

The Statue in the Library

The Story of Faun Dorian

THE STATUE IN THE LIBRARY

THERE IS A STATUE OF A FAUN IN THE ROYAL Library close to the section on Natural Philosophy, and the statue is rather handsome though a bit wistfully sad in its expression.

It was made of a young lad named Dorian who unlike the vast majority of fauns who are healthy and robust, he was always weak of constitution, plagued by allergies and tired spells and palpitations of the heart, and as a result spent very little time out of doors.

Many doctors looked at the lad. The Royal Magi themselves took an interest in the faunling but their best efforts with herbs and hot and cold treatments did little if any good.

Dorian haunted the library the way other faunlings haunted the flowery meadows and shade dappled forests. He read voraciously, the one thing in life he had strength to do with enthusiasm. The classical adventures were his playground, the works of natural philosophy his

pilgrimages into the greater world, and the musings of Eratosthenes his window on a greater truth that transcended the world he could see and touch.

It was said by the time Dorian was 14 that he knew more than the Mage Scribe himself. And though this cannot be verified, everyone recognized his great wisdom and people would ask him questions rather than seeking the answer in books.

One day the Mage Scribe was about the library tidying up when he saw the usual table empty. He wondered where Dorian had gone, and when he saw that a white rose had been placed in his favorite chair, he knew the awful truth. Dorian had died.

His heartbroken parents wanted to erect a monument to his tragically brief life, but the King himself took an interest in the situation and he declared a public subscription so everyone that loved Dorian could show it by donating to a full sized statue to be placed in the library he so loved.

It was a splendid statue of the 14 year old faunling, and by all accounts it was much like having him back at his usual post.

But then a strange and wonderful thing happened. Over the years his features began to age, and people swore he grew taller. In fact, like the young buck he was to become, so became his statue. The miraculous

occurrence was recognized when the statue itself was presented with the tokens of majority that would have gone to Dorian when he became his own buck.

It wasn't for many more years when the artist who did the original statue lay on his deathbed that the truth came out.

So heartbroken were Dorian's parents that they paid nearly every crescent they had to change the statue each year and watch Dorian grow as the Lord intended. And when they ran out of extra funds, the sculptor took his own money and bought the extra bronze needed to recast the statue bigger and more splendid than before.

Now Dorian symbolizes eternal hope. His name in Greek means "Gift" and so he was in life, and also in death, the gift of hope to all who suffer that the ugliness of suffering may be turned into a form of beauty.

THE END

A Matter of Time

*A Testament to the
Meaning of Sacrifice*

A MATTER OF TIME

HOW IRONIC THAT THERE WOULD BE A STATUE to High Mage Rothbart placed in the Garden of Sighs. That fox was once a statue himself for daring to laugh at the White Witch. For his crime he stood a long cold, lonely vigil in her macabre collection of broken dreams, a look of horror frozen on his face by her dread enchantment.

His imprisonment ended when Aslan breathed upon him, and the divine wind dispersed the dark clouds of witchcraft. His icy gray countenance turned soft and red. His ears and tail slumped in blissful relaxation. But most importantly his last memory of pure evil was followed by an impression of pure goodness, and the pairing of the two with goodness washing away the evil made him giddy like strong wine.

He never realized how important such trivial things as scratching an itch and feeling the sun warm against his fur could be. He had taken for granted the gentle drumming of his heart, the tides of air whistling

through his nose and mouth and the press of soft earth and grass against his paws. There were sounds everywhere, smells everywhere, feelings against his skin, movement, color, and the heady thrill of simply moving from place to place. It was as if he had become aware of everything in the universe.

That he had to channel that attention into the grim task of combat was not ideal but it was all right. He would fight for Aslan, avenging the Great Lion and all of Narnia against the White Witch. He would expunge the stain of impure blood.

After the battle at the Ford of Beruna, he was free to go home and take up his life where he had left off. Only this time the life that had returned to him had also returned to the world about him and Springtime chattered and whistled and throbbed in the air. The grass was so brilliant green and the flowers so sunshine gold that it almost hurt to look on them. The air was fresh and clean and bursting with the sweet smells of renaissance.

