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NARNIA

C.S. LEWIS



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The Chronicles of Narnia: The Complete Collection

C. S. LEWIS



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Chapter I

THE WRONG DOOR

THIS IS A story about something that happened long ago when your grandfather was a child. It is a very important story because it shows how all the comings and goings between our own world and the land of Narnia first began.

In those days Mr. Sherlock Holmes was still living in Baker Street and the Bastables were looking for treasure in the Lewisham Road. In those days, if you were a boy you had to wear a stiff Eton collar every day, and schools were usually nastier than now. But meals were nicer; and as for sweets, I won't tell you how cheap and good they were, because it would only make your mouth water in vain. And in those days there lived in London a girl called Polly Plummer.

She lived in one of a long row of houses which were all joined together. One morning she was out in the back garden when a boy scrambled up from the garden next door and put his face over the wall. Polly was very surprised because up till now there had never been any children in that house, but only Mr. Ketterley and Miss Ketterley, a brother and sister, one a bachelor and old maid, living together. So she looked up, full of curiosity. The face of the strange boy was very grubby. It could hardly have been grubbier if he had first rubbed his hands in the earth, and then had a good cry, and then dried his face with his hands. As a matter of fact, this was very nearly what he had been doing.

"Hullo," said Polly.

"Hullo," said the boy. "What's your name?"

"Polly," said Polly. "What's yours?"

"Digory," said the boy.

"I say, what a funny name!" said Polly.

"It isn't half so funny as Polly," said Digory.

"Yes it is," said Polly.

"No, it isn't," said Digory.

"At any rate I *do* wash my face," said Polly. "Which is what you need to do; especially after—" and then she stopped. She had been going to say "After you've been blubbing," but she thought that wouldn't be polite.

"All right, I have then," said Digory in a much louder voice, like a boy who was so miserable that he didn't care who knew he had been crying. "And so would you," he went on. "if you'd lived all your life in the country and had a pony, and a river at the bottom of the garden, and then been brought to live in a beastly Hole like this."

"London isn't a Hole," said Polly indignantly. But the boy was too wound up to take any notice of her, and he went on—

"And if your father was away in India—and you had to come and live with an Aunt and an Uncle who's mad (how would you like that?)—and if the reason was that they were looking after your Mother—and if your Mother was ill and was going to—going to—die." Then his face went the wrong sort of shape as it does if you're trying to keep back your tears.

“I didn’t know. I’m sorry,” said Polly humbly. And then, because she hardly knew what to say, and also to turn Digory’s mind to cheerful subjects, she asked:

“Is Mr. Ketterley really mad?”

“Well either he’s mad,” said Digory, “or there’s some other mystery. He has a study on the top-floor and Aunt Letty says I must never go up there. Well, that looks fishy to begin with. And then there’s another thing. Whenever he tries to say anything to me at meal times—he never even tries to talk to *her*—she always shuts him up. She says, ‘Don’t worry the boy, Andrew’ or ‘I’m sure Digory doesn’t want to hear about *that*’ or else ‘Now, Digory, wouldn’t you like to go out and play in the garden’.”

“What sort of things does he try to say?”

“I don’t know. He never gets far enough. But there’s more than that. One night—it was late at night in fact—as I was going past the foot of the attic-stairs on my way to bed (and I don’t care much for going past them either) I’m sure I heard a yell.”

“Perhaps he keeps a mad wife shut up there.”

“Yes, I’ve thought of that.”

“Or perhaps he’s a coiner.”

“Or he might have been a pirate, like the man at the beginning of *Treasure Island*, and he was always hiding from his old shipmates.”

“How exciting!” said Polly, “I never knew your house was so interesting.”

“You may think it interesting,” said Digory. “But you wouldn’t like it if you had to sleep there. How would you like to lie awake listening for Uncle Andrew’s step to come creeping along the passage to your room? And he has such awful eyes.”

That was how Polly and Digory got to know one another; and as it was just the beginning of the summer holidays and neither of them was going away to the sea that year, they met nearly every day.

