

## 6. THE SILVER CHAIR (Summary)

### The Quest Begins

As the story opens Jill Pole and Eustace Scrubb, classmates at an alternative school called Experiment House, hide behind the gym to avoid school bullies. (Eustace's full name is Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he is sometimes called Eustace Clarence, but mostly just Eustace or Scrubb.) Eustace comforts a crying Jill with stories of Narnia, and she wishes they could escape to that magical land. Together they call out to Aslan just as the bullies appear, and they flee through a magical door that transports them to Aslan's country. They find themselves atop a high cliff, where Jill shows off by standing perilously close to the edge, but she gets dizzy from the height. When Eustace rushes in to keep her from falling, he plunges over the cliff himself. Immediately, a lion rushes onto the scene and blows a current of air that catches Eustace and carries him safely over the sea to distant Narnia.

It is Aslan, and he gently scolds Jill for her behavior, warning her: "your task will be the harder because of what you have done." He tells her of the quest they've been called to Narnia to complete: they are to rescue the kidnapped Prince Rilian, heir to the Narnian throne. Aslan gives Jill four signs to help them in their quest:

Eustace will encounter an old friend in Narnia right away. If he greets this friend, they will receive help on their quest.

Jill and Eustace must travel north "to the ruined city of the ancient giants."

In the ruined city, they must "do what the writing tells [them]."

They will know the lost prince because he will call on them to do something in Aslan's name.

Aslan then blows Jill to Narnia, too, and she lands next to Eustace. They are in a crowd of Narnians, watching the elderly king's ship depart in search of Aslan to the east. Jill tries to tell Eustace about the signs, but he shushes her, still angry about what happened on the cliff.

Glimfeather the Owl approaches the pair, having seen their strange arrival on the current of air. He informs them the now-departed king is none other than Caspian the Tenth, the same Caspian Eustace had sailed with aboard the Dawn Treader. Eustace is shocked at how the king has aged, when only a few months have passed in their own world since Eustace visited Narnia. Glimfeather then introduces them to the land's Lord Regent, Trumpkin the Dwarf, who gives them rooms in the castle and agrees to hear their petition the next day. Later that night Jill and Eustace discuss their predicament. She explains her meeting with Aslan fully, revealing the four signs and quest for the lost prince. The children realize they've already blown the first sign—Eustace did not greet Caspian, so they will not receive his help.

They go to bed, but late that night, Glimfeather reappears and spirits them out of the castle to attend a parliament of owls. The owl is convinced Trumpkin would keep them from their quest. One of the owls tells the story of Prince Rilian's abduction, which happened ten years ago. The prince's mother was killed by a serpent, "great, shining, and as green as poison," and Rilian set out to find and kill the beast. Instead, he met a beautiful lady, "wrapped in a thin garment as green as poison," and he simply disappeared one day. Since then, many lives had been lost in the fruitless search for the lost prince, and the king has forbidden any further rescue missions. The owls, however, want to help Jill and Eustace. They figure out that the children must go north to Ettinsmoor to find the ruined city of giants, the second sign given to Jill by Aslan. Two owls take the children to meet someone who can help: Puddleglum the Marsh-wiggle, a tall, froglike creature who lives on the marsh. He predicts their doom with logical pessimism, but willingly signs on to guide the children on their quest—Narnia needs a king, and he will do what he can to help.

## A Perilous Journey

Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum set out for the north, and after ten days, come to a giants' bridge over an impassable gorge. Crossing the bridge, they meet a silent knight in black armor and a beautiful, merry lady in green, the Lady of the Green Kirtle, as she calls herself. She directs them not to the ruined city they seek, but to Harfang, a city of "gentle giants" where an Autumn Feast is about to take place. "[T]ell them ... She of the Green Kirtle salutes them by you," she offers, promising them the hospitality of hot baths, comfortable beds, and full bellies. Puddleglum is skeptical of her motives, but the children are enthralled by the idea of Harfang as a break from their arduous journey—and the horrid winter weather that sets in as they continue up the giants' road.

Against the Marsh-wiggle's wishes, they decide to make for Harfang. As they slog through the pelting snow, they come upon strange, snow-covered features on a hill: deep trenches, ledges, squarish rocks, and structures that look like chimneys or cliffs. Jill falls down into a narrow trench. They pull her out, and Puddleglum asks her to remind them of the signs they're supposed to be following. "Oh, come on! Bother the signs," she pouts, wanting to get to the comforts of Harfang. In truth, the signs have gotten fuzzy in her mind "because she had given up saying the signs over every night." Puddleglum wants to further investigate the hill they're currently on, but the lights of Harfang in the distance appear and the children overrule him once more.

They arrive at the gate of Harfang, where Jill tells the porter that the Lady of the Green Kirtle has sent them. They are treated to a warm fire and a tippie of booze for Puddleglum (who seems to get rather drunk), and then they are taken to meet the king and queen. Eustace explains that the Lady of the Green Kirtle "said you'd like to have us for your Autumn Feast," and the monarchs "smiled in a way that Jill didn't exactly like." Nonetheless, the travelers are given the royal treatment from giant baths and gorgeous rooms to delicious food and luxurious clothes. That night, Jill has a dream that Aslan shows her the phrase "UNDER ME" outside her window, though she forgets the dream upon waking. As soon as she looks out the window, though, she sees what can only be the ruined city of giants. It is the strange hill of ledges and trenches they had passed through the previous day (the snow now melted away), and on the stones is carved the huge inscription, "UNDER ME."

