

# The Chronicles of Narnia (Series) | The Horse and His Boy | Summary

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## About the Title

The fifth book of the series tells of the journey of Shasta, a runaway boy, and Bree, a talking Narnian horse. While the story focuses more on Shasta, Bree is no less important a character. In a reversal of the expected order of things, Lewis names the story *The Horse and His Boy* rather than *The Boy and His Horse*, since Bree is as much an independent, intelligent being as Shasta is. It is Bree who guides Shasta throughout much of the book, first suggesting they escape together, then teaching Shasta how to ride over the course of the next several weeks. Bree also explains to Aravis that he and Hwin are "free Narnians," and that "Hwin isn't *your* horse any longer. One might just as well say you're *her* human."

## Summary

### Breaking Away

In the land of Calormene, not far from Narnia, a young boy named Shasta lives with a fisherman named Arsheesh, whom he calls Father. Shasta works hard keeping the house and helping mend the nets, but he is treated badly by Arsheesh, who sometimes beats him. One day the rich lord Anradin arrives on a fine horse and demands lodging for the night. Shasta is sent to sleep in the stable, but instead he eavesdrops and overhears Anradin offer to buy him as a slave. The fisherman reveals Shasta is not really his son—a fact that is plain because, as Anradin says, Arsheesh is a dark-skinned Calormene while Shasta is "fair and white like the accursed but beautiful barbarians who inhabit the remote North." Distressed, Shasta returns to the stable where he wonders aloud what type of man Anradin is, and to his amazement, the lord's fine horse Bree (full name: Breehy-hinny-brinny-hoohy-hah) answers him—Anradin is a cruel master. Together, they decide to run away to Narnia in the North, the land from which the horse was kidnapped as a foal. "I've been longing to go to the North all my life," says Shasta, and they set off on the journey that very night.

As they travel northward for weeks, Shasta learns the art of riding, and Bree shares stories from his days as a warhorse in battle. One night they are pursued by lions, and as they gallop away from the beasts, a Calormene lord and his horse join in fleeing from the lions. When they all reach safety, Shasta and Bree learn that the lord's horse, Hwin, is also a talking horse of Narnia. The two horses strike up an immediate rapport and discover they are all escaping northward, first through Archenland and then into Narnia. The horses decide to join forces and travel together, despite the objections of their human riders, who do not trust one another. The impressive lord is revealed as "only a girl," Aravis, a Calormene Tarkheena (noblewoman) who is dressed in her brother's armor. She is running away from home to escape an unwanted marriage to the wealthy, powerful, detestable Ahoshta, who is a Tarkaan, which means great, or noble, lord. In order to escape, she has drugged a servant girl, who will likely face punishment.

Bree, Hwin, Aravis, and Shasta strategize on how to pass unnoticed through Tashbaan, a great city that is unavoidably on their path. Hwin suggests they disguise themselves and go directly through the gates as if they were average peasants among the crowd. If anything should separate them, they agree to meet at the abandoned Tombs of the Ancient Kings past the city—a "haunted" place where they are unlikely to be discovered.

### Separated!

The plan begins well, and the foursome enters the city without being stopped or recognized. Their progress is halted, however, by a train of Narnian lords passing through the streets. One of them notices Shasta in the crowd and cries out, "There he is! There's our runaway!" It is King Edmund, and

before Shasta knows what is happening, he is separated from his companions and marched away by the Narnians, who happen to be guests at the royal castle. Queen Susan joyfully greets Shasta as "Corin," and it is now plain to Shasta that he's been mistaken for someone else—the young Prince Corin from Archenland.

Too afraid to correct this misunderstanding, Shasta remains silent while the others discuss the dangerous situation they are currently facing. Queen Susan, who is being courted by the Calormene Prince Rabadash, has decided to turn down his proposal of marriage. King Edmund fears they will not be allowed to leave the country peacefully, for they have discovered the prince is "a most proud, bloody, luxurious, cruel and self-pleasing tyrant." The Narnians discuss various means of escape, including a secret route through the desert to the northwest—the same desert that Shasta and his companions intend to cross. This secret route begins at the Tombs of the Ancient Kings and heads toward Mount Pire, a set of peaks in the distant mountains. Along the route, a narrow valley conceals a river that flows all the way to Archenland. The Narnians strike on a different plan, though: Tumnus the Faun suggests they stage a fake banquet aboard their ship as a cover story for their escape. They'll be able to store supplies of food and drink without being questioned, and can slip away that night.

