

2. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (Summary)

Narnia Discovered

As World War II unfolds, four siblings are sent to the safety of the countryside to escape the air raids of London. Peter Pevensie, Susan Pevensie, Edmund Pevensie, and Lucy Pevensie arrive at the grand manor of Professor Digory Kirke. As they explore the house, Lucy, the youngest, steps into a massive wardrobe tucked away in a spare room. Inside the wardrobe, she discovers the magical realm of Narnia, a wintery land of talking animals, tree spirits, and other fantastical creatures. She soon meets Tumnus, a faun, standing near a glowing lamppost in the middle of the forest. He invites her for tea and lulls her to sleep with his mystical flute. Unknown to Lucy, he plans to turn her over to the White Witch, who is ever watchful for trespassing humans—Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve. Lucy charms Tumnus, however, and his conscience gets the better of him. He hustles her back to the safety of her own world before the witch can capture her. Lucy emerges from the wardrobe, excited to share her adventure with her siblings, but they find her tale too far-fetched to believe, since literally no time has passed, and honest Lucy is devastated.

Some days later, Lucy reenters the wardrobe to visit Tumnus, and this time Edmund sneaks in behind her. Once inside, he is astonished to discover that Lucy was telling the truth about Narnia. Before he can find her to apologize, however, a grand sleigh arrives, pulled by reindeer and driven by a dwarf. Its passenger calls herself the Queen of Narnia. Upon discovering a human boy in her realm, the queen beguiles Edmund with soft-spoken lies, flattery, and enchanted confections. As Edmund gorges on bewitched Turkish delight, he thoughtlessly divulges information about his siblings, as well as Lucy's association with the Faun Tumnus. The queen promises to make Edmund King of Narnia one day, but only if he will return to Narnia with his three siblings and bring them to her. She points out the direction of her home so that Edmund can find her when he returns, and then drives away.

Lucy arrives moments after the Queen's departure, thrilled to see her brother, who now can corroborate her story with their skeptical siblings. She warns him about the White Witch, who is hated across the land by all good creatures and who has cast a spell over Narnia so that it is "always winter, but it never gets to be Christmas." Edmund realizes Lucy is describing the woman he just encountered, the so-called Queen of Narnia. Still longing for more of the bewitched candy, however, he dismisses her warning, declaring peevishly, "You can't always believe what Fauns say." As they return to their own world through the wardrobe, Edmund stewes over having to admit Lucy was right to his siblings, who will surely "all be on the side of the Fauns and the animals," while he himself is "already more than half on the side of the Witch."

Once back home, Edmund pettily denies the visit to Narnia ever happened, leaving Lucy in tears. Peter angrily accuses him of toying with young Lucy "out of spite," and Peter and Susan begin to worry that Lucy has truly lost her mind. Desperate for advice, they confess all to the Professor Digory Kirke, who, much to their surprise, takes Lucy's side. "How do you know?" he asks, "that your sister's story is not true?" She is clearly not mad, he states, nor does she have a history of telling lies (unlike Edmund), and therefore she must be telling the truth. Unable to come to a logical conclusion they can accept, the children let the matter drop.

Trouble Brewing in Narnia

One morning not long thereafter, the children are forced to hide in the wardrobe in order to avoid the stern housekeeper Mrs. Macready and a party of visitors who are touring the mansion. They find themselves in Narnia, where a slip of the tongue by Edmund reveals that he has, in fact, visited Narnia before. Disgusted, Peter calls him out as a liar and likens him to some "poisonous little beasts," and Edmund secretly vows to pay back his "stuck-up, self-satisfied" siblings.

The four set off through the snow for Tumnus's home, only to find it ransacked and the faun arrested for treason against the White Witch. Feeling responsible, Lucy insists they try to rescue Tumnus, and the others reluctantly agree. With no leads on where to begin, the children follow a clever-looking robin into the forest, where they

encounter Mr. Beaver, who spirits them away to his dam on a frozen river. Once safely inside, Mr. Beaver discloses that Tumnus has been taken to the White Witch's house, lamenting that few who enter her home ever come out again. Mrs. Beaver prepares a hot meal for the cold, famished crew, and after dinner, Mr. Beaver tells of Aslan the Lion, "the Lord of the whole wood," who has returned to Narnia after a long absence. "He'll put all to rights," Mr. Beaver assures them, revealing key prophecies to the children: Winter will end when Aslan returns, and the evil Queen's reign will topple "when Adam's flesh and Adam's bone / Sits at Cair Paravel in throne." The four thrones of castle Cair Paravel await the arrival of two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve—and surely, these must be Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy. Mr. Beaver says the children are to meet Aslan at the Stone Table as soon as possible, and Aslan will help them rescue Tumnus. Somewhere in the midst of these revelations, Edmund slips away into the whirling snowstorm outside. Mr. Beaver knows instantly that "[h]e's gone to her, to the White Witch. He has betrayed us all."

Meanwhile, Edmund arrives at the witch's house, where he encounters an eerie courtyard of lifelike statues—noble creatures the witch has turned to stone with her magic wand. He is escorted to the witch by a talking wolf, Maugrim, the Chief of the Secret Police. The witch is enraged that Edmund has come without his siblings, and Edmund spills his guts about his siblings, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, and their plans to rendezvous with Aslan at the Stone Table.

The Tide Turns

Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, Peter, Susan, and Lucy quickly gather supplies and flee the cozy dam, fearing the arrival of the police at any moment. They set out to find Aslan in a race against the White Witch to the Stone Table, where the lordly Lion awaits. In the dark of night, they take refuge in a hidden cave and sink into exhausted sleep. They awaken to the sound of jingling bells and are delighted to find Father Christmas has arrived. He gives the children weapons for the upcoming battle, and to Lucy, he gives a precious bottle of cordial that heals all wounds. Cheered by the advent of Christmas—a clear sign the witch's power is waning—the party once again embarks to find Aslan.

