Out of the Silent Planet

By

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PART 1

Chapter 1

THE LAST drops of the thundershower had hardly ceased falling when the Pedestrian stuffed his map into his pocket, settled his pack more comfortably on his tired shoulders, and stepped out from the shelter of a large chestnut tree into the middle of the road. A violent yellow sunset was pouring through a rift in the clouds to westward, but straight ahead over the hills the sky was the colour of dark slate. Every tree and blade of grass was dripping, and the road shone like a river. The Pedestrian wasted no time on the landscape but set out at once with the determined stride of a good walker who has lately realized that he will have to walk farther than he intended. That, indeed, was his situation. If he had chosen to look back, which he did not, he could have seen the spire of Much Nadderby, and, seeing it, might have uttered a malediction on the inhospitable little hotels which, though obviously empty, had refused him a bed. The place had changed hands since he last went for a walking tour in these parts. The kindly old landlord on whom he had reckoned had been replaced by someone whom the bar-maid referred to as 'the lady,' and the lady was apparently a British innkeeper of that orthodox school who regard guests as a nuisance. His only chance now was Sterk, on the far side of the hills, and a good six miles away. The map marked an inn at Sterk. The Pedestrian was too experienced to build any very sanguine hopes on this, but there seemed nothing else within range.

He walked fairly fast, and doggedly, without looking much about him, like a man trying shorten the way with some interesting train of thought. He was tall, but a little round-shouldered, about thirty-five to forty years of age, and dressed with that particular kind of shabbiness which marks a member of the intelligentsia on a holiday. He might easily have been mistaken for a doctor or a schoolmaster at first sight, though he had not the man-of-the-world air of the one or the indefinable breeziness of the other. In fact, he was a philologist, and fellow of a Cambridge college. His name was Ransom.

He had hoped when he left Nadderby that he might find a night's lodging at some friendly farm before he had walked as far as Sterk. But the land this side of the hills seemed almost uninhabited. It was a desolate, featureless sort of country mainly devoted to cabbage

and turnip, with poor hedges and few trees. It attracted no visitors like the richer country south of Nadderby and it was protected by the hills from the industrial areas beyond Sterk. As the evening drew in... and the noise of the birds came to an end it grew more silent than an English landscape usually is. The noise of his own feet on the road became irritating.

He had walked thus for a matter of two miles when he became aware of a light ahead. He was close under the hills by now and it was nearly dark, so that he still cherished hopes of a substantial farmhouse until he was quite close to the real origin of the light; which proved to be a very small cottage of ugly nineteenth-century brick. A woman darted out of the open doorway as he approached it and almost collided with him.

'I beg your pardon, sir: she said. 'I thought it, was my Harry.'

Ransom asked her if there was any place nearer than Sterk where he might possibly get a bed.

'No, sir,' said the woman. 'Not nearer than Sterk. I dare say as they might fix you up at Nadderby.'

She spoke in a humbly fretful voice as if her mind were intent on something else. Ransom explained that he had already tried Nadderby.

'Then I don't know, I'm sure, sir,' she replied.' 'There isn't hardly any house before Sterk, not what you want. There's only The Rise, where my Harry works, and I thought you was coming from that way, sir, and that's why I come out when I heard you, thinking it might be him. He ought to be home this long time."

'The 'Rise,' said Ransom. 'What's that? A farm? Would they put me up?'

'Oh no, sir. You see there's no one there not except the Professor and the gentleman from London, not since Miss Alice died. They wouldn't do' anything like that, sir. They don't even keep any servants, except my Harry for doing the furnace like, and he's not in the house.'

'What's this professor's name?' asked Ransom with a faint hope.

'I don't know, I'm sure, sir,' said the woman. The other gentleman's Mr Devine, he is, and 'Harry says the other gentleman is a professor. He don't know much about it, you see, being a little simple, and that's why I don't like him coming home so late, and they said they'd always send him home at six o'clock. It isn't as if he didn't do a good day's work, either.'

The monotonous voice and the limited range of the woman's vocabulary did not express much emotion, but Ransom was standing sufficiently near to perceive that she was trembling and nearly crying. It occurred. to him that he ought to call on the mysterious professor and ask for the boy to be sent home: and it occurred to him just a fraction of a second later that once he was inside the house - among men of his own profession - he might very reasonably accept the offer of a night's hospitality'. Whatever the process of thought may have been, he found that the mental picture of himself calling at The Rise had assumed all the solidity of a thing determined upon. He told the woman what he intended to do.

'Thank you very much, sir, I'm sure,' she said. 'And if you would be so kind as to see him out of the gate and on the road before you leave, if you see what I mean, sir. 'He's that' frightened of the Professor and he wouldn't come away once your back was turned, sir, not if they hadn't sent him home themselves like.'

Ransom reassured the woman as well as he could and bade her goodbye, after ascertaining that he would find The Rise on his left in about five minutes. Stiffness had grown upon him while he was standing still, and he preceded slowly and painfully on his way.

There was no sign of any lights on the left of the road - nothing but the flat fields and a mass of darkness which he took to be a copse. It seemed more than five minutes before he reached it and found that he had been mistaken. It was divided from the road by a good hedge and in the hedge was a white gate: and the trees which rose above him as he examined the gate were not the first line of a copse but only a belt, and the sky showed through them, He felt sure now that this must be the gate of The Rise and that these trees surrounded a house and garden. He tried the gate and found it locked. He stood for a moment undecided, discouraged by the silence and the growing darkness. His first inclination, tired as he felt, was to continue his journey to Sterk: but, he had committed himself to a troublesome duty on behalf of the old woman. He knew that it would be possible, if one really wanted, to force a way through the hedge. He did not want to. A nice fool he would look, blundering in upon some retired eccentric - the sort of a man who kept his gates locked in the country - with this silly story of a hysterical mother in tears because her idiot boy had been kept half an hour late at his work! Yet it was perfectly clear that he would have to get in, and since one cannot crawl through a hedge with a pack on, he slipped his pack off and flung it over the gate. The 'moment' he had done so, it seemed to him that he had not till now fully made up his mind - now that he must break into the garden if only in order to recover the pack. He became very angry with the woman, and with himself, but he got down on his hands and knees and began to worm his way into the hedge.

The operation proved more difficult than he had expected and it was several minutes before he stood up in the wet darkness on the inner side of the hedge smarting from his contact with thorns and nettles. He groped his way to the gate, picked up his pack, and then for the first time turned to take stock of his surroundings. It was lighter on the drive than it had been under the trees and he had no difficulty in making out a large stone house divided from him by a width of untidy and neglected lawn. The drive branched into two a little way ahead of him - the right-hand path leading in a gentle sweep to the front door, while the left ran straight ahead, doubtless to the back premises of the house. He noticed that this path was churned up into deep ruts - now full of water as if it were used to carrying a traffic of heavy lorries. The other, on which he now began to approach the house, was overgrown with moss. The house itself showed no light: some of the windows were shuttered, some gaped blank without shutter or curtain, but all were lifeless and inhospitable. The only sign of occupation was a column of smoke that rose from behind the house with a density which suggested the chimney of a factory, or at least of a laundry, rather than that of a kitchen. The Rise was clearly the last place in the world where a stranger was likely to be asked to stay the night, and Ransom, who had already wasted some time in exploring it, would certainly have turned away if he had not been bound by his unfortunate promise to the old woman.

He mounted the three steps which led into the deep porch, rang the bell, and waited. After a time, he rang the bell again and sat down on a wooden bench which ran along one side of the porch. He sat so long that though the night was warm and starlit the sweat began to dry on his face and a faint chilliriess crept over his shoulders. He was very tired by now, and it was perhaps this which prevented him from rising and ringing the third time: this, and the soothing stillness of the garden, the beauty of the summer sky, and the occasional hooting of

an owl somewhere in the neighbourhood which seemed only to emphasize the underlying tranquility of his surroundings. Something like drowsiness had already descended upon him when he found himself startled into vigilance. A peculiar noise was going on - a scuffling, irregular noise, vaguely reminiscent of a football scrum. He stood up. The noise was unmistakable by now. People in boots were fighting or wrestling or playing some game. They were shouting too. He could not make out the words but he heard the monosyllabic barking ejaculations of men who are angry and out of breath. The last thing Ransom wanted was an adventure, but a conviction that he ought to investigate the matter was already growing upon him when a much louder cry rang out in which he could distinguish the words, 'Let me go. Let me go,' and then, a second later, 'I'm not going in there. Let me go home.'

Throwing off his pack, Ransom sprang down the steps of the porch, and ran round to the back of the house as quickly as his stiff and footsore condition allowed him. The ruts and pools of the muddy path led him to what seemed - to be a yard, but a yard surrounded with an an usual number of outhouses. He had a momentary vision of a tall chimney, a low door filled with red firelight, and a huge round shape that rose black against the stars, which he took for the dome of a small observatory: then all this was blotted out of his mind by the figures of three men who were struggling together so close to him that he almost cannoned into them. From the very first Ransom felt no doubt that the central figure, whom the two others seemed to be detaining in spite of his struggles, was the old woman's Harry. He would like to have thundered out, 'What are you doing to that boy?' but the words that actually came - in rather an unimpressive voice - were, 'Here! I say!

The three combatants fell suddenly apart, the boy blubbering. 'May I ask,' said the thicker and taller of the two men, 'who the devil you may be and what you are doing here?' His voice had all the qualities which Ransom's had so regrettably lacked.

'I'm on a walking tour', said Ransom, 'and I promised a poor woman"

'Poor woman be damned,' said the other. 'How did you get in?'

'Through the hedge,' said Ransom, who felt a little ill-temper coming to his assistance. 'I don't know what you're doing to that boy, but --'

'We ought to have a dog in this place,' said the thick man to his companion, ignoring Ransom.

'You mean we should have a dog if you hadn't insisted on using Tartar for an experiment,' said the man who had not yet spoken. He was nearly as tall as the other, but slender, and apparently the younger of the two, and his voice sounded vaguely familiar to Ransom.

The latter made a fresh beginning. 'Look here,' he said, 'I don't know what you are doing to that boy, but it's long after hours and it is high time you sent him home. I haven't the least wish to interfere in your private affairs, but -'

'Who are you?' bawled the thick man.

'My name is Ransom, if that is what you mean. And -'

'By jove,' said the slender man, 'not Ransom who used to be at Wedenshaw?'

'I was at school at Wedenshaw,' said Ransom.

'I thought I knew you as soon as you spoke,' said the slender man. 'I'm Devine. Don't you remember me?'

'Of course. I should think I do!' said Ransom as the two men shook hands with the rather laboured cordiality which is traditional in such

meetings. In actual fact Ransom had disliked Devine at school as much as anyone he could remember.

'Touching, isn't it?' said Devine. 'The far-flung line even in the wilds of Sterk and Nadderby. This is where we get a lump - in our throats and remember Sunday evening Chapel in the DOP. You don't know Weston, perhaps?' Devine indicated his massive and loud-voiced companion. 'The Weston,' he added. 'You know. The great physicist. Has Einstein on toast and drinks a pint of Schrodinger's blood for breakfast. Weston, allow me to introduce my old schoolfellow, Ransom. Dr Elwin Ransom. The Ransom, you know. The great philologist. Has Jespersen on toast and drinks a pint -'

'I know nothing about it,' said Weston, who was still holding the unfortunate Harry by the collar. 'And if you expect me to say that I am pleased to see this person who has just broken into my garden, you will be disappointed. I don't care twopence what school he was at nor on what unscientific foolery he is at present wasting money that ought to go to research. I want to know what he's doing here: and after that I want to see the last of him.'

'Don't be an ass, Weston,' said Devine in a more serious voice. 'His dropping in is delightfully apropos. You mustn't mind Weston's little way, Ransom. Conceals a generous heart beneath a grim exterior, you know. You'll come in and have a drink and something to eat, of course?'

'That's very kind of you,' said Ransom. 'But about the boy -'

Devine drew Ransom aside. 'Balmy,' he said in a low voice. 'Works like a beaver as a rule but gets these fits. We are only trying to get him into the wash-house and keep him quiet for an hour or so till he's normal again. Can't let him go home in his present state. All done by kindness. You can take him home yourself presently if you like and come back and sleep here.'

Ransom was very much perplexed. There was something about the whole scene suspicious enough and disagreeable enough to convince him that he had blundered on something criminal, while on the other hand he had all the deep, irrational conviction of his age and class that such things could never cross the path of an ordinary person except in fiction and could least of all be associated with professors and old schoolfellows. Even if they had been ill-treating the boy, Ransom did not see much chance of getting him from them by force.

While these thoughts were passing through his head, Devine had been speaking to Weston, in a low voice, but no lower than was to be expected of a man discussing hospitable arrangements in the presence of a guest. It ended with a grunt of assent from Weston. Ransom, to whose other difficulties a merely social embarrassment was now being added, turned with the idea of making some remark. But Weston was now speaking to the boy.

'You have given enough trouble for one night, Harry,' he said. 'And in a properly governed country I'd know how to deal with you. Hold your tongue and stop sniveling. You needn't go into the wash-house if you don't want -'

It weren't the wash-house,' sobbed the halfwit, 'you know it weren't. I don't want to go in that thing again.'

'He means the laboratory,' interrupted Devine. 'He got in there and was shut, in by accident for a few hours once. It put the wind up him for some reason. Lo, the poor Indian, you know.' He turned to the boy. 'Listen, Harry,' he said 'This kind gentleman is going to take you home as soon as he's had a rest. If you'll come in and sit down quietly in the hall. I'll give you something you like.' He imitated the noise of

a cork being drawn from a bottle. Ransom remembered it had been one of Devine's tricks at school and a guffaw of infantile knowingness broke from Harry's lips.

'Bring him in,' said Weston as he turned away and disappeared into the house. Ransom hesitated to follow, but Devine assured him that Weston would be very glad to see him. The lie was barefaced, but Ransom's desire for a rest and a drink were rapidly overcoming his social scruples. Preceded by Devine and Harry, he entered the house and found himself a moment later seated in an armchair and awaiting the return of Devine, who had gone to fetch refreshments.

