

Heart of Ice

*A Prequel to C.S. Lewis' Novel
"The Lion, the Witch and the
Wardrobe"*

THE SUCCESSION

IT WAS TWO IN THE MORNING. THE OLD KING sat on the edge of his bed, his face lined with age, fatigue and worry. A door opened and a servant announced, “His Excellency, High Mage Orbereth.”

The badger that entered looked anything but excellent...he was still wearing a plain cotton robe he had clutched in a hurry, and his eyes were still clouded with sleep, but he smiled indulgently. “Is everything quite all right, Sire?”

“I’m not sure,” King Rothbart said. “I’m sorry to turn you out of bed, old friend, but this can’t wait till morning. I’ve sent for tea and biscuits in case you’re hungry.”

“Unable to sleep?”

The king rested his face in his hands. “That would have been so much better. I just had the most terrifying dream.”

“Indeed. I can put some tremblebane in your tea. A sprig or two and you’ll sleep like a baby.”

“This is not about sleep,” Rothbart said, nervously scratching his beard. “Perhaps it was a sign.”

Tea and biscuits arrived and the two friends shared refreshments together on the side of the bed. Tea helped put a good face on the night’s terrors, but for Rothbart the greatest comfort of all was the High Mage, his best friend and counselor.

“In my dream, I was here in my chambers. There was only one candle lit and it had burned terribly low. I looked for a replacement but there was none in the drawer. The fire had also burned down and when I went to stoke it, there were no logs in the keep. Suddenly the clock struck midnight and when the last bell rang the window burst open and a bitter cold wind swept through the room, snuffing the candle and quenching the fire. The room went dark, so dark I could not even see the glow of dying embers. I felt as if my heart had turned to ice. Then I awoke. I couldn’t be sure if I was waking or dreaming till I saw wood in the keeper and candles in the drawer. I tell you, Orbereth, I’m still shaking.” The king

took another sip of tea. "Is this a sign, or just a night terror from a doddering old man?"

"No, Sire. I had the same dream two nights ago, but I thought it nothing of it till now."

"By the Lion! You thought nothing of it?"

"I didn't want to worry Your Majesty until I was quite sure. By your leave I shall convene the magi and debate the question."

The king put his hand on the badger's shoulder. "I don't need debates. This is not your King speaking but your friend. I need honesty, Orbereth, even if it hurts."

The badger looked up again and met the King's glance. He took the old man's trembling hand between his paws and gave it a squeeze. "Two lights but one meaning. Your time with us is nearly finished. Death is calling, and there is no heir to the throne. If provisions are not made soon, the light of Narnia will go dark."

Rothbart sighed and looked up to the ceiling. "Have I not prayed about it a thousand times? Prayed for a son or daughter? Prayed that a prince would come from the world of King Frank? Kings have come to Narnia from caves, from thickets, from the great Eastern Sea. One even sailed the sky in a silver chariot! I don't understand, my friend. I have lived my whole life to serve Aslan and Narnia, and been a faithful steward in all

things. What have I done to make the Great Lion deaf to my pleas?"

"Your Majesty," the badger gasped. "Come now, you have surely not offended Aslan, and he has not forsaken us. He will send us a sign. Perhaps he sent this dream."

"But why can't he set my heart at rest? Why not let an old man die in peace?" When the old king met Orbereth's eyes, his face was streaked with tears.

Orbereth was heartbroken. The badger had to do something, however unpleasant, to ease Rothbart's heavy burden. And so he heard himself saying words he had often practiced but never desired. "King Maximillian of Archenland has two sons," he conceded, giving the King's hand another squeeze. "By Aslan's will, one shall rule the west. Perhaps the other may rule the east?"

Rothbart quickly straightened. "Orbereth! That's brilliant! Why didn't I think of that??" He embraced the badger tightly. "Bless you, old friend! Truly you are the son I never had, the comfort of my old age! Now fetch me pen and parchment and I will write King Maximilian tonight, this very hour! There is no time to lose!"

Now please understand the situation in Archenland, dear readers, that Crown Prince Ethelred was his father's pride and joy while Prince Godwin was...well...the King's other son. As accomplished and handsome and tall and wise as Ethelred was, so worthless and ugly and short and foolish was Godwin. As Ethelred grew in stature and the love of his people, Godwin wallowed in self pity and drew nothing but scorn.