All his life he had seen nothing but white snow and gray skies. The old landmarks had been swept away by a flood of green and it was hard for him to find his way back to Brockhurst. He had to ask directions

repeatedly and even as he drew close to what should have been his village he saw few clues to tell him he was on the right track.

Still once he got on the main street he had little trouble recognizing the Flying Unicorn, the Gate of Solace, the docks and the Mayor's Estate. It was all just as if it had been yesterday, or at least last winter, which in fact it had been--for a very, very long time.

He was delighted to catch site of his little cottage sitting prettily in the middle of a green field with flowers along the sides of the walk and birds singing in the trees. What a wondrous thing it was, so familiar and yet so much more alive!

He ran up the front walk, but then slowed as he reached the door. He realized the magnitude of what he was about to do. Would she be home? Would she be expecting him? His dearest Briar Rose?

His heart hammering with expectation, Rothbart reached out with a trembling paw and knocked. "Rose, it's me! Open up!"

The latch clicked from the inside and the door slowly opened. An elderly face peeked through the crack. "May I help you, Sir?"

"Pardon me, Ma'am. I'm looking for my wife Briar Rose. Does she still live here?"

The old vixen's eyes widened and her mouth hung open. She gasped deeply, then raised a paw to her heart.

"Ma'am, what's wrong?"

"Rothbart? Is that you? After all these years?"

"Yes, my dear. So is Rose about?"

Her face contorted in a sob. She reached out with a trembling paw and stroked his cheek ruffs. "Don't you know me? Don't you know me?" She stiffened, then collapsed.

Old Briar Rose died in his arms.

Reeling with shock and near madness, the fox made a tormented pilgrimage of grief to his parents' graves, his sister's ruined cabin, and finally to his old smithy where an otter he'd never met was shaping an iron strap on his daddy's anvil with his daddy's hammer. Everything he once was and everything he once had was gone, melted away with the long, bitter winter.

The otter had the same giddy optimism that all the other villagers wore like a badge on their sleeve. If anything, the ocean of joy that surrounded him made Rothbart feel more alone.

"Can I help you sir?"

“Yes,” the fox intoned. “I want to get drunk. Very drunk. Where’s the closest pub?”

“Go straight left two blocks, then bear right. The Knight and Squire. You can’t miss it.”

He had some coins in his purse to go buy provisions. “Twenty crescents. That ought to do,” he muttered. “Maybe that’s enough to solve my problem permanently.”

Rothbart sat unsteadily at the bar. "Inkeeper," he said groggily, "bring me another."

"Don't you think you've had too much, foxy?" the grizzled badger said. "You're clinging on with one toe, son."

"One toe too many," the fox murmured bitterly. "I want to sleep. I want to dream. It's all I have left."

"Come on, sir, surely you don't mean it?" He pulled a large club from under the bar and sat it in front of him.

"Threatening me, boy?"

"Not a threat, sir. Just a way to save money. You might as well smack your brains out with this...it will do you just as much good and it costs less."

The fox looked up at him with bloodshot eyes. "Making fun of me? Are you?? I wasn't a drunk a week ago! I was a soldier for Aslan! A soldier who fought the White Witch! I lost everything for him, and I have nothing left but an empty glass. Fill it up, boy. If I can drink enough today the problem will go away for good and we'll *all* be happier."

"Oh sir, I can't be the cause of your undoing. No sir, it violates my ethics."

"Ethics?" The fox laughed bitterly. "That's like fairness, right? Well there is no fairness, so ethics can go out with the bilge!" He waved a paw before his nose. "Fill it up. I can still see my paw in front of my face."

Just then, another paw slipped over his and gave it a sympathetic squeeze. He looked about at the old hare, stunned. "Marse Dooley?"

"Vicar Dooley now."

"Do you know me, Marse?"

