
C.S. LEWIS

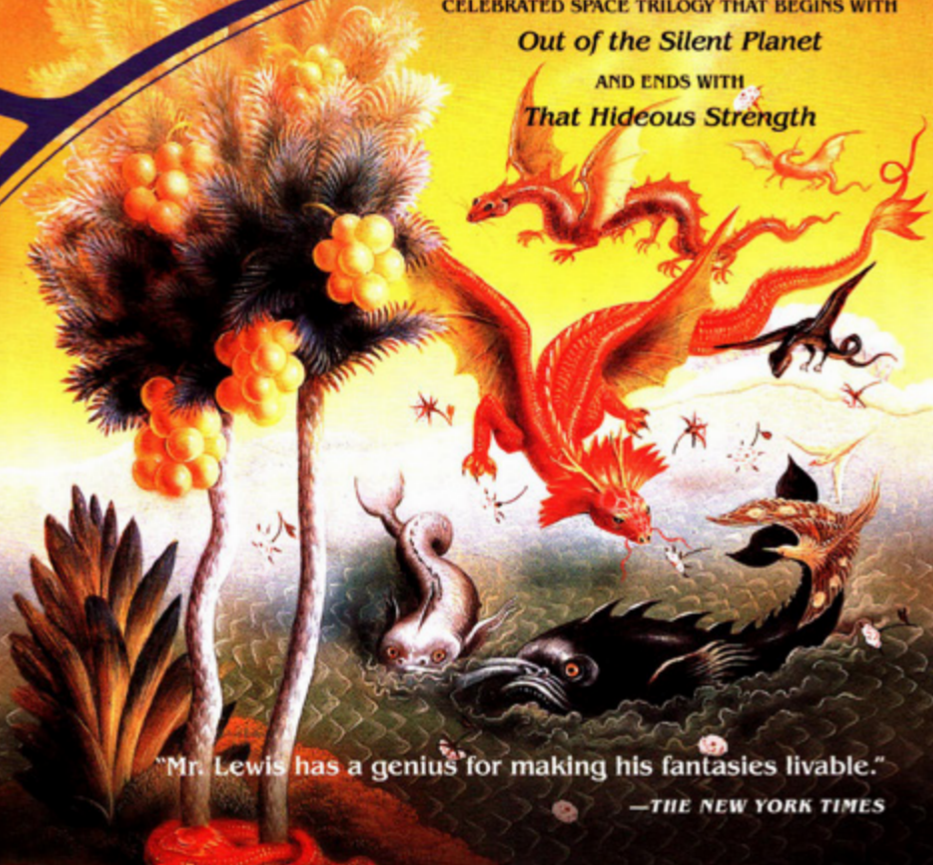
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Out of the Silent Planet
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C. S. Lewis

PERELANDRA

A NOVEL

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1230 Avenue of the Americas
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*Designed by Brooke Koven
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Manufactured in the United States of America

33 35 37 39 40 38 36 34 32

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN-13: 978-0-684-83365-1
ISBN-10: 0-684-83365-4
ISBN-13: 978-0-7432-3491-7 (Pbk)
ISBN-10: 0-7432-3491-X (Pbk)

To SOME LADIES at WANTAGE

PREFACE

This story can be read by itself but is also a sequel to *Out of the Silent Planet* in which some account was given of Ransom's adventures in Mars—or, as its inhabitants call it, *Malacandra*. All the human characters in this book are purely fictitious and none of them is allegorical.

C.S.L.

I

As I left the railway station at Worcester and set out on the three-mile walk to Ransom's cottage, I reflected that no one on that platform could possibly guess the truth about the man I was going to visit. The flat heath which spread out before me (for the village lies all behind and to the north of the station) looked an ordinary heath. The gloomy five-o'clock sky was such as you might see on any autumn afternoon. The few houses and the clumps of red or yellowish trees were in no way remarkable. Who could imagine that a little farther on in that quiet landscape I should meet and shake by the hand a man who had lived and eaten and drunk in a world forty million miles distant from London, who had seen this Earth from where it looks like a mere point of green fire, and who had spoken face to face with a creature whose life began before our own planet was inhabitable?