Chapter 2

THE ROOM into which he had been shown revealed a strange mixture of luxury and squalor. The windows were shuttered and curtainless, the floor was uncarpeted and strewn with packing cases, shavings, newspapers and books, and the wallpaper showed the stains left by the pictures and furniture of the previous occupants. On the other hand, the only two armchairs were of the costliest type, and in the litter which covered the tables, cigars, oyster shells and empty champagne bottles jostled with tins of condensed milk and opened sardine tins, with cheap crockery, broken bread, teacups a quarter full of tea and cigarette ends.

His hosts seemed to be a long time away, and Ransom fell to thinking of Devine. He felt for him that sort of distaste we feel for someone whom we have admired in boyhood for a very brief period and then outgrown. Devine had learned just half a term earlier than anyone else that kind of humour which consists in a perpetual parody of the sentimental or idealistic cliches of one's elders. For a few weeks his references to the Dear old Place and to Playing the Game, to the White Man's Burden and a Straight Bat, had swept everyone, Ransom included, off their feet. But before he left Wedenshaw Ransom had already begun to find Devine a bore, and at Cambridge he had avoided him, wondering from afar how anyone so flashy and, as it were, ready-made could be so successful. Then had come the mystery of Devine's election. to the Leicester fellowship, and the further mystery of his increasing wealth. He had long since abandoned Cambridge for London, and was presumably something 'in the city'. One heard of him occasionally and one's informant usually ended either by saying, 'A damn clever chap, Devine, in his own way', or else by observing plaintively, 'It's a mystery to me how that man has got where he is.' As far as Ransom could gather from the brief conversation in the yard, his old schoolfellow had altered very little.

He was interrupted by the opening of the door Devine entered alone, carrying a bottle of whiskey on a tray with glass, and a syphon.

'Weston is looking out something to eat,' he said as he placed the tray on the floor beside Ransom's chair, and addressed himself to opening the bottle. Ransom, who was very thirsty indeed by now, observed that his host was one of those irritating people who forget to use their hands when they begin talking. Devine started to prise up the silver paper which covered the cork with the point of a corkscrew, and then stopped to ask: 'How do you come to be in this - benighted part of the country?"

'I'm on a walking tour,' said Ransom; 'slept at Stoke Underwood last night and had hoped to end at Nadderby tonight. They wouldn't put me up, so I was going on to Sterk.'

'God!' exclaimed Devine, his corkscrew still idle. 'Do you do it for money, or is it sheer masochism?'

'Pleasure; of course,' said Ransom, keeping his eye immovably on the still unopened bottle.

'Can the attraction of it be explained to the uninitiate?' asked Devine, remembering himself sufficiently to rip up a small portion of the silver paper.

'I hardly know. To begin with, I like the actual walking -'

'God! You must have enjoyed the army. Jogging along to Thingummy, eh?'

'No, no. It's just the opposite of the army. The whole point about the army is that you are never alone for a moment and can never choose where you're going or even what part of the road you're walking on. On a walking tour you are absolutely detached. You stop where you like and go on when you like. As long as it lasts you need consider no one and consult no one but yourself.'

'Until one night you find a wire waiting at your hotel saying, "Come back at once"', replied Devine, at last removing the silver paper.

'Only if you were fool enough to leave a list of addresses and go to them! The worst that could happen to me would be that man on the wireless saying, "Will Dr Elwin Ransom, believed to be walking somewhere in the Midlands- "'

'I begin to see the idea,' said Devine, pausing in the very act of drawing the cork. 'It wouldn't do if you were in business. You are a lucky devil! But can even you just disappear like that? No wife, no young, no aged but honest parent or anything of that sort?'

'Only a married sister in India. And then, you see, I'm a don. And a don in the middle of long vacation is almost a non-existent creature, as you ought to remember. College neither knows nor cares where he is, and certainly no one else does.'

The cork at last came out of the bottle with a heart-cheering noise.

'Say when,' said Devine, as Ransom held out his glass. 'But I feel sure there's a catch somewhere. Do you really mean to say that no one knows where you are or when you ought to get back, and no one can get hold of you?'

Ransom was nodding in reply when Devine, who had picked up the syphon, suddenly swore. 'I'm afraid this is empty,' he said. 'Do you mind having water? I'll have to get some from the scullery. How much do you like?'

'Fill it up, please,' said Ransom.

A few minutes later Devine returned and handed Ransom his long delayed drink. The latter remarked, as he put down the half-emptied tumbler with a sigh of satisfaction that Devine's choice of residence was at least as odd as his own choice of a holiday.

'Quite,' said Devine. 'But if you knew Weston you'd realize that it's much less trouble to go where he wants than to argue the matter. What you call a strong colleague.'

'Colleague?' said Ransom inquiringly.

'In a sense.' Devine glanced at the door, drew his chair closer to Ransom's, and continued in a more confidential tone. 'He's the goods all right, though. Between ourselves, I am putting a little money into some experiments he has on hand. It's all straight stuff - the march of progress and the good of humanity and all that, but it has an industrial side.'

While Devine was speaking something odd began to happen to Ransom. At first it merely seemed to him that Devine's words were no longer making sense. He appeared to be saying that he was industrial all down both sides but could never get an experiment to fit him in London. Then he realized that Devine was not so much unintelligible as inaudible, which was not surprising, since he was

now so far away - about a mile away, though perfectly clear like something seen through the wrong end of a telescope. From that bright distance where he sat in his tiny chair he was gazing at Ransom with a new expression on his face. The gaze became disconcerting. Ransom tried to move in his chair but found that he had lost all power over his own body. He felt quite comfortable, but it was as if his legs and arms had been bandaged to the chair and his head gripped in a vice; a beautifully padded, but quite immovable, vice. He did not feel afraid, though he knew that he ought to be afraid and soon would be. Then, very gradually, the room faded from his sight.

Ransom could never be sure whether what followed had any bearing on the events recorded in this book or whether it was merely an irresponsible dream. It seemed to him that he and Weston and Devine were all standing in a little garden surrounded by a wall. The garden was bright and sunlit, but over the top of the wall you could see nothing but darkness. They were trying to climb over the wall and Weston asked them to give him a hoist up. Ransom kept on telling him not to go over the wall because it was so dark on the other side, but Weston insisted, and all three of them set about doing so. Ransom was the last. He got astride on the top of the wall, sitting on his coat because of the broken bottles. The other two had already dropped down on the outside into the darkness, but before he followed them a door in the wall which none of them had noticed was opened from without and the queerest people he had ever seen came into the garden bringing Weston and Devine back with them. They left them in the garden and retired into the darkness themselves, locking the door behind them. Ransom found it impossible to get down from the wall. He remained sitting there, not frightened but rather uncomfortable because his right leg, which was on the outside, felt so dark and his left leg felt so light. 'My leg will drop off if it gets much darker,' he said. Then he looked down into the darkness and asked, 'Who are you?' and the Queer People must still have been there for they all replied, 'Hoo Hoo - Hoo?' just like owls.

He began to realize that his leg was not so much dark as cold and stiff; because he had been resting the other on it for so long: and also that he was in an armchair in a lighted room. A conversation was going on near him and had, he now realized, being going on for some time. His head was comparatively clear. He realized that he had been drugged or hypnotized, or both, and he felt that some control over his own body was returning to him though he was still very weak. He listened intently without trying to move.

'I'm getting a little tired of this, Weston,' Devine was saying, 'and specially as it's my money that is being risked. I tell you he'll do quite as well as the boy, and in some ways better. Only, he'll be coming round very soon now and we must get him on board at once. We ought to have done it an hour ago.

'The boy was ideal,' said Weston sulkily. 'Incapable of serving humanity and only too likely to propagate idiocy. He was the sort of boy who in a civilized community would be automatically handed over to a state laboratory for experimental purposes.

'I dare say. But in England he is the sort of boy in whom Scotland Yard might conceivably feel an interest. This busy-body, on the other hand, will not be missed. for months, and even then, no one will know where he was when he disappeared. He came alone. He left no address. He has no family. And finally, he has poked his nose into the whole affair of his own accord.'

'Well, I confess I don't like it. He is, after all, human. The boy was really almost a - a preparation. Still, he's only an individual, and probably a quite useless one. We're risking our own lives, too. In a great cause - For the Lord's sake. don't start all that stuff now. We haven't time.'

'I dare say,' replied Weston, 'he would consent if he could be made to understand.'

'Take his feet and I'll take his head,' said Devine.

'If you really think he's coming round,' said Weston, 'you'd better give him another dose. We can't start till we get the sunlight. It wouldn't be pleasant to have him struggling in there for three hours or so. It would be better if he didn't wake up till we were under way.

'True enough. Just keep an eye on him while I run upstairs and get another.'

Devine left the room. Ransom saw through his half-closed eyes that Weston was standing over him. He had no means of foretelling how his own body would respond, if it responded at all, to a sudden attempt at movement, but he saw at once that he must take his chance. Almost before Devine had closed the door he flung himself with all his force at Weston's feet. The scientist fell forward across the chair, and Ransom, flinging him off with an agonizing effort, rose and dashed out into the hall. He was very weak and fell as he entered it but terror was behind him and in a couple of seconds he had found the hall door and was working desperately to master the bolts. Darkness and his trembling hands were against him. Before he had drawn one bolt, booted feet were clattering over the carpetless floor behind him. He was gripped by the shoulders and the knees. Kicking, writhing, dripping with sweat, and bellowing as loud as he could in the faint hope of rescue, he prolonged the struggle with a violence of which he would have believed himself incapable. For one glorious moment the door was open, the fresh night air was in his face, he saw the reassuring stars and even his own pack lying in the porch. Then a heavy blow fell on his head. Consciousness faded, and the last thing of which he was aware was the grip of strong hands pulling him back into the dark passage, and the sound of a closing door.

Chapter 3

WHEN RANSOM came to his senses he seemed to be in bed in a dark room. He had a pretty severe headache, and this, combined with a general lassitude, discouraged him at first from attempting to rise or to take stock of his surroundings. He noticed, drawing his hand across his forehead, that he was sweating freely, and this directed his attention to the fact that the room (if it was a room) was remarkably warm. Moving his arms to fling off the bedclothes, he touched a wall at the right side of the bed: it was not only warm, but hot. He moved his left hand to and fro in the emptiness on the other side and noticed that there the air was cooler - apparently the heat was coming from the wall. He felt his face and found a bruise over the left eye. This recalled to his mind the struggle with Weston and Devine, and he instantly concluded that they had put him in an outhouse behind their furnace. At the same time he looked up and recognized the source of the dim light in which, without noticing it, he had all along been able to see the movements of his own hands. There was some kind of skylight immediately over his head - a square of night sky filled with stars.' It seemed to Ransom that he had never looked out on such a frosty night. Pulsing with brightness as with some unbearable pain or pleasure, clustered in pathless and countless multitudes, dreamlike in clarity, blazing in perfect blackness, the stars seized all his attention, troubled him, excited him, and drew him up to a sitting position. At the same time, they quickened the throb of his headache, and this reminded him that he had been drugged. He was just formulating to himself the theory that the stuff they had given him might have some effect on the pupil and that this would explain the unnatural splendour and fullness of the sky, when a disturbance of silver light, almost a pale and miniature sunrise, at one corner of the

skylight, drew his eyes upward again. Some minutes later the orb of the full moon was pushing its way into the field of vision. Ransom sat still and watched. He had never seen such a moon - so white, so blinding and so large. 'Like' a great' football just outside the glass,' he thought, and then, a moment later; 'No - it's bigger than that.' By this time he was quite certain that something was seriously wrong with his eyes: no moon could possibly be the size of the thing he was seeing.

The light of the huge moon - if it was a moon - had by now illuminated his surroundings almost as clearly as if it were day. It was a very strange room. The floor was so small that the bed and a table beside it occupied the whole width of it: the ceiling seemed to be nearly twice as wide and the walls sloped outward as they rose, so that Ransom had the impression of lying at the bottom of a deep and narrow wheelbarrow. This confirmed his belief that his sight was either temporarily or permanently injured. In other respects, however, he was recovering rapidly and even beginning to feel an unnatural lightness of heart and a not disagreeable excitement. The heat was still oppressive, and he stripped off everything but his shirt and trousers before rising to explore. His rising was disastrous and raised graver apprehensions in his mind about the effects of being drugged. Although he had been conscious of no unusual muscular effort, he found himself leaping from the bed with an energy which brought his head into sharp contact with the skylight and flung him down again in a heap on the floor. He found himself on the other side against the wall the wall that ought to have sloped outwards like the side of a wheelbarrow, according to his previous reconnaissance. But it didn't. He felt it and looked at it; it was unmistakably at right angles to the floor. More cautiously this time, he rose again to his feet. He felt an extraordinary lightness of body: it was, with difficulty, that he kept his feet on the floor. For the first time a suspicion that he might be dead and already in the ghost-life crossed his mind. He was trembling, but a hundred mental habits forbade him to consider this possibility. Instead, he explored his prison. The result was beyond doubt: all the walls looked as if they sloped outwards so as to make the room wider at the ceiling than it was at the floor, but each wall as you stood beside it turned out to be perfectly perpendicular - not only to sight but to touch also if one stooped down and examined with one's fingers the angle between it and the floor. The same examination revealed two other curious facts. The room was walled and floored with metal, and was in a state of continuous faint vibration - a silent vibration with a strangely lifelike and unmechanical quality about it. But if the vibration was silent, there was plenty of noise going on a series of musical raps or percussions at quite irregular intervals which seemed to come from the ceiling. It was as if the metal chamber in which he found himself was being bombarded with small, tinkling missiles. Ransom was by now thoroughly frightened - not with the prosaic fright that a man suffers in a war, but with a heady, bounding kind of fear that was hardly distinguishable from his general excitement: he was poised on a sort of emotional watershed from which, he felt, he might at any moment pass either into delirious terror or into an ecstasy of joy. He knew now that he was not in a submarine: and the infinitesimal quivering of the metal did not suggest the motion of any wheeled vehicle. A ship, then, he supposed, or some kind of airship... but there was an oddity in all his sensations for which neither supposition accounted. Puzzled, he sat down again on the bed, and stared at the portentous moon.

An airship, some kind of flying machine... but why did the moon look so big? It was larger than he had thought at first. No moon could really be that size; and he realized now that he had known this from the first but had repressed the knowledge through terror. At the same

moment a thought came into his head which stopped his breath - there could be no full moon at all that night. He remembered distinctly that he had walked from Nadderby on a moonless night. Even if the thin crescent of a new moon had escaped his notice, it could, not have grown to this in a few hours. It could not have grown to this at all - this megalomaniac disc, far larger than the football he had at first compared it to, larger than a child's hoop, filling almost half the sky. And where was the old 'man in the moon' - the familiar face that had looked down on all the generations of men? The thing wasn't the Moon at all; and he felt his hair move on his scalp.

