

ONE

THE MESSAGE

IT WAS A WONDERFUL DAY IN LATE spring, neither too chilly nor too hot. The cherry trees had blossomed in pink splendor down the streets of Cair Paravel, the pennants on the castle stirred in a mild breeze and outside Trundle the Badger's carpenter's shop a bird sang with unbridled optimism.

It was almost more than poor Trundle could stand!

He glanced out the window at the splendid weather, then bent back to his drudgery, resuming the maddening tap tap tap of his mallet and chisel on yet another mortise for yet another cabinet.

In his sulky mood he missed a stroke and brought the mallet down on his paw. “Thunderation!” he yelled, doing a frantic dance about the floor of his workshop. “Ow, ow, ow! Garn and garbage!” He nursed his injured paw. “That’s the last straw! Cabinets or no cabinets, I’m through for the day!”

Trundle tossed off his apron, threw down his chisel, and fled down the long switchback trail to the beach. He was a fugitive from the workday world.

Free at last! Trundle sighed deeply. He had lived in Cair Paravel his whole life and never once had the nerve or the means to board one of the vessels in the harbor that plied the Eastern Sea or rode the silver highway of the Great River. But as he stood on the beach in the cool moist sand and let the hypnotic cadence of the waves gently massage his frazzled nerves, all of that mattered a lot less. For a few moments he could

wrap himself in the silver consolation of his dreams and drift along with the tides.

Dreams cost nothing, which just fit into his budget, and since big ones had the same price as small ones, he indulged himself with marvelous visions, gazing into the East across the endless waves, meditating on the raucous tune of hungry seabirds following the fishing boats.

Once a sailor taking pity on him kindly pointed out the general direction of the Lone Islands and told him what wonders they held. He faced them and tried to feel their presence. He imagined himself standing on their shore looking back at Cair Paravel. For a while it was so real he had almost convinced himself. "Aslan," he silently mouthed, "let me go there someday?"

Though his pipe dreams had never been realized, Trundle was by no means a failure. He had worked hard to establish his business, which he literally built from the ground up, cutting all the timbers himself and driving every last nail. By hard work, long hours and scrimping and

saving he had carved out a niche in the world that was uniquely his, and he was justly proud to be known as a creature of substance.

That being said, when he was alone and thoughtful in the night he often repeated his timeworn litany of regret that he never went to sea like Uncle Burly. He had traded liberty for safety like his father before him, learning what his family agreed was a “useful trade.” The problem was it seemed useful to everyone else but Trundle.

At times the safe, useful life he had achieved seemed to close in on him from all sides and his one escape lay somewhere out there over the eternal waves, alternately calling him and taunting him from the Utter East.

He turned and walked down the beach looking for the occasional shell in the tide. Somehow it encouraged him that even the sea’s poorest creatures could afford such magnificent lodgings. The largest one he’d ever found, a conch, sat on a shelf in his shop. When he was tired and discouraged, he would put it to his ear and listen to the echoes of the ocean waves.

They called to him, and he longed to follow them into the far horizon.

That is when he saw the answer to his prayer lying on the sand; a bottle sealed with a hand-carved stopper and inside it a scrap of paper.

A message! And to think he would have missed it had he not hit his paw with a mallet! Oh blessed paw, blessed mallet!

Like most *Paravellers*, Trundle could read a little. His paws trembled as the words emerged from the black smudges:

“If you should find this, I am Seaman Holly Tremble, of the late ship HMS Reliant, wrecked in a storm somewhere close to the Spice Islands. I am washed ashore on an uncharted island not far away. Please send this on to Proudfoot at the Dancing Dog Pub in Cair Paravel. He will know what to do. Your time shall be rewarded.”

TWO

THE DANCING DOG

FEELING VERY IMPORTANT AND QUITE pleased with himself, Trundle went straightway to the *Dancing Dog*.

The pub, known by the locals as the *Double D*, was a well known “beastie pub”. The tables and chairs were the right size to cater to the smaller folk, but were hardly the safest place to be. It seemed that every other day a local rowdy was conked with “the persuader” and tossed into the back alley to repent.

Things seemed peaceable enough when the badger walked in. Most folk didn’t bother to look about, and those who did subtly nodded and turned back.

At the bar sat a couple of foxes with one drink between them. “The problem with you,” one said, “is that you don’t understand vixens.”

“And I suppose you do?”

“Oh yes. You just have to follow three simple rules....”

“Agreed. But they change the rules every day!” The second fox downed the last swallow in the glass.

“Hey!”

Behind the bar was a meek looking hare swabbing down the woodwork and a rough looking wolf going about barking orders to the kitchen crew. It was clear to Trundle who was boss, and swallowing heavily, he drew close, nose in paw.

The wolf glanced up. “May I help you?”

“Good sir, would you point out Proudfoot for me?”

That got the wolf’s full attention. “It depends on who’s asking and why.”

“Well, yes, I suppose it does.” Trundle was flustered for a moment, then he gathered his wits and held out the note. “This is why.”

The barkeep gave the note a cursory glance as if it were a mere trifle. “One of those, hmm? So you found us, Stripey Dog. I suppose you’ll be wanting your reward.”

Trundle straightened indignantly. “Reward? Oh...that bit at the end. Of course not. Money takes all the joy out of it.”

“So why *did* you bring it in?”

“The poor chap’s in trouble, and it’s the right thing to do.” Trundle looked back into the wolf’s intent gaze. “Are you Proudfoot?”

The wolf subtly shook his head. “There ain’t no Holly Tremble, and there ain’t no Proudfoot.”

“I beg your pardon, sir...”

“See for yourself.” The wolf opened a small drawer in the bar and dumped out seven identical copies of the message.

Trundle stared at them in shock. Had he been a man he would have blushed, but he was

not so his ears went back. “Are you saying this is some sort of trick? A nasty jape?”

“No, it’s a test, and a very good one.” The wolf looked him up and down. “And you are?”

“Trundle, sir.”

“Well, Sir Trundle, what do you do for a living?”

“It’s just Trundle. And as if it were any of your business...”

“Well??”

The badger withered under the wolf’s baleful stare. “I...I’m a carpenter.”

“Wife and kids?”

“Someday.”

At this one of the two foxes said, “Haw haw, that’s a good answer! I wish I’d thought of that one!”

The wolf shot the foxes an icy stare. “You’ve finished your drink, now off with ye!”

After the two foxes stalked out, Trundle scratched his cheek. “I didn’t think sharing a drink was allowed.”

“Ordinarily it wouldn’t be.” The wolf leaned forward and said, “Every day the Rufus twins buy two drinks and split each one down the middle. I think they’re a bit soft in the head.”

“Perhaps,” the badger said, looking a little dubious. “Maybe they’re just lonely.”

The wolf’s expression softened a bit. “You seem to be the understanding type.” He looked over at the hare and nodded. “I think you’ve found him.”

The hare brightened, came over, and took a small purse of silver coins from his belt, spilling them out on the counter. “Bravo, Trundle, Son of Earth! You have passed every test. If you make the grade, there’ll be more, and it will be gold.”

The badger stared at the coins. He wasn’t so crass as to count them but guessed there had to be at least fifty of them. “Why thank you. Thank you very much. But who are you, and what’s all this about tests and making the grade?”

“I am Sir Joseph of Brockhurst, and whatever else you may be, you are the true friend sent to me by Aslan.” He quickly and cautiously

turned back the corner of his apron to reveal a gold and diamond brooch with a crimson lion on silver. It was the most beautiful and most fearful thing Trundle had ever seen and he stared at it transfixed. “You’re a Knight of Narnia.”

Sir Joseph nodded gravely. “Come with me to the office. You shall hear my awful tale and all things will become clear.”

After the office door was properly secured, Joseph seated himself by the fire and invited Trundle to join him in a hot cider.

“Sometimes it is amazing what foolish things we do for those we love,” the hare began. “Such was my love for my new wife Fiona that I could refuse her nothing that money could buy! In her case it was a trip to the Lone Isles for our honeymoon.”

“That’s not too expensive, is it?”

“It depends on how you look at things. It cost me my very soul.” Joseph took in a deep breath and let it out in a long sigh, slumping back in his chair. “The latest Calormene war had been settled but a month before, and the ink on the treaty had hardly dried! Yet such was her resolve to sail to the Lone Isles and spend the first bloom of April on the beach that she used her feminine wiles on me, smiling a bit, pouting a bit, and letting me know it never really slipped her mind. So I gave in, and we sailed there to spend three wonderful weeks in the sun and surf.

“Fiona, ah even her name is music! Such a fair and gentle creature this world has scarce seen before and may never see again, and I adore her with every fiber of my being. During those three weeks in paradise, we spread our blanket on the sand, sleeping out in the balmy nights with naught but a ceiling of stars to look down on our love...” He trembled at the memory. “We treasured every moment, and how fortunate that we did! My buck, when everything is perfect and you stand on the unmatched pinnacle of joy there

is nowhere to go but down. And as high as we flew, how much further we fell!

“Before we knew it we were returning home on the Reliant—that part of the note was true.

“The first three days were calm and uneventful. Then an April storm swept out of the North, and an angry cold wind sent waves breaking over the deck.

“The lads rushed the yardarms and tried to reef in the sails, yet despite all, the rudder was sheared off, the ship turned broadside to the waves, and we quickly capsized.

“As suddenly as the storm came, it went. The sun returned and it would have been a lovely day except we were alone in the sea with nothing but flotsam to cling to for support. Fiona was in the longboat with the other does and I clung to a great wooden chest with the injured boatswain. He had crushed one of his arms and he had a nasty cut on his forehead.

“Two days passed. Nothing to eat and surrounded by miles of water unfit to drink. Heat, hunger, burning thirst. No one knew to look for us. Sharks took their awful share, and sometime in the second night the boatswain lost his grip on the chest and slipped away to his silent doom.

“Then just as hope began to fail, along came two merchant ships, Calormene Arabellas.

“We thought we were saved. Especially since our nations were officially at peace. But the barbarians insisted that we ‘pay our passage’, which is putting a good face on stealing our few possessions. Since I had some gold in my purse they let me go. And it was my understanding that the bribe covered my wife too, but that was wrong. Fiona was on the other ship, something that did not concern me at the time. However it got to port first.

“Fiona did not have ransom so she was taken back to Tashbaan and there sold into slavery. My dear wife was gone!”

Trundle gasped. “The dirty blighters...”

“To ransom her I would have given everything I had... even my very life...”

Joseph looked down. He kept his quiet dignity which made his grief seem all the more crushing.

Trundle impulsively put his arm about the hare's shoulder and gave him a pat. “Wasn't there anything you could do? Didn't you see the King?”

Joseph sighed deeply. “I petitioned the Crown to give me an escort of troops, but the King was afraid it would start another war, something Narnia could ill afford. Instead the King gave me gold and told me to be careful what I did with it. For a while, too long, I stayed home, the gold sitting untouched in its chest, going through the motions of living. I tended my roses, I kept my appointments, and each night I held her pillow tightly and cried myself to sleep.”

“Oh Sir Godfrey!” The badger set his tankard down and wiped his eyes. “Is there anything I can do?”

“Yes, there is one thing.” The hare looked Trundle in the eyes. “We are going to that foul land to find her and fetch her home.”

“We?”

“You and I.” Joseph took one of Trundle’s paws and squeezed it. “It was for that purpose I wrote the note in the bottle, and I believe with all my heart that’s why Aslan led you to find it.”

The badger was silent for a moment. Taking the safe and simple way had become an ingrained habit. He had been challenged to put security...indeed, his very life...in peril. What would Mum and Dad say? What would his customers say?

Then he thought about Fiona. What about her security? What about her family? What about her very life?

Trundle took a deep breath, let it out slowly, and said, “Garn, I’ll do it!”

THREE

QUEEN OF THE SEA

TRUNDLE AND JOSEPH LUGGED THEIR newly-purchased gear down the long switchback walk to the dock to find the Queen of the Sea. What they saw was a third-class trading vessel that didn't look like a queen, a duchess or even a dame, but more like a barmaid's charwoman.

Joseph looked at it and shrugged. "It's a fly in the eye, but I suppose it will get us there."

Trundle's assessment was a bit higher. "I bet it took a really big tree to make that sail-tree in the middle."

"The mainmast," Joseph said indulgently. "The branches are yardarms. First time out?"

"That obvious?"

Joseph smiled again. “Our first job is to secure our gear below decks.”

“Oh, I *love* that kind of talk,” Trundle said. “What are the directions again?”

“Port is left, starboard is right, the bow is in the front and you head forward, the stern is in the back and you head astern.”

“Why do sailors use all those fancy words? It’s like they’re trying to make a lot of plain things sound important.”

Joseph laughed. “When you’re far from shore, it’s *all* important. So the big tree...as you call it...up front is the foremast. The tall one in the center is the mainmast, and the one in back is the mizzenmast. The ropes that hold them together are called rigging.”

“My, you know everything, don’t you?”

“I know your sea bag is coming untied...”

Trundle was finally having the adventure he’d prayed for. The wood planks groaned as he walked and the ropes creaked as the ship nodded

in the swell. The capstans turned as seamen put their backs into their labor and the anchor chains rattled as they were stowed in the hold. Other sailors climbed the masts and crawled out on the yard arms, unfurling the sheets and belaying the rigging so that they caught the evening breeze. “Embarking” was another term Trundle had learned, and he felt his paws tremble as the dock began to move backwards, at least from his viewpoint. He wanted to laugh, he wanted to cry, outwardly he did neither but inside him he did both at once.

It was Trundle’s first ocean voyage, and therefore it was his best so far. And yet within moments he realized it was also his worst ocean voyage. At first it was an annoying feeling from the swaying of the ship. It seemed irritating at first, then more and more discomforting so that by the time he was out of sight of the quay he

wondered if he'd made a mistake. He tried walking about on deck to see if that helped, but his feet were unsteady.

“Don't worry,” Joseph said, “you'll soon find your sea legs.”

What he needed most was a sea stomach.

By the time they went to the galley poor Trundle was feeling a bit green in the gills.

The meat they were given might have charitably been called one of the great mysteries of the sea.

Trundle moved it about with his knife. “What I wouldn't give for a nice pot of simmer and sing stew!”

Joseph looked at his tray with loathing. “Do you know what this is?”

Trundle shook his head. “Not sure, but it lived an unhappy life and died an unpleasant death.”

Joseph wrinkled his nose. “Well it's getting its revenge now.”

The smell of the unsavory fare suddenly made the badger's malaise worse and he feared he would need to run up on deck to "see the scenery".

Fortunately the hare had a cache of medicinal herbs "just in case" and he put something in the badger's tea. "Drink this."

"What is it?"

"Tremblebane. It will steady the nerves and settle your stomach."

Trundle grabbed for the cup and though it was hot he downed it in one long pull.

"You should feel better soon," Joseph said.

"As soon as I see the scenery," Trundle said, jumping up from the table and running for the ladder.

FOUR

SHARED DESTINY

SPACE ON THE CROWDED QUEEN OF THE Sea was at a premium, and every spot had to do double duty. Where Trundle had dined earlier, he watched folk setting up hammocks. The badger had a rolled canvas which ended in two iron hooks. He carefully watched Joseph unroll his bed and did likewise, dogging the hooks in the eyes on the upright timbers.

Sleeping in a hammock was a bit of an art. Trundle paid careful attention to the hare as he went to bed to see how he did it. It looked easy enough, and by following his teacher exactly he managed to lay down without falling off the other side. Not gracefully, yet safely.

The hammock wrapped around him, a very different sensation from sleeping in a straw bed

since the movement of the ship gently rocked him. It was oddly comforting to Trundle, perhaps harking back to distant memories of Mum rocking his cradle and softly singing. Between the tremblebane and the tender embrace of the canvas, he started to drift off.

As they slept, a child's quiet brown hands rifled through their belongings by the light of a single candle. Joseph's long ears pricked and his eyes opened. In moments he sprung into action, rolling out of bed, drawing his sword and pointing it in the boy's startled face.

“Ho there, laddiebuck! Looking for a free lunch?”

Awakened by the hurly burly, Trundle made a quick and painful exit from the wrong side of his hammock, ending up in a heap on the deck.

It was the cabin boy who trembled at the other end of Joseph's sword. Oddly enough for someone dressed like a Calormene sailor he had the distinctive eyes and nose of a Narnian Telmarine.

"Don't hurt me," the boy said as if afraid of waking the others. Certainly he had awakened several, but they lay still hoping to remain uninvolved. "I didn't mean to steal from a talking animal. Honest, sir..."

The hare nodded grimly and sheathed his sword. "So it's alright to steal from the others, eh?"

"Momma taught me it's wrong to steal, and I hate to do it, really. I'm a slave, and I'm trying to buy my freedom to get back to Narnia. They stole from me so I steal back from them."

