

And Ye Shall Receive

Caspian the Tenth, King of Narnia, stood on the balcony of his palace, staring up at the clear winter sky. One hand caressed the richly-carven horn which never left his side.

"Keep it," said a soft voice in his memory. *"You might need to call me again."*

The stars blurred, though no clouds marred the sky this night, this first Christmas of his reign.

I know I cannot need you, or Aslan would not have sent you away, but want you, oh yes, that I can...

It barely seemed possible that he had known the ancient Kings and Queens for such a short time. In those few weeks, Peter and Edmund had become the companions and brothers he had always dreamed of having. Their companionship had had rough edges, yes, but there was a strength to knowing another's sword always ready in your defense that Caspian had never known until the ancient Kings had become his friends.

Lucy, in her turn, had charmed Caspian instantly with her child's smile and the strength of her faith, both in her siblings and in Aslan the great Lion. To his consternation, though, the little Queen had no sooner met him than her faith had been transferred to him as well. All through the battle at Aslan's How, some part of him had insisted that he had to triumph for her sake, that he could not let her down, and he wondered sometimes if that were part of the reason he had fought so well.

And Susan...

Queen Susan the Gentle was her name in the ancient stories, but the girl of Caspian's memories, guarding her sister's life and Narnia's best chance with her own slender body and her swift arrows, might have been better called Queen Susan the Fierce. The first moment he had seen her, her face wild with alarm for her brother and her clothes and skin stained with travel, he had thought her lovely. In the gown she had worn the day she returned to her own land, she had been impossibly beautiful, and he had finally understood the tales which claimed that every king and prince in the known world had sought her hand in marriage when she had been Queen in her own right.

On that day, as he watched her disappear through the tree, he had known that Aslan spoke truly. This new Narnia must have new royalty, fresh blood to make it strong again. The ancient Kings and Queens had come only to help him to his throne, not to take it from him. They had their own lives to lead, in a land far from Narnia. It would have been wrong of him to ask them, any of them, to leave those lives just for him.

And he had known that he would mourn to the end of his days that it could not be so.

Susan, my Susan... it makes no sense, we knew each other so short a time, how can I miss you so? How can every other woman look frail, every other face seem pallid, beside my memory of you? I must marry, I must have heirs, but how can I ever bear to take a Queen when you are Queen of my heart?

Half-angrily, he dashed the tears from his eyes and held up the Horn, staring into the eyes of the snarling lion it had been carved to resemble. "I think very little of your plans," he informed it tartly. "Could you not have spared me this pain?"

As though in a dream, or from very far off, he seemed to hear Aslan's response. *"No one is ever told what would have happened..."*

Caspian drew a deep breath. "So it is," he said, and stepped forward to the railing of the balcony, looking down to the tossing waves below. "This Horn cannot bring my love back to me; I have no more use for it. Let the Sea take it, and may whoever finds it have more joy of it than I, who have gained my crown and lost my heart by it."

He held the Horn out over the rail for a moment, mouthpiece down. Then he released it, and it fell through the air, whistling as it went, until a faint splash told him it was gone.

Goodbye, Susan, my love. May your life in your own world be filled with every joy.

King Caspian of Narnia turned and went inside.

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Three days later, a reproachful naiad knocked at the door to the palace, bearing Queen Susan's Horn in her hand.

"Your Majesty should be more careful of your treasures," she scolded Caspian. "This Horn was lost once, and see what troubles we have had without it! What will we come to if it is not kept safe now?"

"Indeed," Caspian said, and "Quite so."

After the coronation, he laid the Horn in a far corner of the Royal Treasury, on a fine cloth of purple, and bowed to it as he would have to the Queen herself. Then he left it, and came there no more, sending instead his most trusted nobles to that portion of the Treasury.

For he dared not imagine what it could mean that the Horn of Queen Susan had come back of its own accord to the shores of Narnia.

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Susan Pevensie, once Queen of Narnia, stood in the woods behind her family's home, staring up at the clear winter sky. One hand rose, as though to stroke the starry mane of the Lion peering down at her.