"Of course I know you, Rothbart. Come home with me and tell me all about it over tea and biscuits."

If anything, Rothbart's strange odyssey from blacksmith to High Mage of Narnia was even more astounding than the path that sat him on that bar stool in

long ago Brockhurst. Once he ceased to pity himself, he found he had a wonderful gift for ministering to others, and in healing their woes he found surcease for his own deep sorrows.

By the time Old Marse had retired as Vicar, Rothbart was superbly qualified to fill the vacancy.

On one of Aslan's infrequent trips to Narnia he stopped by the vicarage to see Vicar Rothbart, kissed him with a warm, wonderful lion kiss, and said, "You have freely given, and you shall freely receive." He also whispered something in his ear, a phrase that the fox never told another living soul. But we all suspected it was a passed-along greeting from his beloved Briar Rose.

Whatever it was, Aslan's blessing took hold and grew in the fertile soil of Rothbart's spirit, and no one was surprised when he became Mage...and finally High Mage...of Narnia.

THE END

The Other Magician

A Story of Love and Service

THE OTHER MAGICIAN

THE OLD MAGICIAN, IF YOU ASKED HIM, could have told you all sorts of stories about the days he traveled the vaudeville circuit. His favorite story was the time his assistant forgot to walk the sheep he would use in his act, and the sheep stole the show by relieving himself onstage. Most actors are afraid of being upstaged by children and animals, but Harley was not most actors, and he loved both dearly.

He had a booking on Christmas Eve, the same booking he'd rated for the last three years to rave reviews. And he knew, to his heartbreak, that for many of these children in the pediatric ward it would be his good bye performance. True there would be other patients in the same bed next year, brought there by the maddening, outrageous fact that children don't always bury their parents...sometimes the natural order is overturned. He tried hard...very hard...not to think about it.

Wan and weak, they still loved him. He gave them back their childhood, and in return they kept him young. Once on his first show he had to leave quickly for the restroom, locking himself in a stall to wretch and sob. After that, he always put the feelings of his audience first and was, by all accounts, a great success at bringing much needed Christmas cheer.

One little girl caught his eye and as he came to see her he said, "Aren't you a lovely little thing?"

"I know what I look like," she said quite frankly, pointing to her bald head. "I don't mind."

"Well if you don't mind, I don't." He took off his hat...wig and all...and was as bald as a billiard ball. As he showed the hat about, all the kids laughed. It was one of his favorite stunts and it never failed.

He detached the wig from the hat, placed it slightly askew on his head, then said, "Now we'll pull you something nice from the magic hat, shall we?"

His hand went in to feel for the small sack of chocolate drops he had stuck to the inside with tape. His forearm plunged in up to the elbow. A gasp went up from the audience, and his eyes turned down to see what he thought he would see, his hand punched through the lid and hanging below. But there was no hand below the hat. As he began to notice the slight cool breeze that blew across his hand, he knew something was not right.

"I hope it's an orange," she said, her eyes twinkling with merriment.

Just then, the magician felt a hand, quite certainly a hand, brush against his and slip something into his palm. His hand closed around something round, then came trembling from the depths of what felt like a very long tunnel. It was...an orange.

"How did you DO that?"

"Well, Missy, it's a magic hat. Anything can happen."

Concealing his shattered nerves, he put the hat on his head and said, "Oh, look at the time! You do want to tuck in before old Saint Nick gets here!" He gathered his coat and gloves, and though it was a bit brief the performance was over. He left while he still retained a tenuous grip on reality.

"Maybe it was a one time deal," he said to himself as he sat in his favorite chair before the TV, clutching a bourbon in one hand and his hat in the other. After taking a drink...he felt an urgent need for "spine stiffening"...he looked once more inside the hat.

He saw sky. Sky, clouds and sun.

As he turned the hat about, he saw his view change as one might while swinging a telescope about. There were mountains, waves, clouds, trees, meadows... He reached inside, and on his hand he felt the sun warming one side, the breeze tickling the other. It was as if he might, if he could force himself through the hat, take a trip to this wonderful place and walk the beach.