"So you want to go home? Enough to earn it with some honest work?"

"Yes sir. I swear..."

Joseph scratched his chin. "I want to trust you, really, but trust has to be earned. First off, there's to be no more stealing, not from us or anyone else. Ever."

The boy shook his head.

“Now tell us something about yourself.”

He boy looked puzzled. “I am Hassam the cabin boy on the Queen. That’s it.”

Trundle asked gently, “You don’t look like a Hassam. What’s your real name?”

The boy cringed. “Oh please, sir...”

The badger laid a paw on his shoulder. “Your name belongs to you. It is the gift of Aslan, and one of the things that makes you different from all other boys on Earth. I am Trundle. This is Sir Joseph. What is your name, son?”

His destiny hardened expression gave way. “My name... is... My name is Orlando.” He seemed embarrassed that his eyes misted up. “I was born in Farthingdale.” He had forgotten how powerful the music of his own name could be and how poignant the sound of home. “They’ll beat me if they know I told you. You won’t tell anyone, will you?”

Joseph put his paw on the boy's hand. "Don't be afraid. When a Knight of Narnia gives his word, he never breaks it. And I give my word."

"A Knight? A real, live Knight?"

"The best kind." The hare smiled and put his other paw on the boy's head. "Orlando of Farthingdale, I, Sir Joseph, a Knight of Narnia, ask you to be my squire. Remember before you answer that a knight never cries, and neither does his squire if he too wants to become a knight someday."

"I'll never be a knight in this place. I want to go home."

Joseph could understand that all too well. "Help us and you will go home."

"Then I will be your squire. Tell me what I have to do."

FIVE

FISH OUT OF WATER

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG, IT OFTEN happens quickly. One moment Trundle and Joseph were smiling and talking about old times over lunch in the galley, the next a couple of brawny Calormene Markaans sat down, one on either side of them. The two strangers looked at one another across the hare and badger as if they weren't there, talking loudly and obnoxiously about the charms of a certain dancing girl from Agorbah. (If I told you what they were saying, your parents wouldn't let you read this story!)

One of them, leaning closer, knocked over Trundle's cup. If he noticed, he didn't show it.

“If you two gentlemen want to sit together,” the badger said bashfully, “we can move.”

“We were here first,” Joseph said resolutely. “Now Trundle, as we were saying...”

One of the Calormenes rudely shoved Trundle. “My friend here doesn’t like Talking Beasts. One of the little blighters slit his brother’s throat during the war.”

“I’m terribly sorry,” the badger said, openly trembling. “I’m sure he died bravely.”

“I don’t like Talking Beasts either. They smell funny.”

Trundle looked around. “Joseph...let’s go. I don’t stay where I’m not wanted...”

The hare started to rise from his seat, a paw reaching for his dagger. Before he rose to full height, a strong brown arm grabbed him about the throat, wrenching back to snap the hare’s neck with a sickening crack.

“Joseph!” the badger shrieked, lunging forward. He was arrested by strong hands from behind that lifted him struggling and swung him about, slamming him against the bulkhead.

Trembling, gasping for air, and feeling his heart leap out of his chest, Trundle looked down at the strong arm that pinioned him there, and the blade of the dirk that touched his throat and idly drew a line that parted his fur and tickled his skin. He shook his head slightly and managed to weakly stammer, “Please...don’t kill me! Please let me go!” In that extreme moment, the incongruous thought popped into his head that he would die never having seen the Lone Islands. That, and whether it would hurt very much. “I want to live!!”

“Trundle! Wake up, Trundle!”

The badger’s eyes flickered open and standing over him was Joseph’s worried face. “You’re alive...you’re alive!”

“I believe you,” the hare said with a hint of a smile. “This dream of yours, was it awful?”

“The worst in my whole life.”

Joseph nodded slightly. “Now you’ve been properly initiated. Your common sense has caught up with you. It’s not just a holiday now.”

“Sir Joseph, I...I don’t know if I have what it takes. I don’t want to say this, but its better you know now than later.”

The hare put a paw on his shoulder. “I already know you have what it takes. And once you’ve seen the elephant and lived to tell about it, you’ll know it too.”

“We’re going to see an elephant?”

“It’s soldier talk. It means going into battle.”

“Will we be doing it right away?”

“Hopefully we won’t be doing it at all.” The hare looked him in the eye. “Stripey dog, the only thing that frightens me more than fetching them out of Calormen is leaving them there. It’s alright to be afraid as long as you do your duty. It happens to all of us.”

“Even you?”

“Especially me.”

Trundle thought of Joseph’s wife languishing in slavery in a far off land. “I’ll try

not to disappoint you,” the badger said, feeling his throat with a paw where the phantom blade had touched him. “I’ll have a lot of adventures and plenty of stories to tell the grandchildren. But you know what the best bit will be?”

“Making cabinets again?”

“Yes.”

“And I look forward to tending my prize-winning roses with Fiona by my side. She’s all the adventure I need to be happy.”

Trundle noticed that Sir Joseph had kind eyes. He smiled a bit as their warmth began to dispel the awful shadows of his nightmare. “I’d like to see those roses someday. That is, if you don’t mind.”

“I would mind if you *didn’t* come.” The hare lightly patted Trundle’s cheek ruff with a paw. “Now try and get some sleep.”

SIX

TALL TALES

“HASSAM” WAS WORKING CREW, NOT A guest, something the Captain made very clear when the boy was caught talking with the paying passengers. To be Orlando and dream of freedom in a free land, he had to come out on deck during the night watch when he should be sleeping. Joseph and Trundle would meet him at the taffrail.

There among the waves, beneath the jeweled sky, in a drowsy pool of lamp light that danced to the cadence of the swells, he had a perfect place to tell stories of Kings and commoners, joyous fairs and grievous wars. His words were sweet wine to Trundle’s ears and valuable insight for Sir Joseph. What follows is a brief report of their meeting:

Travel to Calormen under the Tisroc's banner (may he live forever) was reasonably safe. The Peacock Kingdom would benefit from running a comfortable tourist haven and reliable trade lines. So long as one went to approved locations, a holiday in Tashbaan could be just the cure for insatiable wanderlust.

However the Tisroc, as his father before him (who did *not* live forever), had lost a series of disastrous wars. These conflicts were portrayed to the Calormene people as limited engagements that ended in honorable peace.

Visitors from abroad might speak a harsher truth; of the disaster at Kesban Valley or the rout at Araksham where the Black Diamond Brigade of Narnia could walk across the river on the bodies of slain Markaans. To go to such places where the shifting sands still revealed skulls and spear points was to flirt with death.

For years Orlando felt abandoned by Aslan, but the noble kindness of Joseph and Trundle had restored his faith. He found he could speak of the local religion without a pall of superstitious dread hanging over him, and he smiled at the foolish stories.

According to legend, Tash and Hagamesh were brothers, the firstborn of all things, having sprung fully grown from the sand where their father the Earth and mother the Sea met. These old gods became lazy and Tash and Hagamesh took their throne, casting a spell over the land and sea to keep them in a deep sleep until the end of time. When the Earth stirred in his dreams he caused earthquakes and when the Sea had nightmares she caused great waves.

For a while the brothers ruled creation well, but their differences caused strife.

Where Tash was comely and creative, Hagamesh was ugly and destructive. The Trickster once stole fire from the sun to give to

mankind which made men dangerous. For this reason he was cast out of the skies and he hides in the shadows away from the angry sun. When someone has been cheated or bad fortune strikes, his name is used as a mild curse.

Among men, three enterprising brothers learned the secret of flight from Hagamesh when he was in a drunken rage. They used that knowledge to steal gold from the sun and silver from the moon and used their wealth to found Tashbaan.

Tashbaan was built on the place where a great whale had washed up on the beach. They carved the whale up for oil and meat and found in its stomach a magic talisman that had been stolen from the Mother Sea. It was that talisman that enabled the Calormenes to become powerful merchants and control the currents and tides.

To travel freely among the people meant mastering certain social graces. Of the hundred or so Orlando described, certain ones stood out from the rest:

Thanks were given before eating rather than after. One bite was always left behind to avoid the appearance of greed.

A visit to someone's home came with a guarantee of safety for the night. When the sun was fully above the horizon the next morning, all bets were off.

If you sat on someone's hat they were justified if they killed you, for that was a grave insult.

When haggling over merchandise, it was alright to disparage the goods but not to call the merchant a cheat or a fool even if he was one.

Never swat flies or mosquitoes on a Wednesday, though one may shoo them.

If you accused someone of a crime and they were not found guilty, you must pay double their fine and serve twice their sentence.

Belching at the table was acceptable, but hiccupping was not. The victim had to leave

immediately and not come back until he had regained his composure and prayed to The Daibeh (the household god) for cleansing.

One must never mention the name of a person who has died whilst seated at the dinner table, though it was alright to drink a toast to their memory whilst standing.

After hearing all that, Trundle scratched his head. "I'm all muddled," he told Orlando. "How does anyone remember all that?"

"It's simple, Mr. Trundle. You can learn a lot in a little to the tap of a well-oiled whip."

Orlando felt very pleased with himself for his contribution to the cause. For the first time in a very long while he got on his knees and recited the prayer of thanksgiving in a clear, confident

voice rather than meekly begging whatever may be out there to help him.

After the boy crept away to go back to his sleeping quarters, Trundle sighed happily and looked up at the stars. “Seeing that did me a world of good.”

“Yes,” the hare said with a sigh more of resignation. “I really envy him.”

“Envy?” The badger looked about puzzled.

Joseph settled back and looked up at the stars. “Yes. I was once like him.” He looked the badger in the eyes. “If this works out, I may be like him again.”

Trundle subtly shifted his position and leaned against the hare. “Why don’t you tell me about it?”

“Not much to tell. Fiona and I were headed back from the Lone Islands, so I prayed for good weather and I didn’t get it. So I prayed the ship could stay the storm and I didn’t get it. I prayed the wounded boatswain would make it back to his wife and children and he didn’t.”

“Bad things happen sometimes,” the badger said.

“I know. Then one day if you hold out from despair and pray hard enough they get better.”

“Indeed they do.”

“But they didn’t. I prayed and prayed that Fiona would make it home with me alright, and she didn’t. So I prayed Aslan would move the King’s heart to give me an armed escort or at least demand an investigation from the Calormene consulate. He did neither.”

Trundle put his arm about Joseph’s shoulder and gave him a little pat. “I can imagine how you felt.”

“Can you, Son of Earth? Can you really?” The hare sighed again. “I would try to say my nightly prayers and I felt...nothing. My words were tiny wisps of winds torn and tumbled in the gales of cruel fortune...”

The badger gave him a little squeeze. “There is someone out there, Joseph. And even

though you don't always feel his presence, he feels yours."

"Well put, and by the hardest I have come to accept that at last. But for a long time I struggled with it, wondering how the Emperor Across the Sea could be all powerful and all good yet let these awful things happen.

"Then one day I was sitting on the city wall looking at the stars. It was much like this...quiet and still and beautiful. I tried one last time to pray. I asked for a sign, however small, that Aslan had not utterly abandoned me.

"All night long I sat there. And then when I had just about decided to go home and go on with what was left of my life, the sun came up.

"If you've never seen the sun rise over the sea, knowing that it comes from the East where Aslan holds his court, you need to. I looked at the beauty of it and without understanding why, tears began to run down my cheeks. Then I could hear his voice. Not words, but a message that rang in my heart like a song of love. If I were faithful, hard working and patient, I would find Fiona. As I wept, Aslan wept with me.

“The very next day I went out and talked with Mage Aramis. He told me that I should trust Aslan fully, the way a squirrel jumps from one tree to another knowing that a branch will be there. And that is why I wrote the notes in the bottles.”

“And that’s why I’m here.”

“Yes. My faithful friend.”

“And so everything worked out in the end.”

“Worked out? I wouldn’t go quite that far.” The hare tensed up and his ears twitched. “I still have my troubles dealing with it all. Just look what happened to Orlando, the poor boy! Where was Aslan when that innocent child had barbaric customs beaten into his head to the tune of a whip?”

“He was in you while you were sitting on the wall at Cair Paravel. Just as he was in you when you promised Orlando his freedom. Sometimes Aslan appears in the strangest places.”

Joseph looked over into Trundle's honest face and smiled. "Just as he is in you now." The smile faded as quickly as it came. He drew his dagger and held it up to let the torch light sparkle on its finely honed edge. "Witness this blood oath, Stripey Dog. Orlando's suffering is over, I guarantee it!" With a sudden lunge the hare stuck the tip of the blade into the deck. His paw trembled in its grip on the dudgeon. "The next mother's son that hurts that boy will die!"

SEVEN

OVER A BARREL

FOR A KNIGHT LIKE SIR JOSEPH, A pledge was a sacred obligation. He had promised Orlando his freedom, then pledged a blood oath that no hand would ever come against him, but keeping those promises would be hard. Perhaps so hard that it would bring his quest to an untimely end.

Though he had the gold to buy the boy's freedom, it was abhorrent for him to reward the theft of a human child with a cash ransom. Orlando was stolen, and he must be stolen back. Still Sir Joseph had spent a week looking for another plan and found nothing. With one day

left in the voyage, the hare paced about below decks looking for a better way.

He fell back on a method that was once his first line of attack but had in recent years become an avenue of last resort. He leaned against a bulkhead, closed his eyes and quietly murmured, “Great Lord of the Universe whose rod sways the sun, moon and stars, show me the way to help Orlando.”

It was not long after that when the knight spotted something both ordinary and wonderful, ugly and beautiful...an empty wine barrel.

“Lord, forgive me for ever doubting you.”

All that night Trundle worked by the light of a single candle, using ink he'd made from lampblack and grease and a brush made from a lock of his tail...a small personal sacrifice. The badger used a cheese grater as a file to remove identifying marks and very neatly painted “Propertey of Sir Godfry” in their place. (You will remember he could read but not that well).

Orlando looked at the barrel dubiously. It would require every bit of his self discipline and a burning desire for escape to let his friends seal him in there.

Trundle said, “Just remember, we’re leaving the tap out. Breathe through the hole, but do so quietly.”

The boy trembled. “I’m afraid of closed in places. Sir Joseph, do I have to do it now?”

“Yes, son. Tomorrow morning is too late.”

Orlando’s face was pale. In a weak voice, he said, “Whatever you say, sir.”

The hare came forward and held the boy in a crushing hug. “You won’t be alone. My courage and prayers go with you.”

Shortly after sunrise the first mate came below decks and rudely shouted “All ashore that’s going ashore!” From the hammocks those

who had gotten a good night's sleep reluctantly stirred and climbed out of their hammocks. Trundle and Joseph had no sleep at all, but they were too frightened to be tired.

In the midst of the confusion, they quietly put a cork into the bung hole of their wine barrel and tapped it in firmly with a mallet. Then they started to roll it out, a slow and painful process since they were two decks down.

"I thought they made these things out of wood," Joseph grumbled.

"They do," Trundle replied through gritted teeth. "Ironwood." (He'd knew all the carpenters' jokes).

They paused a moment, looking up the ramp to the deck above and sighed.

A couple of brawny Calormene crewmen saw their distress and offered to carry it out for a few crescents.

"Most obliging of you fellows," Trundle said. "Careful please! We have some fragile things in there."

Sometimes at the height of our joy, when we feel clever and smug and untouchable, disaster strikes.

Joseph and Trundle were headed down the gangplank with the barrel behind them when suddenly the Captain appeared on deck. “Where is Hassam??”

Joseph’s ears twitched and Trundle gasped. Still, they managed to stifle the panic before it could escape in a yell.

It would have been safest to duck and run, but a promise was a promise, especially when made to a trusting child.

“A reward to the man that finds him! Three hundred darims!”

The sailors scrambled about searching high and low.

The porters rudely cast the barrel aside to search for the boy. At this, Orlando, who felt panicky anyhow, shrieked and kicked out the lid

of the barrel. That was...to put it mildly...ill advised.

“Captain! There he is!”

Sir Joseph shoved the man off the dock. Grabbing the boy’s hand, he hurried after Trundle and was soon lost in the anonymous crowd.

The Captain sent a few runners into the crowd to try and find them, but he knew he was beaten. “I curse you in the name of Tash!” he thundered. “Filthy Narnian trash, may Hagamesh use your backbone for a ladder!”

As soon as they were safely away, Sir Joseph embraced Orlando. “You are free, child. You will never hear the name Hassam again as long as you live.”

“Free!” the boy said exultantly. “It really happened! I mean, I know you promised it would, but now it’s really happened! I’m Orlando to *everyone!*”

“I can find a nice Telmarine family and give them passage money so you can back to

Narnia safely. Then you go to the castle at Cair Paravel and ask to see Mage Aramis...”