At that moment the sound of an opening door made him turn his head. An oblong of dazzling light appeared behind him. and instantly vanished as the door closed again, having admitted the bulky form of a naked man whom Ransom recognized as Weston. No, reproach, no demand for an explanation, rose to Ransom's lips or even to his mind; not with that monstrous orb above them.

The mere presence of a human' being, with its offer of at least some companionship, broke down the tension in which his nerves had long been resisting a bottomless dismay. He found, when he spoke, that he was sobbing.

'Weston! Weston!' he gasped. 'What is it? It's not the Moon, not that size. It can't be, can it?'

'No,' replied Weston, 'it's the Earth.'

Chapter 4

RANSOM'S LEGS failed him, and he must have sunk back upon the bed, but he only became aware of this many minutes later. At the moment he was unconscious of everything except his fear. He did not even know what he was afraid of, the fear itself possessed his whole mind, a formless, infinite misgiving. He did not lose consciousness, though he greatly wished that he might do so. Any change - death or sleep, or, best of all, a waking which should show all this for a dream - would have been inexpressibly welcome. None came. Instead, the lifelong self-control of social man, the virtues which are half hypocrisy or the hypocrisy which is half a virtue, came back to him and soon he found himself answering Weston in a voice not shamefully tremulous.

'Do you mean that?' he asked. 'Certainly.'

'Then where are we?'

'Standing out from Earth about eighty-five thousand miles.'

'You mean we're in space,' Ransom uttered the word with difficulty as a frightened child speaks of ghosts or a frightened man of cancer.

Weston nodded.

'What for?' said Ransom. 'And what on earth have you kidnapped me for? And how have you done it?'

For a moment Weston seemed disposed to give no answer; then, as if on a second thought, he sat down on the bed beside Ransom and spoke as follows:

'I suppose it will save trouble if I deal with these questions at once, instead of leaving you to pester us with them every hour for the next month. As to how we do it - I suppose you mean how the spaceship works there's no good asking that. Unless you were one of the four or five real physicists now living you couldn't understand: and if there were any chance of your understanding you certainly wouldn't be told. If it makes you happy to repeat words that don't mean anything - which is, in fact, what unscientific people want when they ask for an

explanation - you may say we work by exploiting the less observed properties of solar radiation. As to why we are here, we are on our way to Malacandra. . .

'Do you mean a star called Malacandra?'

'Even you can hardly suppose we are going out of the solar system. Malacandra is much nearer than that: we shall make it in about twenty light days.'

'There isn't a planet called Malacandra,' objected Ransom.

'I am giving it its real name, not the name invented by terrestrial astronomers,' said Weston.

'But surely this is nonsense,' said Ransom. 'How the deuce did you find out its real name, as you call it?'

'From the inhabitants.'

It took Ransom some time to digest this statement.

'Do you mean to tell me you claim to have been to this star before, or this planet, or whatever it is?'

'Yes.'

'You can't really ask me to believe that,' said Ransom. 'Damn it, all, it's not an everyday affair. Why has no one heard of it? Why has it not been in all the papers?'

'Because we are not perfect idiots,' said Weston gruffly.

After a few moments silence Ransom began again. 'Which planet is it in our terminology?' he asked.

'Once and for all,' said Weston, 'I am not going to tell you. If you know how to find out when we get there, you are welcome to do so: I don't think we have much to fear from your scientific attainments. In the meantime, there is no reason for you to know.'

'And you say this place is inhabited?' said Ransom.

Weston gave him a peculiar look and then nodded. The uneasiness which this produced in Ransom rapidly merged in an anger which he had almost lost sight of amidst the conflicting emotions that beset him.

"And what has all this to do with me?' he broke out. 'You have assaulted me, drugged me, and are apparently carrying me off as a prisoner in this infernal thing. What have I done to you? What do you say for yourself?'

'I might reply by asking you why you crept into my backyard like a thief. If you had minded your own business, you would not be here. As it is, I admit that we have had to infringe your rights. My only defence is that small claims must give way to great. As far as we know, we are doing what has never been done in the history of man, perhaps never in the history of the universe. We have learned how to jump off the speck of matter on which our species began; infinity, and therefore perhaps eternity, is being put into the hands of the human race. You cannot be so small-minded as to think that the rights or the life of an individual or of a million individuals are of the slightest importance in comparison with this.'

'I happen to disagree,' said Ransom, 'and I always have disagreed, even about vivisection. But you haven't answered my question. What do you want me for? What good am I to do you on this - on Malacandra?'

'That I don't know,' said Weston. 'It was no idea of ours. We are only obeying orders.'

'Whose?'

There was another pause. 'Come,' said Weston at last. 'There is really no use in continuing this cross-examination. You keep on asking me questions I can't answer: in some cases because I don't know the answers, in others because you wouldn't understand them. It will make things very much pleasanter during the voyage if you can only resign your mind to your fate and stop bothering yourself and us. It would be easier if your philosophy of life were not so insufferably narrow and individualistic. I had thought no one could fail to be inspired by the role you are being asked to play: that even a worm, if it could understand, would rise to the sacrifice. I mean, of course, the sacrifice of time and liberty, and some little risk. Don't misunderstand me.

'Well,' said Ransom, 'you hold all the cards, and I must make the best of it. I consider your philosophy of life raving lunacy. I suppose all that stuff about inanity and eternity means that you think you are justified in doing anything - absolutely anything - here and now, on the off chance that some creatures or other descended from man as we know, him may crawl about a few centuries longer in some part of the universe.'

'Yes - anything whatever,' returned the scientist sternly, 'and all educated opinion - for I do not call classics and history and such trash education - is entirely on my side. I am glad you raised the point, and I advise you to remember my answer. In the meantime, if you will follow me into the next room, we will have breakfast. Be careful how you get up: your weight here is hardly appreciable compared with your weight on Earth.'

Ransom rose and his captor opened the door. Instantly the room was flooded with a dazzling golden light which completely eclipsed the pale earthlight behind him.

'I will give you darkened glasses in a moment,' said Weston as he preceded him into the chamber whence the radiance was pouring. It seemed to Ransom that Weston went up a hill towards the doorway and disappeared suddenly downwards when he had passed it. When he followed - which he did with caution - he had the curious impression that he was walking up to the edge of a precipice: the new room beyond the doorway seemed to be built on its side so that its farther wall lay almost in the same plane as the floor of the room he was leaving. When, however, he ventured to put forward his foot, he found that the floor continued flush and as he entered the second room the walls suddenly righted themselves and the rounded ceiling was over his head. Looking back, he perceived that the bedroom in its turn was now heeling over - its roof a wall and one of its walls a roof.

'You will soon get used to it,' said Weston, following his gaze. 'The ship is roughly spherical, and now that we are outside the gravitational field of the Earth "down" means - and feels - towards the centre of our own little metal world. This, of course, was foreseen and we built her accordingly. The core of the ship is a hollow globe - we keep our stores inside it - and the surface of that globe is the floor we are walking on. The cabins are arranged all round this, their walls supporting an outer globe which from our point of view is the roof. As the centre is always "down", the piece of floor you are standing on always feels flat or horizontal and the wall you are standing against always seems vertical. On the other hand, the globe of floor is so small that you can always see over the edge of it - over what would be the horizon if you were a flea - and then you see the floor and walls of the next cabin in a different plane. It is just the same; on Earth, of course, only we are not big enough to see it.'

After this explanation he made arrangements in his precise, ungracious way for the comfort of his guest or prisoner. Ransom, at his advice, removed all his clothes and substituted a little metal girdle hung with enormous weights to reduce, as far as possible, the unmanageable lightness of his body. He also assumed tinted glasses, and soon found himself seated opposite Weston at a small table laid for breakfast. He was both hungry and thirsty and eagerly attacked the meal which consisted of tinned meat, biscuit, butter and coffee.

But all these actions he had performed mechanically. Stripping, eating and drinking passed almost unnoticed, and all he ever remembered of his first meal in the space-ship was the tyranny of heat and light. Both were present in a degree which would have been intolerable on Earth, but each had a new quality. The light was paler than any light of comparable intensity that he had ever seen; it was not pure white but the palest of all imaginable golds, and it cast shadows as sharp as a floodlight. The heat, utterly free from moisture, seemed to knead and stroke the skin like a gigantic masseur: it produced no tendency to drowsiness: rather, intense alacrity. His headache was gone: he felt vigilant, courageous and magnanimous as he had seldom felt on Earth. Gradually he dared to raise his eyes to the skylight. Steel shutters were drawn across all but a chink of the glass, and that chink was covered with blinds of some heavy and dark material; but still it was too bright to look at.

I always thought space was dark and cold,' he marked vaguely.

'Forgotten the sun?' said Weston contemptuously.

Ransom went on eating for some time. Then he began, 'It it's like this in the early morning,' and stopped, warned by the expression on Weston's face. Awe fell upon him: there were no mornings here, no evenings, and no night - nothing but the changeless noon which had filled for centuries beyond history so many millions of cubic miles. He glanced at Weston again, but the latter held up his hand.

'Don't talk,' he said. 'We have discussed all 'that is necessary. The ship does not carry oxygen enough for any unnecessary exertion; not even for talking.'

Shortly afterwards he rose, without inviting the other to follow him, and left the room by one of the many doors which Ransom had not yet seen opened.

Chapter 5

THE PERIOD spent in the space-ship ought to have been one of terror and anxiety for Ransom. He was separated by an astronomical distance from every member of the human race except two whom he had excellent reasons for distrusting. He was heading for an unknown destination, and was being brought thither for a purpose which his captors steadily refused to disclose. Devine and Weston relieved each other regularly in a room which Ransom was never allowed to enter and where he supposed the controls of their machine must be. Weston, during his watches on, was almost entirely silent. Devine was more loquacious and would often talk and guffaw with the prisoner until Weston rapped on the wall of the control room and warned them not to waste air. But Devine was secretive after a certain point. He was quite ready to laugh at Weston's solemn scientific idealism. He didn't give a damn, he said, for the future of the species or the meeting of two worlds.

'There's more to Malacandra than that,' he would add with a wink. But when Ransom asked him what more, he would lapse into satire and make ironical remarks about the white man's burden and the blessings of civilization.

'It is inhabited, then?' Ransom would press.

'Ah - there's always a native question in these things, Devine would answer. For the most part his conversation ran on the things he would do when he got back to Earth: ocean going yachts, the most expensive women and a big place on the Riviera figured largely in his plans. 'I'm not running all these risks for fun.'

Direct questions about Ransom's own role were usually met with silence. Only once, in reply to such a question, Devine, who was then in Ransom's opinion very far from sober, admitted that they were rather 'handing' him the baby.

'But I'm sure,' he added, 'you'll live up to the old school tie.'

All this, as I have said, was sufficiently disquieting. The odd thing was that it did not very greatly disquiet him. It is hard for a man to brood on the future when he is feeling so extremely well as Ransom now felt. There was an endless night on one side of the ship and an endless day on the other: each was marvellous and he moved from the one to the other at his will, delighted. In the nights; which he could create by turning the handle of a door, he lay for hours in contemplation of the skylight. The Earth's disk was nowhere to be seen, the stars, thick as daisies on an uncut lawn, reigned perpetually with no cloud, no moon, no sunrise, to dispute their sway. There were planets of unbelievable majesty, and constellations to dreamed of: there were celestial sapphires, rubies, emeralds and pin-pricks of burning gold; far out on the left of the picture hung a comet, tiny and remote: and between all and behind all, far more emphatic and palpable than it showed on Earth, the undimensioned, enigmatic blackness. The lights trembled: they seemed to grow brighter as he looked. Stretched naked on his bed, a second Dana, he found it night by night more difficult to disbelieve in old astrology: almost he felt, wholly he imagined, 'sweet influence' pouring or even stabbing into his surrendered body. All was silence but for the irregular tinkling noises. He knew now that these were made by meteorite's, small, drifting particles of the world-stuff that smote continually on their hollow drum of steel; and he guessed that at any moment they might meet something large enough to make meteorites of ship and all. But he could not fear. He now felt that Weston had justly called him little-minded in the moment of his first panic. The adventure was too high, its circumstance too 'solemn', for any emotion, save a severe delight. But the days - that is, the hours spent in the sunward hemisphere of their microcosm - were the best of all. Often he rose after only a few hours sleep to return, drawn by an irresistible attraction, to the regions of light; he could not cease to wonder at the noon which always awaited you however early you were to seek it. There, totally immersed in a bath of pure ethereal colour and of unrelenting though unwounding brightness, stretched his full length and with eyes half closed in the strange chariot that bore them, faintly quivering, through depth after depth of tranquility far above the reach of night, he felt his body and mind daily rubbed and scoured and filled with new vitality. Weston, in one of his brief, reluctant answers, admitted a scientific basis for these sensations: they were receiving, he said, many rays that never penetrated the terrestrial atmosphere.

But Ransom, as time wore on, became aware of another and more spiritual cause for his progressive lightening and exultation of heart. A nightmare, long engendered in the modern mind by the mythology that follows in the wake of science, was falling off him. He had read of 'Space': at the back of his thinking for years had lurked the dismal fancy of the black, cold vacuity, the utter deadness, which was supposed to separate the worlds. He had not known how much it affected him till now - now that the very name 'Space' seemed a blasphemous libel for this empyrean ocean of radiance in which they swam. He could not call it 'dead'; he felt life pouring into him from it

every moment. How indeed should it be otherwise, since out of this ocean the worlds and all their life had come? He had thought it barren; he saw now that it was the womb of worlds, whose blazing and innumerable offspring looked down nightly even upon the Earth with so many eyes - and here, with how many more! No: Space was the wrong name. Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens - the heavens which declared its glory.

He did not, of course, spend all his time in basking. He explored the ship (so far as he was allowed), passing from room to room with those slow movements which Weston enjoined upon them lest exertion should overtax their supply of air. From the necessity of its shape, the space-ship contained a good many more chambers than were in regular use; but Ransom was also inclined to think that its owners - or at least Devine - intended these to be filled with cargo of some kind on the return voyage. He also became, by an insensible process, the steward and cook of the company; partly because he felt it natural to share the only labours he could share - he was never allowed into the control room - and partly in order to anticipate a tendency which Weston showed to make him a servant whether he would or not. He preferred to work as a volunteer rather than in admitted slavery: and he liked his own cooking a good deal more than that of his companions.

