



The Queen,

The Lion,

& the Rings

by sumayyah a.

This work was written in homage to *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis and *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien. It is a work of fan fiction intended only for entertainment. I do not own anything of the characters or world of either *Narnia* or *Lord of the Rings*, and I am making no profit off of any of it.

“ I could not write [Susan's] story myself. Not that I have no hope of Susan's ever getting to Aslan's country; but because I have a feeling that the story of her journey would be longer and more like a grown-up novel than I wanted to write. But I may be mistaken. Why not try it yourself? ”

— *C. S. Lewis, in a letter to Pauline Bannister*

It was more than a year after she lost them that Susan found the envelope.

For months she couldn't bear to look at her family's belongings all neatly packed up, and so she hadn't known it was there. Other people, friends and neighbours, had sorted everything out for her, and she'd hired movers to transfer it to and store it all in some of the many empty rooms in the Professor's house—*her* house, now—and shut the doors again.

This house was supposed to be Edmund's. The Professor had willed it to him in one of the last gatherings that Susan had attended.

"Me?" Edmund had spluttered, and the Professor had only looked at him over the rim of his glasses and nodded sagely, eyes twinkling.

"You," he had confirmed.

Later, when she'd approached him. Edmund had said quietly, "I should have thought he'd will it to Peter or Lucy. Not *me*."

"Oh, I don't know," Susan had replied, standing beside him to stare out the windows at the great snow-covered lawn, where one summer she and her siblings had played such fantastical games. "He looks at you, sometimes, and I think he sees a son."

"No, not a son," Lucy had said, coming up to them with a Christmas wreath in her hair. (It had reminded Susan of—of long ago. But that hadn't made sense, because the memory, or fantasy, was of a Lucy grown, and she had only just barely been grown then). "He said once that you reminded him of himself."

Edmund had grimaced, half shy and half pleased and all together disgruntled.

"Whatever the case, it's clear he likes you best of us all," Peter had said cheerily, slinging an arm around him and ruffling his hair with one broad hand. "And what would I do with this house when I have Mother and Father's to be looking after?"

"And *I'm* going to travel," Lucy had said, "I don't need a house, much as I love this one. And it'll be all of ours, really, even if it is in your name, won't it, Ed?"

"Of course," Edmund had said.

Susan had said nothing, only sipped at her wine. If they had asked her, she wouldn't have told them the truth—that she didn't like this house, and didn't understand why they did. It was an old fashioned, draughty place, and it had a strange effect on her family whenever they had these yearly reunions.

But they had not asked.

That was, Susan reflected as she stared into the fire, all alone in this house that she hadn't wanted and which was never supposed to be hers, *the last real conversation I had with any of them*.

Soon after, they'd started reminiscing about lions and talking animals and a never ending winter as though it had been more than just pretend, about fantastical islands and an ocean of sweet water and dragons, about underground cities and witches, always witches...

She'd laughed, told them the wine had gone to their heads, and could they all stop acting like little children and focus on the *real* world, on things that had actually happened and actually mattered? Could they all stop playing pretend?

She still remembered Lucy's eyes, how they'd gone bright with righteous anger. "Don't do this again," she'd said, chin raised with a strange sort of dignity upon her face, which had made Susan feel very small and very angry at the sight of it. "How many times do you need Aslan to show himself to you before you'll believe in him?"

Edmund had been white-faced and silent, Peter grave, Eustace solemn and Jill cutting. Susan had tossed her hair back and rolled her eyes and shot the Professor a venomous look. "I think it's past time we put away childish things¹, don't you, sir?" she'd asked.

But it was Ms. Polly Plummer who'd answered. "The fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up, is, to my mind, the more childish²," she'd said quietly.

Susan had left then, face very hot, and hadn't spoken to any of them again, after that, not really. They would insist on talking about Narnia, and chastising her for caring more about lipstick and nylons and invitations, upset that she hadn't wanted to hear fairy stories anymore.

"I live in the *real* world!" she'd yelled at Peter, when he'd decided to talk down to her again about nonsense. "The *real* world, Peter, where we *live*, where we need to make a life for ourselves. Forgive me for not wanting to sustain myself on *fantasy*."

The sheer disappointment in his face had been worse than anything he could've responded with, and nobody had ever spoken to her about Narnia again after that.

And now they were all gone, even her parents, and no one was *left* to talk with her about Narnia. No one knew anymore, who she'd been, what they'd done. It was just her now, in this great old house, with a wardrobe of fur coats, a wardrobe that was made of ancient, otherworldly wood that wouldn't lead anywhere no matter how many nights she slept in its confines.

Just her, remembering, even though they thought she'd forgotten Narnia.