Their adventures began chiefly because it was one of the wettest and coldest summers there had been for years. That drove them to do indoor things: you might say, indoor exploration. It is wonderful how much exploring you can do with a stump of candle in a box-room, or in a row of houses. Polly had discovered long ago that if you opened a certain little door in the box-room attic of her house you would find the cistern and a dark place behind it which you could get into by a little careful climbing. The dark place was like a long tunnel with brick wall on one side and sloping roof on the other. In the roof there were little chinks of light between the slates. There was no floor in this tunnel: you had to step from rafter to rafter, and between them there was only plaster. If you stepped on this you would find yourself falling through the ceiling of the room below. Polly had used the bit of the tunnel just beside the cistern as a smugglers’ cave. She had brought up bits of old packing cases and the seats of broken kitchen chairs, and things of that sort, and spread them across from rafter to rafter so as to make a bit of floor. Here she kept a cash-box containing various treasures and a story she was writing, and usually a few apples. She had often drunk a quiet bottle of ginger-beer in there: the old bottles made it look more like a smugglers’ cave.

Digory quite liked the Cave (she wouldn’t let him see the story) but he was more interested in exploring.

“Look here,” he said. “How long does this tunnel go on for? I mean, does it stop where your house ends?”

“No,” said Polly. “The walls don’t go out to the roof. It goes on. I don’t know how far.”

“Then we could get the length of the whole row of houses.”

“So we could,” said Polly. “And oh, I say!”

“What?”

“We could get *into* the other houses.”

“Yes, and get taken up for burglars! No thanks.”

“Don’t be so jolly clever. I was thinking of the house beyond yours.”

“What about it?”

“Why, it’s the empty one. Daddy says it’s always been empty ever since we came here.”

“I suppose we ought to have a look at it then,” said Digory. He was a good deal more excited than you’d have thought from the way he spoke. For of course he was thinking, just as you would have been, of all the reasons why the house might have been empty so long. So was Polly. Neither of them said the word “haunted.” And both felt that once the thing had been suggested, it would be feeble not to do it.

“Shall we go and try it now?” said Digory.

“All right,” said Polly.

“Don’t if you’d rather not,” said Digory.

“I’m game if you are,” said she.

“How are we to know when we’re in the next house but one?”

They decided they would have to go out into the box-room and walk across it taking steps as long as the steps from one rafter to the next. That would give them an idea of how many rafters went to a room. Then they would allow about four more for the passage between the two attics in Polly’s house, and then the same number for the maid’s bedroom as for the box-room. That would give them the length of the house. When they had done that distance twice they would be at the end of Digory’s house; any door they came to after that would let them into an attic of the empty house.

“But I don’t expect it’s really empty at all,” said Digory.

“What do you expect?”

“I expect someone lives there in secret, only coming in and out at night, with a dark lantern. We shall probably discover a gang of desperate criminals and get a reward. It’s all right to say a house would be empty all those years unless there was some mystery.”

“Daddy thought it must be the drains,” said Polly.

“Pooh! Grown-ups are always thinking of uninteresting explanations,” said Digory. No matter that they were talking by daylight in the attic instead of by candlelight in the Smuggler’s Cave it seemed much less likely that the empty house would be haunted.

When they had measured the attic they had to get a pencil and do a sum. They both got different answers to it at first, and even when they agreed I am not sure they got it right. They were in a hurry to start on the exploration.

“We mustn’t make a sound,” said Polly as they climbed in again behind the cistern. Because it was such an important occasion they took a candle each (Polly had a good store of these in her cave).

It was very dark and dusty and draughty and they stepped from rafter to rafter without a word except when they whispered to one another, “We’re opposite *your* attic now” or “this must be halfway through *our* house.” And neither of them stumbled and the candles didn’t go

out, and at last they came where they could see a little door in the brick wall on their right. There was no bolt or handle on this side of it, of course, for the door had been made for getting in, not for getting out; but there was a catch (as there often is on the inside of a cupboard door) which they felt sure they would be able to turn.

“Shall I?” said Digory.

“I’m game if you are,” said Polly, just as she had said before. Both felt that it was becoming very serious, but neither would draw back. Digory pushed round the catch with some difficulty. The door swung open and the sudden daylight made them blink. Then, with a great shock, they saw that they were looking, not into a deserted attic, but into a furnished room. But it seemed empty enough. It was dead silent. Polly’s curiosity got the better of her. She blew out her candle and stepped out into the strange room, making no more noise than a mouse.

