the table of his very young children on holiday and very delicately returned the much creased photograph to his wallet. "I don't understand it, Ed."

"Peter will do what Peter will do, Father, and you will have more success moving Gibraltar once he settles upon a course," Edmund replied. "Peter believes he should be wearing the winged horse of the 6th Airborne and we all agree with that decision."

George wondered who the we was and assumed Edmund was speaking of his siblings - it was a curious turn of phrase he filed away for later consideration.

"But why is he set on being common fodder for Nazi guns? He's throwing away what we always wanted for him; it's just a waste of everything he was meant to be."

Edmund leaned forward and set his hand on his father's arm. "Father, Peter is prepared to make the same sacrifices to our cause that we are all called to make. But, I assure you, he is not foolishly
courting death."

"You lot don't know what you are about," Pevensie said bitterly. "What does Peter know of command or war or death? What do you know of it? This isn't the tin soldiers you play with on the drawing room floor."

ooOOoo

They poured Lieutenant Pevensie into a taxi. The father's farewell of his son was at least sincere. The awkward handshake became an embrace. Edmund, however, fabricated on the spot an excuse about meeting commitments preventing their breakfasting together and train schedules demanding departure which prevented a luncheon engagement.

"Do come to Washington, Father, and I shall try to come up here," Edmund said. "With us both so close, we have no excuse."

George could think of several.

It was a short, cold, silent walk back to their hotel.

His patience with family drama had reached the breaking point. "We need to open that bottle," George said once they were back in the room. Pevensie was fussing with hanging up coats.

"Leave them!" George barked and put his coat over a doorknob. "Take off that tie," he ordered, while pulling off his own. "And pour the two of us some rum."

"Yes, Sir, right away, Sir," Pevensie replied. He dutifully removed his tie and draped it over the desk chair, shrugged out of his jacket, tossed his cuff links on the desk, rolled up the shirtsleeves, fetched two glasses from the washroom and poured the drinks.

"You take orders well, Private."

"I do, Sir."

George sat again on his bed and Pevensie returned to his desk chair. They both raised their glasses and after muted "Cheers," drank.

He waited until he saw some of the tension leach out from behind Pevensie's eyes.

"This is damned fine rum," George said. "It's a good choice."

"I'm glad you like it, Sir. I'll make note of it."

"You did very well tonight, too, but wearing the suit was a mistake. I don't want to see you in it again unless there's a damned better reason for it."

"I understand, Sir. The..." Pevensie paused, hesitated, and flushed with embarrassment over conduct that was not his own but that his mere presence had precipitated. "I realize now that the awkwardness would have come regardless and thank you for your efforts to defuse it."

He could see why Mrs. Caspian had associated the Justice card of the Tarot with her brother. Edmund had maintained the maturity his father had lacked and had been more generous than his father had certainly deserved. He really wanted Agnes' views of Private Pevensie. Maybe he'd have him wear the suit that one time for Agnes and see what she made of it.

"About some of the things your father said." It was galling to try to soften such appalling behavior
and George wasn't going to try to psychoanalyze someone who was a subordinate and not a patient. But he also couldn't let it just sit and fester. He remembered enough from his training in Vienna and in the years of observation since to know that such things could destroy relationships and ego, with terrible consequences. "I'm not excusing it but when a man is alone, away from his family, he wants to think that everything will be exactly as he left it, that nothing will ever change…"

Pevensie held up his hand. "Thank you, Colonel, but, with all due respect, I am aware of the phenomenon." His eyes drifted to the journal on the desk, he took a deep breath and some of the tension left his shoulders. "When you ride to war, so to speak, you fix in your mind's eye a vision that will hold you through the horror you must deliver at your own hand. Protecting that vision is why you leave, why you are willing to kill, and why you keep fighting to come home again."

George did not think such passionate words were a mere theoretical exercise. He should really stop being surprised at this point. Mrs. Caspian could have instructed her own father on the subjects of command, war, killing, and death. It stood to reason that her brother could as well. Edmund's words were those of a seasoned soldier.

