

## **Journey**

A Response to C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*

By: Isabella Martinez

*"...always in the rain and always in evening twilight. Time seemed to have paused on that dismal moment when only a few shops have lit up and it is not yet dark enough for their windows to look cheering..."* – C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

Four of them sat on the bank of a dark grey river. The water lapped at the dirty grass that lined the edge of the banks, threatening to drown the vegetation all together in the disgusting sludge. A dank fog rose up from the river, blotting out the bright lights on the other side and giving the entire scene a ghostly appearance.

"What do you think it's like?" one of the girls said suddenly. She was not remarkable in any way. The eternal twilight bleached away all color from her face; but something in her voice carried a hint of *it* which would have attracted the undivided attention of anyone else on their side of the river.

"What are you talking about H?" asked the other girl. This one didn't have that hint of *something* in her voice. Her voice was harsh, almost cruel.

"Across the river," replied H. She strained her eyes, trying to see more than just dim lights through the thick fog that rose from the water like a curtain.

"Warm," answered one of the boys instantly. There was a note in his voice that seemed to signify a shiver, as if he were cold and always cold.

“Warm?” the second girl pulled a face that the others could barely see in the dim light.

“Do you even remember what warm is, B?”

“Don’t you?” B asked her.

The second girl’s gaze darkened and she didn’t reply.

“It’s like...” B searched for the words. “It’s like every muscle in your body relaxes, and you stop fighting yourself. And you don’t need to think about being cold because you aren’t...”

“I think you made it up,” said the second girl harshly. “I don’t think it’s possible.”

B’s face fell and H frowned at her. “You don’t need to be mean, C.”

“I’m not being mean,” C insisted. “I’m being realistic.”

Finally, the fourth youth spoke. He’d been seemingly ignoring the conversation, taking long drags on a rolled up tube that could be a cigarette, could be a joint. But now he said in a halting voice, “Can we...can we even be realistic...here?”

“I think we can,” said H softly. “I think we’re still real.”

“I thought we were beyond real,” said B seriously. “Aren’t we...? Didn’t we...? In a hospital or from a gun or...?”

“And it doesn’t matter anyway,” C snapped. She was getting annoyed with them. This talk made her heart pound uncomfortably. “What’s the point of talking about what is real or not real? Or even about the other side of the river? We’re stuck here.”

“What about the Bridge?” asked H suddenly.

“The Bridge?” C actually laughed. “Don’t be stupid, H. People like *us* don’t get over the Bridge.”

The Bridge gleamed tantalizingly just down the bank. It was the only thing that was clear through the gloom of the day – or was it night? It was this Bridge that gave the youths enough light to see as they sat on the edge of the river. Sometimes, people could see others crossing the Bridge. They always disappeared into the mist forever.

But there was a catch.... To get to the Bridge one had to get *up* the bank. For the ground rose up and up so that the Bridge was on the edge of a cliff that was much higher than a riverbank had any business being.

“How would you know?” asked H. “How would you know that people like us can’t get across?”

“Don’t be stupid,” C repeated. “Everyone just knows.”

“But why?” H insisted.

“Cut it out, H,” the other girl complained. “What are you going to do? Try to cross the Bridge?”

H hesitated, her eyes on the dim lights across the water.

“You would?” C’s eyes got wide. “H! No one ever comes back! What if it’s even worse there than it is here?”

“It can’t be worse than here,” H replied stubbornly. “I want to see *color* again! I want to feel warm!”

“Color? Warmth?” C shook her head. “Those are things we made up back when we were *there*. They don’t exist. At least we know what to expect here. We have no idea what lies on the other side of the Bridge.”

H suddenly stood. Her mind was made up.

“I’m going to try,” she said fiercely. “Who’s coming with me?”

C shook her head and looked back at the river. “You’re a fool.”

H looked at B. He rubbed his arms miserably, looking at the grey water and said, “I don’t know, H...what if C’s right? What if it *is* colder there?” And he didn’t stand.

But the fourth boy stood, flicking the almost finished roll into the river. “I’ll go,” he said. “May...maybe you’re...I’ll try.”

H nodded and they set off towards the Bridge, following the bank of the river. Soon B and C were far behind them.

“Why are you coming, T?” H suddenly asked.

T shrugged and mumbled something. H paused and leaned closer. T cleared his throat and tried again, “Because...because I remember light...*real* light.”

Soon, they were below the Bridge. It was then that they realized their mistake. By following the bank, they were now even further below the Bridge than if they had followed the road. But H was determined; she rolled up her sleeves and began to climb – pulling on weeds and grasping at roots to pull herself up.

T followed much more slowly. Several times, one or the other slid. Minutes? Hours? Perhaps even days, the two youths climbed the slippery bank. Often, H chanted to herself...reminding herself of all the colors she remembered. T listened to her voice and forced himself to follow, remembering – perhaps imagining – light.

Finally, they pulled themselves up onto the level ground at the entrance of the Bridge. For several minutes, they lay on the ground – too exhausted to stand. But something made H

look up, her eyes growing wide. Across the Bridge, faint but unmistakable, she could hear *music*. For the first time in who knew how long, she could hear notes and instruments and singing. T heard her gasp in wonder and raised his head; he didn't hear anything, but he could see *light*. Real, soft, warm and yellow light at the end of the Bridge. For one frantic moment he wondered if he had gone crazy; but he could see H's shadow trembling beside him and he decided to believe that he could See.

Together, the two youths stood and stepped cautiously onto the Bridge.

No one stopped them.

They began to walk, going faster and faster as the music grew louder and the light grew brighter so that neither could mistake the vision of the other.

The Bridge seemed to get longer and shorter at the same time. Even more than when they had been climbing the riverbank, time seemed to bend and morph.

Suddenly, they stepped through the last vestiges of the mist and burst into a light so dazzlingly that both youths were forced to close their eyes. Warm air filled them with every breath, washing away the pain of the journey.

"Welcome home," said a soft voice that sounded like bells and a laughing stream and wondrous music all at once. "We've been waiting for you."

Hope and Tobias opened their eyes to a world full of color.

**Author's Note:** I wrote "Journey" to describe an alternative world to Lewis' purgatory in *The Great Divorce*. More specifically, I found myself wondering how a teenager would see the twilight world that is neither true Heaven nor true Hell, but somewhere in between.