Shasta is left alone to rest as the others depart to make their preparations. Unexpectedly, a young boy that looks just like him climbs through the window. It is the real Prince Corin, who marvels at their similar looks and urges Shasta to stay. Shasta can't be persuaded, though, and hurriedly climbs out the window to seek his companions and continue their journey northward. He exits the city and makes his way to the eerie abandoned Tombs of the Ancient Kings, where he spends a dreadful night alone, frightened by wild animals and the fear of ghosts. A stray cat, which Shasta mistakes for a lion, arrives to offer him the comfort of a companion, and at last Shasta sleeps. He waits throughout the next day, wondering what has happened to his companions.

Meanwhile, Aravis is facing her own difficulties in Tashbaan. Immediately after Shasta is hustled away by the Narnians, Aravis is recognized by a longtime acquaintance, Tarkheena Lasaraleen, an empty-headed and luxury-loving, but still well-meaning Calormene woman. Lasaraleen spirits Aravis away to her home in the city, and also informs her that her father is in town seeking her. Aravis is frantic to get away, and the girls devise a plan to sneak her out a water-door in the garden of the royal palace, where Lasaraleen frequently visits. The horses will be led to the Tombs by a groom, where Aravis will rejoin them—and, hopefully, find Shasta waiting.

Things don't go according to plan, though, for when they arrive at the palace they are nearly discovered by a party of powerful Calormene lords—Tisroc, the land's supreme ruler, his son Prince Rabadash, and Aravis's would-be husband Ahoshta, who is now the Grand Vizier. The girls duck into a dark room and hide behind a sofa to avoid them, but to no avail. The three men enter the room, and the girls overhear a devious plot from Prince Rabadash, who has been humiliated by the Narnians' successful, secret escape by ship. He means to ambush and capture King Lune's castle in Archenland—a prime location from which to invade Narnia—and, from there, ride to Cair Paravel. He will overrun the Narnian castle, which stands unprotected, and await the arrival by ship of Queen Susan, who will then be forced to marry him.

## **A Race against Time**

At last, the lords leave the chamber, and Lasaraleen leads Aravis to the water-door, where Aravis crosses the river by boat. She arrives at the Tombs of the Ancient Kings to find the horses waiting, and Shasta emerges from hiding to greet them all. Aravis reveals Rabadash's terrible plan to attack Archenland without provocation, and they set off at once to try to beat his army there, taking the secret route through the desert that Shasta overheard from the Narnian lords. They journey through the dark of night and blistering heat the next day and at last find the rocky valley and the river. Exhausted, they sleep for far too long and then have to wait for obstinate Bree, who "can't go on without a snack" and insists on eating some grass. They make a very late start, and Bree slacks off from the previous day's pace, leaving the weaker Hwin to take the lead.

They follow the river into Archenland, but looking back to the desert, they see Rabadash's army in the distance rapidly approaching Anvard, the city where King Lune's castle stands. The horses pick up speed, but still Bree lags behind, and all the while Rabadash's army draws nearer and nearer. Suddenly, a lion attacks the party, slashing at Aravis with its claws and spurring the horses to give every ounce of energy. Shasta shouts at Bree to go back and help Aravis, but the frightened horse keeps charging forward. The boy bravely leaps off the horse's back and chases away the lion without even a weapon. The weary foursome then finds sanctuary nearby at the home of the Hermit of the Southern March. The Hermit tends to Aravis's slashed back, and the exhausted horses receive care after their grueling ride. Only Shasta is in a position to go on, to carry the warning of the invading Calormene army to King Lune. The Hermit points out the way to him, urging him, "Run, run: always run." Shasta starts off right away. Bree, ashamed of having run away from the lion and leaving the others behind, declares that he will return to Calormene: "Slavery is all I'm fit for," he mourns. Aravis feels terrible about how she's treated Shasta, too. "I've been snubbing him and looking down on him," she admits, now calling him "the best of us all." The Hermit advises Bree that this humbling incident will help him become a better horse in the long run.

Shasta crosses grassy plains and heads into the forest, where he encounters a hunting party, including King Lune himself, just the man he is seeking. The king mistakes the boy for his son Corin, and a breathless Shasta issues the warning of Rabadash and his two hundred soldiers. Shasta is given a spare horse, and they all ride swiftly to fortify the castle. Shasta falls behind, though, and becomes lost when he is overtaken by fog. Arriving alone at a crossroads and unsure which way to turn, he quickly chooses the right-hand road when he hears Rabadash's army approaching behind him. Luckily they take the left-hand road, so Shasta is safe—but he is also on the wrong road, one that leads away from Anvard. Not knowing what else to do, he continues onward through the thick fog, not realizing he is heading over a mountain pass. In the darkness, a disconsolate Shasta realizes "that someone or somebody was walking beside him," and after a long, uncomfortable silence, he finally asks the creature, "Who are you?" The voice answers, "One who has waited long for you to speak," and then coaxes the boy to "tell me your sorrows." Shasta tells of his hard life and rough adventures, especially in meeting so many dangerous lions. "There was only one lion," the voice says. "I was the lion" who chased the horses, who wounded Aravis, and who watched over Shasta in the form of a cat at the Tombs. Shasta feels gladness he has never known, and as the mist dissolves into morning light, he at last sees his companion, [Aslan](#), and humbly falls at his feet.