"That's it, Harley. You're losing it." He quickly finished off the Bourbon, then poured another and downed it too. Harley was not a drunk, but he felt if he was going to lose his grip on reality he might as well enjoy it.

Setting down the glass, he fumbled for the remote control, turned off the TV, settled back in his recliner, and let the alcohol dull his panic and guide him to a fitful sleep.

His nap was short lived. The sound that wakened him practically brought him straight out of the chair.

There it was again. A loud thump as one might hear from dropping a large box off a truck. And it came from inside his room.

He looked about, then spotted something to convince him he WAS losing it. His large, ornate

wooden trunk where all his props were stored just bounced again.

It was as if someone had locked himself in and struggled to get out. And while the old man was sure there was really nothing to it, he felt he might have some peace if he looked for himself.

With trembling hands he popped the two latches, took the large brass handles in his fingers and lifted the lid slowly.

He saw sky. Sky, clouds and sun!

This curiosity was large enough to poke his head inside, unlike the tempting narrow window of the silk hat. And when he stuck his head and shoulders down into the box, he found himself in a very disorienting position, that of looking straight up rather than straight down. And, as was his natural reaction, rather than pulling back inside, he climbed on out.

He was standing on the beach, watching the waves caress and tease the shore. "If this is madness," he thought, "it is not so bad."

Then from behind, a deep melodious voice said, "I've been waiting for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, Harley, for you."

The old magician looked about, half expecting to see his landlord demanding the rent. Instead he saw a

lion. A huge lion. His knees weakened. "I am mad! Stark raving mad!"

"No, Harley. You are quite sane." The lion came closer.

"What do you want with me?"

"I want to see your act."

"MY act?" He stared at the lion incredulously. "Animal acts always steal the show. Everyone knows that. So how can I top a talking lion??"

The noble lion smiled, came closer, and nosed him gently. "I love your act. I'm your biggest fan. And I want you to come to my house and show this act to a lot of new fans, and several of your old ones."

"Great Lion, I want to believe in you. Really I do. But I'm an old man and very weak. Why didn't you come for me when I was a younger man?"

At this the lion smiled again. "Look back through the doorway, Harley. Tell me what you see?"

The old magician got on his knees and slowly, gingerly, looked through the rectangular hole in the beach. His old apartment once again surrounded him, though upside down and backwards. He gave a startled cry, then raised back up, looked at the lion, and asked, "Who is that in my chair? Me??"

"Yes, Harley," Aslan said. "That old body is worn and tired. I will give you a new one, and take you away

with me to share your magic with all children everywhere."

THE END

Death!

*A Story of Mortality
and Morality*

DEATH!

CHARLIE REMEMBERED HOW HIS MARINE uniform made him feel like a real man. But he had never felt so much like a child in a man's body as he did that moment. As his landing craft approached the beach, he reached up with a trembling hand to finger the crucifix that hung about his neck under his khaki shirt next to his dog tag. *"Our Father, who art in Heaven...hallowed be Thy name..."*

A shell exploded into the water nearly tipping the craft. The smell of the explosion reminded him briefly of hunting in the Maine woods with his father. Only now he was the prey. He checked his rifle nervously. It was armed and ready. He only wished he were equally ready.

"Thy Kingdom come...Thy will be done...on Earth as it is in Heaven..."

He felt a slap on the back. It was Nick. Good old Nick.

"Give us this day our daily bread..."

Out of the corner of his eye, Aslan saw the shreds of his mane in the flickering torchlight as yard by painful yard he was dragged over the stony ground toward the Stone Table. He thought about Susan and Lucy, filling his mind with love of them to drown out the hatred and malice that surrounded him. He knew they saw everything. Even if he would give Jadis the satisfaction of hearing his shrieks, he would never let the girls know how badly they were hurting him.

The edge of the Stone Table brutally raked him as he was yanked the last few feet. Many ugly things went through his mind as the evil could not longer be distanced. He had urinated before he came so they would not laugh when he wet himself at the end. Still it never occurred to him that they would feel such glee at clipping him bald.