It was shaped, of course, like an attic, but furnished as a sitting-room. Every bit of the walls was lined with shelves and every bit of the shelves was full of books. A fire was burning in the grate (you remember that it was a very cold wet summer that year) and in front of the fireplace with its back towards them was a high-backed arm-chair. Between the chair and Polly, and filling most of the middle of the room, was a big table piled with all sorts of things—printed books, and books of the sort you write in, and ink bottles and pens and sealing-wax and a microscope. But what she noticed first was a bright red wooden tray with a number of rings on it. They were in pairs—a yellow one and a green one together, then a little space, and then another yellow one and another green one. They were no bigger than ordinary rings, and no one could help noticing them because they were so bright. They were the most beautifully shiny little things you can imagine. If Polly had been a very little younger she would have wanted to put one in her mouth.

The room was so quiet that you noticed the ticking of the clock at once. And yet, as she now found, it was not absolutely quiet either. There was a faint—a very, very faint humming sound. If Hoovers had been invented in those days Polly would have thought it was the sound of a Hoover being worked a long way off—several rooms away and several floors below. But it was a nicer sound than that, a more musical tone: only so faint that you could hardly hear it.

“It’s all right; there’s no one here,” said Polly over her shoulder to Digory. She was speaking above a whisper now. And Digory came out, blinking and looking extremely dirty—as indeed Polly was too.

“This is no good,” he said. “It’s not an empty house at all. We’d better bunk before any one comes.”

“What do you think those are?” said Polly, pointing at the coloured rings.

“Oh come *on*,” said Digory. “The sooner—”

He never finished what he was going to say for at that moment something happened. The high-backed chair in front of the fire moved suddenly and there rose up out of it—like a pantomime demon coming up out of a trap-door—the alarming form of Uncle Andrew. They were not in the empty house at all; they were in Digory’s house and in the forbidden study. Both children said “O-o-oh” and realised their terrible mistake. They felt that they ought to have known all along that they hadn’t gone nearly far enough.

Uncle Andrew was very tall and very thin. He had a long-clean-shaven face with a sharp

nose and extremely bright eyes and a great tousled mop of grey hair.

Digory was quite speechless, for Uncle Andrew looked a thousand times more alarming than he had ever looked before. Polly was not so frightened yet; but she soon was. For the very first thing Uncle Andrew did was to walk across to the door of the room, shut it, and turn the key in the lock. Then he turned round, fixed the children with his bright eyes, and smiled, showing all his teeth.

“There!” he said. “Now my fool of a sister can’t get at you!”

It was dreadfully unlike anything a grown-up would be expected to do. Polly’s heart came into her mouth, and she and Digory started backing towards the little door they had come by. Uncle Andrew was too quick for them. He got behind them and shut that door too and stood in front of it. Then he rubbed his hands and made his knuckles crack. He had very long beautifully white, fingers.

“I am delighted to see you,” he said. “Two children are just what I wanted.”

“Please, Mr. Ketterley,” said Polly. “I’ve got to go home. Will you let us out, please?”

“Not just yet,” said Uncle Andrew. “This is too good an opportunity to miss. I wanted two children. You see, I’m in the middle of a great experiment. I’ve tried it on a guinea-pig and seemed to work. But then a guinea-pig can’t tell you anything. And you can’t explain to me how to come back.”

“Look here, Uncle Andrew,” said Digory, “it really is dinner time and they’ll be looking for us in a moment. You must let us out.”

“Must?” said Uncle Andrew.

Digory and Polly glanced at one another. They dared not say anything, but the glance meant “Isn’t this dreadful?” and “We must humour him.”

“If you let us go for our dinner now,” said Polly, “we could come back after dinner.”

“Ah, but how do I know that you would?” said Uncle Andrew with a cunning smile. Then he seemed to change his mind.

“Well, well,” he said, “if you really must go, I suppose you must. I can’t expect two youngsters like you to find it much fun talking to an old duffer like me.” He sighed and went on. “You’ve no idea how lonely I sometimes am. But no matter. Go to your dinner. But I must give you a present before you go. It’s not every day that I see a little girl in my dingy old study, especially, if I may say so, such a very attractive young lady as yourself.”

Polly began to think he might not really be mad after all.

“Wouldn’t you like a ring, my dear?” said Uncle Andrew to Polly.

“Do you mean one of those yellow or green ones?” said Polly. “How lovely!”

“Not a green one,” said Uncle Andrew. “I’m afraid I can’t give the green ones away. But I’ll be delighted to give you any of the yellow ones: with my love. Come and try one on.”