It was these duties that made him at first the unwilling, and then the alarmed, hearer of a conversation which occurred about a fortnight (he judged) after the beginning of their voyage. He had washed up the remains of their evening meal, basked in the sunlight, chatted with Devine - better company than Weston, though in Ransom's opinion much the more odious of the two - and retired to bed at his usual time. He was a little restless, and after an hour or so it occurred to him that he had forgotten one or two small arrangements in the galley which would facilitate his work in the morning. The galley opened off the saloon or day room, and its door was close to that of the control room. He rose and went there at once. His feet, like the rest of him, were bare.

The galley skylight was on the dark side of the ship, but Ransom did not turn on the light. To leave the door ajar was sufficient, as this admitted a stream of brilliant sunlight. As everyone who has 'kept house' will understand, he found that his preparations for the morning had been even more incomplete than he supposed. He did his work well, from practice, and therefore quietly. He had just finished and was drying his hands on the roller towel behind the galley door when he heard the door of the control room open and saw the silhouette of a man outside the galley - Devine's, he gathered. Devine did not come forward into the saloon, but remained standing and talking - apparently into the control room. It thus came about that while Ransom could hear distinctly what Devine said, he could not make out Weston's answers.

'I think it would be damn silly,' said Devine. 'If you could be sure of meeting the brutes where we alight there might be something in it. But suppose we have to trek? All we'd gain by your plan would be having to carry a drugged man and his pack instead of letting a live man walk with us and do his share of the work.' Weston apparently replied.

'But he can't find out,' returned Devine. 'Unless someone is fool enough to tell him. Anyway, even if he suspects, do you think a man like that would have the guts to run away on a strange planet? Without food? Without weapons? You'll find he'll eat out of your hand at the first sight of a sorn.' Again Ransom heard the indistinct noise of Weston's voice.

'How should I know?' said Devine. 'It may be some sort of chief: much more likely a mumbo-jumbo.'

This time came a very short utterance from the control room: - apparently a question. Devine answered at once. 'It would explain why he was wanted.' Weston asked him something more.

'Human sacrifice, I suppose. At least it wouldn't be human from their point of view; you know what I mean.

Weston had a good deal to say this time, and it elicited Devine's characteristic chuckle.

'Quite, quite,' he said. 'It is understood that you are doing it all from the highest motives. So long as they lead to the same actions as my motives, you are quite welcome to them.'

Weston continued; and this time Devine seemed to interrupt him.

'You're not losing your own nerve, are you?' he said. He was then silent for some time, as if listening. Finally, he replied:

'If you're so fond of the brutes as that you'd better stay and interbreed - if they have sexes, which we don't yet know. Don't you worry. When the time comes for cleaning the place up we'll save one or two for you, and you can keep them as pets or vivisect them or sleep with them or all three - whichever way it takes ..... Yes, I know. Perfectly loathsome. I was only joking. Good night.'

A moment later Devine closed the door of the control room, crossed the saloon and entered his own cabin. Ransom heard him bolt the door of it according to his invariable, though puzzling, custom. The tension with which he had been listening relaxed. He found that he had been holding his breath, and breathed deeply again. Then cautiously he stepped out into the saloon.

Though he knew that it would be prudent to return to his bed as quickly as possible, he found himself standing still in the now familiar glory of the light and viewing it with a new and poignant emotion. Out of this heaven, these happy climes, they were presently to descend - into what? Sorns, human sacrifice, loathsome sexless monsters. What was a sorn? His own role in the affair was now clear enough. Somebody or something had sent for him. It could hardly be for him personally. The somebody wanted a victim - any victim - from Earth. He had been picked because Devine had done the picking; he realized for the first time - in all circumstances a late and startling discovery - that Devine had hated him all these years as heartily as he hated Devine. But what was a sorn? When he saw them he would eat out of Weston's hands. His mind, like so many minds of his generation, was richly furnished with bogies. He had read his H. G. Wells and others. His unaverse was peopled with horrors such as ancient and medieval mythology could hardly rival. No insect-like, vermiculate or crustacean Abominable, no twitching feelers, - rasping wings, slimy coils, curling tentacles, no monstrous union of superhuman intelligence and insatiable cruelty seemed to him anything but likely on an alien world. The sores would be... would be... he dared not think what the sores would be. And he was to be given to them. Somehow this seemed more horrible than being caught by them. Given, handed over, offered. He saw in imagination various incompatible monstrosities - bulbous eyes, grinning jaws, horns, stings, mandibles. Loathing of insects, loathing of snakes, loathing of things that squashed and squelched, all played their horrible symphonies over his nerves. But the reality would be worse: it would be an extra-terrestrial otherness - something one had never thought of never could have thought of. In that moment Ransom made a decision. He could face death, but not the sores. He must escape when they got to Malacandra, if there were any possibility.

Starvation, or even to be chased by sores, would be better than being handed over. If escape were impossible, then it must be suicide. Ransom was a pious man. He hoped he would be forgiven. It was no more in his power, he thought, to decide otherwise than to grow a new limb. Without hesitation he stole back into the galley and secured the sharpest knife: henceforward he determined never to be parted from it.

Such was the exhaustion produced by terror that when he regained his bed he fell instantly into stupefied and dreamless sleep.

Chapter 6

HE WOKE much refreshed, and even a little ashamed of his terror on the previous night. His situation was, no doubt, very serious: indeed, the possibility of returning alive to Earth must be almost discounted. But death could be faced, and rational fear of death could be mastered. It was only the irrational, the biological, horror of monsters that was the real difficulty: and this he faced and came to terms with as well as he could while he lay in the sunlight after breakfast. He had the feeling that one sailing in the heavens, as he was doing, should not suffer abject dismay before any earthbound creature. He even reflected that the knife could pierce other flesh as well as his own. The bellicose mood was a very rare one with Ransom. Like many men of his own age, he rather under-estimated than over-estimated his own courage; the gap between boyhood's dreams and his actual experience of the War had been startling, and his subsequent view of his own unheroic qualities had perhaps swung too far in the opposite direction. He had some anxiety lest the firmness of his present mood should prove a short-lived illusion; but he must make the best of it.

As hour followed hour and waking followed sleep in their eternal day, he became aware of a gradual change. The temperature was slowly falling. They resumed clothes. Later, they added warm underclothes. Later still, an electric heater was turned on in the centre of the ship. And it became certain, too - though the phenomenon was hard to seize - that the light was less overwhelming than it had been at the beginning of the voyage. It became certain to the comparing intellect, but it was difficult to feel what was happening as a diminution of light and impossible to think of it as darkening, because while the radiance changed in degree, its unearthly quality had remained exactly the same since the moment he first beheld it. It was not, like fading light upon the Earth, mixed with the increasing moisture and phantom colours of the air. You might halve its intensity, Ransom perceived, and the remaining half would still be what the whole had been - merely less, not other. Halve it again, and the residue would still be the same. As long as it was at all, it would be itself - out even to that unimagined distance where its last force was spent. He tried to explain what he meant to Devine.

'Like thingummy's soap!' grinned Devine. 'Pure soap to the last bubble, eh?'

Shortly after this the even tenor of their life in the spaceship began to be disturbed. Weston explained that they would soon begin to feel the gravitational pull of Malacandra.

'That means,' he said, 'that it will no longer be down to the centre of the ship. It will be "down" towards Malacandra - which from our point of view will be under. the control room. As a consequence, the floors of most of the chambers will become wall or roof, and one of the walls a floor. You won't like it.'

The result of this announcement, so far as Ransom was concerned, was hours of heavy labour in which he worked shoulder to shoulder

now with Devine and now with Weston as their alternating watches liberated them from the control room. Water tins, oxygen cylinders, guns, ammunition and foodstuffs had all to be piled on the floors alongside the appropriate walls and lying on their sides so as to be upright when the new 'downwards' came into play. Long before the work was finished disturbing sensations began. At first Ransom supposed that it was the toil itself which so weighted his limbs: but rest did not alleviate the symptom, and it was explained to him that their bodies, in response to the planet that had caught them in its field, were actually gaining weight every minute and doubling in weight with every twenty-four hours. They had the experiences of a pregnant woman, but magnified almost beyond endurance.

At the same time their sense of direction - never very confident on the space-ship - became continuously confused. From any room on board, the next room's floor had always looked downhill and felt level: now it looked downhill and felt a little, a very little, downhill as well. One found oneself running as one entered it. A cushion flung aside on the floor of the saloon would be found hours later to have moved an inch or so towards the wall. All of them were afflicted with vomiting, headache and palpitations of the heart. The conditions grew worse hour by hour. Soon one could only grope and crawl from cabin to cabin. All sense of direction disappeared in a sickening confusion. Parts of the ship were definitely below in the sense that their floors were upside down and only a fly could walk on them: but no part seemed to Ransom to be indisputably the right way up. Sensations of intolerable height and of falling utterly absent in the heavens - recurred constantly. Cooking, of course, had long since been abandoned. Food was snatched as best they could, and drinking presented great difficulties: you could never be sure that you were really holding your mouth below, rather than beside the bottle. Weston grew grimmer and more silent than ever. Devine, a flask of spirits ever in his hand, flung out strange blasphemies and cursed Weston for bringing them. Ransom ached, licked his dry lips, nursed his bruised limbs and prayed for the end.

A time came when one side of the sphere was unmistakably down. Clamped beds and tables hung useless and ridiculous on what was now wall or roof. What had been doors became trap-doors, opened with difficulty. Their bodies seemed made of lead. There was no more work to be done when Devine had set out the clothes - their Malacandrian clothes - from their bundles and squatted down on the end wall of the saloon (now its floor) to watch the thermometer. The clothes, Ransom noticed, included heavy woolen underwear, sheepskin jerkins, fur gloves and eared caps. Devine made no reply to his questions. He was engaged in studying the thermometer and in shouting down to Weston in the control room.

'Slower, slower,' he kept shouting. 'Slower, you damned fool. You'll be in air in a minute or two.' Then sharply and angrily. 'Here! Let me get at it.'

Weston made no replies. It was unlike Devine to waste his advice: Ransom concluded that the man was almost out of his senses, whether with fear or excitement.

Suddenly the lights of the Universe seemed to be turned down. As if some demon had rubbed the heaven's face with a dirty sponge, the splendour in which they had lived for so long blenched to a pallid, cheerless and pitiable grey. It was impossible from where they sat to open the shutters or roll back the heavy blind. What had been a chariot gliding in the fields of heaven became a dark steel box dimly lighted by a slit of window, and falling. They were falling out of the heaven, into a world. Nothing. in all his adventures bit so deeply into Ransom's mind as this. He wondered how he could ever have thought of planets, even of the Earth, as islands of life and reality floating in a

deadly void. Now, with a certainty which never after deserted him, he saw the planets - the 'earths' he called them in his thought - as mere holes or gaps in the living heaven - excluded and rejected wastes of heavy matter and murky air, formed not by addition to, but by subtraction from, the surrounding brightness; And yet, he thought, beyond the solar system the brightness ends. Is that the real void, the real death? Unless ... he groped for the idea ... unless visible light is also a hole or gap, a mere diminution of something else. Something that is to bright unchanging heaven as heaven is to the dark, heavy earths....

Things do not always happen as a man would expect. The moment of his arrival in an unknown world found Ransom wholly absorbed in a philosophical speculation.

Chapter 7

'HAVING A doze?' said Devine.

'Can you see anything?' interrupted Weston.

'I can't manage the shutters, damn them,' returned Devine. 'We may as well get to the manhole.'

Ransom awoke from his brown study. The two partners were working together close beside him in the semi-darkness. He was cold and his body, though in fact much lighter than on Earth, still felt intolerably heavy. But a vivid sense of his situation returned to him; some fear, but more curiosity. It might mean death, but what a scaffold! Already cold air was coming in from without, and light. He moved his head impatiently to catch some glimpse between the labouring shoulders of the two men. A moment later the last nut was unscrewed. He was looking out through the manhole.

Naturally enough all he saw was the ground - a circle of pale pink, almost of white; whether very close and short vegetation or very wrinkled and granulated rock or soil he could not say. Instantly the dark shape of Devine filled the aperture, and Ransom had time to notice that he had a revolver in his hand - 'For me or for sorns or for both?' he wondered.

'You next,' said Weston curtly.

Ransom took a deep breath and his hand went to the knife beneath his belt. Then he got his head and shoulders through the manhole, his two hands on the soil of Malacandra. The pink stuff was soft and faintly resilient, like india-rubber: clearly vegetation. Instantly Ransom looked up. He saw a pale blue sky - a fine winter morning sky it would have been on Earth a great billowy cumular mass of rose-colour lower down which he took for a cloud, and then -'Get out,' said Weston from behind him. He scrambled through and rose to his feet. The air was cold but not bitterly so, and it seemed a little rough at the back of his throat. He gazed about him, and the very intensity of his desire to take in the new world at a glance defeated itself. He saw nothing but colours - colours that refused to form themselves into things. Moreover, he knew nothing yet well enough to see it: you cannot see things till you know roughly what they are. His first impression was of a bright, pale world - a watercolour world out of a child's paint-box; a moment later he recognized the flat belt of light blue as a sheet of water, or of something like water, which came nearly to his feet. They were on the shore of a lake or river.

'Now then,' said Weston, brushing past him. He turned and saw to his surprise, a quite recognizable object in the immediate foreground' - a hut of unmistakably terrestrial pattern though built of strange materials.

'They're human,' he gasped. 'They build houses?'

'We do,' said Devine. 'Guess again,' and, producing a key from his pocket, proceeded to unlock a very ordinary padlock on the door of the hut. With a not very clearly defined feeling of disappointment or relief Ransom realized that his captors were merely returning to their own camp. They behaved as one might have expected. They walked into the hut, let down the slats which served for windows, sniffed the close air, expressed' surprise that they had left it so dirty, and presently reemerged.

'We'd better see about the stores,' said Weston.