“Oh no, sir. Begging your pardon, but I’d rather stay with you.”

“Son, we’re going into the heart of darkness. Hot days, cold nights, dry winds, roving bandits, low rations and long marches.”

“I know, but I can go there of my own free will. I’m not a slave anymore. *I* choose. I’m coming with you.”

The hare put his paw on Orlando’s cheek and gave it a pat. “You put me to shame. I was seeing the boy you were and missing the man you’re becoming.”

Trundle watched in rapt silence. The escape had frightened him out of his wits, but now he felt an odd kind of exhilaration. He had cheated death and come away with the prize! He nudged the hare. “Have I seen the elephant yet?”

“A bit of it,” Joseph said, obviously pleased with himself. “Now let’s be off.”

EIGHT

IN THE KOSHAM

TRUNDLE AND JOSEPH WERE STILL arrayed as *Paravellers*, and while neither of them was fit to enter the King's court they still looked prosperous.

Legions of hawkers brought out their wares, buskers played instruments and danced looking for a handout, and those with nothing to sell tried to look pitiable.

"We need to buy some good clothes," Joseph lamented.

"What's wrong with them?" Trundle asked, looking at his vest and cap.

"They aren't dusty and worn, and they don't look Calormene."

Just then, as if to make a point, a gaunt man with his raven hair in a long braid came forward.

“Fine merchandise for our honored travelers? Souvenirs to show the children? Trinkets for your good ladies?”

“No thank you,” Joseph said quickly. “Do you have local fashions?”

“Silk scarves, cedar sandals, coral beads? I have a wide selection of...”

“No. We’re not tourists and this is no holiday. Spare me your trifles.”

The seller noticed the hare’s purse of coins and said, “Ah yes, I see you are a noble creature of discerning taste. Forget these trinkets and buy your lady something fine?”

After glancing about cautiously, the merchant opened a silk bag and shook out a few precious items. There were rings, ear pendants and a couple of brooches.

Sir Joseph gasped and pointed at one pin. “That’s the one I want.”

“A good selection, sir. As for price, I’m sure you’ll agree this elegant example of the master’s art is...”

“Stow the bilge!” the hare sternly hissed. “I don’t know who you are and I don’t care. But that pin once graced the stole of Lady Fiona. Tell me where you got it and I’ll pay four times its weight in gold.”

The merchant swallowed hard and tugged at his beard. “That’s very generous, sir, but my clients prize my discretion. What you ask...”

“All I am asking you where you got it. Six golden lions with no questions asked if you meet my demand.”

“But sir, I...”

“Going once!”

“If he ever found out I was the one...”

“Going twice!”

“You wouldn’t tell him it was me?”

“Sold!” Joseph hissed, putting the shiny gold coins into the man’s trembling hand one by one. “Rest easy, I shan’t breathe a word.”

“It was on a slave sold at the Kosham. Just head for that tower with the blue tile roof. His auction block is behind it. You can’t miss it. Ask to speak with the Kes.”

“The Kes...behind that tower. You have done me a great service, and...”

Before the hare could finish thanking the merchant, he had gathered his wares and disappeared into the crowd.

Joseph stared at the pin incredulously. “This proves it! Look at this, Stripey Dog! Look, Son of Telmar! Proof that Aslan smiles on our undertaking! He wrote a prophesy in the sky in letters a mile high as surely as I live and breathe!”

“Are you sure it’s the same pin?” Trundle asked. “I mean I sure *hope* it is...”

“It is one-of-a-kind,” Joseph rhapsodized, running his paw gently over its lovely contours and kissing it with frustrated affection. “This was on her person when I last saw her. It is a sign, I tell you! The sign I’ve been praying for! I shall see her again!”

The Kosham was a place carefully segregated from the happy face Calormen showed its visitors. There were only three sorts of people there, those who sold, those who bought and those who were purchased.

It was a brutal place that smelled like fear and greed and the Narnians saw the traffic of people as commodities thinly veiled outrage and fear.

Those being sold had various looks. A few were outright defiant. Most were somber and resigned to their fate. A few, at this lowest point in their lives, openly wept though they were abused for doing so and looking weak—it brought down their price. Orlando trembled and Joseph knotted his fists. “Barbarian tooks!”

Trundle shivered. “Isn’t it against the law to buy and sell people in a market?”

“Not here,” Orlando said. “Slaves are people who were captured in war, working off a debt, lawbreakers or just kidnapped.”

“Like my wife,” Joseph hissed under his breath.

“Take heart, Sir Joseph,” Orlando said. “It’s against the law to kill a slave without cause. They fine you a hundred darims.”

“And how much money is that?”

“You can buy a really good shirt for a hundred darims.”

Joseph sighed deeply, then tapped one of the customers. “Good sir, where can I find the Kes?”

“The Kes?” He laughed. “Right there on the stage.” (It seemed that “Kes” was a title, not a name.)

The smiling bloke on the stage, whatever his name, bought out a timid woman and began to hawk his wares with a well-practiced warble... “Behold Cassandra! She has all her teeth, fair skin, and is quite a looker and yet capable of hard work and—get this—she can read and write!”

“Two hundred darims!” someone exclaimed.

“Two hundred darims for this fine lass? Perhaps I can sell you a sparrow?” The Kes acknowledged the laughter of the crowd with a half bow. “The next bid I get under five hundred darims will win you a black eye! Now *come on*, people! *Look* at this lovely flower with *both* your eyes!”

“Six hundred darims!”

The oppressive heat of midday, more than the need to eat lunch, called a halt to the proceedings.

Mopping his sweaty brow on his sleeve, the Kes exited the platform to go on break. His approach frightened Orlando who recognized him as the man that sold him.

“Iced cacco?” asked Sir Joseph.

The Kes took it, sniffed it, sipped it, and then downed it quickly. “Ah, just what I needed. Now what will it cost me?”

“No charge.”

“There is no such thing as a free cacco in Tashbaan, especially if it’s iced.”

“Good advice may have its price, but that’s no reason to skip common courtesy.”

The Kes smiled. “You have a civil tongue for a beast. Come, long ears, and we’ll talk in the shade.”

Trundle could hardly pay attention to what was said. His eyes kept wandering to the large fan over their heads that was swung by a servant tugging on a long cord. Between the shade and the cooling breeze he was fairly comfortable, and that was a good thing since panting—a perfectly natural thing to do—was offensive to some Calormenes.

The Kes bit into a date. “Hmm,” he said at last, “I see an ocean of faces every day, yet this Fiona of yours seems familiar. Yes, I’m pretty sure I remember selling her to a caravan of

traders. They can always use good domestic help, you know. Perhaps I can remember which one. Now who was it?”

“Will a little gold help your memory?”
Joseph clinked a few coins about in his paw.

“A little more might.”

“Here’s three hundred darims. One farthing more and I’ll give you something else to remember.”

It was an empty threat and the Kes knew it. There were people about armed with scimitars and daggers and no one in their right mind would dare to draw upon the Kes. Still, he laughed. “I like your attitude rabbit!”

“Hare.”

“Whatever...hare. Three hundred darims and I tell you all.”

After handing him the money in a purse, Joseph said, “You may count it if you wish.”

“No need. No one ever cheats me.” He clapped his hands twice and servants brought spiced wine for all. Trundle looked at the gold cup entrusted to his paw and realized there was money to be made in the slave trade.

“I remember selling her to Agra Rashaam. I’ve sold enough folk to fill a small city, but she stood out, not only because she was a talking beast and a doe at that. Ah yes, she was the unhappiest of wenches. Not afraid for herself but she bribed me with the bauble you possess to let a child escape. Not worth the full price but I was touched by her gesture. I’m a hard man, as anyone can tell you, but I’m *not* a thief and I do admire loyalty. I kept my bargain with her as I kept it with you.” He slipped the coins in his pocket. “Now if you’ll pardon me, it’s time for my back rub.”

Sir Joseph was unusually quiet. Trundle, who was a bit of a chatterbox, had often wished the hare had been more talkative. But even for Joseph, his demeanor was reserved and distant.

“You know something?” the badger said in an upbeat voice, bravely carrying on a one-sided

conversation, “There were times when I thought we’d never find your Fiona, but it seems the Lion is on our side after all. This has been a very productive day so far.” He looked up at the stone-faced hare. “Don’t you agree?”

Joseph nodded mutely.

“Yes sir, we’re hot on her trail, and all we have to do is find this Agra Whats-his-name and before you know it we’ll be on the way home. We’ll be...” The badger stopped. He could feel the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

Joseph collapsed against a wall, his paws rising to his face. “I could see her on that stage! I could see her!”

The badger put his paw on the hare’s shoulder and gave it a little pat. “Time’s a wasting, lad. Let’s stow the tears and be off.”

Orlando said, “I thought a knight never cried.”

Trundle looked down. “Sometimes Aslan cries.”

NINE

BEHIND THE SILKEN
CURTAIN

TASHBAAN WAS A COSMOPOLITAN CITY that coveted money from abroad so long as it came without too many questions attached.

One could buy so-called homemade Narnian faire, though it wasn't clear which Narnia they meant.

There were gambling casinos where high stakes bets were put on bouts of kesbet and cheerless stone faces sat about the harom tables moving tiles as if their whole futures depended upon the outcome. Trundle was about to risk a single silver crescent on the Wheel of Fortune, but Joseph scowled and shook his head.

Orlando whispered in the badger's ear, "It's no loss, Mr. Trundle. Those wheels are rigged."

Once they got beyond the festive atmosphere of Tashbaan's wharf where most of the visitors stayed they found a very different city. That was the land behind the silken curtain, a place that did not wear a painted smile to separate a fool from his money.

In the narrow twisting avenues and back alleys of the Calormene slums beggars relentlessly plied their trade. Some of them were blind and lame from birth, but many of them were cruelly chewed up and spit out by the Tisroc's reckless military campaigns.

From the shadows suspicious eyes peered at them. The words they never heard, always unspoken but loud as a shout, were "What is *their kind* doing here?"

After several minutes of that, by chance or in response to some anxious report, a watchman stepped out of a side street right into their path.

“Well, my Narnian friends, how do you like the Peacock Kingdom?”

“Well enough,” Trundle said.

Joseph took a step forward. “What my badger friend means is everything was going well but we got turned about.”

“Yes, I thought you were lost,” the watchman said, crossing his arms. “There is nothing to see here, and much to fear.”

“Actually we’re looking for Shamar Khan. Would you kindly take us there?”

The man’s arms went back to his sides and his dark face went very pale. “I know nothing of this man. You’re on your own.” He quickly slipped away, casually at first then running when he got out of sight.

“That was excellent advice,” the hare said, patting Orlando on the shoulder. “And how resourceful of you.”

“Resourceful?” Trundle asked. “What did he do?”

“He whispered so low that only these long ears of mine could catch the words.”

“Oh! Very nice!” The badger smiled. “So who is Shamar Khan?”

Orlando drew close and said in a low voice, “He owns half of the gambling parlors you saw on the wharf. They used to belong to Omri Karidian until his headless body was found washed up on the beach. Seems he had a dreadful accident while shaving.”

“Oh...*that* Shamar Khan.” The badger touched his throat with a paw, as if to make sure his head was still attached.

Trundle cringed as Joseph approached a prosperous looking businessman. He both pitied the hare and worried for their skins.

“I’m looking for Agra Rashasm the trader. Do you know anything about him?”

“I live here in the city. Why would I know a trader?”

“He comes here to buy slaves. I think he has my wife. I need to locate him.”

“I said I didn’t know him. And sir, in this country what you don’t know might save your neck.”

“I have gold. Look, see? Money means nothing to me with my wife in chains! Do you have a family, sir? Do you know how it feels to lose one?”

“I’m sure it’s quite tragic,” said the man, pulling the hare’s paw off his arm. “And after all you’ve lost, it would be sad if you ended up in prison, sir.”

“But I...”

“Good afternoon.”

“I appeal to your sense of decency!”

“I appeal to your common sense! Good afternoon!”

“*Someone* has to know of him!” the hare sighed in frustration.

“Perhaps,” the badger answered, “but keep asking folk like that and you’ll have us in the Old Bailey for certain.”

Sir Joseph turned sharply. “It was for that reason I came here! Do you think I braved the seas on that rattle-trap bit of shark bait hoping to pass her on the street?”

“Calm down, my friend. People are looking at us...”

“I’ll calm down if you know a better way to find my family!”

“I might,” Trundle said. “I can’t think in a hurly burly, so calm down and give me a moment...” He scratched his head and sighed. “What sort of person would know Agra Rashaam?”

“His customers,” Sir Joseph said impatiently. “What does that prove?”

“His suppliers would know him too.”

“Well, yes, but what are our chances of meeting them?”

Orlando shook his head slightly. “I think Mr. Trundle is on to something, sir. Don’t traders make money by buying things where they are cheap and plentiful and carrying them off where they are rare and fetch a higher price?”

“Yes,” Trundle said. “I used to make trade goods myself. But wooden things aren’t as good for trade as metal. They have blacksmiths everywhere, and carpenters too, but the things you need a big city craftsman to make...tin and brass...I think Mr. Rashaam would buy them here to sell out there, don’t you?”

Joseph was dumbstruck. “Oh, I was such a fool!” He put an arm about Trundle and Orlando. “You splendid chaps, you clear heads saved the day! Oh, I was such a fool!”

“No,” Trundle said, “you were in love. It does that to a fellow.”

The three friends walked on in silence as the sky turned purple and the moon cast its pallid glow on the honeycomb of houses and courtyards. A few folk lit torches to put on the street corners and cast a shimmering golden light on the passers-by.

Someone was coming. Armed with what he thought was just the right question, Joseph said, "Excuse me sir, might I have a word?"

Trundle quickly stepped in front of him. "You may think me a little daft, but even in Narnia we have heard how excellent the tin pots and pans of Calormen are. They are way overpriced by the time they get to Cair Paravel, and we were hoping to find something we could buy here more cheaply."

The stranger thought a moment, stroking his beard. "I always get mine at Jubeth's. You're practically there now. Just head three blocks straight ahead, turn left at the lamp post and walk till you see the open shed on your right."

"You are most kind," the badger replied, motioning his friends on. After a while he tugged

Joseph's arm. "The difference between us is you beg people to talk. With a little flattery they beg me to listen."

"I underestimated you," the hare said. "Where did you learn that?"

"My Uncle Burley, the smart one that went to sea."

Jubeth was a rotund fellow with the bushiest eyebrows they had ever seen, and a long curled moustache. He also had a large leather apron which was pockmarked by the meteoric flight of hot coals from his hearth.

"Yes, my furry friends, I do sell things to Agra Rashaam. But why not buy from me and cut out the surcharge?"

Sir Joseph, taking Trundle's excellent advice, was more subtle than usual. "We sold him something by mistake and need to buy it

back. A necklace with a gold owl that has ruby eyes.”

“Seller’s regret?”

“Worse. There is a powerful spell placed upon it and we need it back or my poor Mum will never rest easy.”

“So you pinched your Mum’s treasure and she sent you all the way to Tashbaan to fetch it! Haw haw, but doesn’t it always happen that way?”

“I have a map. Any help you could offer us would be appreciated.”

“I was about to turn in for the night. I work hard for my money and...”

“Oh, I’ll make it worth your while.” Joseph put a couple of silver crescents on the table. “We really need your help.”

Jubeth nodded. “Let’s see that map. Ah yes, here is Tashbaan. This in the middle is the Great Central Desert. No one goes there if they can help it. Every trader I know starts here with a full load of merchandise and goes about the rim of the kingdom. Gurbruck, Gajjin, then to Kambra, Dokoor and Shimbeck. He’s probably

here by now. You'll have trouble catching up with him."

"Yes, but if we cut straight through here, wouldn't that give us an advantage?"

Like Trundle, the tinsmith looked at Sir Joseph askance. "Oh you don't want to do that. First off it is very forbidding country. And second, there are places where your kind have not set foot since the war. I cannot guarantee what will happen if you disturb the bones of the dead."

"I understand. Thank you for your help and for your advice. You don't know what good you have just done."

"I have sent you to an early grave. Do not thank me, strangers. I can see you are determined to let your folly lead you to your doom." He fished out a small silver charm on a necklace. "This will give you some small hope of surviving the journey."

"How much do you want for it?"

“A night’s peaceful rest. You are either very brave or very foolish. Now go, and may your name be written in the book.”

TEN

A MATTER OF LIFE
AND DEATH

THE TREES OF THE COAST GAVE WAY TO the irrigated fields further in. But as the last of the arable land gave way to brush and scrub, Sir Joseph knew it was time to prepare his friends for what lay ahead.

The hare sat under one of the last palm trees and in its fitful shade gave Trundle and Orlando the talk that soldiers heard when going out into the desert.