These tidings were known to Orbereth, but the badger loved the old king and spared his feelings. The badger, who had counseled a Rothbart the Gentle for many years, thought of Godwin the Dull and shivered. Perhaps an early retirement was in order.

MIXED MESSAGES

THE KING OF ARCHENLAND HANDED A parchment scroll to his counselor, a dwarf. "This offer came in from Narnia. What do you think of this, Grayling?"

The dwarf unfurled the scroll and took a long, careful look at it. His eyebrows raised. "Your Majesty, I sense an opportunity of the highest order. I would urge you to accept."

"Why? Speak freely."

"Two reasons, Sire. First, absence makes the heart grow fonder. This is an excellent way for your sons to grow closer in friendship."

"In other words to stop hating one another."

Without daring to agree or disagree, the dwarf continued. "Second, an Archenlander on the Narnian throne would prove comforting with the restless Calormenes at our southern border."

"Indeed it would." The king stroked his beard. "It is our intention to accept his gracious offer and send our son to Cair Paravel."

"Ah yes," the dwarf said, "and yet..."

"With you there is always an 'and yet!' Out with it, Grayling. What's the catch?"

"And yet, Sire, timing is critical." He handed the scroll back to the monarch. "A hasty reply speaks of urgency, and that would trouble King Rothbart and Prince Godwin. Narnia would not want a prince that comes at a moment's notice. And as for your son, if the lad sensed a haste to be rid of him, he might not want to go. You would rather have an ally than a foe on the throne of Aslan."

"Yes Grayling, of course. It would be unwise to speak too soon. We shall wait two days to reply, and another week to send forth our son. Summon Prince Godwin. We shall speak with him alone."

Maximillian carefully watched Godwin's face as he read the scroll. The young man's growing smile was a blessed sight.

"Father, this is my destiny! I must do this thing!"

"Then you would accept their offer?"

"With all my heart! The sooner the better!"

"Can't leave the nest quickly enough, hmm?"

Godwin met his father's eyes. "This is my one chance to make you proud of me."

Maximillian was taken aback. "My boy, are you serious? You want to make me proud of you? I thought you didn't give a brass farthing for my thoughts."

"I always have," Godwin said. "I wanted you to be proud of me, but I knew it would never happen. Ethelred is just like you and I'm not like you at all. Godwin the Dull, that's what they call me! You can't even stand to look at me! Do you have any idea what that does to me? I'm not dull, I'm just different!"

"Can't stand to look at you? My own son?" The king rested a hand on Godwin's shoulder. "I hated what life has done to you, but you were always my son and you always will be. Do you think I'd let you anywhere near the Throne of Aslan if I didn't believe you could handle it? Without Narnia, our kingdom would be part of Calormen! Your leadership is all that stands between

us and the Tisroc. I trust you to lead them wisely and well."

Godwin stood quietly and let the words sink in. "I want to believe you. I really do."

"Then do it. Put aside bitterness, jealousy, envy and let us and your brother be reconciled. Prepare yourself for the road ahead and think not of yesterday."

"How do I do that? All these years I never thought I had a future."

Maximillian put an arm around Godwin's shoulder. "I can help you, son. Come and spend some time with me at the scrying pool. See what only a king's eyes may see and we will chart your course together."

They climbed the long spiral staircase of the tallest tower in the castle. At the top was a heavy oak door that was always locked. Godwin had always hated and resented that place because it was the one room in the castle denied to him. It symbolized all he resented and envied. And yet as the king put the key in the lock and turned it with a satisfying click, he was overcome with awe.

He stepped into a rather simple room. The windows alone was worth the climb, but there in the

middle of the chamber was a different sort of view...the scrying pool. "Behold," the king said with a flourish. "The Eyes of Archenland."

The king lit the four candles at the corners of the bowl, then closed the shutters and drew the heavy drapes. After a few moments to let their eyes adjust to the dark, the King said, "Now you shall catch a vision of your future. Some great thing that will guide the course of your life. What we see in this place goes no farther than the two of us, understand?"

"Surely. But all I see is my reflection."