Ransom soon found that he was to have little leisure for observation and no opportunity of escape. The monotonous work of transferring food, clothes, weapons and many unidentifiable packages from the ship to the hut kept him vigorously occupied for the next hour or so, and in the closest contact with his kidnappers. But something he learned. Before anything else he learned that Malacandra was beautiful; and he even reflected how odd it was that this possibility had never entered into his speculations about it. The same peculiar twist of imagination which led him to people the universe with monsters - had somehow taught him to expect nothing on a strange planet except rocky desolation or else a network of nightmare machines. He could not say why, now that he came to think of it. He also discovered that the blue water surrounded them on at least three sides: his view in the fourth direction was blotted out by the vast steel football in which they had come. The hut, in fact, was built either on the point of a peninsula or on the end of an island. He also came little by little to the conclusion that the water was not merely blue in certain lights like terrestrial water but 'really' blue. There was something about its behaviour under the gentle breeze which puzzled him - something wrong or unnatural about the waves. For one thing, they were too big for such a wind, but that was not the whole secret. They reminded him somehow of the water that he had seen shooting up under the impact of shells in pictures of naval battles. Then suddenly realization came to him: they were the wrong shape, out of drawing, far too high for their length, 'too narrow at the base, too steep in the sides. He was reminded of something he had read in one of those modern poets about a sea rising in 'turreted walls'.

'Catch!' shouted Devine. Ransom caught and hurled the parcel on to 'Weston at the hut door.

On one side the water extended a long way - about a quarter of a mile, he thought, but perspective was still difficult in the strange world. On the other side it was much narrower, not wider than fifteen feet perhaps, and seemed to be flowing over a shallow - broken and swirling water that made a softer and more hissing sound than water on earth; and where it washed the hither bank - the pinkish-white vegetation went down to the very brink - there was a bubbling and sparkling which suggested effervescence. He tried hard, in such stolen glances as the work allowed him, to make out something of the farther shore. A mass of something purple, so huge that he took it for a heather-covered mountain, was his first impression: on the other side, beyond the larger water, there was something of the same kind. But there, he could see over the top of it. Beyond were strange upright shapes of whitish green; too jagged and irregular for buildings, too thin and steep for mountains. Beyond and above these again was the rose-coloured cloud-like mass. It might really be a cloud but it was very solid looking and did not seem to have moved since he first set eyes on it from the manhole. It looked like the top of a gigantic red cauliflower - or like a huge bowl of red soapsuds - and it was exquisitely beautiful in tint and shape.

Baffled by this, he turned his attention to the nearer shore beyond the shallows. The purple mass looked for a moment like a plump of organ pipes, then like a stack of rolls of cloth set up on end, then like a forest of gigantic umbrellas blown inside out. It was in faint motion. Suddenly his eyes mastered the object. The purple stuff was vegetation: more precisely it was vegetables, vegetables about twice the height of English elms, but apparently soft and flimsy. The stalks - one could hardly call them trunks - rose smooth and round, and surprisingly thin, for about forty feet: above that, the huge plants opened into a sheaf-like development, not of branches but of leaves, leaves large as lifeboats but nearly transparent. The whole thing corresponded roughly to his idea of a submarine forest: the plants, at once so large and so frail, seemed to need water to support them, and he wondered that they could hang in the air. Lower down, between the stems, he saw the vivid purple twilight, mottled with paler sunshine, which made up the internal scenery of the wood.

'Time for lunch,' said Devine suddenly. Ransom straightened his back; in spite of the thinness and coldness of the air, his forehead was moist. They had been working hard and he was short of breath. Weston appeared from the door of the hut and muttered something about finishing first'. Devine, however, overruled him. A tin of beef and some biscuits were produced, and the men sat down on the various boxes which were still plentifully littered between the spaceship and the hut. Some whiskey again at Devine's suggestion and against Weston's advice was poured into the tin cups and mixed with water: the latter, Ransom noticed, was drawn from their own water tins and not from the blue lakes.

As often happens, the cessation of bodily activity drew Ransom's attention to the excitement under which he had been labouring ever since their landing. Eating seemed almost out of the question. Mindful, however, of a possible dash for liberty, he forced himself to eat very much more than usual, and appetite returned as he ate. He devoured all that he could lay hands on either of food or drink: and the taste of that first meal was ever after associated in his mind with the first unearthly strangeness (never fully recaptured) of the bright, still; sparkling unintelligible landscape - with needling shapes of pale green, thousands of feet high, with sheets of dazzling blue soda-water, and acres of rose-red soapsuds. He was a little afraid that his companions might notice, and suspect his new achievements as a trencherman; but their attention was otherwise engaged. Their eyes never ceased roving the landscape; they spoke abstractedly and often changed position, and were ever looking over their shoulders. Ransom was just finishing his protracted meal when he saw Devine stiffen like a dog, and lay his hand in silence on Weston's shoulder. Both nodded. They rose. Ransom, gulping down the last of his whiskey, rose too. He found himself between his two captors. Both revolvers were out. They were edging him to the shore of the narrow water, and they were looking and pointing across it.

At first he could not see clearly what they were pointing at. There seemed to be some paler and slenderer plants than he had noticed before among the purple ones; he hardly attended to them, for his eyes were busy searching the ground - so obsessed was he with the reptile fears and insect fears of modern imagining. It was the reflections of the new white objects in the water that sent his eyes back to them: long, streaky, white reflections motionless in the running water - four or five, no, to be precise, six of them. He looked up. Six, white things were standing there. Spindly and flimsy things, twice or three times the height of a man. His first idea was that they were images of men, the work of savage artists; he had seen things like them in books of archaeology. But what could they be made of; and how could they stand? - so crazily thin and elongated in the leg,

so top-heavily pouted in the chest, such stalky, flexible-looking distortions of earthly bipeds ... like something seen in one of those comic mirrors. They were certainly not made of stone or metal, for now they seemed to sway a little as he watched; now with a shock that chased the blood from his cheeks he saw that they were alive, that they were moving, that they were coming at him. He had a momentary, scared glimpse of their faces, thin and unnaturally long, with long, drooping noses and drooping mouths of half spectral, half-idiotic solemnity. Then he turned wildly to fly and found himself gripped by Devine.

'Let me go,' he cried.

'Don't be a fool,' hissed Devine, offering the muzzle of his pistol. Then, as they struggled, one of the things sent its voice across the water to them: an enormous horn-like voice far above their heads.

'They want us to go across,' said Weston.

Both the men were forcing him to the water's edge. He planted his feet, bent his back and resisted donkey fashion. Now the other two were both in the water pulling him, and he was still on the land. He found that he was screaming. Suddenly a second, much louder and less articulate noise broke from the creatures on the far bank. Weston shouted, too, relaxed his grip on Ransom and suddenly fired his revolver not across the water but up it. Ransom saw why at the same moment.

A line of foam like the track of a torpedo was speeding towards them, and in the midst of it some large, shining beast. Devine shrieked a curse, slipped and collapsed into the water. Ransom saw a snapping jaw between them, and heard the deafening noise of Weston's revolver again and again beside him and, almost as loud, the clamour of the monsters on the far bank, who seemed to be taking to the water, too. He had had no need to make a decision. The moment he was free he had found himself automatically darting behind his captors, then behind the space-ship and on as fast as his legs could carry him into the utterly unknown beyond it. As he rounded the metal sphere a wild confusion of blue, purple, and red met his eyes. He did not slacken his pace for a moment's inspection. He found himself splashing through water and crying out not with pain but with surprise because the water was warm. In less than a minute he was climbing out on to dry land again. He was running up a steep incline. And now he was running through purple shadow between the stems of another forest of the huge plants.

Chapter 8

A MONTH of inactivity, a heavy meal and an unknown world do not help a man to run. Half an hour later, Ransom was walking, not running, through the forest, with a hand pressed to his aching side and his ears strained for any noise of pursuit. The clamour of revolver shots and voices behind him (not all human voices) had been succeeded first by rifle shots and calls at long intervals and then by utter silence. As far as eye could reach, he saw nothing but the stems of the great plants about him receding in the violet shade, and far overhead the multiple transparency of huge leaves filtering the sunshine to the solemn splendour of twilight in which he walked. Whenever he felt able, he ran again; the ground continued soft and springy, covered with the same resilient weed which was the first thing his hands had touched in Malacandra. Once or twice a small red creature scuttled across his path, but otherwise there seemed to be no life stirring in the wood; nothing to fear - except the fact of wandering unprovisioned and alone in a forest of unknown

vegetation thousands or millions of miles beyond the reach or knowledge of man.

But Ransom was thinking of 'sores' - for doubtless those were the sores, those creatures they had tried to give him to. They were quite unlike the horrors his imagination had conjured up, and for that reason had taken him off his guard. They appealed away from the Wellsian fantasies to an earlier, almost an infantile, complex of fears. Giants - ogres - ghosts - skeletons: those were its key words. Spooks on stilts, he said to himself; surrealistic bogy-men with their long faces. At the same time, the disabling panic of the first moments was ebbing away from him. The idea of suicide was now far from his mind; instead, he was determined to back his luck to the end. He prayed, and he felt his knife. He felt a strange emotion of confidence and affection towards himself - he checked himself on the point of saying, 'We'll stick to one another.'

The ground became worse and interrupted his meditation. He had been going gently upwards for some hours with steeper ground on his right, apparently half scaling, half skirting a hill. His path now began to cross a number of ridges, spurs doubtless of the higher ground on the right. He did not know why he should cross them, but for some reason he did; possibly a vague memory of earthly geography suggested that the lower ground would open out to bare places between wood and water where 'sores' would be more likely to catch him. As he continued crossing ridges and gullies he was struck with their extreme steepness; but somehow they were not very difficult to cross. He noticed, too, that even the smallest hummocks of earth were of an unearthly shape - too narrow, too pointed at the top and too small at the base: He remembered that the waves on the blue lakes had displayed a similar oddity. And glancing up at the purple leaves he saw the same theme of perpendicularity - the same rush to the sky - repeated there. They did not tip over at the ends; vast as they were, air was sufficient to support them so that the long aisles of the forest all rose to a kind of fan tracery. And the sores, likewise - he shuddered as he thought it - they too were madly elongated.

He had sufficient science to guess that he must be on a world lighter than the Earth, where less strength was needed and nature was set free to follow her skyward impulse on a superterrestrial scale. This set him wondering where he was. He could not remember whether Venus was larger or smaller than Earth, and he had an idea that she would be hotter than this. Perhaps he was on Mars; perhaps even on the Moon. The latter he at first rejected on the ground that, if it were so, he ought to have seen the Earth in the sky when they landed; but later he remembered having been told that one face of the Moon was always turned away from the Earth. For all he knew he was wandering on the Moon's outer side; and irrationally enough, this idea brought about him a bleak sense of desolation than he had yet felt.

Many of the gullies which he crossed now carried streams, blue hissing streams, all hastening to the lower ground on his left. Like the lakes they were warm, and the air was warm above them, so that as he climbed down and up the sides of the gullies he was continually changing temperatures. It was the contrast, as he crested the farther bank of one such small ravine, which first drew his attention to the growing chilliness of the forest; and as he looked about him he became certain that the light was failing, too. He had not taken night into his calculations. He had no means of guessing what night might be on Malacandra. As he stood gazing into the deepening gloom a sign of cold wind crept through the purple stems and set them all swaying, revealing once again the startling contrast between their size and their apparent flexibility and lightness. Hunger and

weariness, long kept at bay by the mingled fear and wonder of his situation, smote him suddenly. He shivered and forced himself to proceed. The wind increased. The mighty leaves danced and dipped above his head, admitting glimpses of a pale and then a paler sky; and then, discomfortingly, of a sky with one or two stars in it. The wood was no longer silent. His eyes darted hither and thither in search of an approaching enemy and discovered only how quickly the darkness grew upon him. He welcomed the streams now for their warmth.

It was this that first suggested to him a possible protection against the increasing cold. There was really no use in going farther; for all he knew he might as well be walking towards danger as away from it. All was danger; he was no safer travelling than resting. Beside some stream it might be warm enough to lie. He shuffled on to find another gully, and went so far that he began to think he had got out of the region of them. He had almost determined to turn back when the ground began falling steeply; he slipped, recovered and found himself on the bank of a torrent. The trees - for as 'trees' he could not help regarding them - did not quite meet overhead, and the water itself seemed to have some faintly phosphorescent quality, so that it was lighter here. The fall from tight to left was steep. Guided by some vague picnicker's hankering for a 'better' place, he went a few yards upstream. The valley grew steeper, and he came to a little cataract. He noticed dully that the water seemed to be descending a little too slowly for the incline, but he was too tired to speculate about it. The water was apparently hotter than that of the lake - perhaps nearer its subterranean source of heat. What he really wanted to know was whether he dared drink it. He was very thirsty by now; but it looked very poisonous, very unwatery. He would try not to drink it; perhaps he was so tired that thirst would let him sleep. He sank on his knees and bathed his hands in the warm torrent; then he rolled over in a hollow close beside the fall, and yawned.

The sound of his own voice yawning - the old sound heard in night nurseries, school dormitories and in so many bedrooms - liberated a flood of self-pity. He drew his knees up and hugged himself; he felt a sort of physical, almost a filial, love for his own body. He put his wristwatch to his ear and found that it had stopped. He wound it. Muttering, half whimpering to himself; he thought of men going to bed on the far-distant planet Earth - men in clubs, and liners, and hotels, married men, and small children who slept with nurses in the room, and warm, tobacco-smelling men tumbled together in forecastles and dug-outs. The tendency to talk to himself was irresistible... 'We'll look after you, Ransom... we'll stick together, old man.' It occurred to him that one of those creatures with snapping jaws might live in the stream. 'You're quite right, Ransom,' he answered in a mumble. 'It's not a safe place to spend the night. We'll just rest a bit till you feel better, then we'll go on again. Not now. Presently.'