“Supplies must be the bare essentials, something we took care of in the army by restricting soldiers to the equipment they were assigned. You will have to be shaken down and put in good order.”

Orlando owned practically nothing but the clothes on his back, but Trundle, who had purchased some ill-advised souvenirs, had to pare down. Methodically—or as some might think ruthlessly—the hare rummaged through the badger’s rucksack, putting aside item after item with a shake of the head. Trundle was dismayed.

“Oh Sir Joseph, not my favorite rock!”

“You’ve never seen a green rock with crystals before, I know. You’ll remember it longer if you don’t die of exhaustion.”

Once they were all “shaken down” Joseph went over the survival rules. “These are, quite literally, a matter of life and death.

“Here the heat is oppressive by day and the cold is numbing by night. That leaves two times when it is safe and comfortable to travel...dawn and dusk. You only move about when your shadow is at least as long as you are tall.

“Understanding the local customs can save you from prison or, worse, the sword. Watch

exactly what I do and try to imitate me. I've been here before and survived. I'll survive again, and I'll make sure you do too.

“Recognize and avoid poisonous and dangerous plants and snakes. At night serpents may come in with you to keep warm. Every morning without exception you will open your rucksack and remove every last item, turn it upside down and shake it. Then inspect each item as you repack it. Scorpions can either kill you or make you wish you were dead.

“Lack of water is serious business. The wind dries you out as does breathing the dry air so you must drink enough. You never waste water but you should drink frequently. If you don't have to step off the trail from time to time you are drying out, and that can leave you retching on the ground. Trust me, that is no fun.

“Every morning we will eat some jerky and bread. Every night we'll have dried fruit. This promotes endurance by day and restful sleep at night. Don't eat anything you cannot identify

unless you are a dinner guest. If you visit someone's house, you will eat what they serve you and enjoy it, whether you like it or not.

“Lastly I have several herbs, but the most important one is Willow Bark. It's a thoughtful gift from Mage Aramis. Chew a bit of it to ward off body aches, fever and chills.”

“I suppose the fun part is over now,” Trundle said, a bit somber.

“It depends on your spirit of adventure, Stripey Dog. When you have faced the desert and lived to tell of it, you'll be glad you came.”

Jubeth the tinsmith was busy at his table, hammering a sheet of metal into the shape of a pan. Like most craftsmen he did not like to be disturbed while he was concentrating, but he was the only one in the shop at the time. So when a couple of potential customers came in he set aside his work and came over.

“May I help you gentlemen?”

One of the two sailors said, “Oh yes. Three of our friends were by this way. A badger, a hare and a young boy. Do you happen to know where they went?” He opened his hand and five shiny new silver crescents sparkled...

ELEVEN

STRANGERS IN A
STRANGE LAND

THE RELATIVE LUSHNESS OF THE COAST was forgotten as the three friends traversed the dry and scrubby inland dominated by short squat trees, sage brush and malicious thorn bushes whose whole purpose in life seemed to be bringing misery.

The wind, when it blew, came with a vengeance and stirred up choking dust devils without really cooling the brow one bit.

“It isn’t very pretty here, is it?” Trundle asked.

“It depends on your point of view,” Joseph replied. “If you’re a vulture, it’s the perfect place to wait for a hare or a badger to drop dead.”

Trundle laughed nervously, then said, “You are joking, aren’t you?”

“Well, I might be,” the hare said with a wan smile. “All I know is I want to find shelter before those storm clouds catch us.”

Orlando looked about. “Sir Joseph, those aren’t clouds!” He looked from side to side. “Over there! Quickly!”

The boy led his friends to a dry ravine. He crouched down in the bottom and pulled a cloth over his head. Joseph and Trundle followed suit without knowing why.

They soon found out...

The sky became tan, brown, then such a profound black the friends could not tell if it was day or night. The wind roared like a giant waterfall.

The dust storm was a type the local people called a *raksolla*. They blamed them on the

wrath of the storm god, though they have been known to be wrong about such things before.

“How long do these dust storms last?” Trundle asked.

“It shouldn’t be much longer,” Orlando hissed, coughing at the effort. “The wind dies down at night.”

“I wonder how much farther it is to Agra Rashaam?” the badger asked.

“I don’t know,” Sir Joseph replied, putting a paw on Trundle’s shoulder. “Are you sorry you came?”

“I wouldn’t exactly call it sorry,” the badger answered. “Still, I was just thinking about the cherry trees in bloom. Out here the memory of such things fades away, and it’s almost like they never really existed except in dreams. I’d like to see the pink blossoms again in Cair Paravel before I die. That doesn’t make me a coward, does it?”

“No, not at all,” Joseph said, putting his paw over Joseph’s and giving it a little squeeze. “You’ll see them again if I have to move the earth, sea and sky.”

“I believe you.” Trundle cracked a shy smile. “I miss my home, but I think I’d miss you even more. And that goes for Orlando too. I don’t want to see the flowers all alone.”

“We’ll be there soon enough,” the boy said, drawing near to Trundle and putting an arm about him. “Oh look! Up there! I can make out the sun! It’s still daytime!”

“Hurrah!” the badger shouted, shaking off a cloud of dust, then coughing spasmodically.

TWELVE

THRUST AND PARRY

IT RARELY RAINED IN THE CENTRAL part of Calormen, but when it did, it came down with a vengeance. The suffocating red dust became clinging red mud that made walking through the pounding drops even more miserable.

“Look!” Joseph shouted, “A barn!”

“I wonder if they’d let us stay,” Trundle said.

“I’m sure they will. We’ll ask them on the way out.”

There was no sign of the owners, and only a few horses in the barn reacted to their presence. Trundle tried to start up a conversation but these

were not talking beasts and wanted nothing more from him than extra oats and a rub on the nose.

In the meanwhile Sir Joseph was showing Orlando how he sharpened his sword with a stone.

“When you are on dangerous ground, your blade is your most important tool. Even a full suit of armor will only delay the inevitable if you are cowering on the ground rather than advancing, ever advancing. That’s why you always keep it clean and well manicured.”

The badger stepped away from the horses, walking over quietly to watch Joseph and Orlando inspect the bright blade. All of the talk of pommels, fullers and grips made him feel worthless as a companion.

“Sir Joseph, why did you choose me?”

“Beg pardon? Choose you for what?”

Trundle made a sweeping gesture. “This. *Everything*. I’m a carpenter, and you’re a knight on a great quest. I feel so helpless. You could have chosen a soldier but you picked me instead.

I don't know why. I only know I must be a real disappointment.”

The hare put his blade back into its scabbard. “Bosh! That's a lot of nonsense. I *need* you. Not what you do but *you*. Aslan chose you because of your character and generous spirit and I have never regretted his good judgment.”

“Well and good of you to feel that way, but I want to know how to defend myself. More importantly, I want to know how to defend you and that innocent child. If I watched someone kill you while I stood here helpless, I'd never forgive myself.”

Sir Joseph reached up and took Trundle's paw in his own, giving it a little squeeze. “And you wondered why you were chosen?”

Trundle raised his stick. At least he had a weapon as splendid as Joseph's, and it did not need to be sharpened.

The hare said, “First we face off. Then go on guard.”

“Like this?”

“No, hold your blade higher.”

“Alright, I’m on guard. Now when do I move around?”

“You have to learn a few terms first. Watch me advance. My foot moves forward, the body follows, *advance!* I go back like this...*retreat!*”

“Advance...retreat. That’s not so hard. Is using a sword one of those things like sailing a ship where everything has a name?”

“Oh yes. But here’s where the fun begins. You’re your opponent...*thrust!!*”

The stick stopped a mere fraction of an inch in front of the badger’s belly. “Oh my...”

“Blade cuts from the side...*slash!!*”

The blade whistled right in front of Trundle’s throat. He swallowed heavily.

“Now *hack, hammer and strike!!*”

Trundle’s ears went back. “Do I just stand here and let you make mincemeat out of me?”

“No. Remember how to thrust?”

“Yes...*thrust!!*”

“*Parry!!*”

With a nimble tap, the hare sent the badger’s blade off course.

“So when I thrust, you parry?”

“Yes. Now try a slash.”

“Alright...*slash!!*”

“*Block!!*”

The hare stopped the badger’s blade cold and with a strong push sent Trundle tumbling backward.

Orlando came and offered his hand.

“Need help, Mr. Trundle?”

“No, thank you.” He got up and brushed himself off. “So every time I try to skewer you, you block me, and every time you try to run me through I knock your sword away. What’s the point?”

The hare laughed and lowered his weapon.

“The point is to trick the other fellow into letting his guard down. To be quicker, harder, deadlier. No matter what you see in play acting, in real sword fights it only takes a moment of carelessness to lose your head...literally.”

Orlando cleared his throat. “One moment, I have to go water the camels.”

Joseph’s long ears twitched. “Eh?”

The boy laughed. “You know...pay the piper.”

The Telmarine stepped out into the miserable rain. As it pelted down on his wet hair, he thought things couldn’t get any worse.

Suddenly a hand clapped over his mouth and he was grabbed from behind. His arm was turned up in a sailor’s lock and every time he tried to escape the man pulled up on his arm, nearly wrenching it out of the socket.

“We have a pretty prize for the Captain,” hissed a whisper from behind. Orlando recognized the voice as that of Minkam the first mate of the Queen.

“He’s missed you terribly,” said Dakrah who stepped out of the bushes. “He’s planning a little welcome home party.”

Minkam chuckled. “Some folk were laughing at the Captain. He doesn’t like it, Hassam. But I doubt you’ll have any more adventures when he’s through with you, hmm?” He pulled up on the boy’s arm again to relish the look of pain in his eyes and hear a soft moan escape his tightly sealed mouth. “You ran us on a fool’s errand, but look what it got you in the end! Yes, look what it got you!” He jerked the boy’s arm again.

“Patience, patience!” Dakrah said, “Save it for later. The Captain wants him alive and unhurt...for now.”

“Yes, but then I’m going to hold you still while he brands you on both cheeks with a hot iron. Then we’re going to parade you in front of the crew and down the docks for everyone to see. You’ll be an example what happens to bad little boys.”

They brought their struggling prisoner around the corner of the barn. There highlighted in a flash of lightning stood Joseph, sword drawn.

“Let the lad go.”

“He’s not yours, you thieving beast,” Dakrah said. “Step aside or we’ll lop those ears off and poke them down your throat!”

“You and whose regiment?”

The two sailors together could have easily beaten the hare, but Minkam was busy holding on to Orlando. Dakrah drew his sword and advanced boldly.

“I’ll show you what I’m made of!” Joseph shouted.

“I’ll see for myself when I rip your liver!”

They clashed, swords flickering in the intermittent lightning. What was hard enough to do in the bright sunlight was nightmarishly difficult by the light of a swaying lantern.

Joseph held himself well for someone smaller than his opponent, yet he was being

relentlessly backed into a corner by the man's brute strength. For a while, what seemed like an eternity, it appeared Dakrah would make good on his threat. The hare had his back to the wall and no way out. He hoped that Trundle would have enough sense to stay hidden. At least the badger would live.

“Now,” the sailor hissed, “you get yours!”

“I think not,” said Trundle, the tip of his stick poking into the Calormene's ribs.

For a moment Dakrah was surprised. Then he turned about quickly, boxing Trundle so hard with the back of his fist that the badger fell like a tree. But it was all the diversion Joseph needed. He thrust Dakrah through from the back, and the Calormene fell mortally wounded.

Minkam, realizing his predicament, drew his dagger but pointed it not at the hare but at Orlando's throat. “You'll never take him alive!”

Sir Joseph shouted, “Let him loose or die!”

“Come closer and I'll kill him!”

“Kill him and I’ll butcher you bit by bit!”

“I’m already dead!” Orlando stammered.
“I love you Joseph! Save yourself!”

At this point, Trundle began to stir. He was a badger, made of sterner stuff than most talking animals, and it would take more than a single blow to take him out of a fight.

Seeing the predicament, the badger picked up a rock and tossed it. It only grazed the man but it startled him.

That was enough of a diversion for Orlando to pull free and dash away.

Without his hostage, Minkam was just a man with a dagger against a swift hare with a sword. In the lantern light Joseph’s eyes glowed red with hate. “So you were going to hold him while the Captain branded his cheeks with a hot iron? Well, *were you??*”

The first mate threw down his blade and took a step back. “Hold, I say! You won the lad fair and square.”

Ordinarily after such a surrender the man would be free to bolt and hide like the coward he was. But the hare's heart was aflame with righteous indignation . "I am a Knight of Narnia and I swore a blood oath to kill the next mother's son that hurt my boy. Prepare to meet your Tash!"

The man stared at him in a mixture of fear and anger. Nostrils heaving and eyes staring, he said, "So that is your precious knight's honor? I'm unarmed and helpless. Kill me now like the Narnian trash you are! Kill me like your people killed my brother at Araksham! That's all your kind knows to do."

The tip of Joseph's upraised sword wavered for a moment, then backed away.

"Get out," the hare hissed. "Go now before I change my mind!"

After the sailor fled in shame, Joseph bent down and picked up the Calormene's dagger.

"May I see it?" Trundle asked.

"You may see it, clean it and sharpen it, Son of Earth." The hare placed it in the badger's

paws. “You won this in open combat. Wear it with dignity and use it well.”

Trundle took the blade and turned it about in the lantern light. “You know, I’m kind of glad you didn’t kill that chap while he was unarmed.”

Joseph nodded, then turned his attention to the boy who was huddled by the barn quietly sobbing. He settled next to him, folding him in his embrace and murmuring, “I love you too.”

THIRTEEN

THE SHRINE

AFTER SOME MISERABLE MILES IN THE dust and rain, the three friends were ready for a real shelter where they could rest and relax.

They came across a small desert village, the sort that grew up around a reliable source of water. And thanks to Orlando's sage advice they knew just what to look for.

One of the mud brick houses had a wide red arrow hanging over the front door. Since it was pointed up, they knew it was a house that took in visitors for a fee. When such families had no room, or just wanted privacy, the arrow would hang pointed down.

“Is it safe to go in?” Trundle asked. “They might not take kindly to talking beasts here.”

“If they invite you to step inside, you’re safe for the night,” Orlando said. “In this land a family’s invitation to come in is a guarantee of safety for the night. Of course the next morning is another matter. If you’re a welcome guest they will bring you tea in the morning. If you’re not, they’ll bring you your cloak. If they do, don’t walk out, *run*.”

Trundle timidly knocked. After a while, an elderly man answered the door. After a bit of initial surprise, he said, “Can you say something?”

“Anything in particular?” the badger asked.

“Ah, very good, sir! So you are Narnian talking beasts. Well met! Come on in!” The man unhooked the arrow and turned it upside down.

“You must not get many Narnians out here,” Sir Joseph said, hanging his cloak and pack on the strangest hall tree he’d ever seen, then likewise relieving Trundle of his burden. He also reached for Orlando’s rucksack but the boy subtly shook his head.

“We do get talking beasts at times, but not from Narnia. Most of them are from Willoughby, and they are not so generous.”

“Willoughby?” The hare looked at Trundle but the badger only shrugged.

Dinner was a festive affair. There were many surprises on the menu, and most of them were pleasant. Kodu the innkeeper was a pleasant sort of fellow with finely polished manners and lots of interesting tidbits of information about the local goings on. He also had a healthy interest in all things Narnian and even asked if anyone had ever seen the Great Lion with his own eyes.

“He’s not about our way very much,” Trundle said.

“So how does your kingdom survive without its King keeping a close watch on things?”

“He keeps a human King on the throne that rules in his name.”

“Ah, splendid. I’d hate to see your beautiful land fall into mob rule.”

Trundle glanced over at Joseph and the hare subtly shook his head. “In Narnia most things are handled locally by the mayors and vicars. It altogether meets with my approval.”

“Well said, Stripey Dog!” The Calormene laughed and took a sip of his wine. “Small government means low taxes. That is one thing we certainly envy about your kind, though we don’t shout it in the streets, of course.”

“Of course,” Trundle said with an innocent smile. “So, have you ever seen Tash?”

“Why I...” The man frowned and sat down his wine glass with a loud clink. “Tash is

like the wind. You don't see him, but he makes the trees move."

"I'm sure my friend meant no harm," Sir Joseph said. "He's not from here and doesn't know much about such things."

"Yes, of course. If your people knew more about our marvelous Tash, perhaps you wouldn't have lost so many wars."

At that, Sir Joseph glanced at Trundle and it was the badger's turn to subtly shake his head. What the Tisroc lacked in military prowess, he made up for in boasting and swaggering.

After dinner, Trundle excused himself for a moment and Joseph paid Kodu fifteen crescents for use of his rooms plus another three crescents for each additional member of his party. All in all, 21 crescents was not that much for a welcome good night's sleep and home-cooked meal.