Polly had now quite got over her fright and felt sure that the old gentleman was not mad, and there certainly something strangely attractive about those bright rings. She moved over to the tray.

“Why! I declare,” she said. “That humming noise gets louder here. It’s almost as if the rings were making it.”

“What a funny fancy, my dear,” said Uncle Andrew with a laugh. It sounded a very natural laugh, but Digory had seen an eager, almost a greedy, look on his face.

“Polly! Don’t be a fool!” he shouted. “Don’t touch them.”

It was too late. Exactly as he spoke, Polly's hand went out to touch one of the rings. And immediately, without a flash or a noise or a warning of any sort, there was no Polly. Digon and his Uncle were alone in the room.

Chapter II

DIGORY AND HIS UNCLE

IT WAS SO sudden, and so horribly unlike anything that had ever happened to Digory even in a nightmare, that he let out a scream. Instantly Uncle Andrew's hand was over his mouth. "None of that!" he hissed in Digory's ear. "If you start making a noise your Mother'll hear it. And you know what a fright might do to her."

As Digory said afterwards, the horrible meanness of getting at a chap in *that* way, almost made him sick. But of course he didn't scream again.

"That's better," said Uncle Andrew. "Perhaps you couldn't help it. It is a shock when you first see someone vanish. Why, it gave even me a turn when the guinea-pig did it last night."

"Was that when you yelled?" asked Digory.

"Oh, you heard *that*, did you? I hope you haven't been spying on me?"

"No, I haven't," said Digory indignantly. "But what's happened to Polly?"

"Congratulate me, my dear boy," said Uncle Andrew, rubbing his hands. "My experiment has succeeded. The little girl's gone—vanished—right out of the world."

"What have you done to her?"

"Sent her to—well—to another place."

"What *do* you mean?" asked Digory.

Uncle Andrew sat down and said, "Well, I'll tell you all about it. Have you ever heard of old Mrs. Lefay?"

"Wasn't she a great-aunt or something?" said Digory.

"Not exactly," said Uncle Andrew. "She was my god-mother. That's her, there, on the wall."

Digory looked and saw a faded photograph: it showed the face of an old woman in a bonnet. And he could now remember that he had once seen a photo of the same face in an old drawer, at home, in the country. He had asked his Mother who it was and Mother had not seemed to want to talk about the subject much. It was not at all a nice face, Digory thought, though of course with those early photographs one could never really tell.

"Was there—wasn't there—something wrong about her, Uncle Andrew?" he said.

"Well," said Uncle Andrew with a chuckle, "it depends what you call *wrong*. People are so narrow minded. She certainly got very queer in later life. Did very unwise things. That was why they shut her up."

"In an asylum, do you mean?"

"Oh no, no, no," said Uncle Andrew in a shocked voice. "Nothing of that sort. Only prison."

"I say!" said Digory. "What had she done?"

"Ah, poor woman," said Uncle Andrew. "She had been very unwise. There were a good many different things. We needn't go into all that. She was always very kind to me."

"But look here, what has all this got to do with Polly? I do wish you'd—"

"All in good time, my boy," said Uncle Andrew. "They let old Mrs. Lefay out before she died and I was one of the very few people whom she would allow to see her in her last

illness. She had got to dislike ordinary, ignorant people, you understand. I do myself. But she and I were interested in the same sort of things. It was only a few days before her death that she told me to go to an old bureau in her house and open a secret drawer and bring her little box that I would find there. The moment I picked up that box I could tell by the pricking in my fingers that I held some great secret in my hands. She gave it to me and made me promise that as soon as she was dead I would burn it unopened, with certain ceremonies. That promise I did not keep.”

“Well then, it was jolly rotten of you,” said Digory.

“Rotten?” said Uncle Andrew with a puzzled look. “Oh, I see. You mean that little boy ought to keep their promises. Very true: most right and proper, I’m sure, and I’m very glad you have been taught to do it. But of course you must understand that rules of that sort, however excellent they may be for little boys—and servants—and women—and even people in general, can’t possibly be expected to apply to profound students and great thinkers and sages. No, Digory. Men like me who possess hidden wisdom, are freed from common rules just as we are cut off from common pleasures. Ours, my boy, is a high and lonely destiny.”