Chapter 9

IT WAS thirst that woke him. He had slept warm, though his clothes were damp, and found himself lying in sunlight, the blue waterfall at his side dancing and coruscating with every transparent shade in the whole gamut of blue and flinging strange lights far up to the underside of the forest leaves. The realization of his position, as it rolled heavily back upon consciousness, was unbearable. If only he hadn't lost his nerve the sores would have killed him by now. Then he remembered with inexpressible relief that there was a man wandering in the wood - poor devil he'd be glad to see him. He would come up to him and say, 'Hullo, Ransom,' - he stopped, puzzled. No,

it was only himself: he was Ransom. Or was he? Who was the man whom he had led to a hot stream and tucked up in bed, telling him not to drink the strange water? Obviously some newcomer who didn't know the place as well as he. But whatever Ransom had told him, he was going to drink now. He lay down on the bank and plunged his face in the warm rushing liquid. It was good to drink. It had a strong mineral flavour, but it was very good. He drank again and found himself greatly refreshed and steadied. All that about the other Ransom was nonsense. He was quite aware of the danger of madness, and applied himself vigorously to his devotions and his toilet. Not that madness mattered much. Perhaps he was mad already, and not really on Malacandra but safe in bed in an English asylum. If only it might be so! He would ask Ransom - curse it! there his mind went playing the same trick again. He rose and began walking briskly away.

The delusions recurred every few minutes as long as this stage of his journey lasted. He learned to stand still mentally, as it were, and let them roll over his mind. It was no good bothering about them. When they were gone you could resume sanity again. Far more important was the problem of food. He tried one of the 'trees' with his knife. As he expected, it was toughly soft like a vegetable, not hard like wood. He cut a little piece out of it, and under this operation the whole gigantic organism vibrated to its top - it was like being able to shake the mast of a full-rigged ship with one hand. When he put it in his mouth he found it almost tasteless but by no means disagreeable, and for some minutes he munched away contentedly. But he made no progress. The stuff was quite unswallowable and could only be used as a chewing-gum. As such he used it, and after it many other pieces; not without some comfort.

It was impossible to continue yesterday's flight as a flight - inevitably it degenerated into an endless ramble, vaguely motivated by the search for food. The search was necessarily vague, since he did not know whether Malacandra held food for him nor how to recognize it if it did. He had one bad fright in the course of the morning, when, passing through a somewhat more open glade, he became aware first of a huge, yellow object, then of two, and then of an indefinite multitude coming towards him. Before he could fly he found himself in the midst of a herd of enormous pale furry creatures more like giraffes than anything else he could think of; except that they could and did raise themselves on their hind legs and even progress several paces in that position. They were slenderer, and very much higher, than giraffes, and were eating the leaves off the tops of the purple plants. They saw him and stared at him with their big liquid eyes, snorting in 'basso profondissimo', but had apparently no hostile intentions. Their appetite was voracious. In five minutes they had mutilated the tops of a few hundred 'trees' and admitted a new flood of sunlight into the forest. Then they passed on.

This episode had an infinitely comforting effect on Ransom. The planet was not, as he had begun to fear, lifeless except for 'sores'. Here was a very presentable sort of animal, an animal which man could probably tame, and whose food man could possibly share. If only it were possible to climb the 'trees'! He was staring about him with some idea of attempting this feat, when he noticed that the devastation wrought by the leaf-eating animals had opened a vista overhead beyond the plant tops to a collection of the same greenish-white objects which he had seen across the lake at their first landing.

This time they were much closer. They were enormously high, so that he had to throw back his head to see the top of them. They were something like pylons in shape, but solid; irregular in height and

grouped in an apparently haphazard and disorderly fashion. Some ended in points that looked from where he stood as sharp as needles, while others, after narrowing towards the summit, opened out again into knobs or platforms that seemed to his terrestrial eyes ready to fall at any moment. He noticed that the sides were rougher and more seamed with fissures than he had realized at first, and between two of them he saw a motionless line of twisting blue brightness - obviously a distant fall of water. It was this which finally convinced him that the things, in spite of their improbable shape, were mountains; and with that discovery the mere oddity of the prospect was swallowed up in the fantastic sublime. Here, he understood, was the full statement of that 'perpendicular' theme which beast and plant and earth all played on Malacandra - here in this riot of rock, leaping and surging skyward like solid jets from some rock fountain, and hanging by their own lightness in the air, so shaped, so elongated, that all terrestrial mountains must ever after seem to him to be mountains lying on their sides. He felt a lift and lightening at the heart.

But next moment his heart stood still. Against the pallid background of the mountains and quite close to him - for the mountains themselves seemed but a quarter of a mile away - a moving shape appeared. He recognized it instantly as it moved slowly (and, he thought, stealthily) between two of the denuded plant tops - the giant stature, the cadaverous leanness, the long, drooping, wizard-like profile of a 'sorn'. The head appeared to be narrow and conical; the hands or paws with which it parted the stems before it as it moved were thin, mobile, spidery and almost transparent. He felt an immediate certainty that it was looking for him. All this he took in in an infinitesimal time. The ineffaceable image was hardly stamped on his brain before he was running as hard as he could into the thickest of the forest.

He had no plan save to put as many miles as he could between himself and the sorn. He prayed fervently that there might be only one perhaps the wood was full of them - perhaps they had the intelligence to make a circle round him. No matter - there was nothing for it now but sheer running, running, knife in hand. The fear had all gone into action; emotionally he was cool and alert, and ready - as ready as he ever would be - for the last trial. His flight led him downhill at an ever-increasing speed; soon the incline was so steep that if his body had had terrestrial gravity he would have been compelled to take to his hands and knees and clamber down. Then he saw something gleaming ahead of him. A minute later he had emerged from the wood altogether; he was standing, blinking in the light of sun and water, on the shore of a broad river, and looking out on a flat landscape of inter-mingled river, lake, island and promontory - the same sort of country on which his eyes had first rested in Malacandra.

There was no sound of pursuit. Ransom dropped down on his stomach and drank, cursing a world where cold water appeared to be unobtainable. Then he lay still to listen and to recover his breath. His eyes were upon blue water. It was agitated. Circles shuddered and bubbles danced ten yards away from his face. Suddenly the water heaved and a round, shining, black thing like a cannonball came into sight. Then he saw eyes and mouth - a puffing mouth bearded with bubbles. More of the thing came up out of the water. It was gleaming black. Finally, it splashed and wallowed to the shore and rose, steaming, on its hind legs - six or seven feet high and too thin for its height, like everything in Malacandra. It had a coat of thick black hair, lucid as sealskin, very short legs with webbed feet, a broad beaver-like or fish-like tail, strong fore-limbs with webbed claws or fingers, and some complication halfway up the belly which Ransom took to be its genitals. It was something like a penguin, something like an

otter, something like a seal; the slenderness and flexibility of the body suggested a giant stoat. The great round head, heavily whiskered, was mainly responsible for the suggestion of seal; but it was higher in the forehead than a seal's and the mouth was smaller.

There comes a point at which the actions of fear and precaution are purely conventional, no longer felt as terror or hope by the fugitive. Ransom lay perfectly still, pressing his body as well down into the weed as he could, in obedience to a wholly theoretical idea that he might thus pass unobserved. He felt little emotion. He noted in a dry, objective way that this was apparently to be the end of his story - caught between a 'sorn' from the land and a big, black animal from the water. He had, it is true, a vague notion that the jaws and mouth of the beast were not those of a carnivore; but he knew that he was too ignorant of zoology to do more than guess.

Then something happened which completely altered his state of mind. The creature, which was still steaming and shaking itself on the bank and had obviously not seen him, opened its mouth and began to make noises. This in itself was not remarkable; but a lifetime of linguistic study assured Ransom almost at once that these were articulate noises. The creature was talking. It had language. If you are not yourself a philologist, I am afraid you must take on trust the prodigious emotional consequences of this realization in Ransom's mind. A new world he had already seen - but a new, an extra-terrestrial, a non-human language was a different matter. Somehow he had not thought of this in connection with the sorns; now, it flashed upon him like a revelation. The love of knowledge is a kind of madness. In the fraction of a second which it took Ransom to decide that the creature was really talking, and while he still knew that he might be facing instant death, his imagination had leaped over every fear and hope and probability of his situation to follow the dazzling project of making a Malacandrian grammar. An Introduction to the Malacandrian Language - The Lunar Verb - A Concise Martian-English Dictionary .. . the titles flitted through his mind. And what might one not discover from the speech of a non-human race? The very form of language itself, the principle behind all possible languages, might fall into his hands. Unconsciously he raised himself on his elbow and stared at the black beast. It became silent. The huge bullet head swung round and lustrous amber eyes fixed him. There was no wind on the lake or in the wood. Minute after minute in utter silence the representatives of two so far-divided species stared each into the other's face.

Ransom rose to his knees. The creature leaped back, watching him intently, and they became motionless again. Then it came a pace nearer, and Ransom jumped up and retreated, but not far; curiosity held him. He summoned up his courage and advanced holding out his hand; the beast misunderstood the gesture. It backed into the shallows of the lake and he could see the muscles tightened under its sleek pelt, ready for sudden movement. But there it stopped; it, too, was in the grip of curiosity. Neither dared let the other approach, yet each repeatedly felt the impulse to do so himself, and yielded to it. It was foolish, frightening, ecstatic and unbearable all in one moment. It was more than curiosity. It was like a courtship - like the meeting of the first man and the first woman in the world; it was like something beyond that; so natural is the contact of sexes, so limited the strangeness, so shallow the reticence, so mild the repugnance to be overcome, compared with the first tingling intercourse of two different, but rational, species.

The creature suddenly turned and began walking away. A disappointment like despair smote Ransom. 'Come back,' he shouted in English. The thing turned, spread out its arms and spoke again in

its unintelligible language; then it resumed its progress. It had not gone more than twenty yards away when Ransom saw it stoop down and pick something up. It returned. In its hand (he was already thinking of its webbed fore-paw as a hand) it was carrying what appeared to be a shell - the shell of some oyster-like creature, but rounder and more deeply domed. It dipped the shell in the lake and raised it full of water. Then it held the shell to its own middle and seemed to be pouring something into the water. Ransom thought with disgust that it was urinating in the shell. Then he realized that the protuberances on the creature's belly were not genital organs nor organs at all; it was wearing a kind of girdle hung with various pouch-like objects, and it was adding a few drops of liquid from one of these to the water in the shell. This done it raised the shell to its black lips and drank - not throwing back its head like a man but bowing it and sucking like a horse. When it had finished it refilled the shell and once again added a few drops from the receptacle - it seemed to be some kind of skin bottle - at its waist. Supporting the shell in its two arms, it extended them towards Ransom. The intention was unmistakable. Hesitantly, almost shyly, he advanced and took the cup. His fingertips touched the webbed membrane of the creature's paws and an indescribable thrill of mingled attraction and repulsion ran through him; then he drank. Whatever had been added to the water was plainly alcoholic; he had never enjoyed a drink so much.

'Thank you,' he said in English. 'Thank you very much.'

The creature struck itself on the chest and made a noise. Ransom did not at first realize what it meant. Then he saw that it was trying to teach him its name - presumably the name of the species.

"Hross,' it said, 'hross,' and flapped itself.

'Hross,' repeated Ransom, and pointed at it; then 'Man,' and struck his own chest.

'Hma - hma - hman,' imitated the hross. It picked up a handful of earth, where earth appeared between weed and water at the bank of the lake.

'Handra,' it said. Ransom repeated the word. Then an idea occurred to him.

'Malacandra?' he said in an inquiring voice. The hross rolled its eyes and waved its arms, obviously in an effort to indicate the whole landscape. Ransom was getting on well. Handra was earth the element; Malacandra the 'earth' or planet as a whole. Soon he would find out what Malac meant. In the meantime 'H disappears after C' he noted, and made his first step in Malacandrian phonetics. The hross was now trying to teach him the meaning of 'handramit'. He recognized the root handra- again (and noted 'They have suffixes as well as prefixes'), but this time he could make nothing of the hross's gestures, and remained ignorant what a handramit might be. He took the initiative by opening his mouth, pointing to it and going through the pantomime of eating. The Malacandrian word for food or eat which he got in return proved to contain consonants unreproducible by a human mouth, and Ransom, continuing the pantomime, tried to explain that his interest was practical as well as philological. The hross understood him, though he took some time to understand from its gestures that it was inviting him to follow it. In the end, he did so.

It took him only as far as where it had got the shell, and here, to his not very reasonable astonishment, Ransom found that a kind of boat was moored. Man-like, when he saw the artefact, he felt more certain of the hross's rationality. He even valued the creature the more because the boat, allowing for the usual Malacandrian height and flimsiness, was really very like an earthly boat; only later did he set himself the question, 'What else could a boat be like?' The hross produced an oval platter of some tough but slightly flexible material,

covered it with strips of a spongy, orange coloured substance and gave it to Ransom. He cut a convenient length off with his knife and began to eat; doubtfully at first and then ravenously. It had a bean-like taste but sweeter; good enough for a starving man. Then, as his hunger ebbed, the sense of his situation returned with dismaying force. The huge, seal-like creature seated beside him became unbearably ominous. It seemed friendly; but it was very big, very black, and he knew nothing at all about it. What were its relations to the sorns? And was it really as rational as it appeared?

It was only many days later that Ransom discovered how to deal with these sudden losses of confidence. They arose when the rationality of the hross tempted you to think of it as a man. Then it became abominable - a man seven feet high, with a snaky body, covered, face and all, with thick black animal hair, and whiskered like a cat. But starting from the other end you had an animal with everything an animal ought to have - glossy coat, liquid eye, sweet breath and whitest teeth - and added to all these, as though Paradise had never been lost and earliest dreams were true, the charm of speech and reason. Nothing could be more disgusting than the one impression; nothing more delightful than the other. It all depended on the point of view.

Chapter 10

WHEN RANSOM had finished his meal and drunk again of the strong waters of Malacandra, his host rose and entered the boat. He did this headfirst like an animal, his sinuous body allowing him to rest his hands on the bottom of the boat while his feet were still planted on the land. He completed the operation by flinging rump, tail and hind legs all together about five feet into the air and then whisking them neatly on board with an agility which would have been quite impossible to an animal of his bulk on Earth.

Having got into the boat, he proceeded to get out again and then pointed to it. Ransom understood that he was being invited to follow his example. The question which he wanted to ask above all others could not, of course, be put. Were the hrossa (he discovered later that this was the plural of hross) the dominant species on Malacandra, and the sorns, despite their more man-like shape, merely a semi-intelligent kind of cattle? Fervently he hoped that it might be so. On the other hand, the hrossa might be the domestic animals of the sorns, in which case the latter would be superintelligent. His whole imaginative training somehow encouraged him to associate superhuman intelligence with monstrosity of form and ruthlessness of will. To step on board the hross's boat might mean surrendering himself to sorns at the other end of the journey. On the other hand, the hross's invitation might be a golden opportunity of leaving the sorn-haunted forests forever. And by this time the hross itself was becoming puzzled at his apparent inability to understand it. The urgency of its signs finally determined him. The thought of parting from the hross could not be seriously entertained; its animality shocked him in a dozen ways, but his longing to learn its language, and, deeper still, the shy, ineluctable fascination of unlike for unlike, the sense that the key to prodigious adventure was being put in his hands - all this had really attached him to it by bonds stronger than he knew. He stepped into the boat.

