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*To my brother W. H. L.
a life-long critic of the space-and-time story*

NOTE: Certain slighting references to earlier stories of this type which will be found in the following pages have been put there for purely dramatic purposes. The author would be sorry if any reader supposed he was too stupid to have enjoyed Mr. H. G. Wells's fantasies or too ungrateful to acknowledge his debt to them.

C. S. L.

I

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 realised 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 hotel 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 The kindly old landlord on whom he had reckoned had been replaced by someone whom the barmaid referred to as "the lady," and the lady was apparently a British innkeeper of that orthodox school who regard guests as a nuisance.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 to 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 metalled 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 now 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, sir, 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 were 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 good-bye, 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 proceeded 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 quite 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 neglected lawn. The drive branched into two a little way ahead of him—the righthand 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 fac-

tory, 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 chilliness crept over his shoulders. He was very tired by now, and it was perhaps this which prevented him from rising and ringing a 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 tranquillity 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 foot-sore 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 unusual 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 blubbing. "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 D.O.P. 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 Schrödinger'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 two-pence 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 the 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 snivelling. You needn't go into the wash-house if you don't want——"

"It weren't the wash-house," sobbed the half-wit, "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. "That 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 arm-chair and awaiting the return of Devine, who had gone to fetch refreshments.

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 boots, 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, and 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 clichés 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 their 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 glasses, 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 to-night. 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 realise 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 realised 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 realise 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 arm-chair in a lighted room. A conversation was going on near him and had, he now realised, been going on for some time. His head was comparatively clear. He realised 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 busybody, 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 weigh."

"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 of 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.

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 recognised 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 posi-

tion. 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 outwards 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 life-like 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 into delirious terror or into an ecstasy of joy. He knew now that he was not in a house, but in some moving vessel. It was clearly not 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 realised 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 in 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 disk, 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 recognised 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."

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 space-ship works—there's no good your 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-eight 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 infinity and eternity means that you think you are justi-

fied 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 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

floors and wall 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 flood-light. 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 remarked vaguely.

"Forgotten the sun?" said Weston contemptuously.

Ransom went on eating for some time. Then he began, "If 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.

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 off, 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

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C. S. LEWIS was a professor of medieval and Renaissance literature at Oxford and Cambridge universities who wrote more than thirty books in his lifetime, including *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Mere Christianity*. He died in 1963.



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