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When Friendship Sours: A Study of Trumpkin, Trufflehunter, and Nikabrik

by Victoria Holtz Wodzak

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In Lewis's chapter on friendship in *The Four Loves*, he says that when individuals "share their vision—it is then that friendship is born" (92). He continues, quoting Emerson, saying that, to be friends, individuals may disagree, but they must care about the same truth.

The disintegrating relationship among Nikabrik, Trumpkin, and Trufflehunter in *Prince Caspian* can be traced to their inability to continue caring about the same truth. We don't know how the three of them came to share their underground home. I'd like to think that, until Caspian's arrival cast the tensions of their relationship into high relief, that their home looked a lot like the home of Duffle, Rogin, and Bricklethumb, the dwarves who hosted Shasta to his first, and much needed, breakfast and nap in Narnia: they serve him bacon, eggs, and fried mushrooms, draw lots for who must do the dishes, and ultimately make the now-filled, but sleepy, Shasta a bed on their floor. It is a picture of hospitality and mutual understanding (*Horse* 155-56). By contrast, when Caspian wakes up from the blow on the head that separated him from his horse Destrier and landed him on his hosts' doorstep, he finds no such cozy, agreeable hospitality and mutual regard. Instead,

When he came to himself he was lying in a firelit place with bruised limbs and a bad headache. Low voices were speaking close at hand.

"And now," said one, "before it wakes up we must decide what to do with it."

"Kill it," said another. "We can't let it live. It would betray us."

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“We ought to have killed it at once, or else let it alone,” said a third voice. “We can’t kill it now. Not after we’ve taken it in and bandaged its head and all. It would be murdering a guest” (*Prince* 60-61)

His hosts’ disagreement on what to do with Caspian continues into his recovery:

“And now,” said Nikabrik on the first evening when Caspian was well enough to sit up and talk, we still have to decide what to do with this Human. You two think you’ve done it a great kindness by not letting me kill it. But I suppose the upshot is that we have to keep it a prisoner for life. I’m certainly not going to let it go alive—to go back to its own kind and betray us all.” (*Prince* 63)

Trufflehunter and Trumpkin will have none of it. Trufflehunter says that beasts “don’t change. We hold on. . . . Great good will come of [sheltering Caspian]. This is the true King of Narnia we’ve got here; a true King, coming back to true Narnia. And we beasts remember, even if Dwarfs forget, that Narnia was never right except when a son of Adam was King” (*Prince* 64). Trumpkin responds with skepticism. He is, as he had said earlier, morally opposed to “murdering a guest,” but he sees little reason to accept Trufflehunter’s faith in Aslan and the ways of Old Narnia. He asks “who believes in Aslan nowadays?” (*Prince* 64). The reasonable Trumpkin has some basis for his question. It has, after all, likely been 1300 years or so since the High King Peter and his siblings reigned and Aslan was last seen in Narnia. To Trumpkin, these stories are, at best, fanciful, and at worst deceptive.

Where is the common vision that should cement this friendship? It would seem that, if it existed, it was in a shared fear and hatred of humans in general and Telmarines in particular. Caspian’s arrival and predicament show the insufficient vision to hold this friendship together, even though Lewis is careful to point out that, while shared vision is necessary, agreement about that vision is not. Nikabrik speaks repeatedly of hating humans and hating Telmarines. When they go in search of the hidden Narnians, he agrees with his fellow Black Dwarfs’ suggestion to recruit ogres and hags to the cause, but he is overruled. When Trufflehunter points out that, were they to recruit hags and ogres, they “should not have Aslan for [their] friend,” Trumpkin is skeptical (*Prince* 70-71). And when they discuss their inability to wake the trees and waters, Trumpkin responds “What imaginations you Animals have! . . . But why stop at Trees and Waters? Wouldn’t it be even nicer if the stones started throwing themselves at old Miraz?”

(*Prince* 76). Pretty clearly, this is a friendship whose shared vision, if it ever existed, is fraying quickly. Perhaps, rather than a friendship, as Lewis defines the term, it was always what he terms *companionship*, a relationship defined by common needs.

As the relationship sours, it takes its most toxic turn in Nikabrik. His initial hatred of humans becomes a loyalty to his own kind only, and a quick suspicion that, as things get difficult, it is always the dwarfs, and one suspects in his mind the Black Dwarfs like him, who bear the brunt of it. “Who” he asks “is sent on all the dangerous raids? The Dwarfs. Who goes short when the rations fail? The Dwarfs” (*Prince* 149). Finally, he brings new friends—note the choice of word—to council: a werewolf and a hag who offers to conjure up the White Witch. They offer Nikabrik a new vision, one in which Miraz is supplanted by a resurrected White Witch. As for anything bad that might come of her return, Nikabrik is unconcerned. He claims she was always good to dwarfs, and he will support anyone or anything that can rid Narnia of Telmarines. When, in the scuffle that follows this conversation, Nikabrik is killed, Caspian observes