"It sleeps," Maximillian said. "Give me your hand."

Godwin held out his hand, the smooth, light skinned hand of a man who had never had to work for a living. The king clutched it, then quickly stove the point of his brooch pin into the tip of a finger. A red drop formed and fell into the water, spreading rings across the surface. The water began to glow softly like moonlight.

"The eye awakens. Look carefully, my son."

Indeed they did see an image forming in the water. Godwin stared at the devastatingly beautiful woman in white, her face as pale and comely as a swan's. He was standing in a snowy field next to her, drinking wine from a golden goblet. The image faded and another formed.

He saw himself with a wreath made of living boughs running toward the same woman and embracing her. Then the pool went dark.

Maximillian said, “Good show! My boy, there is a balm for all your woes! And she will bear you some handsome sons!”

"Father, one thing at a time!"

"Of course, son. But it never pays to dawdle. Look what happened to Rothbart.”

DAMOZEL IN DISTRESS

GODWIN WAS NEVER COMELY, BUT IN HIS BEST suit riding on his best horse with his best gold-trimmed saddle, he looked every inch a Crown Prince.

He was approaching the border of Narnia, and since he had never been out of Archenland in his whole life, he wanted to savor the experience. He had a special gift in his saddlebag to give the first talking beast he met in Narnia. Once Godwin had seen a talking hare, and the experience enchanted him. He always wanted to meet a talking beaver and see if they were as industrious as the non-speaking ones that dwelt in Archenland.

Suddenly Godwin pointed. "Whoa, what's that?"

Just on the Archenland side of the Stonybrook Bridge, in a small copse of pine trees, was a lady dressed

in flowing white robes standing next to a sleigh with a broken runner. A dwarf appeared to be helping her repair it, but she waved at the oncoming convoy with an expression of great relief. "Hello there!" she shouted. "We're having no luck! Can you help us?"

"We can leave a soldier here," Captain Giles softly muttered to Godwin, trying not to meet the lady's glance. "Your Highness is expected presently."

"That's rather scant hospitality for such a fine lady in such a cold and lonely place. I want my coming into Narnia to be an occasion of great joy. Besides, I've seen her before, I know it!"

"I've seen robbers and Calormenes before, but I don't give them rides."

"Surely you jest!" Godwin said with a laugh. He rode on up to the woman and dismounted. "Well hello there!"

She smiled broadly. "Oh sir, you're my knight in shining armor!"

"I'm not a knight but a prince."

"Well so you are!" she exclaimed. "You're Prince Godwin the Bold!" She curtsied. "Your Highness!"

He smiled, flattered to be remembered, and even more so to be remembered as something nicer than Godwin the Dull. "You have me at a disadvantage, my lady. Your face is familiar but I cannot place the name."

He looked back at Captain Giles and said with a puckish grin, "Tell me, Captain, is she a robber or a Calormene?"

"My name is Jadis," she said. "I really doubt you've seen my face before. I came from the far off land of Charn."

"Hmm...Charn? I wish I had done better at geography. Alas, that might as well be on another world!"

She winced at his nearness to the truth. "I have decided to live out my days in Narnia. I was headed that way when my sleigh broke down. So tell me, Your Highness, are the men of Narnia as handsome as you?"

He smiled. "They will be soon enough. For I am become Crown Prince of Narnia. May I give you a ride to the nearest town?"

She glanced at the creek which may as well have been a stone wall. "Oh no, I can't..." She stopped herself. "I mean to say, it is the custom in Charn to drink the health of one's benefactor. Before I may budge from this spot, let me offer you some Thracian Wine. Such a pleasure is not to be missed, although I'm sure Your Highness has drunk it often at high state affairs."

"Never once, actually." He smiled. "Wonderful wine and a beautiful woman. What a fine welcome."

"Well aren't you the slayer of hearts?" She had her dwarf pour wine from a crystal bottle into two golden goblets. When he took his cup, she tapped it with her own. "A toast to Prince Godwin and the throne of Narnia! To a long and happy association."

They drank. And it was sweet and rich, and he smiled, but then his hand went to his forehead. "Oh, that vintage has a powerful kick."

She touched his cheek gently with her white hand. "Thracian wine is strong. Not to worry...your head will clear soon."