"Muzzle him!" Jadis yelled.

Aslan sighed. No one brings shears to a battle. No one brings a muzzle. She had planned that carefully.

The landing craft bottomed out a few feet from the shore. Its front end was a ramp, and when it dropped with a splash, the sergeant's cry of "Go, go!" was hardly necessary.

Charlie's heart pounded in his chest. He felt the cold briny water as he plunged into the surf. He felt the sand beneath his boots as he waded forward. He felt the warm wind in his face.

On the shore the advancing troops were being picked off by Japanese fire. Charlie tried very hard not to think about it. He concentrated on the barbed wire. He fell to the ground and shuffled forward beneath the cruel strands of steel just as he had been trained, moving forward on his belly, pushing his gun ahead of him. One thing at a time. That's all he could afford to think about.

Aslan breathed rapidly, his heart pounding in his chest. The rapid pulses only made the ropes around his limbs throb all the worse. "Edmund," he thought, "at least you are safe. At least you..."

Jadis voice punctuated his thoughts again. "Your death will appease the Deep Magic. But after you're dead, what is to stop me from killing him? You have

given me Narnia forever! You have lost your life and have not saved his!"

She held high the obsidian knife. He knew this though he could not look around to see her trembling hands.

"In that knowledge, despair...and die!"

Charlie had just cleared the barbed wire. He stood, raised his rifle, and then looked into the face of death. He caught a glint of light on a rifle barrel. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" he muttered. There was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide.

The slug felt like just that, being slugged in the abdomen by a boxer. Warm blood poured down his legs. The rifle slipped from his grasp. The ground was falling toward him. He could not catch himself. "That's it," he thought.

Aslan felt the click when the knife, wielded with such force, pierced his heart and hit a rib on the other side. Even in his final agony he noticed how cold the

stone felt against his warm body. Then the pain resurged as she rudely wrenched the knife from the wound.

His legs stiffened for a moment, then fell limp. It was to him as if the torches all went out at once and a night with no moon or stars swallowed up everything in deadly darkness.

The marine walked forward. The tunnel through which he traveled was couched in shadows but at the end beckoned a brilliant white light.

He ambled along serenely, noting that he felt no more pain. Despite the surreality of everything he saw, he felt no more fear. That is not to say he felt no regrets. There would be the usual telegram from the War Department coming for Dad. His name would be added to the "Pro Patria Mori" list hanging in the church. Janice would have to put her dreams on hold until another love came into her life. Todd would get his hunting rifle...his letters home made that quite clear...

The passage seemed to go on for hours...or it could have been days. He passed the shadows of people he had once known. They seemed to regard him with friendly recognition but no surprise. He waved at his Grandmother Tuttle and she nodded her head in reply.

Finally he emerged into the light. He stood at the edge of a bottomless canyon. Crossing it was a large ornate stone bridge that looked wide enough to drive a jeep across easily. Beyond it, on the other side, were green meadows with flowers and trees and on past that distant misty mountains reaching into a cloudless, pure sky.

As he approached the bridge, he heard something behind him and looked around. What he saw startled him, or the closest feeling to being startled he could manage in death.

It was a lion. A very large lion. His face was surrounded by a rough stubble of mane. In his side was a terrible gaping wound.

The serenity of the moment was shattered. Charlie went to the lion without fear. Somehow he knew it was all right.

"Hey there, fellow, what happened to you?"

"The same thing that happened to you. I died for my country."

For some reason Charlie was not shocked that the lion answered him. What disturbed him the most was the suffering the lion had no doubt endured. Though Charlie was a hunter, he had never bagged anything bigger than rabbits and squirrels, and the large, sad, noble face of the

lion broke his heart. Besides, it was clear this was no clean kill. That cat had been tortured and desecrated.

"Who did this to you?"

"In a way, it was a good friend."

"Are you saying it was it an accident?"

