

The Last Battle; Night Falls on Narnia

By C. S. Lewis

He went to the door and they all followed him. He raised his head and roared, "Now it is time!"; then louder, "Time!"; then so loud that it could have shaken the stars, "TIME." The door flew open.

They all stood beside Asian, on his right side, and looked through the open doorway.

The bonfire had gone out. On the earth all was blackness; in fact, you could not have told that you were looking into a wood, if you had not seen where the dark shapes of the trees ended and the stars began. But when Asian had roared yet again, out on their left they saw another black shape. That is, they saw another patch where there were no stars; and the patch rose up higher and higher and became the shape of a man, the hugest of all giants. They all knew Narnia well enough to work out where he must be standing. He must be on the high moorlands that stretch away to the north beyond the River Shribble. Then Jill and Eustace remembered how once long ago, in the deep caves beneath those moors, they had seen a great giant asleep and been told that his name was Father Time, and that he would wake on the day the world ended.

"Yes," said Asian, though they had not spoken. "While he lay dreaming, his name was Time. Now that he is awake, he will have a new name."

Then the great giant raised a horn to his mouth. They could see this by the change of the black shape he made against the stars. After that—quite a bit later, because sound travels so slowly—they heard the sound of the horn: high and terrible, yet of a strange, deadly beauty.

Immediately the sky became full of shooting stars. Even one shooting star is a fine thing to see; but these were dozens, and then scores, and then hundreds, till it was like silver rain; and it went on and on. And when it had gone on for some while, one or two of them began to think that there was another dark shape against the sky as well as the giant's. It was in a different place, right overhead, up in the very roof of the sky, as you might call it. Perhaps it is a cloud, thought Edmund. At any rate, there were no stars there: just blackness. But all around, the downpour of stars went on. And then the starless patch began to grow, spreading further and further out from the center of the sky. And presently a quarter of the whole sky was black, and then a half, and at last the rain of shooting stars was going on only low down near the horizon.

With a thrill of wonder (and there was some terror in it too), they all suddenly realized what was happening. The spreading blackness was not a cloud at all; it was simply emptiness. The black part of the sky was the part in which there were no stars left. All the stars were falling: Asian had called them home.

The last few seconds before the rain of stars had quite ended were very exciting. Stars began falling all round them. But stars in that world are not the great flaming globes they are in ours. They are people (Edmund and Lucy had once met one). So now they found showers of glittering people, all with long hair like burning silver and spears like white-hot metal, rushing down to them out of the black air, swifter than falling stones. They made a hissing noise as they landed, and burned the grass. And all these stars glided past them and stood somewhere behind, a little to the right.

This was a great advantage, because otherwise, now that there were no stars in the sky, everything would have been completely dark and you could have seen nothing. As it was, the

crowd of stars behind them cast a fierce, white light over their shoulders. They could see mile upon mile of Narnian woods spread out before them, looking as if they were floodlit. Every bush and almost every blade of grass had its black shadow behind it. The edge of every leaf stood out so sharp that you'd think you could cut your finger on it.

On the grass before them lay their own shadows. But the great thing was Asian's shadow. It streamed away to their left, enormous and very terrible. And all this was under a sky that would now be starless forever.

The light from behind them (and a little to their right) was so strong that it lit up even the slopes of the northern moors. Something was moving there. Enormous animals were crawling and sliding down into Narnia: great dragons and giant lizards and featherless birds with wings like bat's wings. They disappeared into the woods and for a few minutes there was silence. Then there came—at first from very far off—sounds of wailing and then, from every direction, a rustling and a pattering and a sound of wings. It came nearer and nearer. Soon one could distinguish the scamper of little feet from the padding of big paws, and the clack-clack of light little hoofs from the thunder of great ones. And then one could see thousands of pairs of eyes gleaming. And at last, out of the shadow of the trees, racing up the hill for dear life, by thousands and by millions, came all kinds of creatures—talking beasts, dwarfs, satyrs, fauns, giants, Calormenes, men from Archenland, Monopods, and strange unearthly things from the remote islands or the unknown western lands. And all these ran up to the doorway where Asian stood.

This part of the adventure was the only one which seemed rather like a dream at the time and rather hard to remember properly afterward. Especially, one couldn't say how long it had taken. Sometimes it seemed to have lasted only a few minutes, but at others it felt as if it might have gone on for years. Obviously, unless either the door had grown very much larger or the creatures had suddenly grown as small as gnats, a crowd like that couldn't ever have tried to get through it. But no one thought about that sort of thing at the time.

The creatures came rushing on, their eyes brighter and brighter as they drew nearer and nearer to the standing stars. But as they came right up to Asian, one or other of two things happened to each of them. They all looked straight in his face; I don't think they had any choice about that. And when some looked, the expression of their faces changed terribly—it was fear and hatred; except that, on the faces of talking beasts, the to their left and the higher mountains to their right crumbled and slipped down with a roar and a splash into the mounting water; and the water came swirling up to the very threshold of the doorway (but never passed it) so that the foam splashed about Asian's forefeet. All now was level water from where they stood to where the water met the sky.