A Lion, indeed, said a cool voice within her mind. A great magic Lion, and a magic land where you were Queen, and a magic King to fall in love with. All very convenient, and very pretty, I'm sure. Certainly he was. But you're getting a bit old to moon after pretend-games, aren't you?

"Shut up," Susan said aloud, her voice sounding thin in the cold air. "Shut up, I don't want to listen to you."

Of course not. But that's because you know I'm right. The voice sounded smug. Magic isn't real. Wardrobes and subway tunnels don't lead to other worlds. Ordinary girls can't become Queens and fall in love with Kings. And there is no great Lion. There never was.

"Shut up!" Susan clutched her head in both hands. "Shut up, shut up, you're lying!"

No, I'm not. You just wish I was.

"SHUT UP!" Susan shrieked, and finally, finally, the voice obeyed. Shaking all over, she went to her knees in the snow, hot tears welling up in her eyes.

"Fine way to spend Christmas," she whispered. "Shouting at some fool voice..."

Deep in her heart, she was not sure which voice frightened her more: the chill one she had just banished, which told her that she had never been a Queen, or the soft one she tried to block from her ears late at night, which murmured tales of what she once had been and would never be again.

A long, mournful whistle sounded far away.

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"No, no, and no again!" Caspian punctuated the last word with a thump of his fist against the table. "I do not care what is customary. It was customary, let me remind you, for Telmarines to conquer and lay waste other lands! It was customary for kings to create their own laws instead of abiding by those of Aslan! And it is customary for Telmarines to fear and hate the sea! All of which are *stupid* customs, and I refuse to abide by them, just as I refuse to abide by this one! I will not marry merely for the sake of *custom*!"

"Calm down, boy," Trumpkin said from the other side of the table, relighting his pipe. "No one said you have to get married. Trufflehunter was just suggesting—"

"It is a bad suggestion." Caspian crossed his arms and glared at the Badger.

"There are several perfectly eligible candidates," said Doctor Cornelius calmly, referring to his notes. "Both in Narnia and abroad. The daughter of the Duke of Galma, for instance, whom you shall meet on the sea voyage you propose. The king of Terebinthia has a pair of nieces who might do. And even here, among Telmarines and Narnians alike—"

Caspian sighed. "I do not think it would be wise for me to take a Narnian bride," he said. "Not from among the Old Narnians, at least. The Telmarines already fear that I favor Old Narnia too much in my decisions. And a Telmarine bride would stir up the same fears among Old Narnians."

The King's Council sighed, for there could be no denying the truth in the King's words.

But Caspian was not finished. "Not to mention—" The glare was back, in all its regal power. "—the three girls—it is still three, Doctor?—yes, the three noble Telmarine girls, in as many years, who have fled Narnia altogether rather than even contemplate marriage with me!"

"Hearsay, Your Majesty," said Trufflehunter. "If you'll forgive my saying so, you've been listening to only one side of the story. The Cats hereabouts say two of those girls, possibly all three of them, were unhappy with their lives as a whole. Not just with the idea of marrying you."

Caspian nodded. "I know that. You know that. All of us here know that. But what about them?" His hand swept in a broad arc, indicating all of Narnia and the lands beyond. "What about Archenland, Galma, Calormen? What do they think of me, when they hear these stories of girls running away from home the moment their parents started to prepare them for an entrance into royal circles?"

"Let's be fair, Your Majesty," said Trumpkin. "Calormen will think the worst of us. Always have, always will. The word of a 'northern infidel', especially a female, isn't likely to make them think worse. Even if that were possible. Besides, she's a dancer in one of their winehouses. Hardly a high-class profession."

"By the same token, Archenland's our ally," Trufflehunter picked up. "It'd take more than one disenchanting noble turned scullery maid to change that. She thought her bedtime stories would come true, that the King would see through her dirt and her servant's gown and fall in love with her, and she discovered the difference between dreams and reality. Who's likely to listen to her?"

"So the only unknown is where our third girl can have gone," Doctor Cornelius said, frowning. "She was the first to disappear, if I remember rightly—the first Christmas after your coronation, that was, Sire. Her mother and father had high hopes for her success in royal circles, because of her

unusual looks.”