"More like poor judgment."

Charlie put his arms around the lion's neck and gave him a pat. "Kind of like my running down to enlist, hmm? We old soldiers ought to stick together. Stay with me friend, and I'll look after you."

The lion looked up at him. "Would you will look after me, Charlie?" Aslan smiled. "Then I will look after you. While I must go on alone, your time has not yet come. Go home, get well, and go squirrel hunting with your dad. I'll come back when you're ready. Remember me."

The pain was back but it felt different somehow. Charlie could not move much but he glanced about at the bottles, the doctors, the bright light.

"He's coming around," the orderly said.

"You're quite lucky," the Navy doctor said. "One of your buddies pulled you to safety."

"Two of them," Charlie whispered.

"We can save this arm if infection doesn't set in. This is a ticket home, you lucky stiff."

"My arm?" Charlie asked. "I was shot in the arm?" His eyes closed and as he slipped back into unconsciousness, he muttered "Remember me."

THE END

The Terrors That Come By Night

*Some Dreams Should Never
Come True...*

THE PINK DRESS

FOURTEEN YEAR OLD ARBADELLA FREEMAN was on top of the world. She skipped along the sidewalk with glee, hoping someone, anyone, was looking out of their windows. Her pink dress was the result of two unlikely planets coming into alignment, first that some pink silk cloth came up for sale at all after Pearl Harbor, and second that her mother was able to afford to buy it. Her father was one of the Tuskegee Airmen, a war hero of the first magnitude but certainly making less than the butcher down the street, and for 1943 Harlem that was quite small.

She had begged and pled with her mother to wear that lovely Easter dress to school the next day. She did not want to admit that there was a young boy she wanted to impress, but her mother, who was a little girl once,

understood such things and did not press the point. "But don' you get dat dress dirty young lady or dey's gonna be words, you understand?"

Arbadella understood all too well. She knew how many things her mother gave up for her and was suitably grateful. She had looked at herself in the mirror and exclaimed, "I'm another Judy Garland, mama!" Except of course that Judy Garland was white, did not have pigtails, and had a lot of fine clothes. But her mother understood exactly what she meant and said, "You sho' do, honey. You is so beautiful, child, I just want to eat you up."

She passed the corner of Jonkers and Main where the Rabonowitz' lived. She liked Chaim who was about her age even though there was no question at the time nothing would come of it. After all, they were just friends. She had reserved her emerging feminine wiles for Jimmy. Still, it wouldn't hurt if Chaim looked out the window and saw her and thought she was pretty. "No harm in that," she thought. "No sir, no harm in telling the truth."

She looked at the apartment building and counted up three levels of windows and over five. Darn, the blinds were drawn! He would never see her! What a shame to let all that beauty go to waste!

The heard quick footsteps. Just then a man ran past her on the sidewalk. For one brief moment she saw that he was wearing a zoot suit, but his watch in his mad flight had come loose and was dragging behind him on the sidewalk at the end of its long chain. "Where's the fire?" she shouted after him but he didn't look around.

A car came out of a side street and turned on two wheels with a screech like a mad ghost in pain. What happened then seemed to take place in slow motion. There was a glint of a metal barrel sticking from the side window of a brown Ford touring car. Then Arbadella heard what she thought was firecrackers. POP POP POP!

A stunning blow hit the side of her head. She heard a scream. It was her voice. The sidewalk was rushing toward her face. She tried to ward off the oncoming collision but her arms were not quick enough.

Darkness.

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TO SLEEP

MRS. FREEMAN SAT NEXT TO THE HOSPITAL bed, clutching her daughter's tiny hand. Arbadella's blood stained dress had been cut off and replaced with a sterile hospital gown, and her lovely face was swollen. The braided pigtails had been shorn by necessity and a bandage swathed her head.

"We are trying to keep the brain from swelling too much," the doctor explained slowly to the pained woman. "That's what happens when injuries like this occur. The brain has no where to go and it presses against the inside of the skull. That cuts blood off. That's why she's in a coma."