"I'll show you to your room," the innkeeper said, and very naively Joseph went to

fetch his belongings from the “hall tree”. That, in hindsight, was a big mistake.

Trundle was coming about the house from the back yard when he saw Joseph and Orlando being run out by a shouting innkeeper armed with a broom. “Get out, Narnian trash! Thieves!” He swatted the hare so hard he lost all his dignity and shrieked. “And don’t let me catch you here again or I’ll drag you off to the Old Bailey!”

Joseph rubbed his poor sore ears. “How was I to know that wasn’t a hall tree?”

Orlando sighed. “By the time you hung those things up, it was too late. I was going to tell you when we got in the room. He’ll have bad luck for a whole year.”

“So,” Trundle said, “You made offerings to the household god and then stole them back? My, what a monkey run!”

“Monkey run? If he’d had a real weapon he might have killed us.”

“I always miss the good stuff.”

“Speaking of which, where were you when I needed you, Stripey Dog?”

“I had to go pay the piper.”

“Pay the piper?” Orlando asked.

“You know, what goes in must come out,” Joseph said.

“Oh, you mean water the camels!”

“But of course.” He looked at the badger. “There were no trees or shrubs back there. I hope you were discrete about it.”

“Discrete? I used the loo. They had a nice one too...wooden with a carved lid. Better than I expected in this place.”

“Tell me,” Orlando asked uneasily, “Did the lid have a design on it?”

Trundle said, “Yes, it did. A circle with an X over it.”

Orlando turned away and giggled. “Oh Mr. Trundle!”

“What? What’s so funny?”

“That was a shrine for the bones of their ancestors!”

“Talk about a monkey run!” Joseph said. He tried to keep his composure but glanced back at the bashful badger and burst out laughing. “We’ll be haunted for seven years!”

“Well,” Trundle said in a huff, “why doesn’t someone tell me these things??”

They settled down for the night under a scrubby tree, wrapping in blankets to stave off the desert nighttime chill. Joseph passed out some dried apricots, nuts and a canteen of water.

“Oh what I wouldn’t give for a pot of simmer and sing stew,” Trundle said.

“Someday I’ll buy you enough to fill a cauldron,” the hare said.

Orlando said wistfully, "I'd be happy to have a warm bed tonight." Of course Joseph and Trundle felt the same way, but neither one dared speak of it.

"Tell me about your wife," the boy asked Sir Joseph. "Is it alright to talk about her?"

"If Aslan wills you'll be meeting her soon." Joseph sat back. "I saw Fiona at an archery tournament with a friend. She was nudging her friend and talking about me."

Trundle smiled. "Every buck thinks the girl is talking about him."

"She pointed at me. She was. Well I resolved to meet her. She was very beautiful and her voice was like music."

"So did you ever find out what she was saying about you?"

"Look at that fellow with the gold chain about his neck. That smug grin. I bet he thinks he's really something."

Trundle laughed. "Don't you?"

"I thought I had everything. Success, respect, even once a parade where young furlings tossed flowers beneath my feet. Then when I met

Fiona I realized I had spent most of my youth fighting to preserve a way of life that I had never lived for one single day.”

The badger nodded. “Sometimes we meet people that show us our lives can be so much more. Like you, for instance. If a year ago someone had told me I’d be here doing this I would have laughed.”

“That’s the way it often happens,” Joseph said. “So how about you? Ever fall in love?”

“Oh yes. Very deeply.”

“So you and she...do you have any plans?”

“None together, I’m afraid.”

“Oh? How did you break up?”

“Break up? I never told her that I loved her.”

“You’re kind of shy aren’t you?” He looked at the badger. “Don’t be offended. I had a brother like you. Wonderful chap but always sure no girl would ever really like him.”

“Is he lonely too?”

“He and his wife and five children aren’t lonely now.”

“Really?” Trundle smiled a bit.

“When I met you I was both happy and sad. I’m happy to get a fine fellow by my side for this adventure. I’m also sad to see you have so little tying you down that you pull up stakes and pack your tent at a moment’s notice. You need a friend.”

“I have friends.”

“A real friend, one that you’d want to stay for. And if you help me, Trundle, I will be that friend for you. I have long ears, but an even longer memory.”

Trundle looked up and smiled shyly. “I knew that from the moment I met you.”

FOURTEEN

ONE CHANCE

MORNING HAD COME. JOSEPH WOKE TO the sounds talking and laughter but he wasn't concerned because he recognized the voices.

He shucked off his blanket and looked about. There he saw something that made him smile.

Trundle and Orlando stood five paces apart. The badger had a freshly carved wooden ball and he tossed it to the boy who then tossed it back to him. After the ball had made one round, they both took one step backward before Trundle tossed again. The game was as simple as it was diabolical, to keep increasing the distance until someone missed.

“Come on, Stripey Dog!” the hare shouted, smiling. “You’re defending the honor of talking animals!”

“You’d better hope I win,” Trundle said. “You have to play the winner.” He caught the ball and, tongue stuck out in concentration, lofted it back. “Do you give up now?”

“No!” Orlando said, laughing, ball in hand. “Look out, here it comes!”

Sir Joseph knew he had serious work to do, but he was encouraged to see Hassam, the man in a boy’s body becoming Orlando, a child who likes to play ball. He remembered some advice his mother gave him years ago when he spent too much time hanging about with his father’s regiment. “You only have one chance to be a child. Don’t waste it.” Orlando would get his chance.

“Oh Trundle!” Joseph said, laughing. “Did that hurt?”

The badger rubbed his head and tossed the ball to the hare. “Want me to show you how much, long ears??”

“Don’t worry. I’ll show him a thing or two...”

Orlando took a long drink from his canteen. He took Joseph’s advice about living in the desert very seriously. In fact he hung on the hare’s every word. As he handed the canteen back, he asked, “Tell me about the war.”

At this Sir Joseph’s ears slumped a bit. “I saw and did a lot of things I’d rather forget.”

“Oh...” The boy thought a moment for a safer topic, then asked, “Is being a Knight bigger than a Lieutenant?”

Joseph laughed. “Son, Knight is a title, not a rank. I was a Knight and a Major. I retired early when I met Fiona so I could settle down and raise a family. But I’ll always be a Knight unless I dishonor myself.”

“And you’d never do that!”

“I should say not.” Joseph mussed the boy’s hair. “Being a good chap has become too much of a habit with me.”

“Do you miss the army?”

“Sometimes. But thank Aslan I learned something important before it was too late. A sharp blade can also prune roses.”

“What have you done with yourself since?”

“I’m a royal advisor. The King wanted someone that knew Calormenes but didn’t try to solve problems by killing them all. I fit the job.” The hare was reflective. “You know, I learned more about the Calormenes as people on this one trip than I did all the last war. They have some strengths and the promise of greatness if they would adopt a different sense of fair play. As I start to give up hope I see the children and every child is a new chance.”

Orlando looked back. “When you get back, do you think you’ll ask the King to be nicer to the Calormenes?”

“Sadly no. We hope for what might be but we deal with what is. We are already as nice to

the Calormenes as they will let us be...and I'm afraid that's not much."

As they walked along the road, Sir Joseph glanced at Orlando from time to time. The lad took his job as pathfinder very seriously, and that was well and good from a survival standpoint. Yet the hare looked back on his decision to make the boy his squire and wondered if it might not have been a mistake.

He remembered how proud his father was the day he asked to be his squire. But he also remembered his mother's tears. Then he passed it off, but it came back to haunt him when the lovely Fiona watched him from the grandstands as he tried to concentrate on hitting the archery target. Oh the aching loneliness. His mother was not crying for the boy he was but for the lonely buck he was becoming. Aslan be praised that the gentle doe came along before it was too late! But

was he becoming his father Moonwood? Was he standing proudly by as a boy traded his childhood for dreams of glory and manly courage?

That night as the desert cold set in, Trundle felt the need to check on the boy. He quietly crept over to see Joseph and Orlando huddled together, the boy's head leaning against the hare. They had one blanket among them, and it was not doing either one of them much good. Trundle shook his head, then quietly put his blanket about the boy and kissed him on the cheek.

As he left, Orlando opened one eye halfway and smiled.

The next day they were going along what was charitably called the desert road, though for much of its length it was merely a path marked by a series of cairns...piles of rocks to you

uninitiated readers. Where Joseph had excellent hearing and Trundle had a first class sense of smell, this was time for Orlando to shine, using his eyesight. His important role gave him confidence and pride. He stood straighter and walked with his head held high. No longer a cabin boy, no sir!

And yet after a while Orlando got very somber and worried. He glanced about a lot and looked panicky.

“Getting a bit turned about?” Joseph asked paternally, giving the boy’s shoulder a little pat.

“I don’t see the next cairn.”

“We can go back to the last one and try again.”

“I can’t see the last one.”

They looked back but there were no footprints either. The road was swept by the constant wind.

Orlando struggled with the two fears of being lost and letting down his friends. After a

few quiet moments, he said, “Maybe we should just keep going.”

“I think we should turn back,” Trundle said.

Sir Joseph shook his head. “Let’s not get even more lost.”

“How can one get even more lost?” the badger asked.

“Remember what I said about using your resources. We have a map, the sun is still low enough in the sky to cast a good shadow. Since it is morning, East is toward the sun, West is along our shadow. That must be North.”

“There’s a lot of North,” Trundle said with a nervous laugh.

“Right, but we’ll look for a guide. According to our map there is a very big dry stream just a short distance from here. When we reach it, we’ll turn toward the Well of Benzeer. Then we’ll be back on course.”

“I like that idea,” Trundle said. “I like it a lot. But do we turn left or right? We’re lost but we don’t know *where* we’re lost.”

“I thought of that,” Joseph said. “I need a shiny metal object. Ah, this coin will do. If I rub it with a bit of wool...and Trundle, your head will have to do...I can spin it and the face on the coin will turn to face the nearest source of water. It’s a known fact.”

“But your canteen, won’t that throw things off?”

“Not if you put it behind your back.” He added in a slightly irritated tone, “I’m so glad you thought of that.”

He waited till all the water had been stowed, then he put the map on the ground, spun the coin three separate times until it was kind enough to land face up, and said in his most cheerful voice, “To the left.”

They walked on in near silence for the next whole hour until they came across a rather deep cut on the face of the land with rounded rocks in the floor and some scrubby bushes on either side.

“That’s it,” the hare said. “Now left face and forward march!”

As they were walking, Trundle whispered very lowly so Orlando couldn't hear, "Where did you learn that trick about the coin?"

"I made it up. Keep smiling, Trundle, and don't frighten the boy. If we're wrong, we'll stop in an hour and reverse direction. Sooner or later we *will* find it."

"I would have just flipped the coin," Trundle said.

"That's why I'm a Major and you're not," the hare said, giving him a little pat on the shoulder. "Say a little prayer we're right."

"Ho there!" Orlando said, "What are you fellows whispering about?"

Trundle sighed, "A nice big bowl of simmer and sing stew, a firkin of wine and some fresh baked bread right from the oven." He added, "We were afraid of making you hungry."

Joseph smiled a bit, then whispered, "Now you're thinking like a Major, Stripey Dog."

Shortly thereafter they saw something as beautiful as it was ugly, a crudely cemented circular rock wall with a windlass and bucket. “See!” Joseph said proudly, “There it is! The Well of Benzeer, and the road!” Quietly he added under his breath, “Thank you, dear Aslan!”

FIFTEEN

THE HIGHWAYMAN

THE GREAT MAJORITY OF CONVICTED felons maintain their innocence to the bitter end, so those with steely nerves and iron will rarely speak of the tricks of their trade. A few, however, loosen up, especially under the influence of ale. These tell remarkably similar tales.

The most promising victims are those who walk more quickly than normal, more slowly, glance about frequently as if haunted by fears, look down at their feet as they walk, or otherwise stand out in a crowd.

In all Calormen no one stood out more in a crowd than a hare, badger, and little lost Telmarine.

As the friends walked, Joseph's long ears twitched from time to time. After a while it became so obvious that Trundle asked, "What do you hear?"

"Shh!" the hare hissed, spreading his paws. Everyone stopped. "I would swear..."

"What? What?"

"Shh!" Joseph motioned for the others to follow him once more. They went a few more steps, then he spread his paws. They stopped again. His ears twitched again. "Run!!"

Had the hare been alone his great speed would have served him well. But he was hobbled by a badger and a Telmarine boy. At least there was a grove of scrubby trees and bush ahead and they disappeared off the trail into the makeshift sanctuary and dropped to the ground.

As they lay still, their hearts hammering and gasping, they heard another pair of footsteps

draw near and pass right by them. It was a man, sword drawn, and he was looking for them.

Had he seized their belongings, at the very least they would have been stranded in a strange land without food or water, depending on the kindness of strangers. And for Narnians and Telmarines that kindness was rare indeed.

They lay still for a very long time before they dared to stir themselves. Still shaking, Trundle said, “How can someone make a living stealing from other people?”

“It beats the slave trade,” Joseph said sarcastically. “Low overhead to maximize the profit margin.”

“If I were the Tisroc, I’d make slavery illegal and lock up all the brigands.”

“If you were Tisroc, you’d have simmer-and-sing stew every day.”

The badger laughed. “Well, not on Wednesdays. Variety is the spice of life.”

Joseph put an arm about his shoulder.
“Come on, Stripey Dog. Let’s head out.”

They carefully backtracked out of the copse, and there was the road to greet them...and the highwayman, sword drawn.

“Hello again. I wondered where you’d gone.”

If Joseph was supposed to meekly surrender, he didn’t know it. In an instant his blade flashed in the desert sun. “You’ll regret this, Calormene fool!”

“I’ll teach you manners soon enough!”

The Calormene lunged but the hare parried nicely, whacking the man on the backside with the flat of his sword.

Their deadly struggle had a strange sort of beauty. Trundle’s fear was mixed with admiration. Thrust and parry, slash and block!

“You’re not too bad,” Joseph taunted.
“Why don’t you get a real job?”

“Ha! Then I wouldn’t get the pleasure of hearing you scream!”

Trundle wanted to help Joseph, and he saw the need for the man had superior strength and was wearing the hare down. As things were going it was only a matter of time till the highwayman made good on his threat.

The badger looked about for a weapon. He did not have a blade, but he did see a large rock. Edging toward it, he bent over, grasped the edge, and pried it out of the sand. Then he crept up on them stealthily.

Trundle came not a moment too soon. The Calormene had tripped Joseph and stood with his boot on the hare’s arm. He was pinned. “Now let’s hear you sing!”

Joseph’s look of fear melted into a coy smile. “This time I choose the tune.”

Trundle brought the stone down on the robber's head. The highwayman crumpled in a heap.

Joseph pushed the man off of him, not easy to do because he was worn out by the combat. "Bravo, Son of Earth!"

"I guess I showed him," the badger said. "He'll never try that again."

"I daresay," Joseph replied, looking at the Calormene. "He's dead."

"Dead?" Trundle looked at the highwayman. "But I just hit him with a rock. He's out, but he'll wake up. We'd better hurry..."

"No need to hurry. The blow cracked his skull," the hare said, taking the thief's purse and finding six gold coins in it. "That's two for each of us to cover expenses." He held out two toward Trundle.

"Oh no!" said the badger, backing away. He turned, holding his belly, and retched on the ground.

“They stole my family and now they tried to kill us all. Trust me, Stripey Dog, they owed us this.” He slipped the coins into the badger’s paw. “You saved my life. Don’t be ashamed. Even when you know it’s right, it always feels this way the first time.”

Trundle looked at the coins in his paw, a tear running down his cheek. “The first time...”

SIXTEEN

THE PLAGUE

NOT ALL OF THEIR EXPERIENCES IN Calormen were unpleasant. Sir Joseph was uncommonly fond of quebeh, a type of goat milk cheese with a distinctive tangy taste. Trundle could eat his weight in quail eggs, especially when fried in butter and saffron. But most importantly, they had some good experiences dealing with the local people. Using the good manners they learned from Orlando, they discovered that a warm smile could pick the heaviest locks.

The small town of Agorbah had a turnip festival in late fall. The rest of the year they tended their goats and sheep, and raised their

turnips. So the arrival of a couple of world travelers was a welcome bit of savor for the bland tenor of their lives.

As they passed house after house...and calling them houses was charitable...folk looked out the windows and doors. Most were too timid to be the first to make contact, so the whole town seemed to be in a breathless hush waiting for the other sandal to fall.

That moment arrived when one innocent little cherub ran past her father and out to Trundle.

The badger knelt and looked at the toddler eye to eye, a smile spreading across his face. "Hello little girl!"

"Hi hi!" she said, reaching out to feel his cheek ruffs, his wet black nose and his tickly whiskers.