“Nothing unusual about blonde hair,” Trumpkin said, leaning back in his chair. “You Telmarines all look too much alike anyway. Need some Red Dwarf and dryad blood in you. Maybe a bit of naiad too.”

The Doctor directed a sharp glance at Trumpkin. “If I may...” Trumpkin inclined his head, and Cornelius went on. “Her mother entered her bedroom to wake her on Christmas morning, to start preparing for the ball at the palace, and found the bed empty. The Dogs tracked her to the edge of the Sea...” He trailed off, shaking his head. “I am afraid I must fear the worst.”

“But she was disaffected to begin with,” Trumpkin put in. “Like Trufflehunter said. Unhappy with her life, wanted a change. Who’s to say she didn’t find it? A message to a Galmian or Terebinthian ship with a little gold for earnest, a boat to shore at midnight, and away to a life of adventure. If that’s what she was after.”

“Do you truly think so?” Caspian asked hopefully.

Trumpkin shrugged. “Whether it was or not, she’s not your concern any longer, Your Majesty. She took herself out of Narnia—there was no sign of a struggle anywhere along the way, not even at the water’s edge—so let that be an end to it. Your duty’s to your land and your people, the ones with the wit to remain so. Not to one yellow-haired wench without the brains to stay in the finest country under this or any sun.”

“Hear, hear,” said Trufflehunter.

Despite himself, Caspian smiled. “Thank you, my friend. My friends, rather.”

His eyes fell to the table, tracing out a long curve in the grain of the wood which could almost be a bow, a thin crack nearby serving for the arrow. “You know the true reason I am reluctant to marry,” he said softly.

Trumpkin snorted. “Us and the rest of Narnia. Romantic it might have been, but kissing her in front of half the kingdom like that—”

“Watch your language, Dwarf!” Caspian sat bolt upright, his cheeks flushing dark. “*She* kissed *me* !”

“Oh, and that makes it so much better?” Trumpkin countered.

Trufflehunter leaned over to Doctor Cornelius as King and Dwarf disputed. “The sooner we can get him aboard that ship, the better,” the Badger muttered. “If he’s still brooding like this when she’s been gone three years...”

“Agreed.” Cornelius cast a worried look towards Caspian. “And hope that somewhere in this world there exists a young woman who can hold her own against his memories.”

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“You were really there,” Peter said for the seventh time. “In Aslan’s country. I can’t believe it.”

Lucy had her eyes closed. “I wish you could have been there,” she said dreamily. “You would have loved it.” She opened one eye to peek at her oldest brother. “Did he tell you what he did us? That there was a door into his country here, in our world, and we just had to find it?”

Peter nodded. “He told me a few things about where to start looking, and the Professor helped me follow on. I’ll show you tonight.” He smiled sadly. “And I wish I could have been there too, Lu. But I suppose Aslan knows who belongs in Narnia and who doesn’t.”

“Did Eustace a world of good,” said Edmund. “Of course, meeting Aslan would for anybody. But Eustace really needed it. I wouldn’t have thought he could ever shape up, before the *Dawn Treader*.”

“Who would?” Peter shook his head. “Of all the people to be in on Narnia...”

“Are you on about that again?” Susan said, coming in from the yard. “Honestly. Magic kingdoms and great talking lions. I’d have thought you’d have given it up long since.”

The other three exchanged weary glances. Susan had been in this exceptionally tiresome mood ever since she returned from America. As Lucy put it, “She must have looked at all the silliest grownups she could find, and taken all the silliest things they do, and put them together.”

“Su, you know it’s real,” Peter said patiently. “You were there the same times we were.”

Susan sighed melodramatically. “I’m only going to say this one more time,” she said, crossing her arms. “I don’t know about the rest of you, but I was never any Queen in any place called Narnia, and I wouldn’t be if you paid me. I haven’t ever seen a mouse or a beaver or a lion that could talk, nor yet a faun or a dryad or any of the other things you all go on about, and I don’t want to. I like this world, and I intend to stay here, and I don’t want to be bothered with any more silly fantasy stories. Is that clear enough for you?”