The boat was without seats. It had a very high prow, an enormous expanse of free-board, and what seemed to Ransom an impossibly shallow draught.

Indeed, very little of it even rested on the water; he was reminded of a modern European speed-boat. It was moored by something that

looked at first like rope; but the hross cast off not by untying but by simply pulling the apparent rope in two as one might pull in two a piece of soft toffee or a roll of plasticine. It then squatted down on its rump in the stern-sheets and took up a paddle - a paddle of such enormous blade that Ransom wondered how the creature could wield it, till he again remembered how light a planet they were on. The length of the hross's body enabled him to work freely in the squatting position despite the high gunwale. It paddled quickly.

For the first few minutes they passed between banks wooded with the purple trees, upon a waterway not more than a hundred yards in width. Then they doubled a promontory, and Ransom saw that they were emerging on to a much larger sheet of water - a great lake, almost a sea. The hross, now taking great care and often changing direction and looking about it, paddled well out from the shore. The dazzling blue expanse grew moment by moment wider around them; Ransom could not look steadily at it. The warmth from the water was oppressive; he removed his cap and jerkin, and by so doing surprised the hross very much.

He rose cautiously to a standing position and surveyed the Malacandrian prospect which had opened on every side. Before and behind them lay the glittering lake, here studded with islands, and there smiling uninterruptedly at the pale blue sky; the sun, he noticed, was almost immediately overhead - they were in the Malacandrian tropics. At each end the lake vanished into more complicated groupings of land and water, softly, featherily embossed in the purple giant weed. But this marshy land or chain of archipelagoes, as he now beheld it, was bordered on each side with jagged walls of the pale green mountains, which he could still hardly call mountains, so tall they were, so gaunt, sharp, narrow and seemingly unbalanced. On the starboard they were not more than a mile away and seemed divided from the water only by a narrow strip of forest; to the left they were far more distant, though still impressive - perhaps seven miles from the boat. They ran on each side of the watered country as far as he could see, both onwards and behind them; he was sailing, in fact, on the flooded floor of a majestic canyon nearly ten miles wide and of unknown length. Behind and sometimes above the mountain peaks he could make out in many places, great billowy piles of the rose-red substance which he had yesterday mistaken for cloud. The mountains, in fact, seemed to have no fall of ground behind them; they were rather the serrated bastion of immeasurable tablelands, higher in many places than themselves, which made the Malacandrian horizon left and right as far as eye could reach. Only straight ahead and straight astern was the planet cut with the vast gorge, which now appeared to him only as a rut or crack in the tableland.

He wondered what the cloud-like red masses were and endeavoured to ask by signs. The question was, however, too particular for sign-language. The hross, with a wealth of gesticulation - its arms or fore-limbs were more flexible than his and in quick motion almost whip-like - made it clear that it supposed him to be asking about the high ground in general. It named this harandra. The low, watered country, the gorge or canyon, appeared to be handramit. Ransom grasped the implications, handra earth, harandra high earth, mountain, handramit, low earth, valley. Highland and lowland, in fact. The peculiar importance of the distinction in Malacandrian geography he learned later.

By this time the hross had attained the end of its careful navigation. They were a couple of miles from land when it suddenly ceased paddling and sat tense with its paddle poised in the air; at the same moment the boat quivered and shot forward as if from a catapult.

They had apparently availed themselves of some current. In a few seconds they were racing forward at some fifteen miles an hour and rising and falling on the strange, sharp, perpendicular waves of Malacandra with a jerky motion quite unlike that of the choppiest sea that Ransom had ever met on Earth. It reminded him of disastrous experiences on a trotting horse in the army; and it was intensely disagreeable. He gripped the gunwale with his left hand and mopped his brow with his right the damp warmth from the water had become very troublesome. He wondered if the Malacandrian food, and still more the Malacandrian drink, were really digestible by a human stomach. Thank heaven he was a good sailor! At least a fairly good sailor. At least - Hastily he leaned over the side. Heat from blue water smote up to his face; in the depth he thought he saw eels playing: long, silver eels. The worst happened not once but many times. In his misery he remembered vividly the shame of being sick at a children's party ... long ago in the star where he was born. He felt a similar shame now. It was not thus that the first representative of hummity would choose to appear before a new species. Did hrossa vomit too? Would it know what he was doing? Shaking and groaning, he turned back into the boat. The creature was keeping an eye on him, but its face seemed to him expressionless; it was only long after that he learned to read the Malacandrian face. The current meanwhile seemed to be gathering speed. In a huge curve they swung across the lake to within a furlong of the farther shore, then back again, and once more onward, in giddy spirals and figures of eight, while purple wood and jagged mountain raced backwards and Ransom loathingly associated their sinuous course with the nauseous curling of the silver eels. He was rapidly losing all interest in Malacandra: the distinction between Earth and other planets seemed of no importance compared with the awful distinction of earth and water. He wondered despairingly whether the hross habitually lived on water. Perhaps they were going to spend the night in this detestable boat ...

His sufferings did not, in fact, last long. There came a blessed cessation of the choppy movement and a slackening of speed, and he saw that the hross was backing water rapidly. They were still afloat, with shores close on each side; between them a narrow channel in which the water hissed furiously - apparently a shallow. The hross jumped overboard, splashing abundance of warm water into the ship; Ransom, more cautiously and shakily, clambered after it. He was about up to his knees. To his astonishment, the hross, without any appearance of effort, lifted the boat bodily on to the top of its head, steaded it with one fore-paw, and proceeded, erect as a Grecian caryatid, to the land. They walked forward - if the swinging movements of the hross's short legs from its flexible hips could be called walking - beside the channel. In a few minutes Ransom saw a new landscape.

The channel was not only a shallow but a rapid - the first, indeed, of a series of rapids by which the water descended steeply for the next half mile. The ground fell away before them and the canyon - or handramit - continued at a very much lower level. Its walls, however, did not sink with it, and from his present position Ransom got a clearer notion of the lie of the land. Far more of the highlands to left and right were visible, sometimes covered with the cloud-like red swellings, but more often level, pale and barren to where the smooth line of their horizon marched with the sky. The mountain peaks now appeared only as the fringe or border of the true highland, surrounding it as the lower teeth surround the tongue. He was struck by the vivid contrast between harandra and handramit. Like a rope of jewels the gorge spread beneath him, purple, sapphire blue, yellow and pinkish white, a rich and variegated inlay of wooded land and disappearing, reappearing, ubiquitous water. Malacandra was less

like earth than he had been beginning to suppose. The handramit was no true valley rising and falling with the mountain chain it belonged to. Indeed, it did not belong to a mountain chain. It was only an enormous crack or ditch, of varying depth, running through the high and level harandra; the latter, he now began to suspect, was the true 'surface' of the planet - certainly would appear as surface to a terrestrial astronomer. To the handramit itself there seemed no end; uninterrupted and very nearly straight, it ran before him, a narrowing line of colour, to where it clove the horizon with a V-shaped indenture. There must be a hundred miles of it in view, he thought; and he reckoned that he had put some thirty or forty miles of it behind him since yesterday.

All this time they were descending beside the rapids to where the water was level again and the hross could relaunch its skiff. During this walk Ransom learned the words for boat, rapid, water, sun and carry; the latter, as his first verb, interested him particularly. The hross was also at some pains to impress upon him an association or relation which it tried to convey by repeating the contrasted pairs of words hrossa-handramit and seroni-harondra. Ransom understood him to mean that the hrossa lived down in the handramit and the seroni up on the harandra. What the deuce were seroni, he wondered. The open reaches of the harandra did not look as if anything lived up there. Perhaps the hrossa had a mythology - he took it for granted they were on a low cultural level - and the seroni were gods or demons.

The journey continued, with frequent, though decreasing, recurrences of nausea for Ransom. Hours later he realized that seroni might very well be the plural of sorn.

The sun declined, on their right. It dropped quicker than on Earth, or at least on those parts of Earth that Ransom knew, and in the cloudless sky it had little sunset pomp about it. In some other queer way which he could not specify it differed from the sun he knew; but even while he speculated the needle-like mountain tops stood out black against it and the handramit grew dark, though eastward (to their left) the high country of the harandra still shone pale rose, remote and smooth and tranquil, like another and more spiritual world.

Soon he became aware that they were landing again, that they were treading solid ground, were making for the depth of the purple forest. The motion of the boat still worked in his fantasy and the earth seemed to sway beneath him; this, with weariness and twilight, made the rest of the journey dream-like. Light began to glare in his eyes. A fire was turning. It illuminated the huge leaves overhead, and he saw stars beyond them. Dozens of hrossa seemed to have surrounded him; more animal, less human, in their multitude and their close neighbourhood to him, than his solitary guide had seemed. He felt some fear, but more a ghastly inappropriateness. He wanted men - any men, even Weston and Devine. He was too tired to do anything about these meaningless bullet heads and furry faces - could make no response at all. And then, lower down, closer to him, more mobile, came in throngs the whelps, the puppies, the cubs, whatever you called them. Suddenly his mood changed. They were jolly little things. He laid his hand on one black head and smiled; the creature scurried away.

He never could remember much of that evening. There was more eating and drinking, there was continual coming and going of black forms, there were strange eyes luminous in the firelight; finally, there was sleep in some dark, apparently covered place.

Chapter 11

EVER SINCE he awoke on the space-ship Ransom had been thinking about the amazing adventure of going to another planet, and about

his chances of returning from it. What he had not thought about was being on it. It was with a kind of stupefaction each morning that he found himself neither arriving in, nor escaping from, but simply living on, Malacandra; waking, sleeping, eating, swimming, and even, as the days passed, talking. The wonder of it smote him most strongly when he found himself about three weeks after his arrival, actually going for a walk. A few weeks later he had his favourite walks, and his favourite foods; he was beginning to develop habits. He knew a male from a female hross at sight, and even individual differences were becoming plain. Hyoi who had first found him - miles away to the north - was a very different person from the grey-muzzled, venerable Hnohra who was daily teaching him the language; and the young of the species were different again. They were delightful. You could forget all about the rationality of hrossa in dealing with them. Too young to trouble him with the baffling enigma of reason in an inhuman form, they solaced his loneliness, as if he had been allowed to bring a few dogs with him from the Earth. The cubs, on their part, felt the liveliest interest in the hairless goblin which had appeared among them. With them, and therefore indirectly with their dams, he was a brilliant success.

Of the community in general his earlier impressions were all gradually being corrected. His first diagnosis of their culture was what he called 'old stone age'. The few cutting instruments they possessed were made of stone. They seemed to have no pottery but a few clumsy vessels used for boiling, and boiling was the only cookery they attempted. Their common drinking vessel, dish and ladle all in one was the oyster-like shell in which he had first tasted bross hospitality; the fish which it contained was their only animal food. Vegetable fare they had in great plenty and variety, some of it delicious. Even the pinkish-white weed which covered the whole handramit was edible at a pinch, so that if he had starved before Hyoi found him he would have starved amidst abundance. No hross, however, ate the weed (honodrashrud) for choice, though it might be used 'faute de mieux' on a journey. Their dwellings were beehive-shaped huts of stiff leaf and the villages - there were several in the neighbourhood - were always built beside rivers for warmth and well upstream towards the walls of the handramit where the water was hottest. They slept on the ground. They seemed to have no arts except a kind of poetry and music which was practised almost every evening by a team or troupe of four hrossa.

One recited half chanting at great length while the other three, sometimes singly and sometimes antiphonally, interrupted him from time to time with song. Ransom could not find out whether these interruptions were simply lyrical interludes or dramatic dialogue arising out of the leaders' narrative. He could make nothing of the music. The voices were not disagreeable and the scale seemed adapted to human ears, but the time pattern was meaningless to his sense of rhythm. The occupations of the tribe or family were at first mysterious. People were always disappearing for a few days and reappearing again. There was a little fishing and much journeying in boats of which he never discovered the object. Then one day he saw a kind of caravan of hrossa setting out by land each with a load of vegetable food on its head. Apparently, there was some kind of trade in Malacandra.

He discovered their agriculture in the first week. About a mile down the handramit one came to broad lands free of forest and clothed for many miles together in low pulpy vegetation in which yellow, orange and blue predominated. Later on, there were lettuce-like plants about the height of a terrestrial birch tree. Where one of these overhung the warmth of water you could step into one of the lower leaves and lie deliciously as in a gently moving - fragrant hammock.

Elsewhere it was not warm enough to sit still for long out of doors; the general temperature of the handramit was that of a fine winter's morning on Earth. These food-producing areas were worked communally by the surrounding villages, and division of labour had been carried to a higher point than he expected. Cutting, drying, storing, transport and something like manuring were all carried on, and he suspected that some at least of the water channels were artificial.

But the real revolution in his understanding of the hrossa began when he had learned enough of their language to attempt some satisfaction of their curiosity about himself. In answer to their questions he began by saying that he had come out of the sky. Hnohra immediately asked from which planet or earth (handra). Ransom, who had deliberately given a childish version of the truth in order to adapt it to the supposed ignorance of his audience, was a little annoyed to find Hnohra painfully explaining to him that he could not live in the sky because there was no air in it; he might have come through the sky but he must have come from a handra. He was quite unable to point Earth out to them in the night sky. They seemed surprised at his inability, and repeatedly pointed out to him a bright planet low on the western horizon - a little south of where the sun had gone down. He was surprised that they selected a planet instead of a mere star and stuck to their choice; could it be possible that they nnderstood astronomy? Unfortunately, he still knew too little of the language to explore their knowledge. He turned the conversation by asking them the name of the bright southern planet, and was told that it was Thulcandra - the silent world or planet.

'Why do you call it Thulc?' he asked. 'Why silent?' No one knew.

'The seroni know,' said Hnohra. 'That is the sort of thing they know.'

Then he was asked how he had come, and made a very poor attempt at describing the spaceship - but again:

'The seroni would know.'