¹ Adapted from *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* by C. S. Lewis

² Adapted from *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* by C. S. Lewis

For a long time, she *had*, or convinced herself she had. Had played pretend the way she'd accused them of doing, and played it well. It had been easier that way. Easier not to miss it. Easier not to find her world, the world she *belonged* to, all the more dull for the richness of the world of her heart, of her dreams.

Aslan had told her and Peter, the last time, that they were getting too old for Narnia. It had broken her heart to hear it.

When Edmund and Lucy had brought Eustace with them, their faces bright with a light that nothing in this world could give them, and had told them all about Caspian and their great voyage, Susan had felt betrayed. The feeling had not abated, not even when Edmund and Lucy had said they too would never go back, and had conveyed Aslan's last words to them.

*I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name.*³

Susan had held out hope until then, you see, had dreamed of returning to Narnia someday, no matter what Aslan had said. Had dreamed of being queen again, of being more than a girl from Finchley, of being somebody who mattered, of *doing* something that mattered. Of adventures, and love, and wonder.

But Narnia had turned away from her. *Aslan* had turned away from her.

And he had given all of that, instead, to *other* children. Had replaced them with Eustace and then Jill and—who knew how many others to come. How many others had there *been*? How many had had what she had, and lost what she had?

How many had been *abandoned*?

It was spite that had motivated her. Spite and misery and grief. Susan had decided she really was too old for Narnia, and that *this* was her world now, and she would rule it, in her own small way.

(Once a king or queen...)

And so she had done, no matter anyone's approval or disapproval. She had put aside all thoughts and memories of Narnia, of Aslan, of her country and her people.

(They had forgotten her first, after all).

She focused instead on the things that brought her joy, things which she loved, which she delighted in. She had convinced herself, or tried to convince herself, that her adventures in Narnia had been nothing more than a story, a game...

³ From *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C. S. Lewis

Until she'd woken up one day, after a confusing dream about a desperate king and an ape and a donkey, to a telegram from Edmund, Edmund who was stubborn and patient and hadn't given up on her the way Peter and Lucy and even Susan herself had.

We think we may have found a way back, he had written. *We think Narnia needs us. Please, Susan.*

And with the telegram had been a train ticket.

She had stared at it for a long time, her breath caught in her throat, years and years of memories and hopes and wishes crashing through her heart and her head in the span of a moment, years and years of longing and fury and shame and hurt.

And then she had done something she would regret for all the rest of her life.

She'd put the ticket and the telegram aside, and went about her day, scoffing at her brother's silliness.

And now they were gone. Gone where she could not follow.

The day she'd buried them all had been a blazingly glorious autumn day. She hadn't cried. Everything in her had gone cold (colder than a hundred year winter with no Christmas) the moment she'd gotten the news.

Shock, they'd murmured, squeezing her hand, crying on her behalf.

It wasn't until the last of the visitors and mourners had gone away, leaving her standing in front of the graves, the sun shining through the riot of orange and red on the trees surrounding like so much heatless fire, that she'd started to cry.

The wind had come and blown through those trees, loosening their leaves and sending them whirling all about her in something like a dance, crisp and cutting, and it had sounded like the faint roar of a Lion, or maybe his sigh.

Dearest, she had thought she'd heard. *Dearest*.

And like it had once so long ago, that voice had warmed her all the way through. It had melted away the frozen wasteland of her heart. It had broken something brittle and bitter in her.

She'd cried then, cried and cried and cried, until the snowmelt was all gone and what was left behind was a wreckage.

Days had passed. Weeks, and then months, and then a year. She dreamed, every night, of Peter and Edmund and Lucy. Of Narnia, of a war, of death. Of a great door, closing. Of her family, laughing. Of a far, green country. Of Aslan.

She would wake, weeping, reaching for them. But always, always, they would be out of reach, racing on and never looking back at her.

Dearest, she would imagine hearing, when the wind blew or the fire burned or her heart beat particularly loud in her ears. *Dearest*.

Aslan, she would cry back. *Take me too, take me back, take me to them*.

Today, after another dream (*further up and further in and laughter and light*), aching and heart-worn and missing them so greatly she thought it might kill her, she'd finally gone through their things, as though by doing so she could hold them again.

She'd found mother's dresses and father's cufflinks, Peter's sketches of battlefield tactics and Edmund's hand-carved chess pieces and Lucy's notebook of botany with accompanying watercolours. She didn't have anything of Eustace's, which had gone to his parents, or of Jill's, which had gone to hers, but it brought back memories clearer than ever, all the same, of gatherings of the Friends of Narnia.

And then she found a dusty, sooty box of possessions recovered from the crash, such as could be determined to be hers, which she hadn't looked at or into since the officials had delivered it to her with their heads bowed and their hats in their hands.