"Also, Colonel, my apologies for that pain to your foot. I did not deem it a conversation we could carry given my father's limited understanding." Pevensie again seemed embarrassed for behavior that he was not responsible for in any way. "It is regrettable but his ignorance could not be corrected under the circumstances. He has hardly seen us at all since the War started."

His mother had said the change in her children had its roots in their evacuation during the Blitz. Lieutenant Pevensie's ignorance of the dramatic changes was therefore explained, but his blindness to what had been sitting in front of him could not be excused.

"It hurt like hell, so let's work out better ways to communicate for next time? Given what you and your sister concocted, I expect codes and hand signals are a specialty of yours."

Pevensie's level stare back at him was solid confirmation of every suspicion George had harboured about Mrs. Caspian and her brother. They both were too clever by half and under the influence of the Moon of the Tarot - a life of illusion.

"They are, Sir. I'll prepare a lexicon of simple gestures and cues and will be glad to teach it to you."

Of all the cheek.

George raised his glass. "Pevensie, whatever your father thinks, Mrs. Caspian said you were the man for the job. Major al-Masri said the same. And not that I'd expect otherwise, because I trust both of them, but your conduct shows they weren't wrong."

"Thank you, Colonel." Pevensie raised his own glass and they both drank. Pevensie turned back to the desk, set his glass aside, and made a show of opening the driving manual. "With your permission, Sir, I should do a little more reading? Gather my thoughts for tomorrow?"

George saw what the couched request really was. Men had to make allowance for one another when living in such close quarters. Some wanted to drink and talk it through. Others, George included, wanted to hit something. But he'd known men like Edmund Pevensie, too, the reserved ones, the spies, the ones who needed quiet and solitude.

"Of course."

George nursed another glass of rum and tried to keep reading Kim only to wake up when he heard the door of the room shut. There was a note on the nightstand, Went for a walk.
Pevensie’s journal was on the desk. He’d not even bothered to put his usual minor security measures in, the precisely tied knot of string and the hair that would fall out if it was opened. Tonight only, George would not scold about always using the precautions even when you were distracted or disturbed.

He flipped through the journal. There were four pages of new writing. At the beginning, the smeared words were written in hard, angry strokes. As Pevensie had written through the emotion of the evening, his calmer, flowing script emerged at the end.

He could make no sense of it, other than thinking that, from the length of sentences, odd grammar and repetitive words, much of it was poetry.

One word did appear regularly, capitalized, at the beginning or end of full sentences, offset with commas, as if it were a given name.

Hound.

Illustration 43 was not a success. Maybe they were both getting older. Illustration 43 required a sense of humour and Morgan's own had been stretched far too thin of late. There was too much sadness and tension to laugh.

She slid out of their bed and went to the window. The bonfire was still burning; the Dwarfs and Fauns were still dueling, drums versus flutes. They would play a long while yet; she had a wager down that this time the Fauns, in memory of Leszi, would finish early, too drunk to continue playing. It was a strange and wild night and she could feel the tension in the air.

"Morgan?"

"I'm fine," she said quickly. Too quickly.

"If you are fine, you are doing better than anyone else," Edmund said. "This has been a difficult ordeal for us all."

In some academic way, she had known the swords and arrows were used for more than sport and hunting. She knew that bonding with a warrior King and his country could mean real, live fighting. Edmund had been guarded by enormous carnivores from the first day they met. He always had at least a knife in an arm sheath.

Still… "Bankers go to meetings, not war. I've never been through anything like this before."

It had been a month of unpleasant firsts. She doubted it would be the last. Edmund, Lucy, and the High King had all gone to war; Susan would have as well, she was so furious at this attack upon their ally. But they did not want to risk a hostage situation and one of the Four had to remain in case Cair Paravel had to be defended, either from the Giants in the North, or Calormenes from the South. Morgan sighed and smoothed her hands over her stomach. And that's what our child would have to do, too.

"It was difficult for me as well, Morgan," Harold said from their bed.

She steadied herself against the window sill. "What do you mean? You've done this before. You've… killed." She was glad she was not looking at him when she said the words.