He looked at her, and her face which was comely before looked absolutely beautiful. Her eyes once distant were warm limpid pools. He reached up and stroked her hair, and his heart hammered in his chest. "Now I know where I've seen you before. You are the one."

She smiled alluringly. "You speak in riddles, but your eyes make perfect sense. I like a man that knows what he wants."

He reached out and drew her near to his breast, gazing into her eyes and kissing her.

She smiled at him, tossing her head back so that her hair flowed in soft waves of giddy mirth. "Are you trifling with me, Your Highness, or is this something more?"

"My heart says it is something more."

She laughed prettily. "And if I presume to ask for a token of your love?"

"If you asked me for the moon," he said raptly, "I would catch a white swan and fly up and steal it for you."

"I do not want the moon," she said. "There is a certain tree just a short ride from here. You will see a red house with a slate tile roof and right behind it is a tree like no other in the world. In the snows of winter it carries the blush of spring. Cut it down, and make a crown for each of us from the topmost branches as a sign of your love, and I will be your princess, I swear."

"If it is so beautiful, why cut it down?"

"If we wear these crowns together, my beauty will never fade, nor will your manly strength. We would be immortal. Now if I had asked you to do some dangerous or unpleasant thing for me like kill a dragon, you would do it right away. But for health and pleasure you shrink like a young boy?"

"I shrink from nothing. I'll have Giles and Campion come with me and we'll bring it back momentarily."

"You must do it alone because such a tempting target as that would make them too want to be immortal. Besides, this is Narnia. It's well known fact there are no bandits on the highways of Narnia. They are all peace-loving folk."

Be aware, dear listeners, that he was in the grip of madness brought on by Thracian Wine. If she asked him to kill himself he would do it to prove his love. Giles and Campion had a clear head and she could not risk their being along, as you'll see why when next we speak.

STROKE OF A BLADE

GODWIN STOOD IN AWE OF THE TREE OF Protection. Even in the midwinter it bore the glow of springtime and fruit hung heavy on the boughs.

He approached it. The young vicar, a faun that lived in the nearby cottage, came out to greet him. The faun was used to tips from pilgrims who stopped by to see the Tree of Protection. He would give them hot tea and tell them the story of its planting and make it worth their while.

"A wondrous site, is it not?" he said.

"Indeed," Godwin said. "A lovely prize it will make for my beauty!" He drew the battle axe from his belt sheath.

The vicar saw what he was doing and stood in front of the tree. "Sir! Sir! No! This is the Lord's gift! Aslan put it here!"

The name Aslan made Godwin cringe. The spell over him made him loathe the blessed lion and only strengthened his resolve. He raised the axe, threateningly. "Step aside!"

The faun turned and gripped the tree in a protective embrace. "I swore an oath to guard it, to protect it with my life. My very life!"

"Then keep it if you can," the prince said, savagely striking him with the butt of the axe handle.

The vicar fell, clutching his face. "By the love of Aslan! Don't do this unholy thing!"

Godwin ignored the faun and set about destroying the one barrier between Narnia and the White Witch. He swung and swung, each stroke biting deeply into the wood. The strength of his mixed ardor and madness drove him to almost super-human effort. The sweet balsam of the dying tree filled the air and chips flew far and wide. And then, like the vicar, it crumbled and crashed to the ground, its glow fading and dying in moments. And after only a moment's pause, he went to the crown of the tree and hacked off a few stems from the topmost branches.

Without so much as a glance at the faun, Godwin strode away thinking only of the fair skinned lady that awaited him and passionate kisses under a honey gold moon. He had gone completely mad.

He went to mount up, and his horse, seeing some evil aura about him began to rear up and whinny as if it had seen a snake in the road. Only by sheer force of strength did Godwin subdue him and make it into the saddle.

When the guards saw Godwin returning with the wreaths held high above his head, they cheered and the Captain let out a sigh of relief.

Godwin got off his horse and went to Jadis, holding the wreaths like a schoolboy about to give a present to his latest crush. And when he took her in his arms with his joy complete, she pulled a short dirk from her dress and stabbed him through the heart. She held him upright for a moment and said, 'This is my kiss, you fool!' For one brief moment he saw things as they really were. Despair filled his eyes before they closed for the last time. Then she released him and he fell lifeless to the ground.