Edmund, on the other hand, has "been having a most disappointing time" at the witch's home, where he is treated with contempt and given nothing but stale, dry bread to eat. The witch sends Maugrim to gather his pack of wolves and raid the Beavers' dam, though they arrive to an empty house. The witch, the dwarf, and Edmund, who now is clearly a prisoner, race in the sleigh through the snowy night toward the Stone Table. As morning breaks, they come upon a merry party of animals feasting on plum pudding, a gift from Father Christmas. Infuriated, the witch raises her wand to blast the poor creatures. Edmund pleads with the witch but cannot stop her from turning them to stone, after which she strikes him viciously. "For the first time in this story," Edmund feels sympathy "for someone besides himself." They continue, but as winter loses its hold on the land, the snow begins to melt and the sleigh can go no farther. Edmund's hands are tied behind his back, and he is force-marched forward as spring blooms about them.

The Triumph of Aslan

Mr. and Mrs. Beaver and the three children arrive at Aslan's camp, atop a hill on which the Stone Table rests, "a great grim slab of gray stone supported on four upright stones." Crowds of animals, tree-women and well-women (dryads and naiads), centaurs, and others have rallied in support, and Aslan receives the children, who are awed by his fearsome, magnificent presence. As the great Lion shows Peter the castle Cair Paravel in the distance, "where you are to be King," a strange noise cuts through the calm. It is the horn given to Susan by Father Christmas to summon help in times of crisis. Peter races to his sister, who is stranded up a tree with Maugrim's teeth snapping at her heels. One thrust of Peter's sword fells the beast. As another wolf escapes into the forest, Aslan dispatches a party of warriors to hunt them down, for surely they will be returning to their mistress. "Now is your chance to find the Witch and rescue the fourth Son of Adam," Aslan cries. Then Aslan knights Peter as Sir Peter Wolf's-Bane, for his valor, and tells him to never forget to clean his sword.

Back in the forest, the witch and the dwarf grimly speculate that the children must have already reached the Stone Table by now. The witch decides to thwart the prophecy of the four thrones by killing Edmund on the spot, even though the Stone Table "is the proper place. That is where it has always been done before," she says. Just then, the wolf who escaped Aslan's encampment rushes in and warns the witch of the approaching army, but she refuses to flee. She charges the wolf to gather her own forces together to stand and fight. The dwarf ties Edmund, who is too exhausted to even struggle, to a tree, and the witch readies her stone knife to cut his throat. Suddenly, a horde of creatures thunders onto the scene and cuts Edmund's bonds—it is the rescue party sent by Aslan. The witch and the dwarf disappear in the confusion, and Edmund is brought safely to camp. After a long, somber conversation with Aslan, Edmund humbly makes peace with his siblings, who are relieved their brother is safe at last.

The dwarf then arrives and requests an audience with Aslan for the White Witch. He agrees, and the witch emerges from the woods, unarmed. She calls out Edmund as a traitor and claims the right to kill him—a right ensured to her by the Deep Magic that was woven into the world since the dawn of time. Aslan draws her aside in private conversation, where they make a secret agreement. The crowd rejoices when the witch relinquishes her claim on Edmund, "a look of fierce joy on her face." But Aslan has made her a promise, and she strides away in triumph.

That same day, Aslan walks Peter through strategies for the upcoming battle, stating that he himself can't promise to be on hand for the fight. The Lion's mood is somber throughout the day, and later that night, Susan and Lucy see him stealing away from camp. When they follow him through the woods, he senses their presence and allows them to continue onward with him, for "I should be glad of company tonight." As they approach the hill where the Stone Table sits, Aslan leaves the girls behind, cautioning them that "whatever happens, do not let yourselves be seen." He bids farewell, and the girls weep without knowing exactly why. Awaiting Aslan on the hill is the witch and her throng of evil creatures, who tie Aslan to the Stone Table and torment him cruelly. Aslan offers no resistance while they hurt and humiliate him, and the witch gloats that he has made Narnia hers forever. "You have lost your own life and you have not saved his," she sneers just before she plunges her knife into Aslan's body, killing him.

The gleeful horde of ghouls and creatures departs to hunt down Aslan's army, leaving Lucy and Susan to weep over his body. Little do they know, however, that there is an even Deeper Magic in action from before the dawn of time. As dawn brightens the sky, the Stone Table cracks in two and Aslan reappears, whole and heartier than ever. The Lion has overcome Death by freely offering himself, "a willing victim who had committed no treachery" in place of the traitor Edmund. Joyful, the three share a wondrous ride through the forest, with Susan and Lucy clinging to Aslan's back. Their first stop is the witch's castle, where Aslan restores the stone statues into living creatures by breathing the breath of life into them. This new army made from the woken creatures hastens toward the scene of the battle, where the rest of Aslan's army is fighting, arriving just as all hope seems lost. With fresh reinforcements, the witch's evil army is quickly routed, and Aslan kills the White Witch in the thick of battle.

Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy take their rightful places as kings and queens of Narnia, and they justly reign for many peaceful years. As time passes, the children grow into adults, forgetting their former lives in England. Yet one day, they embark on a hunt for the fabled White Stag, a creature said to grant wishes to whoever can capture it. The stag leads them back to the lamppost, where memories of their old world begin to return. They stumble out through the wardrobe door and find they are children once again. No time has passed in their own world. They confess all to the Professor, who assures them that someday they will return to Narnia. For after all, he says, "Once a King in Narnia, always a King in Narnia."