"Of course. Death is an old friend." Edmund spoke so calmly Morgan felt sick. "As Leszi's death reminds us, Aslan could call us home at any moment."
This was all so morbid and horrid. "It makes it sound like you are looking forward to it!"

"Not at all. None of us seeks death, but we don't fear it, either."

His calm cooled her angry woods. "So why was the siege difficult?" she asked. "You said it ended up being an utter rout for Narnia."

Edmund was a long time in answering. The cries outside turned stranger and sadder and the drumbeats faster.

"The difference this time was that I rode off knowing I was leaving you behind."

She turned around. In the dark she could just make him out, pale and quiet, sitting among the scattered pillows of their bed, one leg pulled up. "I suppose you hadn't done that before," Morgan said.

"No." Edmund leaned forward, and rested his chin on his knee. "The realization came upon me most unexpectedly. I was scolding Corin. Lucy and I realized we'd found Cor again. Our scouts said Rabadash was at the gates. We had to ride right into the heat of it and my nerve nearly failed for a moment when I realized that I might not ever see you again in this world."

"That's…"

"Touching? Humbling? Terrifying?"

"I had this picture, in my head, of you, standing on the dock as we came ashore."

Well that explains it.

"You were just remembering my kiss when you came down the gangway!" Morgan replied with a laugh that was almost genuine.

He laughed too, sounding like a Tiger's chuff. They weren't especially public in their affections for all that so many Narnians did their courting and mating without any regard to who might see or hear – true privacy wasn't really possible regardless with sharp-eared Beasts and sharp-eyed Birds. Their kiss had been both a welcome home after weeks away and her farewell to a King riding to war. It had been breathless, desperate, ardent and so, hmmm, intimate, it drew whoops and hollers, caws and cackles, from the onlookers. Then, Harold had torn himself away, Lucy was shouting more orders, and they'd all run straight to the Armory. The Company had galloped off to Anvard within the hour.

"You won't like me to say it, Morgan, but if my time had come in combat with Rabadash, I would have carried that memory of you on the dock to Aslan's Country."

She sniffed again. He was right; she didn't like to hear it. "That sounds uncommonly romantic," Morgan replied.

"Very," he agreed. "Going into a battle knowing you might not survive can be very clarifying but even so I had never had felt anything like this before."

And to think she had once scoffed at the notion that either of them was romantic. "And here I thought you were saying all these things as a clever ploy to induce another attempt at illustration 43."

"I won't say no to the offer, but that's not why I said it, dearest. You don't hear tender endearments from me often enough. It should not have taken possible death to spur such a declaration."

Death? Perhaps. Or, something else.
"What came to Narnia can leave the same way."

That's what the Cat of her dreams had always warned of.

Too late now.

Morgan again smoothed her hands over her depressingly normal middle. So much time trying to avoid pregnancy, and then two miscarriages, and now, nothing. The Archen midwives had said it could be so and the Canine specialists detected nothing untoward. There was nothing to do but keep trying. She wanted some part of him to always be here. She and Narnia both needed that reassurance.

"What came to Narnia can leave the same way."

"Actually, there is something I have in mind," she said.

"If not a repeat attempt at 43, perhaps Number 12 from Volume 2?"

"Tease," she retorted. Morgan lifted her wrap from the hook on the wall, shrugged into it, and returned to their bed.

He took her hand and helped her slide in. "I'd really like to hear about Mr. Noll and the Mole spies. Edmund."

The sounds of wailing flutes rose above the pounding drum.

"This is my fault for mentioning it, I suppose. And with all the noise, we won't be sleeping right away. It will get louder before they all pass out."

She drew the wrap around her more tightly and sat up next to him. "I know you don't like to talk about it and especially not if Jalur might hear. But he isn't on Night Guard duty tonight. You've spoken of the story for years as something very important. There must be more to it."

"There is. It dates from our very first years in Narnia, though it is more Lucy's tale than mine."

She set her hand on his bare shoulder and felt the strength beneath her fingers. "Please?"