Peter drew himself up. “Perfectly clear, sister,” he said in the tone the ancient foes of Narnia had known well. “We will no longer trouble you with our ‘silly fantasy stories’, as you are pleased to call them.”

For that one instant, he was again High King Peter, called the Magnificent, and Susan quailed before him. Behind his back, Edmund and Lucy clasped hands and hoped.

But in the next moment, Susan’s face was set again. “Thank you,” she said snippily. “Now, if you’ll all excuse me, my hair is a fright.” And she turned

on her heel and stalked towards the stairs.

Lucy sniffled once. "She never used to be like this," she said in a small, lost voice. "Did America do it to her?"

"No," Edmund said, listening to the rhythm of feet thumping on the stair treads. "She's been like this for longer than that. I'm not sure quite when it started, but it wasn't America."

"Whenever it was, we have to face it," Peter said heavily. "She's lost to us. Narnia is without one of her Queens."

Lucy hiccupped and started to cry. "Aslan," she wailed into Edmund's shoulder. "How could you let this happen?"

Over her head, Edmund looked at Peter, who looked away.

There was nothing he could say. He had been wondering the same thing himself.

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Caspian stood at the bow of the *Dawn Treader* with his arm around the daughter of the Star Ramandu. "This day's sailing should bring us safely to Narnia," he said. "I have no doubt my people will be delighted to see I have found a bride on my journey. But there is a small problem I think we must discuss."

"A problem, my lord?" the Lady asked, an undertone of laughter in her musical voice. "What might it be?"

"It is very simple." Caspian turned to look at his wife, for Drinian, as was his right as captain of the *Dawn Treader*, had married his King to the Star's daughter before they left Ramandu's Island. "I refuse to present Narnia with a nameless Queen."

The Lady laughed aloud this time. "You have such a romantic way with you, Caspian," she said. "Does this mean that you wish to know my name?"

"Yes. I find it somewhat astonishing that I have never heard it before, in fact. Can you explain it to me?"

"As you said yourself, it is simple." The Lady leaned forward on the railing, watching the sea foam white over the *Dawn Treader*'s bow. "I have not heard my name in a long time. To my father, I was 'daughter', for so I loved him to call me, and there were no others but just we two on our island. And even when you came with your sailors and your friends, 'Lady' was sufficient, for there was only myself and little Queen Lucy who could bear that title, and she had her own name to be called by." She sighed softly. "I hope that she and her brother and cousin returned safely to their own place."

"Can you doubt it, my lady? When they went to Aslan's country?"

"No." The Lady smiled, but her eyes were sad. "You are right. Aslan would not let them be lost."

"I still do not understand why you have never told me your name," Caspian said, hoping to wipe the sorrow from his Queen's face. "Have you forgotten it, maybe?"

"Forgotten it? No!" The new Queen of Narnia laughed aloud once again, and Caspian's heart trembled. It seemed so right, so natural, that he should have wed her after the few short months they had wintered on the Star's Island, that she should journey home with him now to Narnia. But was he being unfaithful to another, long gone from him but ever in his thoughts?

"I have not forgotten my true name," the Queen went on, her head raised to the sky. "But Aslan has laid it on me that I may only tell it to you, and in the strictest of secrecy. Not even our children, when we have them, may know it. You shall give me another name, and by that I shall be known for as long as I reign with you in Narnia. But my true name must never again be heard until we come to Aslan's country."

"On my honor, none shall know your true name from me," Caspian pledged, laying his hand on his heart. "And in earnest of my oath, I give you a secret of my own. One that I have told to no one, not even my dearest friends."

"I am listening."

"I have told you the story of how I became King. Of the coming of the ancient Kings and Queens, the two you met on your father's island and their two elders, High King Peter who fought for me and Queen Susan whose Horn brought them again to Narnia. And I have told you..." Caspian coughed. "Of the feelings I harbored for Queen Susan."

"You have," the Queen answered evenly.

"I have not told you that, on the Christmas after my coronation, I tried to throw away the Horn."

"What?" The Queen whirled. "Throw away—how could you?"