Had he come alone? No, he had come with two others of his kind - bad men ('bent' men was the nearest hrossian equivalent) who tried to kill him, but he had run away from them. The hrossa found this very difficult, but all finally agreed that he ought to go to Oyarsa. Oyarsa would protect him. Ransom asked who Oyarsa was.
Slowly, and with many misunderstandings, he hammered out the information that Oyarsa (1) lived in Meldilorn; (2) knew everything and ruled everyone; (3) had always been there; and (4) was not a hross, nor one of the seroni. Then Ransom, following his own idea, asked if Oyarsa had made the world. The hrossa almost barked in the fervour of their denial. Did people in Thulcandra not know that Maleldil the Young had made and still ruled the world? Even a child knew that. Where did Maleldil live, Ransom asked.
'With the Old One.'

And who was the Old One? Ransom did not understand the answer. He tried again.

'Where was the Old One?'

'He is not that sort,' said Hnohra, 'that he has to live anywhere,' and proceeded to a good deal which Ransom did not follow. But he followed enough to feel once more a certain irritation. Ever since he had discovered the rationality of the hrossa he had been haunted by a conscientious scruple as to whether it might not be his duty to undertake their religious instruction; now, as a result of his tentative efforts, he found himself being treated as if he were the savage and being given a first sketch of civilized religion - a sort of hrossian

equivalent of the shorter catechism. It became plain that Maleldil was a spirit without body, parts or passions.

'He is not a hnau,' said the hrossa.

'What is hnau?' asked Ransom.

'You are huan. I am hnau. The seroni are hnau. The pfifltriggi are hnau.' 'Pfifltriggi?' said Ransom.

'More than ten days' journey to the west,' said Hnohra. 'The harandra sinks down not into the handramit but into a broad place, an open place, spreading every way. Five days' journey from the north to the south of it; ten days' journey from the east to the west. The forests are of other colours there than here, they are blue and green. It is very deep there; it goes to the roots of the world. The best things that can be dug out of the earth are there. The pfiftriggi live there. They delight in digging. What they dig they soften with fire and make things of it. They are little people, smaller than you, long in the snout, pale, busy. They have long limbs in front. No hnau can match them in making and shaping things as none can match us in singing. But let 'Hman' see.'

He turned and spoke to one of the younger hrossa and presently, passed from hand to hand, there came to him a little bowl. He held it close to the firelight and examined it. It was certainly of gold, and Ransom realized the meaning of Devine's interest in Malacandra.

'Is there much of this thing?' he asked.

Yes, he was told, it was washed down in most of the rivers; but the best and most was among the Pfifltriggi, and it was they who were skilled in it. Arbol hru, they called it - Sun's blood. He looked at the bowl again. It was covered with fine etching. He saw pictures of hrossa and of smaller, almost frog-like animals; and then, of sorns. He pointed to the latter inquiringly.

'Seroni,' said the hrossa, confirming his suspicions. They live up almost on the harandra. In the big caves. The frog-like animals - or tapir-headed frog-bodied animals - were pftfltriggi. Ransom turned it over in his mind. On Malacandra, apparently, three distinct species had reached rationality, and none of them had yet exterminated the other two. It concerned him intensely to find out which was the real master.

'Which of the hnan rule?' he asked.

'Oyarsa rules,' was the reply.

'Is he hnau?'

This puzzled them a little. The seroni, they thought, would be better at that kind of question. Perhaps Oyarsa was hnau, but a very different hnau. He had no death and no young.

'These Seroni know more than the hrossa?' asked Ransom.

This produced more a debate than an answer. What emerged finally was that the seroni or sorns were perfectly helpless in a boat, and could not fish to save their lives, could hardly swim, could make no poetry, and even when hrossa had made it for them could understand only the inferior sorts; but they were admittedly good at finding out things about the stars and understanding the darker utterances of Oyarsa and telling what happened in Malacandra long ago - longer ago than anyone could remember.

'Ah - the intelligentsia,' thought Ransom. 'They must be the real rulers. However it is disguised.'

He tried to ask what would happen if the sorns used their wisdom to make the hrossa do things - this was as far as he could get in his

halting Malacandrian. The question did not sound nearly so urgent in this form as it would have done if he had been able to say 'used their scientific resources for the exploitation of their uncivilized neighbours.' But he might have spared his pains. The mention of the sorns' inadequate appreciation of poetry had diverted the whole conversation into literary channels. Of the heated, and apparently technical, discussion which followed he understood not a syllable.

Naturally his conversations with the hrossa did not all turn on Malacandra. He had to repay them with information about Barth. He was hampered in this both by the humiliating discoveries which he was constantly making of his own ignorance about his native planet, and partly by his determination to conceal some of the truth. He did not want to tell them too much of our human wars and industrialisms. He remembered how H. G. Wells's Cavor had met his end on the Moon; also he felt shy. A sensation akin to that of physical nakedness came over him whenever they questioned him too closely about men - the 'hmana' as they called them. Moreover, he was determined not to let them know that he had been brought there to be given to the sorns; for he was becoming daily more certain that these were the dominant species. What he did tell them fired the imagination of the hrossa: they all began making poems about the strange handra where the plants were hard like stone and the earth-weed green like rock and the waters cold and salt, and hmana, lived out on top, on the harandra.

They were even more interested in what he had to tell them of the aquatic animal with snapping jaws which he had fled from in their own world and even in their own handramit. It was a hnakra, they all agreed. They were intensely excited. There had not been a hnakra in the valley for many years. The youth of the hrossa got out their weapons primitive harpoons with points of bone - and the very cubs began playing at hnakra-hunting in the shallows. Some of the mothers showed signs of anxiety and wanted the cubs to be kept out of the water, but in general the news of the hnakra seemed to be immensely popular. Hyoi set off at once to do something to his boat and Ransom accompanied him. He wished to make himself useful, and was already beginning to have some vague capacity with the primitive hrossian tools. They walked together to Hyoi's creek, a stone's throw through the forest.

On the way, where the path was single and Ransom was following Hyoi, they passed a little she-hross, not much more than a cub. She spoke as they passed, but not to them: her eyes were on a spot about two yards away.

'Who do you speak to, Hrikki?' said Ransom.

'To the eldil.'

'Where?'

'Did you not see him?'

'I saw nothing.'

'There! There!' she cried suddenly. 'Ah! He is gone. Did you not see

him?' 'I saw no one.

'Hyoi,' said the cub, 'the hman cannot see the eldil!'

But Hyoi, continuing steadily on his way, was already out of earshot, and had apparently noticed nothing. Ransome concluded that Hrikki was 'pretending' like the young of his own species. In a few moments he rejoined his companion.

Chapter 12

THEY WORKED hard at Hyoi's boat till noon and then spread themselves on the weed close to the warmth of the creek, and began their midday meal. The war-like nature of their preparations suggested many questions to Ransom. He knew no word for war, but he managed to make Hyoi understand what he wanted to know. Did seroni and hrossa and pftfltriggi ever go out like this, with weapons, against each other?

'What for?' asked Hyoi.

It was difficult to explain. 'If both wanted one thing and neither would give it,' said Ransom, 'would the other at last come with force? Would they say, give it or we kill you?' 'What sort of thing?'

'Well - food, perhaps.'

'If the other hnau wanted food, why should we not give it to them? We often do.'

'But how if we had not enough for ourselves?'

'But Maleldil will not stop the plants growing.'

'Hyoi, if you had more and more young, would Maleldil broaden the handramit and make enough plants for them all?'

'The seroni know that sort of thing. But why should we have more young?' Ransom found this difficult. At last he said:

'Is the begetting of young not a pleasure among the hrossa?'

'A very great one, Hman. This is what we call love.'

'If a thing is a pleasure, a hman wants it again. He might want the pleasure more often than the number of young that could be fed.' It took Hyoi a long time to get the point.

'You mean,' he said slowly, 'that he might do it not only in one or two years of his life but again?'

'Yes.'

'But why? Would he want his dinner all day or want to sleep after he had slept? I do not understand.'

'But a dinner comes every day. This love, you say, comes only once while the hross lives?'

'But it takes his whole life. When he is young he has to look for his mate; and then he has to court her; then he hegets young; then he rears them; then he remembers all this, and boils it inside him and makes it into poems and wisdom.'

'But the pleasure he must be content only to remember?'

'That is like saying "My food I must be content only to eat."'

'I do not understand.'

'A pleasure is full grown only when it is remembered. You are speaking, Hman, as if the pleasure were one thing and the memory another. It is all one thing. The seroni could say it better than I say it now. Not better than I could say it in a poem. What you call remembering is the last part of the pleasure, as the 'crah' is the last part of a poem. When you and I met, the meeting was over very shortly, it was nothing. Now it is growing something as we remember it. But still we know very little about it. What it will be when I remember it as I lie down to die, what it makes in me all my days till then - that is the real meeting. The other is only the beginning of it. You say you have poets in your world. Do they not teach you this?'

'Perhaps some of them do,' said Ransom. 'But even in a poem does a hross never long to hear one splendid line over again?'

Hyoi's reply unfortunately turned on one of those points in their language which Ransom had not mastered. There were two verbs which both, as far as he could see, meant to long or yearn; but the hrossa drew sharp distinction, even an opposition, between them. Hyoi seemed to him merely to be saying that everyone would long for it (wondelone) but no one in his senses could long for it (hluntheline).

'And indeed,' he continued, 'the poem is a good example. For the most splendid line becomes fully splendid only by means of all the lines after it; if you went back to it you would find it less splendid than you thought. You would kill it. I mean in a good poem.'

'But in a bent poem, Hyoi?'

'A bent poem is not listened to, Hman.'

'And how of love in a bent life?'

'How could the life of a hnau be bent?'

'Do you say, Hyoi, that there are no bent hrossa?'

Hyoi reflected. 'I have heard,' he said at last, 'of something like what you mean. It is said that sometimes here and there a cub at a certain age gets strange twists in him. I have heard of one that wanted to eat earth; there might, perhaps, be somewhere a hross likewise that wanted to have the years of love prolonged. I have not heard of it, but it might be. I have heard of something stranger. There is a poem about a hross who lived long ago, in another handramit, who saw things all made two - two suns in the sky, two heads on a neck; and last of all they say that he fell into such a frenzy that he desired two mates. I do not ask you to believe it, but that is the story: that he loved two hressni.'

Ransom pondered this. Here, unless Hyoi was deceiving him, was a species naturally continent, naturally monogamous. And yet, was it so strange? Some animals, he knew, had regular breeding seasons; and if nature could perform the miracle of turning the sexual impulse outward at all, why could she not go further and fix it, not morally but instinctively, to a single object? He even remembered dimly having heard that some terrestrial animals, some of the 'lower' animals, were naturally monogamous. Among the hrossa, anyway, it was obvious that unlimited breeding and promiscuity were as rare as the rarest perversions. At last it dawned upon him that it was not they, but his own species, that were the puzzle. That the hrossa should have such instincts was mildly surprising; but how came it that the instincts of the hrossa so closely resembled the unattained ideals of that far-divided species Man whose instincts were so deplorably different? What was the history of Man? But Hyoi was speaking again.

'Undoubtedly,' he said. 'Maleldil made us so. How could there ever be enough to eat if everyone had twenty young? And how could we endure to live and let time pass if we were always crying for one day or one year to come back - if we did not know that every day in a life fills the whole life with expectation and memory and that these are that day?'

'All the same,' said Ransom, unconsciously nettled on behalf of his own world, 'Maleldil has let in the hnahra.'

'Oh, but that is so different. I long to kill this hnakra as he also longs to kill me. I hope that my ship will be the first and I first in my ship with my straight spear when the black jaws snap. And if he kills me, my people will mourn and my brothers will desire still more to kill him. But they will not wish that there were no hneraki; nor do I. How can I make you understand, when you do not understand the poets?

The hnakra is our enemy, but he is also our beloved. We feel in our hearts his joy as he looks down from the mountain of water in the north where he was born; we leap with him when he jumps the falls; and when winter comes, and the lake smokes higher than our heads, it is with his eyes that we see it and know that his roaming time is come. We hang images of him in our houses, and the sign of all the hrossa is a hnakra. In him the spirit of the valley lives; and our young play at being hneraki as soon as they can splash in the shallows.'

'And then he kills them?'

'Not often them. The hrossa would be bent hrossa if they let him get so near. Long before he had come down so far we should have sought him out. No, Hman, it is not a few deaths roving the world around him that make a hnau miserable. It is a bent hnau that would blacken the world. And I say also this. I do not think the forest would be so bright, nor the water so warm, nor love so sweet, if there were no danger in the lakes. I will tell you a day in my life that has shaped me; such a day as comes only once, like love, or serving Oyarsa in Meldilorn. Then I was young, not much more than a cub, when I went far, far up the handramit to the land where stars shine at midday and even water is cold. A great waterfall I climbed. I stood on the shore of Balki the pool, which is the place of most awe in all worlds. The walls of it go up for ever and ever and huge and holy images are cut in them, the work of old times. There is the fall called the Mountain of Water. Because I have stood there alone, Maleldil and I, for even Oyarsa sent me no word, my heart has been higher, my song deeper, all my days. But do you think it would have been so unless I had known that in Balki hneraki dwelled? There I drank life because death was in the pool. That was the best of drinks save one.

'What one?' asked Ransom.

'Death itself in the day I drink it and go to Maleldil.'

Shortly after that they rose and resumed their work. The sun was declining as they came back through the wood. It occurred to Ransom to ask Hyoi a question.

'Hyoi,' he said, 'it comes into my head that when I first saw you and before you saw me, you were already speaking. That was how I knew that you were hnau, for otherwise I should have thought you a beast, and run away. But who were you speaking to?'

'To an eldil.'

'What is that? I saw no one.

'Are there no eldila in your world, Hman? That must be strange.'

'But what are they?'

'They come from Oyarsa - they are, I suppose, a kind of hnau.'

'As we came out today I passed a child who said she was taking to an eldil, but I could see nothing.'

'One can see by looking at your eyes, Hman, that they are different from ours. But eldila are hard to see. They are not like us. Light goes through them. You must be looking in the right place and the right time; and that is not likely to come about unless the eldil wishes to be seen. Sometimes you can mistake them for a sunbeam or even a movmg of the leaves; but when you look again you see that it was an eldil and that it is gone. But whether your eyes can ever see them I do not know. The seroni would know that.'