And though it made everything in her hurt, she opened it. And inside, among other detritus, was an envelope, and inside that envelope were two rings, green and yellow. She sat and stared at them now, curled up in her nest in the wardrobe, her eyes burning, a terrible hope setting her alight.

Susan took a deep and shuddering breath. It felt like it shook her down to her core, shook away cobwebs and binding ties that weren't so binding after all. She knew, of course, what these rings were. She remembered the Professor's story about them, and the Wood, and the pools to different worlds, and how Narnia had come to be.

She knew what would happen, if she put the yellow one on.

Narnia, her heart sang, *Aslan*.

They'd died, her family. They'd died in the train crash. But perhaps Aslan had taken them away with him, just before it happened. Perhaps their bodies had been left behind, but their spirits had gone on. Perhaps her dreams of them were true, and not fuelled by grief.

Perhaps she could be with them again.

Perhaps Aslan had been calling her, all this time.

Susan sat up and stepped out of the wardrobe. She closed it behind her, and left the empty room without once looking back.

(You won't get into Narnia again by that route.⁴)

Instead, she washed her face and changed into a dress that Lucy had made herself only a few years before, for a party that Ms. Plummer had put together for all the Friends of Narnia. (Susan had not been invited, and would not have attended if she had been).

It was in the Narnian style, though not of Narnian material, and it fitted Susan perfectly, as though it were always meant for her, though Lucy was—had been—shorter and slighter than her. Wearing it brought steel to her spine and lifted a weight from her shoulders, all at the same time. It made her feel very much herself, for the first time in oh, such a *long* time.

Dearest, Aslan called to her, and this time Susan knew she was hearing his voice, that it wasn't fancy or madness or wishful thinking.

I hear you, Susan replied, *I hear you, I'm sorry, I'm coming.*

She opened the envelope—

She touched her finger to the yellow ring—

There was a jerk behind her navel—

The world fell away—

—And in its place was a vast and silent Wood of green light and green trees and dark pools of utterly still water, and before her was a Lion.

Susan fell to her knees.

“Dearest,” Aslan said, his voice half purr, half growl.

She couldn't speak in his presence. She couldn't even look at him. She couldn't do anything more than begin to cry.

“Daughter of Eve,” Aslan said, padding towards her on his silent paws. “I have long awaited you, and finally you have sought me. Do you welcome me now, little one? Do you believe?”

“I do, I do,” Susan wept, and still, she couldn't bring herself to look up at him, couldn't feel she had the right to even *want* to. “I'm so sorry Aslan, I'm so sorry, I've been a fool, I've—”

“Hush now,” he breathed, and his breath washed over her face like the first touch of the sun after a dark and terrible storm. And it swept away all her guilt and her shame and her grief and her

⁴ From *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis

pain and her tears, and in its place was peace and wonder and so much love she felt she would burst with it.

“You are forgiven,” he said, golden and great, and now she could meet his beautiful eyes, and when she did she saw her own love for him reflected back at her, only so very much more, and she gasped. “You are forgiven, dear heart.”

“Will you—may I come home now, Aslan? May I see my family again, and Narnia?”

The Lion shook his head, his magnificent mane waving gently, washing warmth over her even as despair threatened to swallow her whole. “Narnia is closed to you,” he said.

“Oh please,” Susan whispers, “Oh please, Aslan, am I—am I too late then?”

Aslan sighed, all gentle sorrow. “You are,” he said, “For Narnia is no more.”

“But—my family—I dreamed of them, I *saw* them. Was that—was that only—”

“You dreamed true,” Aslan said. “But they are beyond you now.”

Susan bowed her head, gasping wetly for air, and the great Lion bowed his too, until his warm, furred face was pressed alongside hers, and she found that he wept with and perhaps for her.

“Do not despair,” he murmured to her, “For not all is lost. You have a chance now, a chance to return to me, and to your family.”

“Anything,” Susan cried, “Oh Aslan, anything at all, I’ll do it!”

“Do you promise, daughter of Eve?” Aslan asked her.

“Yes,” Susan said, with all the fervour of her broken heart. “Yes, I promise, Aslan.”

“Then this is the task I set before you,” the Lion said, “And it is both the easiest and hardest task anyone has ever been given.”

He nosed at her with his velvety nose until Susan rose to her feet, and walked her to a distant pool, one among many.

“Put on the green ring,” Aslan told her, and Susan found she was still holding the envelope, now crumpled in her fist. “Leave the yellow ring there upon the ground. It will not be used again.”

She did as she was told.

“After I have given you your task, then into this pool you will step, and you will come to this Wood never again, nor to your old home or world. Do you accept the terms?”

“I do, Aslan,” Susan said, stalwart and steadfast.

The Lion's eyes warmed in a smile that made her smile tremulously in return.

"Very good, dear heart. And now, here is the task I lay before you, as was laid before the great Lord Adam and Lady Eve." His voice was growing now, as was the light of him, so that she had to close her eyes to the brightness of it or be blinded.