Before the stunned guards could react, she waved her hand and the pine trees were revealed to be ogres and wolves in magical disguise. “Kill them all!” Jadis shouted. “No witnesses!”

THE STORM BREAKS

IT WAS MIDNIGHT IN THE SMALL TOWN OF Farthingdale. Beneath a silent moon families slept in innocent tranquility. The only sound was the snap and pop of weary coals upon the hearth to stave off the winter chill.

Suddenly a fox ran shrieking down the main street of town, his terror contagious. “Awake! Arm yourselves! We’re under attack! Hurry! Hurry!”

Lamps lit in the windows. Doors opened and tired creatures tumbled out into the streets, many still dressed in their nightclothes. Most bore hoes, shovels or walking staffs. The lucky ones had ancient swords from the Calormene Wars.

They spread the word from door to door, pounding on windows and shouting the news. “Arm yourselves! Danger! Hurry!”

The townsfolk gathered in the center of town, unsure what to expect. And then they saw the enemy. From the West came a sea of fire, Jadis with her foul creatures row on row; ogres and hags and cyclops, werewolves and the people of the toadstools, the light of their torches bringing an early dawn. They were all combat ready, heavily armored and heavily armed, and their rumble as they moved was like the thrashing of an angry sea.

Does wept. Children whimpered or screamed in abject terror. The bucks seeing no way out sounded retreat and they headed a rout to the east. The panicked hordes left hearth and home behind, fleeing with only the shirts on their backs through the cold winds and deep snow drifts. And then they stopped before another wall of soldiers coming in from the Eastern end of town.

They were surrounded, cut off on all sides. A few of the bucks stood their ground. Most of the townsfolk huddled together to wait for death.

The Lord Mayor stumbled forward in a state of shock. The otter approached the Woman in White, paws outstretched, and stammered, “Please! Have mercy! We

have not hurt you! We are peaceful folk! Take our gold and grain, but have mercy!”

An arrow through the chest stopped him, followed quickly by three more. He crumpled over, gasping, his lifeblood staining the virginal snow, Jadis raised her right arm. There were trumpet blasts and the hosts of evil charged forward in glee, throwing their torches at the thatched roofs of homes and shops, thrusting spears in trembling creatures armed only with brooms and staffs. A family of foxes fled their burning home only to be riddled with arrows. From a flaming rooftop a she-wolf shrieked, "Aslan! Aslan!" before a wall of fire turned her into a living torch and she plunged screaming into the street below.

The smoke curled up in an angry pall, blotting out the moon and stars. Seeing the blaze, riverbankers came to offer assistance and ran unsuspecting into a trap. Beavers, otters, stoats pierced with arrows crawled away to die, never knowing why they were slain. For two hours the killing and burning went on until Farthingdale ceased to be.

It was a senseless slaughter. The invaders took no gold or grain. There was no army in town to oppose Jadis. It seemed her only aim was to spread panic through the countryside, and that she did.

Haggard refugees spread the dire tidings across Narnia. They spoke of unquenchable fire, creatures turned to stone in their tracks, and orphans wandering aimlessly in the smoking ruins. Narnia was at war! War of the most evil and unspeakable sort.

Even with an early warning, the peaceful folk of Narnia could do little to slow the relentless advance of the fell enemy. Jadis had spent centuries planning her campaign. Centuries of frustrated longings and hate were directed with fatal precision. Free Narnian forces kept waiting for her to make some mistake, some slight tactical blunder they could exploit, but she never did. It was as if Aslan had deserted them. Some fled across the border into Archenland. Most stayed and fought. Many died.

Jadis' horde swept like a mighty scythe across the land. Old, proud regiments were wiped out...the Highlanders, the Blue and Gold Brigade, the Rough and Readies, the Bare Mountain Boys, the Red Banners, and the Chieftains--their slaughtered ranks left frozen where they fell. Names of once forgotten towns were indelibly written on the roll of honor in blood ... Beruna, North Hanger, Chelsea, Byron, Sybil's Creek. And with each

defeat, the forces of Free Narnia were pushed ever closer to the Great Eastern Sea to face surrender or destruction.