And out there it began to grow light. A streak of dreary and disastrous dawn spread along the horizon, and widened and grew brighter, till in the end they hardly noticed the light of the stars who stood behind them. At last the sun came up. When it did, the Lord Digory and the Lady Polly looked at one another and gave a little nod; those two, in a different world, had once seen a dying sun, and so they knew at once that this sun also was dying. It was three times—twenty times—as big as it ought to be, and very dark red. As its rays fell upon the great Time-giant, he turned red too; and in the reflection of that sun the whole waste of shoreless waters looked like blood.

Then the moon came up, quite in her wrong position, very close to the sun, and she also looked red. And at the sight of her the sun began shooting out great flames, like whiskers or snakes of crimson fire, toward her. It is as if he were an octopus trying to draw her to himself in

his tentacles. And perhaps he did draw her. At any rate she came to him, slowly at first, but then more and more quickly, till at last his long flames licked round her and the two ran together and became one huge ball like a burning coal. Great lumps of fire came dropping out of it into the sea and clouds of steam rose up.

Then Asian said, "Now make an end."

The giant threw his horn into the sea. Then he stretched out one arm—very black it looked, and thousands of miles long—across the sky till his hand reached the sun. He took the sun and squeezed it in his hand as you would squeeze an orange. And instantly there was total darkness.

Everyone except Asian jumped back from the ice-cold air which now blew through the doorway. Its edges were already covered with icicles.

"Peter, High King of Narnia," said Asian. "Shut the door."

Peter, shivering with cold, leaned out into the darkness and pulled the door to. It scraped over ice as he pulled it. Then, rather clumsily (for even in that moment his hands had gone numb and blue), he took out a golden key and locked it.

They had seen strange things enough through that doorway. But it was stranger than any of them to look round and find themselves in warm daylight, the blue sky above them, flowers at their feet, and laughter in Asian's eyes.

He turned swiftly round, crouched lower, lashed himself with his tail, and shot away like a golden arrow.

"Come further in! Come further up!" he shouted over his shoulder. But who could keep up with him at that pace? They set out walking westward to follow him.

"So," said Peter, "night falls on Narnia. What, Lucy! You're not *crying*? With Asian ahead, and all of us here?"

"Don't try to stop me, Peter," said Lucy. "I am sure Asian would not. I am sure it is not wrong to mourn for Narnia. Think of all that lies dead and frozen behind that door."

"Yes, and I *did hope*," said Jill, "that it might go on forever. I knew *our* world couldn't. I did think Narnia might."

"I saw it begin," said the Lord Digory. "I did not think I would live to see it die."

"Sirs," said Tirian, "the ladies do well to weep. See, I do so myself. I have seen my mother's death. What world but Narnia have I ever known? It were no virtue, but great discourtesy, if we did not mourn."

They walked away from the door and away from the dwarfs who still sat crowded together in their imaginary stable. And as they went they talked to one another about old wars and old peace and ancient Kings and all the glories of Narnia.

The dogs were still with them. They joined in the conversation but not very much because they were too busy racing on ahead and racing back and rushing off to sniff at smells in the grass till they made themselves sneeze. Suddenly they picked up a scent which seemed to excite them very much. They all started arguing about it: "Yes, it is—no, it isn't—that's just what I said— anyone can smell what *that* is—take your great nose out of the way and let someone else smell."

"What is it, cousins?" said Peter.

"A Calormene, Sire," said several dogs at once.

"Lead on to him, then," said Peter. "Whether he meets us in peace or war, he shall be welcome."

The dogs darted on ahead and came back a moment later, running as if their lives depended

on it, and barking loudly to say that it really was a Calormene. (Talking dogs, just like the common ones, behave as if they thought whatever they are doing at the moment, immensely important.)

The others followed where the dogs led them and found a young Calormene sitting under a chestnut tree beside a clear stream of water. It was Emeth. He rose at once and bowed gravely.

"Sir," he said to Peter, "I know not whether you are my friend or my foe, but I should count it my honor to have you for either. Has not one of the poets said that a noble friend is the best gift and a noble enemy the next best?"

"Sir," said Peter, "I do not know that there need be any war between you and us."

"Do tell us who you are and what's happened to you," said Jill.

"If there's going to be a story, let's all have a drink and sit down," barked the dogs. "We're quite blown."

"Well, of course you will be, if you keep tearing about the way you have done," said Eustace.

So the humans sat down on the grass. And when the dogs had all had a very noisy drink out of the stream, they all sat down, bolt upright, panting, with their tongues hanging out of their heads a little on one side, to hear the story. But Jewel remained standing, polishing his horn against his side.