As he said this he sighed and looked so grave and noble and mysterious that for a second Digory really thought he was saying something rather fine. But then he remembered the ugly look he had seen on his Uncle’s face the moment before Polly had vanished: and all at once he saw through Uncle Andrew’s grand words. “All it means,” he said to himself, “is that he thinks he can do anything he likes to get anything he wants.”

“Of course,” said Uncle Andrew, “I didn’t dare to open the box for a long time, for I knew it might contain something highly dangerous. For my godmother was a very remarkable woman. The truth is, she was one of the last mortals in this country who had fairy blood in her. (She said there had been two others in her time. One was a duchess and the other was a charwoman.) In fact, Digory, you are now talking to the last man (possibly) who really had a fairy godmother. There! That’ll be something for you to remember when you are an old man yourself.”

“I bet she was a bad fairy,” thought Digory; and added out loud, “but what about Polly?”

“How you do harp on that!” said Uncle Andrew. “As if that was what mattered. My first task was of course to study the box itself. It was very ancient. And I knew enough even then to know that it wasn’t Greek, or Old Egyptian, or Babylonian, or Hittite, or Chinese. It was older than any of those nations. Ah—that was a great day when I at last found out the truth. The box was Atlantean; it came from the lost island of Atlantis. That meant it was centuries older than any of the stone-age things they dig up in Europe. And it wasn’t a rough, crude thing like them either. For in the very dawn of time Atlantis was already a great city with palaces and temples and learned men.”

He paused for a moment as if he expected Digory to say something. But Digory was disliking his Uncle more every minute, so he said nothing.

“Meanwhile,” continued Uncle Andrew, “I was learning a good deal in other ways (it wouldn’t be proper to explain them to a child) about Magic in general. That meant that I came to have a fair idea what sort of things might be in the box. By various tests I narrowed down the possibilities. I had to get to know some—well, some devilish queer people, and go through some very disagreeable experiences. That was what turned my head grey. One doesn’t become a magician for nothing. My health broke down in the end. But I got better

And at last I actually *knew*.”

Although there was not really the least chance of anyone overhearing them, he leaned forward and almost whispered as he said,

“The Atlantean box contained something that had been brought from another world where our world was only just beginning.”

“What?” asked Digory, who was now interested in spite of himself.

“Only dust,” said Uncle Andrew. “Fine, dry dust. Nothing much to look at. Not much to show for a lifetime of toil, you might say. Ah, but when I looked at that dust (I took good care not to touch it) and thought that every grain had once been in another world—don’t mean another planet, you know; they’re part of our world and you could get to them if you went far enough—but a really other world—another Nature—another universe—somewhere you would never reach even if you travelled through the space of this universe for ever and ever—a world that could be reached only by Magic—well!” Here Uncle Andrew rubbed his hands till his knuckles crackled like fireworks.

“I knew,” he went on, “that if only you could get it into the right form, that dust would draw you back to the place it had come from. But the difficulty was to get it into the right form. My earlier experiments were all failures. I tried them on guinea-pigs. Some of them only died. Some exploded like little bombs—”

“It was a jolly cruel thing to do,” said Digory who had once had a guinea-pig of his own.

“How you do keep on getting off the point!” said Uncle Andrew. “That’s what the creatures were there for. I’d bought them myself. Let me see—where was I? Ah yes. At last I succeeded in making the Rings: the yellow Rings. But now a new difficulty arose. I was pretty sure now, that a yellow Ring would send any creature that touched it into the Other Place. But what would be the good of that if I couldn’t get them back to tell me what they had found there?”

“And what about *them*?” said Digory. “A nice mess they’d be in if they couldn’t get back!”

“You will keep on looking at everything from the wrong point of view,” said Uncle Andrew with a look of impatience. “Can’t you understand that the thing is a great experiment? The whole point of sending anyone into the Other Place is that I want to find out what it’s like.”

“Well why didn’t you go yourself then?”

Digory had hardly ever seen anyone look so surprised and offended as his Uncle did at this simple question. “Me? Me?” he exclaimed. “The boy must be mad! A man at my time of life and in my state of health, to risk the shock and the dangers of being flung suddenly into a different universe? I never heard anything so preposterous in my life! Do you realise what you’re saying? Think what Another World means—you might meet anything—anything.”

“And I suppose you’ve sent Polly into it then,” said Digory. His cheeks were flaming with anger now. “And all I can say,” he added, “even if you are my Uncle—is that you’ve behaved like a coward, sending a girl to a place you’re afraid to go to yourself.”