For Ransom had met other things in Mars besides the Martians. He had met the creatures called *eldila*, and specially that great *eldil* who is the ruler of Mars or, in their speech, the *Oyarsa of Malacandra*. The *eldila* are very different from any planetary creatures. Their physical organism, if organism it can be called, is quite unlike either the human or the Martian. They do not eat, breed, breathe, or suffer natural death, and to that extent resemble thinking minerals more than they resemble anything we should recognise as an animal. Though they appear on planets and may even seem to our senses to be sometimes resident in them, the precise spatial location of an *eldil* at any moment presents great problems. They themselves regard space (or "Deep Heaven") as their true habitat, and the planets are to them not closed worlds but

merely moving points—perhaps even interruptions—in what we know as the Solar System and they as the Field of Arbol.

At present I was going to see Ransom in answer to a wire which had said "Come down Thursday if possible. Business." I guessed what sort of business he meant, and that was why I kept on telling myself that it would be perfectly delightful to spend a night with Ransom and also kept on feeling that I was not enjoying the prospect as much as I ought to. It was the *eldila* that were my trouble. I could just get used to the fact that Ransom had been to Mars . . . but to have met an *eldil*, to have spoken with something whose life appeared to be practically unending. . . . Even the journey to Mars was bad enough. A man who has been in another world does not come back unchanged. One can't put the difference into words. When the man is a friend it may become painful: the old footing is not easy to recover. But much worse my growing conviction that, since his return, the *eldila* were not leaving him alone. Little things in his conversation, little mannerisms, accidental allusions which he made and then drew back with an awkward apology, all suggested that he was keeping strange company; that there were—well, Visitors—at that cottage.

As I plodded along the empty, unfenced road which runs across the middle of Worchester Common I tried to dispel my growing sense of *malaise* by analysing it. What, after all, was I afraid of? The moment I had put this question I regretted it. I was shocked to find that I had mentally used the word "afraid." Up till then I had tried to pretend that I was feeling only distaste, or embarrassment, or even boredom. But the mere word *afraid* had let the cat out of the bag. I realised now that my emotion was neither more, nor less, nor other, than Fear. And I realised that I was afraid of two things—afraid that sooner or later I myself might meet an *eldil*, and afraid that I might get "drawn in." I suppose every one knows this fear of getting "drawn in"—the moment at which a man realises that what had seemed mere speculations are on the point of landing him in the Communist Party or the Christian Church—the sense that a door has just slammed and left him on the inside. The thing was such sheer bad luck. Ransom himself had been taken to Mars (or Malacandra) against his will and almost by accident, and I had become connected with his affair by another accident. Yet here we were both getting more and more involved in what I could only describe as interplanetary politics. As to my intense wish never to come into contact with the *eldila* myself, I am not sure whether I can make you understand it. It was something more than a prudent desire to avoid creatures alien in kind, very powerful, and very intelligent. The truth was that all I heard about them served to connect two things which one's mind tends to keep

separate, and that connecting gave one a sort of shock. We tend to think about non-human intelligences in two distinct categories which we label "scientific" and "supernatural" respectively. We think, in one mood, of Mr. Wells' Martians (very unlike the real Malacandrians, by the bye), or his Selenites. In quite a different mood we let our minds loose on the possibility of angels, ghosts, fairies, and the like. But the very moment we are compelled to recognise a creature in either class as *real* the distinction begins to get blurred: and when it is a creature like an eldila the distinction vanishes altogether. These things were not animals—to that extent one had to classify them with the second group; but they had some kind of material vehicle whose presence could (in principle) be scientifically verified. To that extent they belonged to the first group. The distinction between natural and supernatural, in fact, broke down; and when it had done so, one realised how great a comfort it had been—how it had eased the burden of intolerable strangeness which this universe imposes on us by dividing it into two halves and encouraging the mind never to think of both in the same context. What price we may have paid for this comfort in the way of false security and accepted confusion of thought is another matter.