"I could not bear to keep it with me any longer." Caspian drew a shuddering breath. "It caused me agony to see it, to hold it. I loved Queen Susan, even in so little time as I knew her, and the Horn only reminded me that I could never call her to me again. I dropped it from my balcony above the Sea, on Christmas night, and it whistled as it fell into the waves."

"Whistled," the Queen repeated softly. "I believe I have heard another part of this tale in another place and time..." She shook her head and returned her attention to him. "But you said that you *tried* to throw away the Horn. This makes it sound as though you succeeded."

I did succeed. Then. But the Horn came back." Caspian held out his hands, as though he cradled the Horn even now. "Three days after I had thrown it away, it was returned to me by one of my subjects. I laid it in my Treasury, and I have never since then set eyes on it."

"Why not?"

"Because I fear my mind." Caspian turned and stared into the waves, tracing their crests as they rose and fell. "I fear that I will seek omens where none exist. That I will try to make sense of an accident. That I will continue to hope for a thing Aslan himself has forbidden." He sighed. "Perhaps, now that you and I are safely wed, my fears can become things of the past. So, there is my secret—I tried to cast away one of the greatest treasures of my realm, and it refused to leave me." He looked up at his Queen. "Can you match it, Lady?"

"I believe I can." The Queen smiled, and the glory of a starlit night shone about her. "Come close and I will tell you my true name."

Caspian stepped close to his bride, and she leaned against his shoulder and whispered into his ear. And when he had heard what she had to say, he took her in his arms and kissed her until the lookout's cry of "Land ho!" brought them apart still smiling. Then, together as they would do all things from that day until one far off in a wood, the King and Queen of Narnia turned to face their own dear country at last.

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"Pole," said Eustace with his mouth full, "why don't you tell everyone that story Puddleglum told us, the night with all the shooting stars?"

"But I must have told it before, sometime," Jill objected. "Or you must have."

Aunt Polly shook her head. "I don't think I've heard this one," she said. "A new Narnian story sounds like just the thing for tonight."

"Yes, please do tell us," said Lucy, giving Jill's hand a little squeeze. "We've all heard every story the rest of us know hundreds of times by now. I'd love to hear a new one." She looked into the distance, her eyes wistful. "It would almost be like being in Narnia again. After so long."

Jill ran a finger around the rim of her water glass. "I'm not even sure I remember it properly. It *has* been a long time."

"Properly or improperly, long time or no, we need a breath of Narnia here," said the Professor. "Does it have to do with shooting stars, perhaps?"

"Oh, yes." Jill shut her eyes, thinking. "It was called 'The Star Maiden.' It's a very Wiggly kind of story."

"You mean it squirms about?" Edmund asked, chuckling.

"No!" Jill made a face at him. "I mean... I mean..."

"You remember Marsh-Wiggles, Ed," said Peter, winking at Jill. "Gloomier than the day is long, but brave and loyal to a fault."

"Yes, exactly," Jill said, giving Peter a thankful smile. "And that's how the story is. It sounds terrible and sad at first, but if you listen underneath, it's really very wonderful."

She began to tell it, and the others listened raptly, for a new breath of Narnia was a rare thing indeed among them now.

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A long time ago, or a very short time, or no time at all, in a land so far from here that no Narnian knows where it lies, (Jill said,) there lived a maiden of great beauty. She had no reason to be unhappy, for she lived a life most gay with pleasures, but still she was discontented and knew not why.

One day she found a chasm in a dark place, which, when she stepped through it, transported her to another world altogether. And that world was our fair Narnia. Here her discontent vanished, and she lived right happily for some years, even being courted by a handsome young Narnian. But one day, as she was playing at hide-and-go-seek with her swain, she ran the wrong way for just a moment too long. Before she knew it, she tumbled back through the chasm into her own world, and the chasm sealed itself behind her, so that she could never return to Narnia by that route.

Heartbroken, the maiden set out to search for another way back to her land and her love. Days and weeks and months she searched, asking in towns and villages, but none had ever heard of Narnia, and all mocked her for her seeking. A land ruled by a great Lion, where trees danced and animals spoke? As well seek for a bridge to the stars, or a life after death, they said. Better to give up such a foolish quest, and come again to the life she had once known.