“Silence, Sir!” said Uncle Andrew, bringing his hand down on the table. “I will not be talked to like that by a little, dirty, schoolboy. You don’t understand. I am the great scholar, the magician, the adept, who is *doing* the experiment. Of course I need subjects to do it on. Bless my soul, you’ll be telling me next that I ought to have asked the guinea-pigs’ permission before I used *them*! No great wisdom can be reached without sacrifice. But the idea of my going myself is ridiculous. It’s like asking a general to fight as a common soldier. Supposing

got killed, what would become of my life's work?"

"Oh, do stop jawing," said Digory. "Are you going to bring Polly back?"

"I was going to tell you, when you so rudely interrupted me," said Uncle Andrew, "that I did at last find out a way of doing the return journey. The Green Rings draw you back."

"But Polly hasn't got a Green Ring."

"No," said Uncle Andrew with a cruel smile.

"Then she can't get back," shouted Digory. "And it's exactly the same as if you'd murdered her."

"She can get back," said Uncle Andrew, "if someone else will go after her, wearing a Yellow Ring himself and taking two Green Rings, one to bring himself back and one to bring her back."

And now of course Digory saw the trap in which he was caught: and he stared at Uncle Andrew, saying nothing, with his mouth wide open. His cheeks had gone very pale.

"I hope," said Uncle Andrew presently in a very high and mighty voice, just as if he were a perfect Uncle who had given one a handsome tip and some good advice, "I hope, Digory, you are not given to showing the white feather. I should be very sorry to think that anyone of our family had not enough honour and chivalry to go to the aid of—er—a lady in distress."

"Oh shut up!" said Digory. "If you had any honour and all that, you'd be going yourself. But I know you won't. All right. I see I've got to go. But you *are* a beast. I suppose you planned the whole thing, so that she'd go without knowing it and then I'd have to go after her."

"Of course," said Uncle Andrew with his hateful smile.

"Very well. I'll go. But there's one thing I jolly well mean to say first. I didn't believe in Magic till to-day. I see now it's real. Well if it is, I suppose all the old fairy tales are more or less true. And you're simply a wicked, cruel magician like the ones in the stories. Well, I've never read a story in which people of that sort weren't paid out in the end, and I bet you will be. And serve you right."

Of all the things Digory had said this was the first that really went home. Uncle Andrew started and there came over his face a look of such horror that, beast though he was, you could almost feel sorry for him. But a second later he smoothed it all away and said with a rather forced laugh, "Well, well, I suppose that is a natural thing for a child to think—brought up among women, as you have been. Old wives' tales, eh? I don't think you need worry about my danger, Digory. Wouldn't it be better to worry about the danger of your little friend? She's been gone some time. If there are any dangers Over There—well, it would be a pity to arrive a moment too late."

"A lot *you* care," said Digory fiercely. "But I'm sick of this jaw. What have I got to do?"

"You really must learn to control that temper of yours, my boy," said Uncle Andrew coolly. "Otherwise you'll grow up to be just like your Aunt Letty. Now. Attend to me."

He got up, put on a pair of gloves, and walked over to the tray that contained the Rings.

"They only work," he said, "if they're actually touching your skin. Wearing gloves, I can pick them up—like this—and nothing happens. If you carried one in your pocket nothing would happen: but of course you'd have to be careful not to put your hand in your pocket and touch it by accident. The moment you touch a Yellow Ring, you vanish out of this world. When you are in the Other Place I expect—of course this hasn't been tested yet, but

expect—that the moment you touch a Green Ring you vanish out of that world and—I expect—re-appear in this. Now. I take these two Greens and drop them into your right-hand pocket. Remember very carefully which pocket the Greens are in. G for Green and R for right. G.R. you see: which are the first two letters of Green. One for you and one for the little girl. And now you pick up a Yellow one for yourself. I should put it on—on your finger—if I were you. There'll be less chance of dropping it."

Digory had almost picked up the Yellow Ring when he suddenly checked himself.

"Look here," he said. "What about Mother? Supposing she asks where I am?"

"The sooner you go, the sooner you'll be back," said Uncle Andrew cheerfully.

"But you don't really know whether I can get back."