"Is my baby gonna live?" Mrs. Freeman asked in a hushed voice.

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"We're doing everything we can. If she can possibly live, she will."

"When will she wake up?"

"Let's put it this way. We don't know how much damage was done and how much swelling there might be. She might be almost like her old self. She might be very different. And then there is the possibility we hope does not happen. She might not wake up."

Mrs. Freeman gasped. "Oh Sweet Jesus, no!"

"The longer she is under, the greater are the chances that she won't be her old self. But if you are a religious woman, it never hurts to get a second opinion from The Almighty."

Mrs. Freeman looked at her daughter and said gently, "If you can hear me baby, mama is here. Come back to me, sweetheart! Come back to me! And till you do, precious angel, may God give you sweet dreams, my love."

Hidden beneath the enigmatic face of Arbadella Freeman was anything but a sweet dream.

DESTINATION UNKNOWN

ARBADELLA WALKED ALONG THE GRAY streets of a town with no name, searching the shadows fearfully for some clue to her escape. Before, as little children were wont to do, she would sometimes hear monsters stirring under the bed or rustling among the clothes in the closet. But before there was always momma. There was always the lamp and the love of someone whose love made every evil thing go away.

Here there was nothing but fear and anxiety. It had been so long, so dreadfully long, no telling if it had been hours or days. And the eyes that peered out of the alleyways would hiss or snicker, sometimes chasing her until she nearly collapsed.

One particularly nasty creature, however, did not run after her. He just relentlessly walked behind her, stopping when she turned around, but trailing her, waiting, watching, biding its time. That was the one she feared most of all. She knew it as "Mister Death."

She thought to evade the creature by running into a building. Frantically she went from side to side of the street trying doors, yanking the unyielding handles and beating frantically and screaming, "Help me! Help me PLEASE!" But the doors were all locked.

Then she thought to run down into an alley and try to lose it. She hurried along until she met a wall.

The alley was a blind alley.

She stood there with her back against the wall with a collection of sorry looking trashcans about her and waited as Mr. Death nearly passed by, then stopped, looked around, and spotting her came about the bend.

"If it's a dream," she thought, "will I really die if it kills me?"

In a moment of lucid thinking, she did the only thing she thought might help. She crossed her arms over her chest and shouted loudly, "Jesus! Jesus, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, and lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil!"

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SHAZAM!

SUDDENLY, A FLASH OF GOLD LIT UP THE drab monochrome landscape. A lion, the largest lion Arbadella would imagine...or could imagine...interposed himself between her and the beast.

Oh great, another fierce creature! She called for a miracle and got a hungry lion! She felt let down, the worst let down of her life. God had abandoned her to her fate.

And yet the lion did not come for her. Instead he turned quickly and with a mighty slash of his paw turned the beast back. He then roared, long and deeply and powerfully, and the creature turned and hurried away.

When he turned about, Arbadella got a close look at the lion's face. It was a beautiful face, full of character

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and grace. The lion approached her but she made no attempt to run.

"Arbadella, sweetheart, come to me. I will not hurt you."

"I know," Arbadella said, "I can tell."

She came forward and, sensing it would be all right, placed her palms against his mane and felt the warm softness of his fur. "You saved me! You're my hero!"

The lion purred and nuzzled her gently. "This place is the prison of your fears, my child. You're asleep, and you will be asleep for a rather long time. I cannot leave you here to suffer. I'll take you to a place where you can make new friends and be safe from the terrors that come by night."

"Is it Heaven?"

"Not yet. You have more living to do before you die. But this place is a lot like Heaven. And you'll be happy to know it's in full color. It's also quite real. It will be your home until you're ready to wake up."

The lion breathed on the wall behind the trapped girl. A doorway formed in the brick wall. "This door leads to Narnia and freedom," Aslan said. "Knock and it shall be opened unto you."

"Seek and ye shall find," Arbadella whispered in awe.

"Ask and it shall be given unto you." The lion smiled and so did Arbadella.

THE END