"Shalzeera!" the man said sternly. "Stop that! You'll annoy him!"

"'Tis alright," the badger said, tenderly hugging the child. "My, aren't you a darling little thing!"

The father came over. “You’ve won her heart, it seems”

Trundle smiled. “They like the stripes.”

“Have you come far?”

“Oh yes. Is there an inn here?”

“Not for you three. You are dining at my house tonight and I shan’t take no for an answer.”

Trundle stood, took the father’s hand and bowed, touching his forehead to it. “May your name be written in the book.”

The man’s face lit in a smile. “And may the gate be open to you.”

Trundle was a good cook and there was no reason for him to go to the trouble and expense of eating out. Still he would make occasional trips to *The Clinging Vine* just to escape his near-perpetual loneliness, even if he were surrounded by strangers.

For several days he had dined with his new friends Joseph and Orlando and eating would never be the same. No longer did the badger merely feed his hunger, he also satisfied his thirst for companionship and new ideas.

Now he had new friends, Tashut, Jarran and Shalzeera. Their exotic fare was a welcome break from the roadworthy foodstuffs he carried in his rucksack.

Everything was going well. The visitors had been careful not to upset the daibeh, and Trundle had not defiled the tomb of their ancestors. Just as things were in danger of being absolutely perfect, the unthinkable happened. A man stuck his head in the open window. “Tashut! Lock the shutters! Bar the door!”

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s the Legion!”

Moments later the warlord Monderbah thundered past with his legion of horsemen. Trundle watched them with horrified fascination

through a small gap in the shutters. “What do they want with this place?”

“The three W’s,” Jarran said, “Wine, women and wares.”

Indeed, from what the badger could see, the brigands stole what they fancied and ravished the daughters—and wives—that did not reach safety.

“I’d give them the point of my sword—if I had one and if I knew how to use it.”

“We all feel that way,” Talshut said with a sigh. “They were once a regiment in the last Calormene war but turned renegade when they weren’t paid their pension. Their thought was if they didn’t get their due, they’d take it by force. But they’re taking it from defenseless people.”

“How long will they be here?” Joseph asked.

“No idea,” Talshut said. “A day, a week, a month.”

“We have to go on,” Sir Joseph said. “You are a wonderful host, but we’re not staying here a week, much less a month.”

“If they see you, they will kill you. They hate everything to do with Narnia. They will strip off your skin and laugh every time you scream...”

Despite Joseph’s impatient determination to leave at once, he and his friends spent a most uncomfortable night catching fitful bouts of sleep punctuated with strange noises and nightmares.

The next morning their situation had become more dire. After a day of raiding the shops, the legionnaires were knocking on the doors of private homes, demanding “contributions.” There was no way to hide three strangers and for good or ill a quick escape had to be devised.

Talshut and Jarran took a couple of poles and a prized bolt of tent cloth to make a litter. Then they found a worn blanket to drape over it.

“You’ll have to lie very still. Don’t move, no matter what happens.”

Joseph and Trundle lay on the litter, some dead fish were packed around them, a rotten egg was smashed on top and the blanket was laid across them. It was an infernal arrangement, hot, fetid and stifling. They could scarcely breathe.

Talshut hoisted the front of the litter and Jarran and Orlando lifted the back. With the most somber expressions they could muster, they worked up a few tears and headed out of town on the main road, heads bowed. Under the blanket Joseph and Trundle also had tears streaming down their faces, but their tears were real.

“Ho there!” a couple of legionnaires cried, running to stop the procession.

“Have you come to help us?” Talshut asked. “These bodies are very heavy and it’s a

hot day. We have to get them in the ground quickly.”

“What kind of fools do you think we are? You’re trying to sneak out with your treasure.”

“They were our treasure,” Jarran said with a broken sob. “Victims of the plague! Cut off in their prime! Don’t take my word for it, smell the stench and examine the bodies with your own eyes.”

They took a step back, a look of horror on their faces. “The plague? Great Hagamesh! Get the cursed baggage out of here!!”

The pallbearers were only too happy to comply.

SEVENTEEN

A SPORTING CHANCE

MOSHEM WAS A TINY SPECK ON THE map, yet it was full of people. Joseph and Trundle got some notice, but by far not the kind of attention they usually attracted. Something was in the air, and as far as they could tell by the snatches of overheard conversation it was a festival called The Riyaad.

The shopkeeper who sold them dried fruit looked over the talking beasts and smiled. “You have come a long way. How did you hear about the race?”

“Actually we were headed North,” Joseph said.

“I hope your paperwork is in order.”

“Paperwork?”

The shopkeeper nodded solemnly. “You know Sam-es-Shahar Province is off-limits to foreigners unless they have a pass, right?”

“Well, to be honest...”

“You’d be lucky just to get arrested. They don’t mess about with foreigners there. It’s a military reserve.”

“Oh....”

“Here is your merchandise. That will be fourteen crescents.” He drew close and added quietly, “You had better go see Governor Habrash right away. He’s in the manor house for the Riyaad.”

As a Knight of Narnia, Sir Joseph was used to getting respect and having his wishes heard. Yet he got no further than the Governor’s personal assistant. “Out of the question, furred one. His Excellency is in a foul mood and is not seeing anyone.”

“Why?”

“He’s been planning to bet 1000 darims on the relay race but his favorite player is ill and cannot perform.”

Joseph thought for a moment. “Perhaps I can solve that little problem. If you will give us a safe conduct pass north I’ll run in your race. And as you can see I’m well suited for a relay.”

The man said, “That’s different! I’ll introduce you at once.” But he never got the chance.

Out burst the Governor himself, a very intense man in a splendid silk suit with gold embroidery. “Behold, a talking rabbit!”

“Hare, Your Excellency.”

“Better and better! If you can pull this off, you’ll get what you want. Oh, I’ll need to clear this with the officials in advance, but I appointed them myself so they won’t give me any trouble, and you’ll need to see the horse master.”

“Horse master?”

“Of course. The man that takes care of your mount. He will explain the rules.” He

shook Joseph's paw. "You'll make an excellent jockey."

As they walked, Trundle said "Garn, Sir Joseph, is there *anything* you haven't done? I didn't know you had experience on horseback!"

The hare answered "I haven't yet, but how hard can it be? The horse does all the work."

Trundle nodded, but Orlando looked worried.

"I'm sure you'd do a good job," the boy said. "Still it would be best if I go. I have experience around horses."

The hare brightened. "Oh really? What kind?"

"I've fed them, and once I led a horse down the canal towpath."

"Hmm, that certainly counts for something," Joseph said. "Still, it's too risky for someone of your tender age."

“I have the answer to this whole problem,” Trundle said very smugly. “No one ever thinks that ol’ Stripey Dog has the key.”

“*You* have experience as a rider?”

“No, but I have the next best thing.” He fished something out of his purse. It was a bent nail.

“Excuse me?”

“It’s a good luck charm, absolutely, positively guaranteed to work.”

“Well now I can’t POSSIBLY lose,” the hare said, one ear drooping, as he felt the bit of ironmongery in his paw.

Once the horse master could look at Joseph without laughing, he explained the Riyaad.

According to legend, a man once carried an urgent message to his general while not

stopping to change horses. His bravado and quick thinking saved the day.

The game pitted two teams against one another, each team having three men and two horses. The team that got both horses across the finish line first won the race.

“Which horse gets to carry two riders?”

“Both of them in turn. For each of the three riders had to switch mounts once, with at least one foot fully resting on the ground, if only for an instant. And it doesn’t help a bit that there are obstacles on the course.

“Remember,” the horse master said, “You just touch the ground, then bound up on the other horse.”

“Just??”

“It’s not against the rules to stop, but you lose precious time. It’s easy. Trust me.” The wizened Calormene looked away for a moment and stroked his beard. “Have you talked this over with your wife?”

Joseph looked about, his ears slumping. “If I don’t run the race, I’ll never see her again.”

The horse master thought for a moment. “I was pretty good at this sport when I was a young man. Listen to me and I’ll tell you what I can.”

Trundle and Orlando, as friends of one of the jockeys, had excellent seats. The badger sat holding Joseph’s purse, knight star, and a folded slip of paper to be read only in the event something went wrong.

The badger turned the paper over nervously. He did not like suspense, especially given the circumstances.

“Orlando, I promised I wouldn’t open it. Did you promise you wouldn’t open it?”

“No,” the boy said, giving Trundle’s shoulder an understanding pat and taking the note. “Oh my, big words. You promised you wouldn’t open it, but you didn’t promise you wouldn’t read it, did you?”

“No, I can’t say I did.” The badger took it back, examining the black marks carefully.

“What does it say?”

He read in a trembling voice, “Last Will and Testament. I, Sir Joseph of Brockhurst, Commander of the Order of the Lion and lately Major of His Majesty’s Armed Forces, hereby leave to Trundle the Badger all my worldly....” He trembled, tears running down his cheeks. “I wish you hadn’t opened it!”

The badger scanned the field and saw Joseph. He ran toward him but was stopped at the edge of the playing field by a couple of attendants. “No visitors. The race is about to begin.”

“But I have to!” He shouted, “Joseph! Joseph!”

The Governor, whom no one dared restrain, went to Joseph, patting his horse on the withers and smiling. “All squared away? Know the rules?”

“Yes, Your Excellency. I won’t disappoint you.”

“I know you won’t. I can sense it.”

“Thank you.” Sir Joseph kissed the ring.

“And remember. Whatever happens, this will make an exciting story someday.”

The horses lined up, waiting for the gong. Quietly Joseph mouthed, “Lord, I would never pray about a race, but help me to do what I must do that good prevails. Help me to...”

The gong sounded, and the horses were away!

Joseph clung with desperate strength to the rider ahead of him. He understood what the horse master meant about “getting his seat”.

The man in front of him drew close to the other horse, tensed a moment, then swung his leg over. Down...up...on! It was amazing!

Joseph slid forward and grabbed for the reins. He tried to hold each one equally tight until a looming barricade forced him to pull the right reign. Like magic the horse dug in and turned deftly around the obstruction.

“Now, Aslan. Now....”

The man on the second horse dropped off, bounced, grabbed at the saddle and was on behind Joseph.

“Alright, bunny, let’s see your stuff!”

“Yes. Here goes...”

Trembling, Joseph threw one leg over the horse’s withers and he slid off, bounced... hard... and grabbed for the saddle ring, managing by the hardest to claw his way back up and get seated.

Oh what a thrill! What elation! The Governor was right, he would have a jolly good story to tell about the fire! And flush with victory he looked back for a moment to see Trundle, paws upraised, cheering him on. But then the badger began to gesticulate wildly.

Joseph looked ahead just in time to see the barricade coming. The horse, sensing disaster, leaped over the obstacle. And for one moment,

the hare hung in space, paw gripping one of the reigns, silhouetted against the sky. Then he plunged into the dust cloud and was lost to view.

As the hare staggered back, face swollen, eye half shut, Governor Habrash ran to him. “Long ears! That was superb! I *knew* you wouldn’t disappoint me!”

“But I lost.”

“The race, yes, and my 1000 darim bet with the mayor. But I had 10,000 darims bet through side channels against you at two to one odds that you would fall flat on your face. Heaven be praised, you did all that and with flair. It wasn’t just a great profit, it was a great show!”

Joseph had never been so relieved, and so insulted, in all his days.

As they left and walked along Trundle glanced at Joseph from time to time. “Don’t say it, stripey dog.”

“I didn’t say anything,” Trundle allowed, continuing to glance at him, then finally bursting out in a snicker.

“And don’t even THINK it.”

“Well I did want to mention one thing. I read your note.”

“Somehow I knew you would.” He walked in silence for a bit. “What did you think of it?”

Trundle handed him back the note. “Read what I wrote on the back.”

The hare scanned the two lines and swallowed hard. In his messy script it read in simple, direct language, “I’m Trundle of Cair Paravel. If I die, everything I own goes to Sir Joseph, my best and bravest friend.”

EIGHTEEN

TRUNDLE'S LARK

THE DELAYS THEY HAD FACED ALONG the way had put them in serious danger. In the desert there were two seasons of the year, bad and worse, and they were quickly going from bad to worse.

Fortunately by a disciplined, determined effort they had reached the next town within a week. Sir Joseph said, "Well my friends, there is En-ezzir! We are in luck!" And they were, but in Calormen there are two kinds of luck...bad and worse.

They had hardly set foot in the city proper when Constable Krugh, a big and unfriendly-looking fellow, caught sight of them.

He came over immediately. “You don’t belong here. Show me your papers and be quick about it.”

After examining them for a bit, his serious face turned into a wicked smile and he burst out laughing.

“Are our papers in order?” Sir Joseph asked.

“You don’t read Calormene Script,” Krugh constable said with a smirk. “It says, and I quote, *These well meaning idiots are determined to die in the desert sun. They will do you no harm and may be good for a laugh. Sincerely, Governor Habrash, Tarkaan Province.*” He looked them over closely. “I know how to handle folk like you. So watch yourselves while you’re in my town. I will.”

Sir Joseph snatched back the paper. “Don’t worry...sir.”

From that moment on the three friends had a new shadow. Sometimes he would stand out in

the open, arms crossed or resting akimbo on his hips. Sometimes he was a vague suggestion of a movement in an alley or the rustle of a bush.

“Keep your paws to yourself,” Joseph said quietly, his ears twitching about at a suspicious noise. “Don’t touch anything, keep moving, be pleasant. I only wish we had gone around, even if it added a lot of extra time. At least when we get out of town his jurisdiction ends.”

“That’s a good thing, right?” Orlando asked.

“Yes. It means he can’t touch us.”

Trundle added, “I don’t even want him *looking* at us.”

Trundle looked at some fresh fruit being hawked. He wasn’t really low on supplies but the round bronzed spheres intrigued him as did their exotic fragrance.

“What are these?”

“Oranges, my striped friend.”

“Are they good to eat?”

The shopkeeper handed him one. “Try it. You’ll love it.”

Trundle opened it. The fruit was in sections and he was delighted by the way it came apart without being cut. “I’ll take a dozen.”

“Those are two crescents apiece. That will be twenty-four.”

Trundle nodded. “Fair and good.” He shook some coins out from his purse and counted them out. “Twenty-four crescents.”

No sooner did the last coin jingle as it went into the shopkeeper’s till than Constable Krugh made his appearance.

“You with the stripes. You are under arrest!”

“Me? But I did nothing wrong!”

“The judge will be here in three days. You can explain it to him.”

Joseph felt his paw reaching for his sword hilt but thought better of it. There had to be a better way than slaying the Constable in the open street.

Trundle languished in his cell in the old bailey. He had been served dinner, a crust of stale bread, some watery broth and a bucket of water he wasn't sure if it was to be drunk, washed in, or both.

“You are not alone in this,” Joseph whispered to him through the bars. “We will get you out soon. I promise.”

“I believe you. You always keep your promises. But there won't be a wine barrel this time. I think it's going to get nasty.”

“Not for you. And besides, what's the worst thing that could happen to you...a fine? I'll handle that.”

“You're a good friend,” the badger said with a smile. “I'm lucky to have you. Now you find a room for the night...I have one.”

Joseph half smiled. “That's my Stripey Dog.”

Trundle's flush of courage left when his friends disappeared from view. The walls of his small cell began to close in on him.

The badger started to sing, but the jailor banged on the bars with his staff. "You, stow the bilge!"

Trundle sighed deeply. "It's a good thing my folks don't know," he murmured quietly. "No one in my family has *ever* been arrested...till now."

The shopkeeper felt responsible for the whole muddle and invited Joseph and Orlando to spend the night at his house. "I was cruel by being kind," he explained. "I should have charged him for thirteen and then given him two crescents as a gift."

Sir Joseph scratched his head. "What's the difference?"

“A lot of difference when Krugh is out for you. Technically he would be right, for there is a law against selling goods for under the minimum price. It was meant to protect us.”

“Protect you?”

“Once a rich merchant gave away apples at a dozen a crescent to put a poorer merchant out of business, then he raised the prices to twice the going rate when he was the only one in town. But the law was not intended to prevent me from giving away free samples. I do it all the time.”

“Then why us? What did we do? I offered him a bribe but he didn’t take the money.”

“He’s not interested in the money. He wants revenge. His son was in the last war and came home missing an eye. The girl he was set to marry could not look at him in the face without crying. For Krugh the war will never be over.”

Sir Joseph sighed. “I hope the judge is more objective.”

“Given a chance, he is. But often...far too often...Krugh arrested his enemies and they

ended up dead before the judge could arrive. I fear he will tempt your badger friend to make a break for it so he can have an excuse to kill him.”

“Then I will go down there and run him through on my sword if it means my death.”

“Wait, eared one. There is another way...”