The maiden turned her face away from the places of men, but the words remained in her heart and ate at her like worms. Could the learned men all be wrong, and her own frail senses in the right? Could there truly have been a Narnia, and an Aslan? Or did she seek an impossible dream, and neglect what life had placed before her?

She took herself into the woods, woods so like and so unlike the ones she had roamed with her beloved. There, under the stars on a wintry night, she turned her face upwards to the sky and cried out in a loud voice.

"Aslan!" she called. "Hear my prayer! I am lost and cannot find my way home. Guide my feet to Narnia once again, I beg of you!"

And above her head, the great lion in the stars raised his head and answered her. "My daughter," he said, "I do nothing without a reason. Narnia is no longer for you."

The maiden wept. "Why?" she begged. "Why will you keep me away from you?"

“It is not me from which you are barred,” Aslan replied. “Only Narnia.”

“But I cannot find you here,” the maiden whispered.

“Yet I am here,” the Lion told her, and in his voice was more than a hint of his growl. “Those who cannot find me may not truly be seeking.”

“I am! Truly I am! Look into my heart!” The maiden bared her breast to the winter winds. “I seek you every day, you are all that I desire, but I am not strong enough to fight the entire world! I know that you are here, but my eyes cannot see you, my ears cannot hear your voice, for the world’s cries and the world’s sights hide you from me. Do not let me give in to them! Do not let me become as they are! I will give anything, anything that is mine to give, if you will only let me see you clearly once again!”

“Anything?” Aslan questioned softly.

“Anything!” The maiden stared up at the lion of stars with eyes suddenly alight with hope. “Only ask it of me, and it is yours!”

“Would you give up your comforts and the things you love best?” Aslan asked.

The maiden shivered, thinking of fires and sweetmeats and hot spiced wine. But the eyes of the Lion were on her, and she forgot chill and hunger and thirst. “Yes.”

“Your family and your friends?”

The maiden drew breath, for she loved her family and her friends dearly. But she had been parted from them before, and had not died. “Yes.”

“Even your very life?”

The maiden knelt in the snow. “My life,” she whispered. “What is life, without you? A beating drum, a clanging gong. A tale told by a fool, with no rhyme nor reason. Yes, Aslan. If it will bring me to you, take even my life from me.”

Aslan sighed a great sigh. “You will find pain and loss along this way, daughter,” he warned. “All will revile your name, even your own kin. Your story will be told as a warning and a fear-tale for children. You shall toil for years with no promise of reward, and there will be days you wish you could change your choice, but it shall not be so. For once you have started along this path, there is no way back.”

“Will you be there?” the maiden asked.

The Lion bowed his great head. “Yes,” he answered her. “I will be there.”

“I choose that path, then.” The maiden rose to her feet. “I would rather look upon your face and die than spend a lifetime in this world which has forsaken you.”

“You shall not die,” Aslan told her. “At least, not yet. But you shall be to those who love you as one dead.”

“Shall we meet again in your country?” the maiden asked.

“All those who love meet in my country,” replied Aslan.

“Then I am ready,” said the maiden.

And two stars fell from the sky, landing just at her feet, and between them arose a great bridge of light. The maiden placed her foot on the bridge, and as she did, the glow rose up around her and engulfed her, so that she was made no longer of flesh but of stars, as was the Lion which came to greet her.

They walked slowly into the sky, and the bridge faded behind them. And some say that the Star Maiden remains in the sky with the Lion even now, while others say that she came to love another star and followed him on his journeying. But that is a story for another day.

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For a long moment after Jill finished speaking, no one moved.

“Phew,” said Edmund at last. “Quite a story, that. Do you think it’s true?”

“I wouldn’t put it past Aslan,” said Lucy. “But whoever she was, the Star Maiden, I mean, she must have been awfully brave. To think of giving up your whole family, everyone you love, and never seeing them again until you come to Aslan’s country. I don’t think I could do it.”

“Good thing no one’s asking it of you, then, Lu,” Peter said. “But I’m with you. I wish I could shake her hand. That took guts.”