"Very well. It is an important tale, even if an uncomfortable one in places, which is, I suppose, why we tell them." He sighed and leaned back in the bed. "It began almost as soon as we…"

What?! "No!" Morgan cried. "Stop!" Really.

"No? No what?" Harold asked. "I thought you wanted to hear the story."

Morgan snorted and shoved her mate. Edmund made a big to-do of injury and flailing.

"That's not how you begin a Narnia story. It's not how Jina…" She stopped, realizing she had said the beloved Hound's name aloud for the first time since her death.

In the dark, they both held a breath and she loved Harold so much for knowing how to wait while she collected herself without her having to say anything.

Morgan exhaled. I saw my love ride off to war knowing he might never return. I can say her name again.

"Jina's stories always began, Come now Gentle Beasts and Birds." Morgan paused. "But there had
better not be any Beasts or Birds in here!"

When there was no comment or sound in the bedroom, she continued, "Jina would have said, *Come now Son of Adam and Daughter of Eve, that might you hear the tale of the Mole spies and the Traitor Noll, and of the Valiant Queen and the Just King.*" Jalur wasn't on duty but still Morgan lowered her voice so any outside wouldn't hear. "*And of the noble sacrifice of the Hound Merle, Guard to King Edmund, Knight of the Order of the Table, Duke of the Lantern Waste, Count of the Western March, and not father, brother or Peter.*"

Edmund laughed. "Perhaps you should recite it?"

Morgan nudged him and shook her head. "Your turn, now."

He cleared his throat. "The Tale of the Mole Spies and the Traitor Noll is told in cave, nest, and den, in wood, mountain, meadow, and pond, so that we might remember it. For though Dwarfs build, and Birds fly, and Fauns dance, Naiads flow, and Dryads green, the Good Beasts of Narnia remember. So, Friends, heed my words. Stop and listen with your sensitive hearts so that all may know this tale of ill judgment, betrayal, and fidelity. Harken to me now."

"It begins thus. In the start of the second year following the defeat of the Usurper Jadis and the end of her interminable winter, the Four, though they ruled with Aslan's blessing and by his will, were still young and most inexperienced. They made many errors; one though, was most especially grievous. It was the Queen Lucy who was first to perceive the wrong and, as her wont, act to correct it…."

To follow, Chapter 18, *The least of my brothers and sisters*

In which Lucy embarks upon a career as both saint and communist.

I want to thank everyone who returned and read the last chapter. Thank you so much for letting me know that you are still reading and interested in the story. Please, never apologize for limited English or ability to say only "thank you!" At least I know you are still there and it means the world to me. Thank you.

Welcome especially to newer readers.

A few notes. This is now the fourth time I have returned to the day and night surrounding Sir Leszi's farewell.

Walker-Smythe's references to Operation Mincemeat are taken from the compelling read, *Operation Mincemeat* by Ben Macintyre. The outlines of Mincemeat originated with Ian Fleming. It called for planting fake battle information on a corpse and floating the corpse into purportedly neutral leaning Spain where Nazi-leaning authorities would provide the false information to the Nazi planners.

Details about the British Security Coordination (BSC) the American arm of the Special Operations Executive, come from numerous sources, including the previously cited, J. Conant's, *The Irregulars: Roald Dahl and the British Spy Ring*. The Casablanca Conference was from 14 - 24 January, 1943. Roosevelt, Churchill and de Gaulle attended to plan the Allied European strategy. Stalin did not attend due to the ongoing battle in Stalingrad.

Lieutenant John Pevensie finally appears. His philandering (and Walker-Smythe's) are based upon my reading of *The Irregulars* and other material. Additionally, as I have mentioned before, the Little Kinsey Report documented rampant marital infidelity, same sex encounters, and pre-marital sex in
1949. Lieutenant Pevensie and Colonel Walker-Smythe are very much a product of their time and their behavior is consistent with it.

Lieutenant Pevensie is also an ass. I have some thoughts on all this and Edmund’s characterization that I've put up in my Live Journal and Dreamwidth along with links to research notes,

My deepest thanks, again to Oldfashionedgirl95 and Starbrow for the support.

Works inspired by this one: Shadow and Light by Lotl101

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