## The Battle and Its Aftermath

The lion then disappears, leaving Shasta to wonder if it were all a dream. And yet, here he stands on the other side of the mountain, having crossed a dangerous, narrow path—guided by Aslan into Narnia. A single paw print remains on the ground as proof, and from it springs a fresh, clear stream of water. Shasta drinks deeply and continues onward, looking for something to eat. He encounters several Narnian creatures and tries to warn them of the army invading Archenland, but none seem overly concerned. He finally meets a red dwarf named Duffle, who immediately dispatches Chervy the Stag to Cair Paravel with the news.

Duffle and his brothers make Shasta a grand meal, and he sleeps nearly all day, waking to the sound of trumpets. The Narnian army is on the march toward Archenland to aid their neighboring ally. Prince Corin eagerly greets Shasta and sneaks him into the ranks of soldiers, despite the fact that the prince has been forbidden to join the battle. The army marches onward to the castle at Anvard, where the Calormenes have the advantage in numbers and are beating the gate with a battering ram. The soldiers sweep down into battle, and Shasta falls off his horse amid the confusion but remains mostly unharmed. Far off, the Hermit of the Southern March watches the battle with Bree and Hwin, gazing into a pool of water that shows him events around the land. They watch as the Narnians rout the invading Calormenes. The castle gates open and a sortie of armed men led by King Lune charges out, and soon the battle has been won. Rabadash, in trying to dramatically leap down upon his enemies from above, has instead gotten caught on a hook on the castle wall, and now dangles there, helpless and irate. The king orders him taken into custody and then turns to business with Shasta. As

Corin and Shasta stand side by side, the king embraces Shasta and the crowd begins to cheer, though Shasta has yet to understand why.

Back with the Hermit, Bree and Hwin prepare to journey onward to Narnia. After having lived so long among nontalking horses, vain Bree feels self-conscious and wonders how he'll be received in Narnia. The horse attempts to school Aravis on who and what Aslan is in a rather know-it-all voice, claiming that of course Aslan isn't really a lion. The lion himself then appears and startles Bree, who feels like a fool as he sees the lion is real indeed. Aslan greets Hwin and explains to Aravis that the claw marks on her back are equal to the lashes received by the serving girl she had drugged to escape from her father's home. After the lion departs, a new visitor arrives: "His Royal Highness Prince Cor of Archenland." It is Shasta, now dressed in royal clothes. He explains he and Corin are twins, but Shasta was kidnapped by enemies not long after birth because they feared a prophecy predicting he would one day save Archenland—which he has now done. As a kidnapped baby, Shasta ended up adrift in a rowboat and was pushed to shore by Aslan, then found by Arsheesh, who took him in.

Cor (Shasta) then invites Aravis to live with them at the castle, and she accepts with pleasure. Along with the horses, they begin the trek back to Anvard. Bree, still worried about how to act once he arrives at Narnia, asks Hwin if she thinks other talking horses there roll around on the ground—he would hate to look undignified in rolling if none of the other horses did so. "I'm going to roll anyway," Hwin answers, but Bree nonetheless takes one last gratifying roll in the grass.

When they arrive at the castle, King Lune brings out Rabadash to deal with at last. The king offers to set him free upon certain conditions, but haughty Rabadash refuses to hear them, cursing them and wanting to fight instead. Aslan appears and warns the arrogant prince, "Take heed. Your doom is very near, but you may still avoid it." Rabadash proceeds to curse Aslan and Narnia, despite further warnings, and finally, his punishment takes hold as his body transforms into a braying donkey. Aslan promises that the prince will return to his human self by standing before all of his people as a donkey at the temple of Tash in Tashbaan. King Lune sends the donkey-prince home, where he becomes one of the most peaceful rulers in Calormene history. The king reveals that Cor is the true heir to the throne, to which Corin cries, "Hurrah! ... I shan't have to be King ... It's princes have all the fun." Aravis and Cor eventually marry and rule Archenland together, and Bree and Hwin go on to happy lives married to other horses.