“I wonder what her family thought had happened to her,” Aunt Polly said. “Did she simply disappear? Did they find her body lying in the woods and think she was dead?”

“Perhaps—” Eustace began, and then broke off, leaping to his feet, as did Lucy and Jill. Jill gave a little shriek to go with it. Aunt Polly gasped, and the Professor’s hand jerked to the side, knocking his wineglass from the table.

A man stood before them, bound tightly to a tree and staring at them as though they were his last hope of salvation. His image was wavy and distorted, as though they saw him through water. But that was not the most startling thing about him.

His clothing and face bore the unmistakable look of Narnia.

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A merry company it was who sat there on the grass in Aslan's country, for all of them had known at last one of the others in times long past, and now they were all friends at once. Peter and Edmund and Lucy, who knew the most people, had had to do quite a lot of introducing, but the Lord Digory and the Lady Polly had borne their share, and even Eustace and Jill knew a few names no one else could say—Tirian, for instance, whose appearance had so startled them all at dinner. He was the last King of Narnia, as it happened, and the youngest two had fought the Calormenes beside him before passing through the Stable Door.

"And so here we are at last," said King Caspian, smiling around at the company. Then his smile faded. "But there seems to be one missing..."

Peter sighed. "I'm sorry, Caspian," he said as gently as he could. "Susan didn't come with us."

"I see." Caspian looked at the ground, then up at Lucy. "Of your grace, Your Majesty, what story were you and the Lady Jill talking about just a moment ago?"

"Oh, it's one she told us just before we saw Tirian and everything started to happen," Lucy said. "The one about the Star Maiden. Do you know it?"

"Very well." Caspian nodded. "Perhaps even better than you, my Lady—if I may?"

"Please," said Jill. "I'm sure I left bits out."

Caspian shook his head. "You left nothing out. It is only that there are portions of the story which are not widely known. Do you recall the end of the story, where it was rumored that the Star Maiden had loved another star and followed him?"

"Yes," said Edmund. "That bothered me a bit. I mean, part of the reason she wanted to get back to Narnia was so she could find the man she loved again. What was the point if she was just going to go off with a star instead?"

"There are many kinds of love, Your Majesty," said Caspian's wife, speaking for the first time since they had all been reunited. "This was not a love of man and woman, but rather of father and daughter."

Her voice was as clear as Edmund and Lucy and Eustace remembered, but it struck another note in their minds as well, dim and far back, like a dream half-recalled or a friend long lost. Lucy wrinkled her brow, reached out her hand to lay it on the answer—

"My heavens," said the Lady Polly wonderingly. "So the story was true after all."

"It was." Caspian smiled, laying an arm around the shoulders of the Star's daughter. "And the question you asked, my Lady, I can answer. Aslan did not want my beloved's family to mourn her as dead, so he sent another into her world to take her place."

"And her family never noticed?" Peter asked skeptically.

"Aslan willed that they should not," Ramandu's daughter answered. "And to ensure it, he exchanged only our spirits, not our bodies. It was my soul which journeyed with Aslan across the bridge of stars on that Christmas night. The flesh into which I was born remained behind, with a new soul to occupy it."

"I knew her," Caspian said, his eyes far away. "The young woman whose body my love wore so long, and whose spirit returned the favor in that other world. She was spoiled and selfish, wanting nothing more than for the world to be the way she thought it should." He shook his head slightly, returning to the moment. "Still, I suppose Aslan does all things for a reason. Perhaps, in time, she too may be redeemed. For her family, though they did not understand, never stopped loving the one they thought was theirs."

The answer was there again, hovering in the back of Lucy's mind, begging her to understand it. She reached for it once more—

"Once a Queen in Narnia," said Caspian's wife softly, "always a Queen in Narnia."

One hand made a mystic pass in front of her face.

Eustace goggled. Jill gasped. The Lady Polly smiled to herself, while the Lord Digory murmured something that might or might not have been, "What *do* they teach them?"

Peter drew a great breath of wonder and thankfulness. Edmund laughed a choky little laugh, his eyes, if anyone had looked, suspiciously bright. And Lucy leapt to her feet and sprang forward with a cry of pure joy.

"SUSAN!"