“I am sorry for Nikabrik . . . though he hated me from the first moment he saw me. He had gone sour inside from long suffering and hating. If we had won quickly he might have become a good Dwarf in the days of peace. I don’t know which of us killed him. I’m glad of that.” (*Prince* 152)

Nikabrik dies, in part, because he traded hope for hatred, and in doing that, made his vision, as Lewis might call it, incompatible with that of his companions Trufflehunter, Trumpkin, and Caspian. Trufflehunter, because animals do not forget, aligns his vision with Caspian, and when they arrive, with the vision of Peter and Edmund, Aslan’s emissaries, who are there, as Peter explains, to put Caspian, the rightful king, on his throne. Trufflehunter embraces Peter in greeting and explains his steadfast lack of doubt: “No credit to me, your Majesty. . . . I’m a beast and we don’t change. I’m a badger, what’s more, and we hold on” (*Prince* 152). Nikabrik’s end, and the ways it contrasts with the story of his companion Trumpkin is instructive in coming to an understanding of Lewis’s views on friendship.

The disintegration of the relationship among Trufflehunter, Nikabrik, and Trumpkin is counterbalanced by the eventual friendship Trumpkin shares with Caspian, with the Pevensies, and ultimately with Aslan. While Trumpkin is initially a nonbeliever, and therefore shares little apparent vision with the children, his dedication to justice, as demonstrated in his argument against killing Caspian, and his

dedication to his king and Narnia, as demonstrated by his willingness to undertake the trip to Cair Paravel to see if blowing Susan's horn has had any effect, place him in position to align his vision with theirs as his experience brings him new understanding. Trumpkin's emerging shared vision with the children parallels an emerging friendship that carries them through difficulties and will carry Caspian and Trumpkin through to the end of Caspian's life.

Vision and friendship. According to Lewis, they must go together in order for companions to become friends. When Trumpkin sets off on his hike across country to see if help has materialized at the ruins of Cair Paravel, he suspects that "the first result of all this foolery is not to bring us help but to lose us two fighters" (*Prince* 88), but he does it. He does not share the cautious hope of Dr. Cornelius, Caspian and Trufflehunter, but he volunteers because "[he knows] the difference between giving advice and taking orders" (*Prince* 89). He goes, hoping that if anything has happened, it is as Dr. Cornelius suggests, that blowing Susan's horn has called "Peter the High King and his mighty consort down from the high past" (*Prince* 88), but suspecting he will be disappointed.

Trumpkin has a vision problem. He can't see what the others can. He can't see the potential in Susan's horn, suspecting that it is a concoction of superstition and old tales. Even having found the four children, he cannot see that help has come. He says,

[T]he King and Trufflehunter and Doctor Cornelius were expecting—well if you see what I mean, help. To put it in another way, I think they'd been imagining you as great warriors. As it is—we're awfully fond of children and all that, but just at the moment, in the middle of a war—but I'm sure you understand. (*Prince* 92)

Trumpkin doesn't realize that, when help is needed, Aslan sends children, for whom Trumpkin, as yet, can see no use.

The idea of friendship reenters the story at this point, initially as a kind of throw away, condescending statement from Trumpkin, that he hopes his "dear little friends" (*Prince* 92) will not be offended by his estimation of their abilities, but by the end of the swordsmanship contest with Edmund, the archery contest with Susan, and after a drop of Lucy's healing cordial, Trumpkin declares to Peter that he is "ready to believe in [them]" (*Prince* 98), and ruefully accepts being named their Dear Little Friend, or at least DLF, a name they often used and soon stopped attending to what it stands for. Essentially, he has been given enough evidence to overcome his skepticism. While

Trumpkin's vision is beginning to align with that of the children, and with that of Caspian and Trufflehunter, he is by no means ready yet to concede his objections to the idea of Aslan.

Vision is literally the issue as the companions try to make their way through the forest, navigating with a pocket compass and recollections of geography that are more than a thousand years out of date. When Lucy insists she has seen Aslan, Trumpkin, ever the skeptic, points out that lions, as well as bears, may live in the forest, and at any rate, Aslan, if it was him, would be a "pretty elderly lion by now" (*Prince* 113). Peter tries to explain to him that he must take it on faith that the children know a bit about Aslan (*Prince* 113). Trumpkin is unconvinced, but he is not alone in his blindness. When Aslan commands Lucy to wake the others and make them follow him in the moonlight, Lucy is the only one whose vision does not fail. Lucy's siblings grumble. Edmund "fully intended to back Lucy up, but he was annoyed at losing his night's sleep" (PC 131) and Peter "couldn't help being a little annoyed with [Lucy]" (*Prince* 131) likely because he is tired. Susan bullies and blusters and threatens to remain behind. Trumpkin falls back on loyalty—he will go where Peter goes—and skepticism:

"But if you ask my private opinion, I'm a plain dwarf who doesn't think there's much chance of finding a road by night where you couldn't find one by day. And I have no use for magic lions which are talking lions and don't talk, and friendly lions thought they don't do us any good, and whopping big lions though nobody can see them. It's all bilge and beanstalks as far as I can see." (*Prince* 131)

It is only gradually, after much scrambling through trees and over rocks, that Aslan allows them the shared ability to see him. As Aslan turns to look at them "they felt as glad as anyone can who feels afraid, and as afraid as anyone can who feels glad" (*Prince* 135). Their contrasting reactions to this opportunity for shared vision is telling. The boys step forward immediately; Susan and Trumpkin "[shrink] back" (*Prince* 135).