THE FINAL PROPHECY

IN ALL OF NARNIA THERE WAS BUT ONE LION banner left flying, the one on Cair Paravel. The king and what remained of Free Narnia were under siege within its walls. Food was running low though they had a source of water. The Tisroc of Calormen would not send troops, and he was overcharging for what food would slip in through the blockade, but finally cut off even that. King Rothbart's ship, The Briar Rose, was prepared to take the monarch to the Lone Islands but it was set ablaze with Greek Fire and sunk. To keep the same thing from happening to Cair Paravel, the splendid tapestries and curtains were ripped down and thrown into the sea along with all unnecessary furniture. Bucket brigades were readied to throw beach sand on the flaming projectiles of

the siege engines. There were other preparations, more somber and heartfelt. The Black Diamond Brigade to the last otter came before the chaplain to wash his paws in the silver bowl, bow his head, and say "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

The king's appearance was untidy. Gaunt and drawn, he looked as pale as a ghost. He had not slept in two days and waved away a servant that brought in food. Orbereth asked him to take nourishment for the good of the nation, but he could not.

The King loved the sound of Orbereth's voice as much as anything the badger had to say. And finally when he could bear no more talk of the siege and where to place the wounded, the King wept and the two of them embraced. "Everyone needs someone they can cry with," Rothbart said. "A King must never cry, but Narnia is dying. Even Aslan would cry."

"Perhaps Narnia will live," Orbereth said. "After all, I had a vision last night of Aslan killing the White Witch on the field of battle."

"But if he's going to kill her, why not now? I used to rule a kingdom. Now I rule this castle. Soon that too will fall. I need a sign, some omen to show me the way. The waiting is stealing my courage and sapping what strength I have left. Will he not send me a sign??"

Captain Tully of the Black Diamonds came in. "Your Majesty, an ogre came to our gates with a white flag of truce. Shall I admit him?"

"We shall hear him."

The creature that entered was hideous and clearly strong enough to hold his own against the three otters that escorted him.

"My Lady, Queen Jadis, sends this message. If the one calling himself Rothbart III, formerly King of Narnia, will accompany me to meet Her Majesty face to face, she will graciously spare the lives of all in Cair Paravel. Otherwise you will all perish in fire and hail."

Captain Tully said, "Sire, the boys stand ready to defend you to the death."

Rothbart looked about at the Magi. "And you too, are you with me to the end?"

"Yes," Orbereth said, "to the very last."

The king nodded slightly. "Then I have decided." He looked at the messenger and said, "For such courageous folk, there can be no shame in surrender. I will see her."

Captain Tully gasped. "Surely not, Sire! You would not face the White Witch alone!"

"He won't be alone," Orbereth said, taking the King's hand in his paw. He felt Rothbart's hand

trembling and gave it a little squeeze. "Where the King goes, I go."

"She only asked for Rothbart," the messenger said, sternly.

"Are you afraid of me?" the badger asked, taking his bodkin out of its sheath and handing it to the startled ogre. "You may tie my paws if you wish."

"I fear no one. Come then."

The King walked down the hall, head held high, proud and erect, hand in paw with High Mage Orbereth. As they passed, the Black Diamond Brigade stood at attention, lances and halberds erect sadness etched into their faces. Rothbart stopped for a moment and looked at one of the young recruits with a red stain on his sleeve. "You're bleeding, son. You should seek help."

"Your Majesty, I can stay at my post."

The old man replied. "The war is over. There are no more posts."

The hall was crowded with well-wishers who stood respectfully, silent but for the occasional muted sob. Caps came off and heads bowed.

A young vixen approached and tugged his robe. "Are you going to die?"

He smiled sadly and touched her head. "We all have to die someday. Don't worry about me, dear child. Aslan watches out for us."

He reached the courtyard where the huddled families awaited news of their fate. The King looked around and said, "Aslan will not forget you, and neither shall we."

Orbereth's final prophesy, smuggled from the palace, bore witness to this:

*An old sun sets, four new arise
To brighten yet the darkest skies
How splendidly their courses run!*

*When Adam's flesh and Adam's bone
Sits at Cair Paravel in throne
The evil time will be o'er and done!*

THE END