The three travelers realize they've messed up the second sign, and now will need to leave Harfang and look for the prince under the ruined city in order to fulfill the third sign. This won't be easy, though, for they now realize they are prisoners rather than guests. Their fate is made clear when they discover a cookbook with recipes for "Man" and "Marsh-wiggle," and they hurriedly escape through an unguarded door by the kitchen. They are spotted before they can make it safely to the ruined city, though, and pursuit begins. "After them," shouts the king, "or we'll have no man-pies tomorrow." The escapees manage to duck through a crack in the ruined steps to avoid the giants' hounds, and they find themselves in total darkness. They stumble forward blindly and slide down a rocky incline, now hopelessly lost. Soon, an eerie voice greets them with, "What make you here, creatures of the Overworld?" It is the Warden of the Marches of Underland, surrounded by "a hundred Earthmen in arms." Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum are marched off to meet the Queen of the Deep Realm. They cross an underground lake by boat and come to a silent, dreary city, where crowds of Earthmen go about their business and ignore the unusual visitors.

## The Rescue

Once inside the queen's castle, the travelers hear a welcome surprise: "a clear, ringing, perfectly human voice, the voice of a young man." It is the black knight they had met on the bridge, who informs them the Queen of the Deep Realm is the none other than the Lady of the Green Kirtle. Eustace angrily blurts out that the queen had sent them to be eaten by giants in Harfang, but the young man defends her as "a nosegay of all virtues, as truth, mercy, constancy, gentleness, courage and the rest." Lucy rashly reveals their mission to find Prince Rilian, but

the young man has never heard of the prince nor of Narnia. He then tells of how the lady has promised to make him a king in Overland someday, where they will be married. A tunnel beneath the chosen land has already been built by the Earthmen, who will serve as the queen's invading army. The young man remembers nothing of his life before coming to the Underland, except that the lady has "saved me from some evil enchantment ... a spell, from which my Lady alone can free me." Each night, he says, he transforms into a raving madman and then a vile serpent, and must be bound to a special silver chair to keep him from harming anyone. The travelers are aghast to learn of the plans to invade the Overland, and they dislike this young man more and more as he talks.

Soon, though, the time for his confinement is upon them. Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum wait in a nearby room while the man is bound to the chair, then return to witness his ravings. The young man warns them "that I shall beg and implore you, with entreaties and threatenings, to loosen my bonds," and they solemnly promise not to untie him, "Whatever he says." As the fit overcomes the man, he begins to speak of the misery of being "[b]uried alive ... in the pit," longing for the green trees and blue skies above. He tries all manner of wheedling and threats to get the visitors to cut the cords that bind him to the silver chair, but they stand firm. At last, though, he calls on them "by the great Lion, by Aslan himself" to release his bonds. The three recognize the final sign and make the frightening decision to set him free. "In the name of Aslan," they cut his cords. Immediately, the young man grabs his sword and destroys the silver chair, the "vile engine of sorcery" that has kept his true self imprisoned. He then reveals he is Prince Rilian, and he has been under the spell of the queen for ten years. Only for one hour each night has he been himself, and in that hour, he was always bound to the chair so he might not escape.

Just then the queen sweeps into the room. Rilian declares his independence from her and condemns her plan to invade the Overland as "plain villainy." The witch then tries to hypnotize the four with enchanted smoke from the fire, soothing music, and a calm voice that lulls them into a stupor. She croons that there is no Narnia, no Overworld, no sun, and no Aslan, and one by one, they each agree that it was "all a dream," and only the witch's world has ever existed. Only Puddleglum is able to resist her brainwashing, and he tromps on the enchanted fire to break the spell. The others come to their senses, and the witch transforms into a serpent—the same loathsome beast that killed Rilian's mother. Together, they slay the serpent, and then make plans to escape with two horses from the royal stables.

The underground city, however, is already beginning to fall apart with the witch's death. The water begins to rise, and a giant chasm opens up deep into the earth, revealing yet another world below. The Earthmen let off fireworks, and laughter and shouts fill the air as they rush toward the chasm and begin to climb downward. Jill, Eustace, Rilian, and Puddleglum slip through the crowd and capture a gnome, Golg, who tells them that the Earthmen have all been enchanted by the witch, too. For years they have toiled for her, but now they have remembered themselves and are returning to their old home, the Land of Bism, through the deep, fiery chasm. Golg shows them the way to the underground tunnel to the Overland, and they race to reach it through the rising water as the chasm rumbles closed behind them.

They come to the end of the tunnel, and Jill climbs up to investigate a patch of bluish light coming from a hole above their heads. She disappears through the hole, pulled up by Narnians who are in the forest celebrating the Great Snow Dance. Quickly, the others are rescued from the tunnel, and Prince Rilian is recognized and honored as the king-to-be, now returned to Narnia. All proceed to the castle at Cair Paravel to welcome back King Caspian, who is reunited with his son before quietly passing away. Aslan appears to bring the children back to their own world, but first they pay a visit to Aslan's country once more. There, the dead King Caspian is returned to life through a drop of blood from the Aslan's paw. He is young and hearty once more, and together,

Jill, Eustace, Caspian, and Aslan step back through the magical door to the children's schoolyard, where they gleefully chase off the terrified school bullies.