"This is a long, dreary road," I thought to myself. "Thank goodness I haven't anything to carry." And then, with a start of realisation, I remembered that I ought to be carrying a pack, containing my things for the night. I swore to myself. I must have left the thing in the train. Will you believe me when I say that my immediate impulse was to turn back to the station and "do something about it"? Of course there was nothing to be done which could not equally well be done by ringing up from the cottage. That train, with my pack in it, must by this time be miles away.

I realise that now as clearly as you do. But at the moment it seemed perfectly obvious that I must retrace my steps, and I had indeed begun to do so before reason or conscience awoke and set me once more plodding forwards. In doing this I discovered more clearly than before how very little I wanted to do it. It was such hard work that I felt as if I were walking against a headwind; but in fact it was one of those still, dead evenings when no twig stirs, and beginning to be a little foggy.

The farther I went the more impossible I found it to think about anything except these eldila. What, after all, did Ransom really know about them? By his own account the sorts which he had met did not usually visit our own planet—or had only begun to do so since his return from Mars. We had eldila of our own, he said, Tellurian eldils, but they were of a different kind and mostly hostile to man. That, in fact, was why our world was cut off from communication with the

other planets. He described us as being in a state of siege, as being, in fact, an enemy-occupied territory, held down by *eldils* who were at war both with us and with the *eldils* of "Deep Heaven," or "space." Like the bacteria on the microscopic level, so these co-inhabiting pests on the macroscopic permeate our whole life invisibly and are the real explanation of that fatal bent which is the main lesson of history. If all this were true, then, of course, we should welcome the fact that *eldila* of a better kind had at last broken the frontier (it is, they say, at the Moon's orbit) and were beginning to visit us. Always assuming that Ransom's account was the correct one.

A nasty idea occurred to me. Why should not Ransom be a dupe? If something from outer space were trying to invade our planet, what better smoke-screen could it put up than this very story of Ransom's? Was there the slightest evidence, after all, for the existence of the supposed maleficent *eldils* on this earth? How if my friend were the unwitting bridge, the Trojan Horse, whereby some possible invader were effecting its landing on Tellus? And then once more, just as when I had discovered that I had no pack, the impulse to go no farther returned to me. "Go back, go back," it whispered to me, "send him a wire, tell him you were ill, say you'll come some other time—anything." The strength of the feeling astonished me. I stood still for a few moments telling myself not to be a fool, and when I finally resumed my walk I was wondering whether this might be the beginning of a nervous breakdown. No sooner had this idea occurred to me than it also became a new reason for not visiting Ransom. Obviously, I wasn't fit for any such jumpy "business" as his telegram almost certainly referred to. I wasn't even fit to spend an ordinary week-end away from home. My only sensible course was to turn back at once and get safe home, before I lost my memory or became hysterical, and to put myself in the hands of a doctor. It was sheer madness to go on.

I was now coming to the end of the heath and going down a small hill, with a copse on my left and some apparently deserted industrial buildings on my right. At the bottom the evening mist was partly thick. "They call it a breakdown *at first*," I thought. Wasn't there some mental disease in which quite ordinary objects looked to the patient unbelievably ominous? . . . looked, in fact, just as that abandoned factory looks to me now? Great bulbous shapes of cement, strange brickwork bogeys, glowered at me over dry scrubby grass pock-marked with grey pools and intersected with the remains of a light railway. I was reminded of things which Ransom had seen in that other world: only there, they were people. Long spindle-like giants whom he called *Sorns*. What made it worse was that he regarded them as good people—very much nicer, in fact,

than our own race. He was in league with them! How did I know he was even a dupe? He might be something worse . . . and again I came to a standstill.

The reader, not knowing Ransom, will not understand how contrary to all reason this idea was. The rational part of my mind, even at that moment, knew perfectly well that even if the whole universe were crazy and hostile, Ransom was sane and wholesome and honest. And this part of my mind in the end sent me forward—but with a reluctance and a difficulty I can hardly put into words. What enabled me to go on was the knowledge (deep down inside me) that I was getting nearer at every stride to the one friend: but I *felt* that I was getting nearer to the one enemy—the traitor, the sorcerer, the man in league with “them” . . . walking into the trap with my eyes open, like a fool. “They call it a breakdown at first,” said my mind, “and send you to a nursing home; later on they move you to an asylum.”