Uncle Andrew shrugged his shoulders, walked across to the door, unlocked it, threw it open, and said:

"Oh very well then. Just as you please. Go down and have your dinner. Leave the little girl to be eaten by wild animals or drowned or starved in Other World or lost there for good, that's what you prefer. It's all one to me. Perhaps before tea time you'd better drop in on Mrs. Plummer and explain that she'll never see her daughter again; because you were afraid to put on a ring."

"By gum," said Digory, "don't I just wish I was big enough to punch your head!"

Then he buttoned up his coat, took a deep breath, and picked up the Ring. And he thought then, as he always thought afterwards too, that he could not decently have done anything else.

Chapter III

THE WOOD BETWEEN THE WORLDS

UNCLE ANDREW AND his study vanished instantly. Then, for a moment, everything became muddled. The next thing Digory knew was that there was a soft green light coming down on him from above, and darkness below. He didn't seem to be standing on anything, or sitting or lying. Nothing appeared to be touching him. "I believe I'm in water," said Digory. "Or *under* water." This frightened him for a second, but almost at once he could feel that he was rushing upwards. Then his head suddenly came out into the air and he found himself scrambling ashore, out on to smooth grassy ground at the edge of a pool.

As he rose to his feet he noticed that he was neither dripping nor panting for breath as anyone would expect after being under water. His clothes were perfectly dry. He was standing by the edge of a small pool—not more than ten feet from side to side—in a wood. The trees grew close together and were so leafy that he could get no glimpse of the sky. All the light was green light that came through the leaves: but there must have been a very strong sun overhead, for this green daylight was bright and warm. It was the quietest wood you could possibly imagine. There were no birds, no insects, no animals, and no wind. You could almost feel the trees growing. The pool he had just got out of was not the only pool. There were dozens of others—a pool every few yards as far as his eyes could reach. You could almost feel the trees drinking the water up with their roots. This wood was very much alive. When he tried to describe it afterwards Digory always said, "It was a *rich* place: as rich as plum-cake."

The strangest thing was that, almost before he had looked about him, Digory had forgotten how he had come there. At any rate, he was certainly not thinking about Polly, or Uncle Andrew, or even his Mother. He was not in the least frightened, or excited, or curious. If anyone had asked him: "Where did you come from?" he would probably have said, "I've always been here." That was what it felt like—as if one had always been in that place and never been bored although nothing had ever happened. As he said long afterwards, "It's not the sort of place where things happen. The trees go on growing, that's all."

After Digory had looked at the wood for a long time he noticed that there was a girl lying on her back at the foot of a tree a few yards away. Her eyes were nearly shut but not quite as if she were just between sleeping and waking. So he looked at her for a long time and said nothing. And at last she opened her eyes and looked at him for a long time and she also said nothing. Then she spoke, in a dreamy, contented sort of voice.

"I think I've seen you before," she said.

"I rather think so too," said Digory. "Have you been here long?"

"Oh, always," said the girl. "At least—I don't know—a very long time."

"So have I," said Digory.

"No you haven't," said she. "I've just seen you come up out of that pool."

"Yes, I suppose I did," said Digory with a puzzled air. "I'd forgotten."

Then for quite a long time neither said any more.

“Look here,” said the girl presently, “I wonder did we ever really meet before? I had a sort of idea—a sort of picture in my head—of a boy and a girl, like us—living somewhere quite different—and doing all sorts of things. Perhaps it was only a dream.”

“I’ve had that same dream, I think,” said Digory. “About a boy and a girl, living next door—and something about crawling among rafters. I remember the girl had a dirty face.”

“Aren’t you getting it mixed? In my dream it was the boy who had the dirty face.”

“I can’t remember the boy’s face,” said Digory: and then added, “Hullo! What’s that?”

“Why! it’s a guinea-pig,” said the girl. And it was—a fat guinea-pig, nosing about in the grass. But round the middle of the guinea-pig there ran a tape, and, tied on to it by the tape, was a bright yellow ring.

“Look! look,” cried Digory. “The Ring! And look! You’ve got one on your finger. And so have I.”

The girl now sat up, really interested at last. They stared very hard at one another, trying to remember. And then, at exactly the same moment, she shouted out “Mr. Ketterley” and he shouted out “Uncle Andrew,” and they knew who they were and began to remember the whole story. After a few minutes of hard talking they had got it straight. Digory explained how beastly Uncle Andrew had been.

“What do we do now?” said Polly. “Take the guinea-pig and go home?”