Where Trumpkin is concerned, Aslan wants to establish friendship, with himself, and with the children. By revealing himself to them, he offers them shared vision, and therefore friendship. His language in addressing Trumpkin is telling: "[W]here" he roars, "is this little Dwarf, this famous swordsman and archer, who doesn't believe in lions? Come HERE!" (*Prince* 136). The key word is *believe*. Just as it was important for Trumpkin to come to believe in the Pevensie

children at Cair Paravel—that they were real children, not ghosts and that they were really of some potential help—here it is important that Trumpkin discard his skepticism and believe in Aslan. After tossing him in the air, and shaking some sense into him, Aslan asks the now-breathless Trumpkin, “Son of Earth, shall we be friends?” (*Prince* 137). In Lewis’s terms, this is a loaded question. Aslan has given the skeptical dwarf tangible evidence of his existence. Given that, is the dwarf ready to realign his values?

But then, there is Susan. She tells Lucy that

“I’ve been far worse than you know. I really believed it was him—he, I mean—yesterday. When he warned us not to go down to the fir wood. And I really believed it was him tonight, when you woke us up. I mean deep down inside. Or I could have, if I’d let myself. But I just wanted to get out of the woods...” (*Prince* 134-5).

Aslan tells her she has “listened to fears.” He breathes on her, and when he asks her if she is brave again, her response is telling: “A little, Aslan.” (*Prince* 135). Aslan’s breath, and the scent of his mane were enough to make Lucy feel like a lioness (*Prince* 127). Susan can muster only a little bravery. Like Nikabrik’s hatred (and likely fear) of Telmarines in particular, and humans in general, Susan’s fears will blind her to the vision the others share in friendship.

After this adventure, Susan will never return to Narnia. Aslan tells her that it is so she can come to know him in her own world, but it doesn’t seem to happen. She is next mentioned, almost in passing, as the “pretty one” of the Pevensie siblings whom a trip to America will most benefit since she is “no good at school work” (*Dawn Treader* 10). Later, in *The Last Battle*, Peter reports that his sister is “no longer a friend of Narnia” (138). To Susan, Narnia has become “funny games we used to play when we were children” (138) and what seems to be important to her is nylons, lipstick, invitations and being grown up. Her vision has shifted (or clouded), and she is no longer a friend. Perhaps, this loss of friendship is not permanent. Lewis notes in one of his letters that Susan still has time to mend (*Letters to Children* 67), and Rogers argues that the tragic loss of her family in the railway accident that has thrown all of them into Aslan’s country might be sufficient to draw her back to friendship with Aslan. But, for the moment, Susan is not one of the nine friends of Narnia.

Friendship, Lewis notes, “is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art. . . . It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things that give value to survival” (*Four Loves* 93). Aslan intends Narnia to be a kind

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and gentle country he says, after its creation, not a cruel country like Jadis's Charn. It seems likely that one of the many shortcomings of the later rulers of Charn, whose faces become progressively crueler over time, is a failure of friendship, and arguably, that failure is one of the things Digory's apple is intended to protect Narnia from. When the Pevensies return from their first adventure in Narnia, Professor Kirke warns them not to talk about their experience—share their vision—unless it is with people they learn have had similar experience. In the end, there are nine of them—nine “friends of Narnia” whose shared vision cements their relationship with each other and brings them, together, to Aslan's country.

Friendship, properly understood, runs deep. I'd like to close with a quote from Lewis's friend Tolkien after Lewis's death. In a letter to his daughter Priscilla, he writes

Dearest, Thank you so much for your letter. . . . So far I have felt the normal feelings of a man of my age—like an old tree that is losing all its leaves one by one: this feels like an axe-blow near the roots. Very sad that we should have been so separated in the last years; but our time of close communion endured in memory for both of us. I had a mass said this morning, and was there, and served; and Havard and Dundas Grant were present. The funeral at Holy Trinity, the Headington Quarry church, which Jack attended, was quiet and attended only by intimates and some Magdalen people including the President.
(*Letters* 251)

Theirs was a friendship that carried them far and endured much. Unlike the bitterness that seems to have shredded Nikabrik's friendship with Trumpkin and Trufflehunter, or the fears that have loosened Susan's friendship with Narnia, Lewis's time of “close communion” with Tolkien seems to have left its mark and endures in memory despite the “separation” in their last years.

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