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Beyond Narnia  
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### The Land of Bism

*"My father went to the world's end," said Rilian thoughtfully. "It would be a marvellous thing if his son went to the bottom of the world."*

*"If your Highness wants to see your father while he's still alive, which I think he'd prefer," said Puddleglum, "it's about time we were getting onto that road to the diggings."*

*"And I won't go down that hole, whatever anyone says," added Jill.*

*"Why, if your Honours are really set to go back to Overworld," said Golg, "there is one bit of the road that's rather lower than this. And perhaps, if that flood's still rising——"*

*"Oh, do, do, do come on!" begged Jill.*

*"I fear it must be so," said the Prince with a deep sigh. "But I have left half of my heart in the land of Bism."*

*"Please!" begged Jill.*

*"Where is the road?" asked Puddleglum.*

*"There are lamps all the way," said Golg. "Your Honour can see the beginning of the road on the far side of the chasm."*

*"How long will the lamps burn for?" asked Puddleglum.*

*At that moment a hissing, scorching voice like the voice of Fire itself (they wondered afterwards if it could have been a salamander's) came whistling up out of the very depths of Bism.*

*"Quick! Quick! Quick! To the cliffs, to the cliffs, to the cliffs!" it said. "The rift closes. It closes. It closes. Quick! Quick." And at the same time, with ear-shattering cracks and creaks, the rocks moved. Already, while they looked, the chasm was narrower. From every side belated gnomes were rushing into it. They would not wait to climb down the rocks. They flung themselves headlong and, either because so strong a blast of hot air was beating up from the bottom, or for some other reason, they could be seen floating downwards like leaves. Thicker and thicker they floated, till their blackness almost blotted out the fiery river and the groves of live gems.*

**The Silver Chair, C.S. Lewis, 182-183**

Eustace gave a sharp turn and grasped Jill by the hand. Jill gasped in horror as Eustace stepped from the edge of the precipice, her own body taken along. Puddleglum grabbed for both of them, but at that moment the rocks on which he stood gave way, and all three of them plunged together into the brightness.

Jill later remarked that the falling was one of the worst experiences of her life. Here, there was no lion's breath to carry her gently to her destination. Instead, rocks fell close enough to her head to make her recoil, and the growing heat rushing past her made her feel as though she

would burst. The falling also lasted much longer than she felt it should have. Bism had appeared so close from the surface, and she had been able to make out the burning river and the distinct, sparkling colors of the gems. Now, she saw nothing but hot smoke. She was vaguely aware of Eustace's hand still tightly gripping her own, and of Puddleglum's hand finding her other arm. There was no sign of the gnomes anymore, and when she looked up, the sight of the Underland was gone, replaced by a cold, rock ceiling.

The whole affair seemed to last hours, but it took less than a minute before Jill landed with a soft thud on what seemed to be earth. But this earth seemed almost fluffy, like it was somehow less real than any other earth she had experienced. It was soft enough that she felt no pain on her landing, but an odd sensation came over her. Her body felt too solid for this place. She pushed her hand into the ground, and the sensation of touch seemed weakened. It was as though someone had numbed her entire body, but the numbness came from the earth itself.

She threw herself to her feet, realizing that neither Eustace nor Puddleglum were still gripping her arm. Looking around, she saw that she stood in a gray, lifeless field. A roof of black stone arced overhead like the edges of an opaque snow globe, possibly a mile up. About ten yards in front of her a red river, which had lost all its brightness but still exuded heat, flowed at what appeared to be an impossible pace. Yet the fire appeared like crimson cotton, soft enough for her to sink instantly to the bottom. The field was interspersed with boulders. Jill recognized them as the gems which had appeared so bright on the surface. Here, in the twilight of Bism, they looked almost like regular rocks, but seemed to move and swirl from within. To her right, she saw Eustace kneeling on the ground, his hand to his head.

Seeing him cleared her mind of all other thought. She was overwhelmed with fury at Eustace for bringing them down into this darkness. They had accomplished their task; they had

followed at least the fourth sign. They had botched the rest, but at least they had saved Rillian! Or at least they might have done. For all Jill knew, Rillian had tried to save them all and gotten himself killed for it. “Oh,” she moaned, “or maybe he died alone trying to get out of that crumbling darkness.” Eustace was to blame. If he hadn’t told her about this place, about Narnia or Caspian or any of it, then Aslan would not have called them here, and she would still be in her world, the normal world.