“There’s no hurry,” said Digory with a huge yawn.

“I think there is,” said Polly. “This place is too quiet! It’s so—so dreamy. You’re almost asleep. If we once give in to it we shall just lie down and drowse for ever and ever.”

“It’s very nice here,” said Digory.

“Yes, it is,” said Polly. “But we’ve got to get back.” She stood up and began to go cautiously towards the guinea-pig. But then she changed her mind.

“We might as well leave the guinea-pig,” she said. “It’s perfectly happy here, and your uncle will only do something horrid to it if we take it home.”

“I bet he would,” answered Digory. “Look at the way he’s treated *us*. By the way, how do we get home?”

“Go back into the pool, I expect.”

They came and stood together at the edge looking down into the smooth water. It was full of the reflection of the green, leafy branches; they made it look very deep.

“We haven’t any bathing things,” said Polly.

“We shan’t need them, silly,” said Digory. “We’re going in with our clothes on. Don’t you remember it didn’t wet us on the way up?”

“Can you swim?”

“A bit. Can you?”

“Well—not much.”

“I don’t think we shall need to swim,” said Digory. “We want to go *down*, don’t we?”

Neither of them much liked the idea of jumping into that pool, but neither said so to the other. They took hands and said “One—Two—Three—Go” and jumped. There was a great splash and of course they closed their eyes. But when they opened them again they found they were still standing, hand in hand, in that green wood, and hardly up to their ankles in water. The pool was apparently only a couple of inches deep. They splashed back onto the dry ground.

“What on earth’s gone wrong?” said Polly in a frightened voice; but not quite so frightened as you might expect, because it is hard to feel really frightened in that wood. The place is too peaceful.

“Oh! I know,” said Digory. “Of course it won’t work. We’re still wearing our yellow Rings. They’re for the outward journey, you know. The green ones take you home. We must change rings. Have you got pockets? Good. Put your yellow ring in your left. I’ve got two green ones. Here’s one for you.”

They put on their green Rings and came back to the pool. But before they tried another jump Digory gave a long “O—o—oh!”

“What’s the matter?” said Polly.

“I’ve just had a really wonderful idea,” said Digory. “What are all the other pools?”

“How do you mean?”

“Why, if we can get back to our own world by jumping into *this* pool, mightn’t we go somewhere else by jumping into one of the others? Supposing there was a world at the bottom of every pool!”

“But I thought we were already in your Uncle Andrew’s other-world or other-place or whatever he called it. Didn’t you say—”

“Oh bother Uncle Andrew,” interrupted Digory. “I don’t believe he knows anything about it. He never had the pluck to come here himself. He only talked of one other-world. But suppose there were dozens?”

“You mean, this wood might be only one of them?”

“No, I don’t believe this wood is a world at all. I think it’s just a sort of in-between place.”

Polly looked puzzled. “Don’t you see?” said Digory. “No, do listen. Think of our tunnel under the slates at home. It isn’t a room in any of the houses. In a way, it isn’t really part of any of the houses. But once you’re in the tunnel you can go along it and come out into any of the houses in the row. Mightn’t this wood be the same?—a place that isn’t in any of the worlds, but once you’ve found that place you can get into them all.”

“Well, even if you can—” began Polly, but Digory went on as if he hadn’t heard her.

“And of course that explains everything,” he said. “That’s why it is so quiet and sleepy here. Nothing ever happens here. Like at home. It’s in the houses that people talk, and do things, and have meals. Nothing goes on in the in-between places, behind the walls and above the ceilings and under the floor, or in our own tunnel. But when you come out of our tunnel you may find yourself in any house. I think we can get out of this place into jolly well anywhere! We don’t need to jump back into the same pool we came up by. Or not just yet.”

“The Wood between the Worlds,” said Polly dreamily. “It sounds rather nice.”

“Come on,” said Digory. “Which pool shall we try?”

“Look here,” said Polly, “I’m not going to try any new pool till we’ve made sure that we *can* get back by the old one. We’re not even sure if it’ll work yet.”

“Yes,” said Digory. “And get caught by Uncle Andrew and have our Rings taken away before we’ve had any fun. No thanks.”

“Couldn’t we just go part of the way down into our own pool,” said Polly. “Just to see if it works. Then if it does, we’ll change Rings and come up again before we’re really back in Mr Ketterley’s study.”

“Can we go *part* of the way down?”

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