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Dear Mr. Lewis,

In most letters it is considered polite to introduce oneself. I can do so in no better way than to say I am a reader. I do not remember a time when I could not read, and I do remember books shaping my mind, my ambitions, and my emotions all my life. With this background, it comes as something of a shock to discover that there is still something I don't know about experiencing a story. Your book That Hideous Strength taught me about my own lack of knowledge, and then flung me head over heels into a new level of glory in books. I know you are enough of a reader yourself that I can hope you will understand what I mean when I say I learned that it is possible to fall in love with a story, with the characters, the plot, the very sentence structure. Maybe you too have wanted to cry when the last page is turned; not because the end was sad, but because it is the end. Perhaps you find it foolish or alarming that I am only discovering this now. In my own defense I can only say that it is a lesson I have learned well, in large part due to the fact that I have a very good teacher.

For my second and primary topic, I must wonder which is stranger: my choice of subject or my choice of audience. After all, what could be odder than a twenty-first century girl telling a man often accused of chauvinism how she found some kind of peace with her feminism through a book of his? Worse, a book in which that was not the main point. Sillier still, this particular girl did not even notice how the ideas applied to her until the second reading. Perhaps this strangeness is only apparent. After all, it is the modern-day brand of feminism that caused the absence of peace. Perhaps it is logical that the relief should come from what is unthinkingly branded as chauvinism.

What does it mean to be female? This may sound like a sexist question. I can only hope it has its equivalent from the male perspective, so as not to give the impression that females are overly analytical or self involved. In any case, it is a relevant question in an age which screams the ideal of women from every magazine cover, in which the rights of women are debated almost continually, but especially close to election times. What does that mean, the rights of women? Do we get to murder our children before they are born? Should we be able to go shirtless in public or be promiscuous without consequences, just because 'men can'? I cannot accept that. I can identify with the bold, confident business woman striding in high heels through the corporate world. Independent, free. Her world is her own, without intruders. Not to subordinate my decisions to another, to both care about someone and to have my 'own life', that is, to be free from the claims that person has over me, would be the ultimate in having my cake and eating it too. But why can't I escape the part of my mind that sympathizes with the old princesses rescued by (dependent upon) princes? What is this mysterious, illogical desire that awakens February 14th, when candy roses are being delivered about the school, and I hope, logically, irrationally, that one is for me, meanwhile fighting to squash the desire the whole time I'm feeling it? Why this paradox?

Superficially at least, Christianity brings only complications. What does it mean to be a Christian female? I have been trained by culture to rebel at every sign of patriarchy, and here we introduce the transcendent something about all things which “is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it”? “Which breaks through hedges and scatters the little kingdoms of your primness”? What is a modern, Christian girl to do with Ephesians 5:22? And I find that both That Hideous Strength and Christianity answer that question in the same breath that they pose it. Surrender. This is not patriarchy; Christ is no usurper but legitimate Lord of me. Lay down arms and let peace and joy come. The kingdoms were built to be scattered in a lover’s child-play and rebuilt in glory. Why surrender? Not because I have no choice. He is the one who gave me my choice and He does not overrule Himself. Not even because He overpowers me. He does, not only after the surrender happens. Because He surrendered. Because the ‘humility of a wife’ is matched with the “humility of a lover”. Because Ephesians 5:22 has Ephesians 5:25 – and John 19:18. The death of a Man is the fulfillment of feminism.

Whether you have followed and perhaps, distantly, sympathized with the story I outline, I do not know. I do know that I would be much amiss if I did not thank you for authoring all of your books, but especially That Hideous Strength.

Sincerely,
Kate Walling

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