"*Live,*" the Lion said, and it was a growl and a sigh and a laugh and a purr, all at once. "Live in my Name, and seek for me all the days of your life, and when the time comes, you will find all you love waiting for you. Live, Susan Pevensie, once and always Queen of Narnia, and do not forget me or forsake me. Live, dearest. *Live.*"

His voice rang in her bones, set her legs to moving, had her turning and facing the pool.

"Until next I see you, Aslan," she called, and stepped into the pool before she heard what, if anything, he replied with.

There was a sensation as though she were falling, only not through water, but through air. And then she landed softly, without the expected jarring motion, as though she had only stepped through a door, and when she opened her eyes it was to an altogether different light in an altogether different wood.

All around her were enormous trees whose trunks and branches were all of silver and their leaves a living gold. And there was a man before her, a very old man dressed all in grey, with a very long beard tucked into his belt and sparkling eyes under bushy brows that stuck out beyond the brim of his hat. In his hand was a long, curved pipe of sweet smelling smoke, which put her in mind of Trumppkin the dwarf.

And yet there was a gravity about him, and a keenness to his eyes, and a light to his face, that reminded her strongly of the Professor. It made her like him immediately.

"Good gracious me," he said, regarding her with an arched brow. "I have seen many strange things in my life, but never have I seen someone appear so suddenly where absolutely no one was before."

Susan blinked at the man and then down at herself. She was standing on sweet smelling grass, in the center of a faint ring of mushrooms. On her finger was the green ring, but even as she looked, it shivered and dissolved from around her finger into nothingness.

When she looked back up, the old man was staring at her hand too. He met her gaze, and his eyes were very sharp.

"If I am not mistaken," he said slowly. "There upon your hand was a Ring of Power, but not one as was accounted to have been made. Who *are* you? How did you come to be here? No one may pass through these woods without leave of the Lady, and I know she has welcomed no stranger hither."

“Ring of power?” Susan murmured, pressing her thumb against the spot where the ring had sat. “Yes, I suppose it was. But it wasn’t one of this world.”

The man’s other eyebrow rose to join the first. He lowered his pipe fully and attended to her with the full weight of his rather palpable attention.

“Not of this world?” he echoed. “How fascinating. I ask you again, my good lady—*who are you?*”

“I was a queen,” Susan answered, the words falling from her mouth readymade. “And I am one still. I was called Gentle, and I fought with a bow, but only when I had to, and I had a horn, which would summon aid whenever it was blown upon. I had two brothers, and they were called Magnificent and Just, and a sister and she was called Valiant. I have lived for thirteen hundred years to some, and twenty-one years to others.”

She smiled faintly at the man, who seemed stunned, but not disbelieving.

“I am Susan Pevensie,” she finished. “That’s all there is left.”

“Well,” said the man, after a pause in which all she could hear was the swaying of the leaves in a light breeze and unfamiliar birds chirping. “I am Gandalf the Grey, and it sounds as though you have a fascinating story. I would be delighted to hear it, if you would tell it to me.”

“That depends,” she answered. “Are you old enough for fairytales again⁵?”

Gandalf the Grey smiled, and for a moment he looked not like an old man, but a shining beacon of white light. “Oh, my dear,” he said, and she blinked and he was as she’d first seen him, standing now and holding his arm out to her. “I daresay I am.”

Susan laughed as she had not laughed in a year, and a darkness fell from her face and did not return again as she took his arm. “Well then,” she said, “Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy⁶...”

*

Many, many years later, she would be known as Susan by a very few, and as Ivorwen to most, for her prowess with the bow as well as for her faithfulness. After many adventures and much growing up, she would eventually wed a man descended from a line of kings, and become mother to the mother of a great king, valorous and noble, both healer and renewer.

She would live all her life in service to the guidance and protection of her adopted peoples, a bastion against an ever encroaching darkness. She would not live to see the vanquishing of that

⁵ Adapted from the dedication in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis

⁶ From *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis

darkness, or the restoration of her people, or the crowning of her grandson, but she would live all the days of her life in hope.

And when her time finally came, when the grey rain-curtain of this world turned all to silver glass and rolled back, she saw white shores, and beyond it a far green country under a swift sunrise⁷.

And she heard a roar of triumphant welcome, and she saw a great figure of gold, and three smaller figures all crowned, running to her, rushing to welcome her with open arms, and she ran to them, laughing and crying at once, and was held by them once more.

And then they stepped back, and she faced the Lion, who for many years now she had known and loved by another of His names.

"Dear heart," He said, "Your task is completed. You have lived, and lived well, and now shall live forever.

Welcome home."

⁷ Adapted from *The Return of the King* by J. R. R. Tolkien