Trundle spent his first night in jail doing what most folk do in those circumstances, realizing the mess he was in. That was one nightmare that Joseph wouldn't wake him from.

He thought on his willingness to die bravely in combat for something he believed in, but instead found himself rotting away in a cell for a crime he did not commit. He thought of his shop sitting idle, of his Mum and Dad and that he might never see them again. “I won't cry,” he said to himself, looking at the moon outside the barred window. That was the same moon that shone on Cair Paravel. It looked close enough in the balmy night to reach out and touch. “I won't

cry,” he stammered again, tears streaming down his face. He went and huddled in the corner trying to keep warm without his blanket.

Then something that would bring him a lot more comfort than a blanket was tossed in his window. It was a note from Sir Joseph.

The next morning Krugh had his tea and kippers and put on his wide brimmed hat. “Alright, you, I’m about to go on patrol. I want no trouble while I’m gone.” He hung the keys to the cell block almost within reach of Trundle’s paws. “Here, take this.” He thrust a broom through the bars. “Work keeps a bloke out of mischief—that’s what I always say. Sweep out your cell while I’m gone, and if it doesn’t meet my test, you’ll get yours.”

It was clearly obvious to Trundle that the man was playing stupid. He thought to himself,

“Oh don’t you just *wish* I would try for those keys!”

To Krugh’s consternation, he came back to find Trundle’s cell sparkling clean and occupied by one very polite badger.

He grumbled to himself, “It’s amazing that animals that stupid lasted a week against our armies...” Then he thought a bit. “Or perhaps *not* so stupid...”

Trundle looked surprisingly upbeat and chipper. The badger hummed to himself as he looked out the window at the people passing by.

“You seem to be in a very good mood for someone in so much trouble,” Krugh said at last.

“Trouble? Me? I have Aslan on my side.”

“Aslan? The talking lion? If there even was an Aslan, do you think you’d be here? You and that foolish religion of yours.”

“Foolish? You wouldn’t have said that if you’d been here half an hour ago. No sir, you would be singing to a different tune.”

“And what happened while I was gone?”

“*He* was here. *He himself.* And he’s coming back tonight to settle the score.”

Krugh did not so much as raise an eyebrow, and he never admitted being afraid. Still, somewhere along the day’s business he managed to acquire a deputy with a long scimitar and dagger in his belt who stayed near him at all times.

Orlando paced about the room nervously. After a while, Joseph looked up at him. “You’re wearing out the rug.”

“I’m sorry,” the boy said, settling against a wall and leaning his head against his knees. “I’ll feel better when Mr. Trundle gets out.”

“I know,” the hare intoned. “Me too. He’s such a faithful friend, and as much as I hate to admit it, the Governor Habrash was right. He’s good for a laugh, bless his dear soul.”

“Like that bit with the loo.”

“Oh yes, and his time on shipboard.”

Joseph smiled a bit. “He loved everything about sailing except seasickness. Why that fellow fell down the ladder once. I asked him if he hurt himself and do you know what he said?”

“What did he say? ‘Garn and garbage?’”

“No, he said, ‘I think I’ve roughed up my starboard ankle!’”

Orlando flashed an embarrassed grin. “Starboard ankle! That sounds like Mr. Trundle.”

“Oh, about that...” Joseph came closer and sat next to the boy. “I really think he’d like for you to call him Trundle. Just Trundle. And you can call me Joseph.”

“I’d like that...Joseph.” The boy leaned his face against the hare’s shoulder. “I wonder if he’s scared.”

“I’m sure he is. I am too.”

That evening as the sun set, Trundle stood by the window helping the shopkeeper loop a rope around the bars. The other end went to a pair of yoked oxen.

Joseph handed the badger a horn, a nice shiny brass horn such as the postman blew when the mail had come. He'd always wanted to blow one, and now he was going to get his chance.

He put his mouth to the piece...

"Not yet!" the hare hissed. Wait for the signal..."

Joseph and Orlando had a horn as well, and the boy also had a bullroarer, a children's toy in Narnia made by tying a flat blade of wood on a long cord. When spun about, it would produce quite a racket.

Sir Joseph stepped a few paces from the bars and raised his paws, whiskers twitching in anticipation...

Krugh tried hard to hide his frazzled nerves, playing a game of Harom with his deputy and making pointless remarks about the weather and how it caused a bitter crop of tea last year and how he hoped things would be different that year. “Maybe our luck will change,” he said.

Just then, his luck changed. There were trumpet blasts, loud whirring sounds and a tremendous crashing!

The Harom board got upset and the pieces scattered all over the floor.

“Hail Aslan! Lord of the Seventh Heaven!”

“Go check that out!” Krugh hissed.

“I...I...”

“Now!”

The deputy gathered his wits and went back to the cell block. What he saw was a huge hole in the wall and the floor scattered with blossoms.

The deputy picked up one of the flowers and smelled it. It practically reeked of incense., and he dropped it in superstitious horror. “Aslan?”

“No, Hagamesh. Certainly.”

The three friends did not stop to sleep that night. They wanted to leave En-ezzir and its obsessed Constable far behind them before the sunrise.

“I wish I could have been a fly on the wall,” Joseph said. “I would have given anything to see his face!”

“I wouldn’t,” Trundle said. “I never want to see that face again.”

“Come now, you’ve quite literally fought the last skirmish of the Calormene War and lived to tell about it. That’s a story for the furlings around the fire, hmm?”

“I should say not. I shan’t breathe a word about this to anyone. Being arrested, sitting in jail. I should become my family’s stone to drag.”

“Why?” Joseph said. “You did nothing wrong, and you certainly made fools out of those

guards. Laugh it off! All in all it was a jolly lark.”

“Jolly lark?” Trundle looked him askance. “Garn, it’s times like this I’m glad to be a badger. Jolly lark indeed!”

NINETEEN

THE RIVER

THE LUSH GREEN IN THE DISTANCE looked like a mirage, one of those curious things veterans of the Calormene Wars spoke of to their families. But as they drew closer to the strip of vegetation snaking across the horizon, they knew it was no illusion.

“Hooray!” Trundle shouted, “A nice cool bath and a long cool drink! And the palm trees! Do you think there will be dates and coconuts?”

“Perhaps,” Joseph said, a hint of tension in his voice.

“Is something wrong?”

The hare sighed. “That’s one place I’ll be glad to leave behind—miles behind, and the sooner the better.”

“Run from an oasis? After all this desert?”

Joseph sighed again. “Ahead of us lies Araksham. More of our Narnian blood was shed in this one place in one day than all the other battles in Calormen put together. More of their blood too, and Calormenes have long memories.”

The river was lovely but broad and swift. Trundle washed the dust from himself on the bank but did not dare try to swim to the opposite bank.

They turned upstream and walked along the bank knowing that where water ran, life followed. And they did finally locate a small house with a cable ferry.

They knocked. The man that came to the door took one look at them and said “Go away.”

Joseph stopped him before he could slam the door. “Sir, we are paying customers. We want to cross the river.”

Why don’t you swim it, Narnian dogs??”

The hare turned a bit to reveal his sword hilt, but did not draw it. He plucked three silver crescents from his purse and tossed them on the floor. “That should more than cover it.”

They headed to the ferry. As they started across, the man ran out with an old sword. He did not get to them before they had already started across so, full of hate, he started hacking at the rope.

“Quick!” Trundle shouted, Grab the line!

The vindictive Calormene cut through the rope but not before the hare, badger and boy had held fast the standing part.

The water was cold, but in the desert heat it felt good. The current swept them downstream, but also aimed them at the far bank, the rope pulling them slowly but surely in the direction where they wanted to go.

“All he did was lose a perfectly good boat,” Trundle spat.

“So much hate,” Sir Joseph said, shaking his head. “How do they live with it?”

“Maybe he lost a son in the war,” Orlando said. That’s where my parents died.

“Your mum too?”

“They weren’t in the navy,” the boy said. “They helped evacuate Komor Bay. At least they tried to.”

“So they drowned saving our soldiers?”

“No, they were captured but there were too many grown-ups to sell. I fetched a good price, but Mom and Dad were surplus—that’s the word they used—and so instead of turning loose Narnians during wartime they were beheaded.”

“You hate Calormenes, don’t you...”

He shrugged. “No. I don’t even hate the Captain. Just the dirty jackal’s draw that killed my Mom and Dad.” He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I’ve never killed anyone, but I *think* I could kill the Kes.”

Joseph’s eyes narrowed. “I *know* I could.”

TWENTY

HALLOWED GROUND

THE FRIENDS HAD REACHED THE OTHER side of the river, the main battlefield where Araksham was conquered by Colonel Cutshaw's 16th Regiment, the Black Diamonds.

Evidence of the epic struggle was everywhere. Most evident was a large shield. The wind had blown sand across it until almost all the paint had been blasted off, but they could still make out the outline of a red lion.

Trundle started to lift it up, but underneath it, partly emerged from the sand, was the skull and forearm of an otter. Silently he lowered it back over the remains.

“Take nothing,” Joseph said. “This is a grave. On this plain a thousand otters saw the sunrise. A thousand brave young lads with breastplates gleaming set out to cross this river. Three hundred and twenty saw the sunset...”

“What a terrible waste.”

“Aye, Trundle.”

“Why are there wars?”

Joseph slipped his arm about the badger’s shoulder and gave it a little pat. “Because Aslan gave us our freedom, and only he has the right to take it away.”

They heard the sound of distant thunder. Clouds were forming overhead and Trundle wondered if there would be rain soon. The conditions did not seem right. He had long ago learned the mariners’ rhyme “Red skies at night, sailor’s delight! Red skies in morning, sailor take warning!” It was not like that...not at all.

The wind picked up out of the west and it was fetid. Despite this there was no hint of the

smell of rain, something Joseph was very sensitive to.

Trundle didn't mind the darkness so much because he was a badger, but he did suffer from an odd itching sensation right between his shoulders that he couldn't quite reach. Orlando, a creature of blue skies and green grass, pulled his cloak about his shoulders as if the wind were cold, though it was not.

The boy looked about. "Sir Joseph, I know what you mean about leaving this place behind. I hate it."

"Well we told you this would happen if you came with us," the hare said, a bit irked. "I suppose you'll be griping about the food next!"

"Garn," Trundle said, glaring. "Don't tell me you two are going at it again..." Even as the words escaped his lips, he thought it odd that he said "again" when he could never remember them 'going at it' before. Perhaps it was that odd humming sound that seemed to hover right at the edge of being heard, as if it were very loud yet

barely perceptible, more of a sensation than a noise. It seemed to aggravate the itch he felt.

They all felt odd sensations as if something grabbed at their ankles and tugged at their rucksacks as they passed.

Around them in the shifting sands were spear points, helmets, breastplates and occasional bones. Death was ever present and stared back at them, a grim reminder rather than a polished monument or a rousing patriotic speech or battle hymn. That was the death of youth's flower spent, the death of broken dreams and families torn asunder.

In the wind, Trundle thought he could hear distant voices. "My family," it hissed as clearly and sharply as you might hear a voice on the wireless. "They were sold for their debts. They are slaves because of you. I was only trying to feed my family and you killed me!"

"I wish you'd stop doing that!" the badger said at last. "It's not funny! Not a bit!"

"Stop doing what?" Joseph snapped. "You always think people are doing things to you, you

big baby! Why don't you grow up and stop imagining things?"

"Surely you don't mean that?" Trundle said, rather hurt.

The hare paused for a moment, as if wondering why he said it. A feminine voice whispered back to him from the wind.

"Of course you hurt him. You don't care who you hurt. Why did you leave me here? I thought you loved me, but all you cared about was your castle and your prized roses! You don't love anyone or anything but yourself!"

"Fiona! That's not true! I do love you! I'm coming for you, darling! I'm coming for you!"

Orlando looked about. "Sir Joseph, what's wrong with you?"

"What do you mean? Didn't you hear her?"

Orlando looked about apprehensively. He did hear something, but it wasn't Fiona. The wind whispered to him. "They don't love you.

They never loved you. They have used you because you know something that can help them. Just like everyone else they just want something you have, and the moment they get it you will be forgotten. Don't you wish you'd stayed on the ship where you belong?"

"I'd rather be dead than go back there!"

Trundle staggered about. "I didn't mean to kill him! I swear! I was frightened!"

Joseph put his paws to his ears. "Help me!" he shrieked. "Somebody help me!"

He heard a deep lion voice. "You dare beg me for help, you doubter! You didn't believe in me! If you had faith I would have helped you! I would have saved you if you had only believed! Now it is too late, you fool and hypocrite! I turn my back upon you!"

"It's not so!" Joseph shrieked. "You're not him! He wouldn't talk that way!"

"Sir Joseph!" Orlando cried, "Don't leave me! Slay me now, but don't leave me!"

The hare fell to the ground and put his paws over his face. "Aslan!! Aslan, help us!!"

At the mention of the Great Lion's name there was a distant sigh, a gasp and a moment of deadly silence. The fingers tugging unseen at them grudgingly let loose and the iron gray clouds were split by a golden shaft of sunlight. It felt like a huge weight had been lifted from the earth.

The oppression stopped like a bad dream and started to fade from memory just as quickly. Sobbing, Orlando ran to the hare and hugged him, kissing his sad face and stroking him. Joseph put his arms around the boy and held on as if he'd never let go.

Trundle came over, head bowed. "Sir Joseph, I'm sorry I made you upset. Please give me another chance and I'll try to do better. I was afraid, but I won't be next time..."

"Another chance??" the hare asked, holding out an arm. "Afraid?? Come here, you fond mook!"

The badger settled into the embrace and wept with relief and joy. And as they stood heart to heart, the east wind cleared the last remnants of evil sendings from the field.

Joseph's sensitive ears twitched. "That way!"

"What's 'that way'?" Orlando asked.

"Bells. I think it must be a shepherd." He sniffed a bit and his nose wrinkled. "Make that a goat herder. I hope we're not in for more trouble."

"If he wants trouble," Trundle said, "he's come to the right place!" The badger tried to draw his dagger for emphasis, but forgot to unbuckle the scabbard first.

When they found him, Hamar the Goatherd only had about half his teeth, but he had an endearing smile. Unlike the other Calormenes, he was kind to them though they were Narnian.

In exchange for the latest gossip from the coast, he gave them cheese and barley loaves.

In gratitude, Sir Joseph took Hamar's hand in both his paws and bowed to touch his forehead to it. "Mr. Hamar, may your name be written in the Book."

"Major Hamar," he said, straightening and saluting. "Of the Tisroc's elite Markaans."

Joseph's ears slumped back. "You were a Markaan?"

"Yes. An elite soldier who faced elite Narnian soldiers in combat on this very spot."

"So why do you live here? Why didn't you take your pension and build a nice cottage by a brook and forget?"

"Because I couldn't forget." He sighed. "I live here where I can leave offerings for the dead of both sides, the Narnians I killed and the Calormenes I led to certain death. I know the truth, and it's a truth that must never be forgotten."

“You are a rare desert flower,” Joseph said. “If you could, would you undo one of those broken dreams?”

“Of course, my long-eared friend.”

“Do you know of a trader named Agra Rashaam?”

“Yes. He was just here a week ago and was headed to Gorbayyam. If you hurry I’m sure you can still catch him.”

Joseph took his hand and touched it to his forehead again. “Blessed be the bringer of good tidings!”

TWENTY-ONE

THE CARAVAN

GORBAYYAM WAS A MERE DOT ON THE map of Calormen in more ways than one, and yet the very air there trembled with dreams and possibilities.

The small town was what it called rather busy that day with farmers and herders from the surrounding countryside coming in to see the only excitement for miles around.

Joseph went among the camels and horses, glanced in the wagons and even rashly peeked in windows and tent flaps.

“Looking for something?” a road seasoned voice boomed.

The hare looked about, flustered. “Are you Agra Rashaam the trader?”

“Aye! Just as I have been for many years!” The portly gentleman laughed and tugged at one end of his handlebar moustache. “I have wares from Tashbaan and places far beyond. You approached from the south. You are not from Willoughby, I assume?”

“You’re the second person that’s asked me that,” Sir Joseph said. “I am from Narnia and have come a great distance to see you, even crossing the Great Desert.”

“Not to buy pots and pans I daresay?”

“No. But I shall make this talk worth your time. That and I want to buy a sword for my badger friend, dried dates and spiced wine.”

“First the sword,” Agra said, motioning to one of his assistants. In a few moments he returned with a splendid scabbard from which emerged a brass and silver pommel.

Trundle took it in his trembling paws and for a moment looked like he was going to open it. “Not here,” Joseph said. “It’s considered a challenge to a duel.”

“You should listen to your friend,” Agra said, “especially when you’re in the market for weapons...and who knows what else.” He motioned to the three friends. “Come into my tent and let us speak alone.