The thought of Aslan stirred her, and she realized she had been muttering to herself for at least a few minutes. “This place is simply horrible.” She moved towards Eustace.

He was on his feet. “Jill, Jill I am so sorry. I don’t know what came over me. I just wanted the adventure. Ours was almost done, you know, and there’s no guarantee we could have made it out, and I just wanted to see it. I’m jolly sorry.”

“Come off it, Eustace,” Jill snapped. “It’ll do us no good to yell about what could have happened. Where’s Puddleglum?”

At that moment, a tall, gangly shape rose from the turf. “I’m here,” muttered Puddleglum. “Nothing broken? Ah, good. We sure have gotten ourselves into it now. But here’s the question: where are all of those creatures who told us how wonderful a place this was?”

Jill and Eustace looked around. Puddleglum was right—there was no sign of the gnomes, the Bismians. There was silence for a few moments before Puddleglum remarked, “They’ve gone into hiding, I shouldn’t wonder. Don’t want us to see what they’re truly like down here. In their own land.”

“What on earth could you mean?” asked Jill.

“Well, don’t you see? They lied about this world.” Puddleglum made a wide gesture with his hands. “So why shouldn’t they have lied about themselves? The living gems, the glowing fire, and here we are in a gray world. I shouldn’t wonder if they are gray, bleak creatures as well. They might be nothing like those harmless gnomes of the Underworld. And for that matter, I believe they might have been in with that witch before she ‘enchanted’ them or whatnot. They might have originally agreed to the work before they realized they would have to go to the surface, and then she tricked them into continuing to work.”

“Oh, that’s so horrible. They seemed like such nice creatures,” said Jill.

At that moment, the great hissing which had arisen from the pit as it was closing reverberated through the field. Jill exclaimed and whirled towards the sound. The crimson river rippled and began to foam. Out of the stream rose a huge, translucent head with pupil-less eyes that glittered with a black depth that seemed to extend forever. The whole body seemed clear and empty as it rose from the river, lit by the red fire from behind. It had a long, snakelike body that seemed disproportionate to the small legs that began halfway down its body. Tiny wings flexed from its back to flick the flaming water from its body. The whole figure was disconcerting, but soft and almost unreal, except for the black glare in its eyes. Jill and Eustace froze in fear, but Puddleglum took one confident step in front of them.

“Hello, surface-dwellerssss.” The voice of the creature was apathetic and drawling.

“Welcome to the land of Bisssm. I am Stelio.”

Only Puddleglum moved. “Pardon me, Stelio, but we are actually trying to leave your land. Could you perhaps point us towards where we might return to the land above?”

The creature laughed, a sound like steaming vents that made Jill shiver.

“I have no knowledge of that, marshwiggles. What I know of is the endless expanse of the world, and the endless choice you will have as you explore it. Here, you will have no responsibilities, no hardship. All of your needs will be provided for you, and you will never go hungry or long for shelter.”

Jill found herself lulled by the salamander’s words. “I suppose we could stay for a little while,” she said.

The gigantic head turned towards her. “Yesss. Just a little while could not possibly do you harm, could it? If you venture further you may meet more of your kind, as well.”

“There are humans here?” Eustace asked.

The salamander made a motion that appeared like shaking its head, although it did this slowly and moved its whole long neck in the process. “The otherssss do not want to leave. They are happy here. They have discovered the joys in their own power and control. They can wish for a home, and it appears. They wish for nice clothes or a new sword, and they have it.”

Jill could not help herself, and she began to think about what she had always wanted. Eleanor Blakiston expelled. Jill had not thought about Experiment House since they had arrived in Narnia, but now that was her only thought. Their entire voyage slipped from her mind. What she truly wanted was to look more grown up, so then the other children at school would take her seriously, and she wouldn’t be chased through the corridors anymore.

“I say, Jill!” Eustace exclaimed, pointing at her.

Jill looked down. She seemed higher off the ground, and realized she had grown at least an inch in just a few seconds, and that she now looked like a woman. In the back of her mind she noticed too that she was now slightly less solid. She could see a hint of the gray earth through her arm.

As this was happening, Eustace found himself staring at Jill. After her transformation, Eustace felt a strong urge to do something to get her attention, to impress her. The salamander brought its face close to his.

“If you carry one of my young around with you, she will surely notice.” It whispered this, and a tiny lizard climbed out of the river as it spoke. The creature scurried over to Eustace and climbed up his leg to his shoulder. “She is quite beautiful,” it whispered in his ear.

