

“THE SILVER CHAIR”

an excerpt by C.S.Lewis

Without a glance at Jill the Lion rose to its feet and gave one last blow. Then, as if satisfied with its work, it turned and stalked slowly away, back into the forest. .

“It must be a dream, it must, it must,” said Jill to herself. “I’ll wake up in a moment--” But it wasn't and she didn't.

“I do wish we'd never come to this dreadful place,” said Jill. “I don't believe Scrubb knew any more about it than I do. Or if he did, he had no business to bring me here without warning me what it was like. It's not my fault he fell over that cliff. If he'd left me alone we should both be all right--” Then she remembered again the scream that Scrubb had given when he fell, and burst into tears.

Crying is all right in its way while it lasts. But you have to stop sooner or later and then you still have to decide what to do. When Jill stopped, she found she was dreadfully thirsty. She had been lying face downward, and now she sat up. The birds had ceased singing and there was perfect silence except for one small persistent sound which seemed to come a good distance away. She listened carefully and felt almost sure it was the sound of running water.

Jill got up and looked round her very carefully. There was no sign of the Lion; but there were so many trees about that it might easily be quite close without her seeing it. For all she knew, there might be several lions. But her thirst was very bad now and she plucked up her courage to go and look for that running water. She went on tip-toes, stealing cautiously from tree to tree, and stopping to peer round her at every step.

The wood was so still that it was not difficult to decide where the sound was coming from. It grew clearer every moment and, sooner than she expected, she came to an open glade and saw the stream bright as glass, running across the turf a stone's throw away from her. But although the sight of the water made her feel ten times thirstier than before, she didn't rush forward and drink. She stood as still as if she had been turned into stone, with her mouth wide open. And she had a very good reason: just on this side of the stream lay the lion.

It lay with its head raised and its two fore-paws out in front of it, like the lions in Trafalgar Square. She knew at once that it had seen her, for its eyes looked straight into hers for a moment and then turned away-as if it knew her quite well and didn't think much of her.

“If I run away, it'll be after me in a moment thought Jill. And if I go on, I shall run straight into its mouth.” Anyway, she couldn't have moved if she had tried, and she couldn't take her eyes of it. How long this lasted, she could not be sure; it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the Lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first.

“If you're thirsty, you may drink”

They were the first words she had heard since Scrubb had spoken to her on the edge of the clip. For a second she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again, “If you are thirsty, come and drink,” and of course she remembered what Scrubs had said about animals talking in that other world, and realized that it was the Lion speaking. Anyway, she had seen its lips move this time, and the voice was not like a man's. It was deeper, wilder, and stronger a sort of heavy, golden voice. It did not make her any less frightened than she had been before, but it made her frightened in rather a different way.

“Are you not thirsty'?” said the Lion.

“I'm *dying* of thirsty” said Jill.

“Then drink” said the Lion.

“May I--could I--would you mind going away while I do” said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to – do anything to me, if I do come” said Jill.

”I make no promises” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

“*Do* you eat girls?” she said.

”I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms” said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren't come and drink” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then”

“There is no other stream” said the Lion.

It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion-- no one who had seen his stern face could do that--and her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted. You didn't need to drink much of it, for it quenched your thirst at once. Before she tasted it she had been intending to make a dash away from the Lion the moment she had finished. Now, she realized that this would be on the whole the most dangerous thing of all. She got up and stood there with her lips still wet from drinking.

“Come here,” said the Lion. And she had to. She was almost between its front paws now, looking straight into its face. But she couldn't stand that for long; she dropped her eyes.

“Human Child,” said the Lion, “Where is the boy?”

He fell over the cliff” said Jill, and added, “Sir.” She didn't know what else to call him, and it sounded cheek to call him nothing.

“How did he come to do that, Human child?”

“He was trying to stop me from falling, Sir”

“Why were you so near the edge, Human child?”

“I was showing off, Sir.”

“That is a very good answer, Human Child. Do so no more. And now” (here for the first time the Lion's face became a little less stern) “the Boy is safe. I have blown him to Narnia. But your task will be the harder because of what you have done.

“Please, what task, Sir?” said Jill.

“The task for which I called you and him here out of your own world.”

This puzzled Jill very much. “It's mistaking me for someone else”, she thought. She didn't dare to tell the Lion this, though she felt things would get into a dreadful muddle unless she did.

“Speak your thought, Human Child “ said the Lion.

“I was wondering--I mean--could there be some mistake? Because nobody called me and Scrubb, you know. It was we who asked to come here. Scrubb said we were to call to--to Somebody--it was a name I wouldn't know--and perhaps the Somebody would let us in. And we did, and then we found the door open.”

“You would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you,” said the Lion.

“Then you are Somebody, Sir?” said Jill.

“I Am.”