Joseph took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. “I’ve spent most of my money trying to find you. I have a bit left and it is yours if you will give me something I desire more than life itself.”

“You wouldn’t be speaking of Fiona, would you?”

Joseph swallowed. He could hardly speak. “She still lives?”

“Ah yes. What a fine girl she was, the only one that knew how to make tea the way I like it. And, as I suppose you know, quite a handsome lass.”

“Yes, very.” The hare tried to control the tremor in his paws to keep the price from going up beyond his ability to pay.

“I would be willing to sell her to you but I can’t. She once asked me if I would let her buy her freedom. And I said, in a bit of a joke, that I swore a girl like that wouldn’t go for less than two thousand darims. I swore an oath that two thousand darims was the price, thinking that would settle the question once and for all. She was, I suspect, both flattered and disappointed. After all I only paid 600 darims for her.” He laughed. And yet we went through Willoughby and she brought me a bag of gold coins! I thought at first she had to steal it, but no one was missing a single crescent. Well, as they say, an oath is an oath... Anyhow, I thought her first act as a freedman would be to curse me. It’s almost a tradition, this final parting swipe. But no, she asked me to come by next time I was in Willoughby and she would fix me a decent cup of tea.”

“That’s my Fiona, a true lady.” Sir Joseph put a trembling paw into his purse and pulled out

four silver coins. “Please, sir, tell me where to find this Willoughby.”

“Bribing me, long ears? Anyone could tell you how to find Willoughby for free.”

“Consider it a gift.”

“May the gate be opened for you!” the trader said, smiling broadly and accepting the coins with a gracious hand gesture. “You have excellent manners, just like your lady friend.” He took them outside and pointed. “It is on your map, but by law it is called Kharmangh. The locals call it Willoughby, a word offensive to the government’s ears. Look at that road. Follow it about that hill and you’ll find your desire.”

TWENTY-TWO

WILLOUGHBY

WILLOUGHBY WAS BUT A SHORT WALK away from Gorbayyam, but it seemed to be taking them an eternity to get there.

“I wonder why she didn’t come home,” Joseph asked.

“Maybe it took every last crescent she had to get her freedom,” Trundle said.

“No doubt. Mr. Rashaam was rather fond of her tea. But I shall buy her a first class ticket home.”

“I thought you were about out of funds,” the badger said.

“No doubt so did Agra.”

“Oh....” Trundle shook his head. In far-off Narnia a shake of paws and a solemn word was as good as a signed contract, and he rather

liked the straightforward, honest life he led in Cair Paravel.

Willoughby was basically an exclave of Narnia, a fancy way of saying “a bit of home”. It was a place where talking animals had some self-government and minimal interference—and prejudice—from the Calormenes.

Though the standard of living was generally poor, the houses and cobblestone streets were a welcome sight. The only things really missing were the trees and grass and, of course, the lion banners.

Trundle would have given his whiskers for the blessed sight of Aslan’s flag flying from the towers of the castle. Never had he felt so far away from the things he knew and loved.

They happened upon a dog fox whitewashing his shutters. He glanced up, looked a bit surprised. “Are you from home?”

Joseph said, “We’re from Narnia, actually.”

“That’s what I mean,” he said with a sigh of heartfelt longing. “I’m Copperfox. I was born here but I was raised Narnian. Tell me truly, is it as beautiful as they said it was?”

“More beautiful,” Trundle said.

“This place is not so bad. Not now anyway. You should have been here during the war. We had a nice home in Tashbaan and plenty of money before the war came. Then they rounded us up and put us here where they could keep an eye on us. It ruined us.”

“Are you free to come and go?”

“In the legal sense, yes. But most of us don’t. We keep to ourselves and settle our problems locally. The less interference from the outside, the better.”

“You ought to come back with us to Narnia. I suppose you’d be able to get citizenship without much trouble.”

“Citizenship? Do you think any of us are citizens of this place? Nothing ties me to this place and I’d give everything I had to go there.”

The hare said, “Aslan helps those who help others. Show us the home of Fiona the Hare and perhaps you will get to see the sun rise from Cair Paravel.”

“Fiona the Hare... Oh yes, the nice lady. You need to find the next to last house on this street on your left.”

Joseph was in an odd state of nervous agitation, and very thoughtfully Trundle put his arm around his shoulder on one side to steady him while Orlando held his paw on the opposite side to give him courage.

The hare almost missed her lodging because her “house” was actually a tent. It was a very nice tent, much better than the ones in camp, but not the sort of place to spend the rest of one’s life.

“This is Joseph. Sir Joseph. May I come in?”

“Yes, please.” It was not a doe’s voice.

The inside of the tent had a few nice furnishings that looked like they belonged in a real house. “We are honored by your hospitality.”

“I am Elwin. The honor is all mine.”

Joseph took a deep breath, held it a moment, and let it out slowly. “Elwin, I am from Narnia. I came looking for Fiona.”

“Are you family?” he asked. “I’m not surprised. A knight. Her first husband was a knight.”

“Her *first* husband?? Are we talking about Lady Fiona from Cair Paravel?”

The hare nodded. “Her first husband died, you know. The Calormenes slit his throat for spitting in the captain’s eye.” His eyes narrowed. “The dirty barbarian tooks!”

“Oh, but sir...” Trundle started, but Joseph grasped him by the arm...tightly. He fell silent.

“Did she ever tell you anything else...about her past?”

“In words, no. For the first year, I would often see her outside looking at the moon. In

those times I knew she was with *him*. She was good to me by day, but I let her have her nights. Some things should never be stripped away.”

Trundle looked from one buck to the other, his nerves making his paws clench and unclench repeatedly. “Did you know Agra Rashaam?”

“We all know him. He’s our only link with home.” Elwin sighed. “When he came to town and I caught sight of her, and knew at once I had to do something to get her out of that situation.”

“Yes,” Joseph said, “her beauty does not belong among such ugliness.”

“It wasn’t her beauty. At least not the beauty she had on the outside. It was only later that I realized she was quite a handsome doe.”

“And you paid her ransom.”

“It cost me my house, my barn and my field to buy respect for her freedom. You see, it is Aslan who makes us free. I only helped him get a little respect.”

Joseph was stunned. “You sold everything you had to buy a wife? And you only knew her one day?”

“Those papers were my gift to her. Marriage was her gift to me. Maybe it was out of love, and maybe it was simple pity. I suspect it was both. When we married, I promised her a real home someday, and she promised me a son. She kept her end of the bargain, but as you can see I failed to make good on mine. I am a failure.”

“You are the most successful person I’ve ever known.” Joseph then asked in a trembling voice, “May I see her now?”

“Of course. She’s in the back yard.”

They went through a flap in the back of the tent into what was kindly called the back yard. It was sand, sage, a few withered sprigs of thick-leaved grass. By stark contrast, one back corner of the lot had a lovingly tended plot of flowers, grass and a stone marker.

“Where is she??” Joseph stammered. “Oh sweet, precious Aslan! *Where is she??*”

Elwin pointed at the marker. “I’m sorry. It was the flu. It happened about a month ago.”

Joseph glanced about at each of them in turn, wide eyed, mouth open. His trembling paws rose, knotted into tight fists and his breath came in short, painful gasps.

As Sir Joseph staggered toward Fiona’s grave, Trundle put a paw on Elwin’s shoulder and turned him about. “For the love of heaven, leave him alone! Please, *just go!*”

From behind him the badger heard a loud wail, a shrieking moan that made the hair on the back of his neck stand up. He turned to see Sir Joseph of Brockhurst collapse across Fiona’s grave.

“Mister Trundle!” shouted Orlando, “Come quick!”

The badger hurried over. Orlando helped him turn the hare on his back, and while the boy caressed Joseph’s face with his fingertips and

kissed his brow, Trundle briskly rubbed and slapped an arm.

“Sir Joseph!” the badger said, “Wake up! Speak to me!”

For a very long time the hare lay still. Then his eyes opened and after an unfocused moment they turned to lock glances with the carpenter.

The badger asked, “Do you know who I am?”

“Trundle...my friend.” His eyes shifted to Orlando, and he reached up with a paw to wipe away the boy’s tears. “You’re crying. My precious boy, I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“I’m not scared,” Orlando said. “I only wish we’d found her.”

“We did,” Joseph said. “She’s with Aslan in the Utter East.” His eyes closed again as he breathed a deep sigh of resignation.

TWENTY-THREE

THE FACE OF ASLAN

ON THE DUSTY ROAD BACK FROM Willoughby, the friends walked in silence for the longest time, Joseph not feeling like talking, and Trundle and Orlando not knowing what to say. Finally they stopped and the hare got a few things out to eat. “We don’t have to ration now. There’s enough for all.”

“Why didn’t you tell him the truth about Fiona?” Orlando asked.

“Someday you’ll understand. I could not spoil what he had with her. No, it is better this way.” Joseph sighed. “At least now he has some gold to buy Fiona’s son that house he promised him. I gave our friend Copperfox enough to buy

passage on the Queen of the Sea and have just enough left to get us home. All is as it should be. It might have been better had I trusted Aslan and not felt sorry for myself such a long time. At least Aslan always trusted me.”

“But he promised you’d find your wife...”

“He kept his promise. I needed to know that she was alright and she is. The uncertainty is gone and I can grieve for her.”

“I’m so glad you’re taking it this way,” Trundle said. “You must not let this destroy your faith.”

“It hasn’t, my friend. I have seen Aslan’s face.”

“You have?” The badger scratched his head. “I was with you the whole time...”

“I’ve seen him three times. Once he was a carpenter, then he was a cabin boy and then he was a farmer that sold all he had to do one great, beautiful deed.” Joseph lost his composure and tears began to stream down his face. “Aslan does not spare us every grief, but he doesn’t make us face them alone. I know that now. I have him, and now I have you.”

Orlando hugged the hare, kissing away his tears. “I’m glad I met you, Sir Joseph. Not because you set me free, but because I thought there was no Aslan till I saw him in you.”

“I love you, Orlando. So very much.” Joseph rested his face against the brown cheeked boy and stroked his hair with a paw. “I came looking for my family and I found it. That is, if you’ll let me adopt you.”

“Oh yes!” the boy said, clinging to him tightly. “I’d rather be your son than a knight, anyhow.”

Trundle cleared his throat. “Where are we going next?”

“Tashbaan and then Cair Paravel.”

“No, after that.”

“After that?”

The badger smiled shyly and glanced about. “Now that you have a son, you’ll need a brother too so the boy can have an uncle.”

The hare brightened and nodded, wiping his eyes. “He needs an aunt too. Good thing for

him I know this lovely badger lass who wants to meet a fine fellow.”

Trundle looked away, his ears laid back. “Garn, Sir Joseph...”

“And she’s a great cook too. Her simmer and sing stew is to die for.”

“She makes simmer and sing?”

“Yes, to die for.” The hare embraced him firmly. “You will come to live with me and you shall make only what you want to make in the finest workshop in Cair Paravel.”

“Oh Sir Joseph! Do you mean it??”

“Joe...please.” The hare gave his shoulder a pat. “Of course I mean it. I wrote those notes in a bottle looking for a small miracle, and instead I found great miracles—and great faith. All in all, I am the luckiest fellow in the world.”

THE END

GLOSSARY

Arabella – A three-masted Calormene sailing ship designed for speed.

Araksham – Site of the bloodiest battle of the Third Calormene War.

Arrow Sign – A sign used by boarding houses to show vacancy or no vacancy.

Beastie Pub – A pub that caters mainly to talking animals.

Black Diamonds – The 16th Regiment under Col. Wilbur Cutshaw which fought the Markaans at the battle of Araksham.

Blood Oath – An oath binding to the death.

Brigands – Pirates

Bullroarer – A child's toy made by tying a wooden slat to a length of rope. When spun it makes a satisfying rumbling sound.

Cacco – Pronounced “KACK-ko” - Chocolate tea

Cairn – A stack of rocks used as a marker

Calormene – *adj.* Of or like Calormen and its people.

Crescent – A Calormene coin worth 1/100 of a Darim.

Daibeh – A household god that brings good luck or mischief depending on how well its respected and rewarded.

Darim – A Calormene coin worth approximately half of a Narnian Gold Lion.

Dust Devils – A swirling wind that stirs up a large tornado-like dust cloud.

Exclave – Outpost or land belonging to a remote power.

Father Earth – A Calormene god who, with Mother Sea gave birth to Tash and Hagamesh.

Firkin of Wine – A wineskin's worth of beverage.

Furling – A young talking animal.

Great Central Desert – The largest and most barren section of Calormen. Poorly inhabited and little known to the outside.

Hagamesh – The ugly, evil twin brother of the supreme Calormen god Tash. Also a mild oath uttered at bad luck and ill omens.

Harom – A Calormene gambling board game similar to the Narnian game Skollers. An inveterate gambler is called a Haromite.

Highwayman – Someone who robs folk on the open road.

Horse Hopping – The somewhat risky Calormene relay race run on horseback. Said to have originated from a bit of battlefield heroics in the distant past.

Hurly Burly – A disturbance, kerfluffle.

Kes – *Literally* “boss”. A slave merchant.

Kesban Valley – The final battle of the Third Calormene War resulting in the Treaty of Trent.

Kesbet – A gambling game played with a deck of 100 cards divided into 10 decades of 10 cards representing types of flowers.

Kharmangh – See “Willoughby”.

Knight's Honor – The obligation of a knight to follow the Chivalric Code even to death.

Komor Bay – A disastrous battle for the 7th and 9th Narnian Regiments requiring evacuation by sea with all available craft.

Kosham – A slave market. “The” Kosham is the market in Tashbaan.

Lone Islands – A possession of Narnia located in the Great Eastern Sea.

Mage Aramis – One of the five Royal Magi and personal friend of Sir Joseph.

Markaan – An elite Calormene warrior trained in a rigorous program called the “five disciplines.” Generally Markaans do not surrender or retreat.

Military Province – an area of a country set aside for use by the armed forces, presumably for garrisoning and training purposes. In the case of Sam-es-Shahar, the reason seemed more to be keeping Narnian pilgrims from visiting the battlefield of Araksham.

Monkey Run – A fool's errand.

Mother Sea – See “Father Earth”

Name Written in the Book – A ritual expression of thanks that means “I hope you are saved for eternal bliss.”

Old Bailey – Prison, Gaol.

Paraveller – A resident of Cair Paravel. The term “dressed like a Paraveller” was used with some derision by other Narnians who saw trappings like capes, tabards and sashes as pointless exercises in sartorial splendor.

Paul Martin – I promised I’d mention him in the book, and I always keep my word. Hi, Paul!

Pay the Piper – Step off the path to relieve oneself.

Peacock Kingdom – A nickname for Calormen

Persuader – A large wooden mallet used by barkeeps to restore order.

Quebeh – A tangy goat milk cheese.

Queen of the Sea – A Calormene ship engaged in trade and tourism with Narnia.

Raksolla – A Calormene dust storm.

Reliant (HMS) – A former naval vessel lost in a gale while sailing from the Lone Islands to Cair Paravel in Narnia. Of 327 aboard, 133 perished in the sea and 16 were taken into slavery by Calormene raiders. One of the dead was the bard Fenris of Farthingdale who wrote “The Emerald Pendant.”

Royal Magi – A group of five talking animals that advise the King of Narnia on spiritual and legal matters.

Sailor’s Hold – A form of restraint that uses pain to prevent escape. Trust me, you wouldn’t like it.

See the Elephant – Go into combat. So called because elephants were used in the First Calormene War to carry soldiers into combat.

Silken Curtain – The pleasantries used to isolate visitors to Calormene tourist spots from the lingering resentment of the interior.

Simmer and Sing Stew – Ask Trundle. He has a great recipe.

Son of Earth – A badger.

Son of Telmar – A Telmarine

Spiced Wine – Wine spiked with wormwood.

Too much can cause hallucinations.

Stripey Dog – *Slang*: badger

Tash – The supreme god of the Calormene pantheon. Brother of Hagamesh.

Telmarine – The most prevalent human race in Narnia, they came from a land called Telmar located on another world.

Tisroc – The Emperor of Calormen

Took - Scoundrel

Tremblebane – A plant closely related to wintergreen with powerful medicinal properties to calm, soothe, and combat nausea. Often served in tea.

Water the Camels – See “Pay the Piper”

Wheel of Fortune – A gambling device where bets are made on where a spinning numbered wheel stops.

Willoughby – A former internment camp officially called Kharmangh where talking animals in Calormen were housed during

the Calormene wars. The site continued as a free community after the Treaty of Trent.

Willow Bark – Bark of the willow tree used to make the extract *Salix Hygenicus* for relief of fever, chills, and head and muscle aches. It may be chewed raw if needed.