Without realizing it, Eustace found he was holding his sword in his hand, looking for an enemy to strike down for Jill’s sake. Before he could run off, Puddleglum exclaimed.

“My greatest wish, Stelio, is to be reunited with the sun, and with Aslan.”

Again, the sound of his name roused the two children. Jill felt herself shrink, and she watched Eustace pluck a tiny salamander from his shoulder and throw it into the river.

Stelio released another sound like that of steam escaping a vent, except this was faster and more high-pitched than his laughter. “We do not use that name here.”

Stelio seemed as though he was about to strike Puddleglum down, but at that moment a voice cried out from behind them.

“CASPIAN.” It roared. The three of them whirled to see a tan man with a long beard stumbling towards them. He was almost a man, but his entire body was transparent and he looked like a ghost. With one hand he held his side as though he was wounded, and with the other he grasped a sword. He stared with wild eyes at Eustace, whose own sword was still drawn.

“Who are you?” asked Eustace.

The man’s nostrils flared. “Who am I? I am the blood on your hands, I am your flesh and blood whose throne you usurped you filthy brat.” He moved towards Eustace.

“I don’t know you. I’m not Caspian!” Eustace exclaimed, raising his sword. Now Puddleglum drew his own weapon and stepped in between Eustace and the madman. The salamander slid back into the river.

“I am Lord Miraz, rightful king of Telmar and Narnia, and you will accept your fate like the dog you are, Caspian.” At this moment, Miraz charged towards Eustace and Puddleglum.

Jill wanted to look away, but she knew she could not. She thought about Stelio’s words, and what had just happened to her own body. In the next moment, the earth split in between the two groups, and the earth pushed itself apart to create a gaping cavern. Miraz ran up to the edge of the cliff and stopped short, now fifty yards from Eustace, Jill, and Puddleglum. He continued to yell at them, but soon turned and began screaming about Caspian to the empty landscape.

“I say, that was a stroke of good luck!” said Eustace.

“I don’t think it was luck,” muttered Puddleglum. “I’d say our Jill did that.”

“I think we’ve got the trick now, haven’t we?” said Eustace. “Jill’s shown us. If we want to get out, we’ve got to want the way.”

“I don’t think it works that way. I wished for Aslan and the sun, and we’re still stuck down here.” said Puddleglum. “I don’t think we’re meant to use the power from down here to get back up there.”

The three started their trek, walking along the edge of the cavern that Jill had created, and trying to go in the opposite direction from the raving Miraz. It felt as though they walked quickly but made very little progress. The landscape never changed from the dreary gray color, but eventually the river of fire looped away from them. After walking for what felt to Jill like hours, they saw a small figure in front of them, trudging in the same direction.

“Do you think it’s friendly?” asked Eustace.

“I should think it will attack us the moment it notices us.” said Puddleglum.

“Hullo!” shouted Jill. She felt confident that the creature would not harm them. It turned, and stiffened. It seemed uncomfortable with three strangers walking towards it. As they drew closer, Jill noticed it was a dwarf. It was partially transparent, but not as ghostly as Miraz had been.

“What do you want?” it growled.

“We were wondering if you know the way out of here? My name’s Jill, by the way. And this is Eustace and Puddleglum.” Jill asked, as Eustace and Puddleglum again drew their swords.

“Nikabrik. Odd, three of you traveling together. But as for me, I’ve heard there’s a metal box on wheels that takes travelers from here to the surface world, or at least to the land of peaceful rest that lies below. I’m trying to find it myself. I know it is nearby.”

“A metal box? Like a car?” asked Eustace.

Nikabrik stared blankly at him. “All I know is that it is a means to get out of here, and I plan to take it.”

“Why are you so interested in leaving?” asked Jill.

“I made a mistake, and that’s why I’m here,” Nikabrik rubbed the back of his head. “But I want to find Aslan and try to explain myself.”

“We are hoping to find Aslan as well,” said Puddleglum. “We will journey with you, good dwarf.”

The four trudged on. Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum relied on the small, gruff man to lead the way. After a few hours of silence, Jill and Eustace cried out. In front of them stood what looked like a bus stop on the edge of a dreary, sweeping city. A crowd was gathered near it, and creatures of all kinds stood jostling each other in an attempting to form the line for the bus.



“What is that?” asked Puddleglum. Above, a glowing bus was descending from the sky, and the crowd exclaimed.

“Hurry!” shouted Jill, and the four raced for the vehicle.