I was past the dead factory now, down in the fog, where it was very cold. Then came a moment—the first one—of absolute terror and I had to bite my lips to keep myself from screaming. It was only a cat that had run across the road, but I found myself completely unnerved. “Soon you will really be screaming,” said my inner tormentor, “running round and round, screaming, and you won’t be able to stop it.”

There was a little empty house by the side of the road, with most of the windows boarded up and one staring like the eye of a dead fish. Please understand that at ordinary times the idea of a “haunted house” means no more to me than it does to you. No more; but also, no less. At that moment it was nothing so definite as the thought of a ghost that came to me. It was just the *word* “haunted.” “Haunted” . . . “haunting” . . . what a quality there is in that first syllable! Would not a child who had never heard the word before and did not know its meaning shudder at the mere sound if, as the day was closing in, it heard one of its elders say to another “This house is haunted”?

At last I came to the cross-roads by the little Wesleyan chapel where I had to turn to the left under the beech trees. I ought to be seeing the lights from Ransom’s windows by now—or was it past black-out time? My watch had stopped, and I didn’t know. It was dark enough but that might be due to the fog and the trees. It wasn’t the dark I was afraid of, you understand. We have all known times when inanimate objects seemed to have almost a facial expression, and it was the expression of this bit of road which I did not like. “It’s not true,” said my mind, “that people who are really going mad never think they’re going mad.” Suppose that real insanity had chosen this place in which to begin? In that case, of course, the black enmity of those dripping trees—their horrible

expectancy—would be a hallucination. But that did not make it any better. To think that the spectre you see is an illusion does not rob him of his terrors: it simply adds the further terror of madness itself—and then on top of that the horrible surmise that those whom the rest call mad have, all along, been the only people who see the world as it really is.

This was upon me now. I staggered on into the cold and the darkness, already half convinced that I must be entering what is called Madness. But each moment my opinion about sanity changed. Had it ever been more than a convention—a comfortable set of blinkers, an agreed mode of wishful thinking, which excluded from our view the full strangeness and malevolence of the universe we are compelled to inhabit? The things I had begun to know during the last few months of my acquaintance with Ransom already amounted to more than “sanity” would admit; but I had come much too far to dismiss them as unreal. I doubted his interpretation, or his good faith. I did not doubt the existence of the things he had met in Mars—the Pfiltriggi, the Hrossa, and the Sorns—nor of these interplanetary eldila. I did not even doubt the reality of that mysterious being whom the eldila call Maleldil and to whom they appear to give a total obedience such as no Tellurian dictator can command. I knew what Ransom supposed Maleldil to be.

Surely that was the cottage. It was very well blacked-out. A childish, whining thought arose on my mind: why was he not out at the gate to welcome me? An even more childish thought followed it. Perhaps he *was* in the garden waiting for me, hiding. Perhaps he would jump on me from behind. Perhaps I should see a figure that looked like Ransom standing with its back to me and when I spoke to it, it would turn round and show a face that was not human at all. . . .

I have naturally no wish to enlarge on this phase of my story. The state of mind I was in was one which I look back on with humiliation. I would have passed it over if I did not think that some account of it was necessary for a full understanding of what follows—and, perhaps, of some other things as well. At all events, I *can't* really describe how I reached the front door of the cottage. Somehow or other, despite the loathing and dismay that pulled me back and a sort of invisible wall of resistance that met me in the face, fighting for each step, and almost shrieking as a harmless spray of the hedge touched my face, I managed to get through the gate and up the little path. And there I was, drumming on the door and wringing the handle and shouting to him to let me in as if my life depended on it.

There was no reply—not a sound except the echo of the sounds I had been making myself. There was only something white fluttering on the knocker. I guessed, of course, that it was a note. In striking a match

to read it by, I discovered how very shaky my hands had become; and when the match went out I realised how dark the evening had grown. After several attempts I read the thing. "Sorry. Had to go up to Cambridge. Shan't be back till the late train. Eatables in larder and bed made up in your usual room. Don't wait supper for me unless you feel like it—E. R." And immediately the impulse to retreat, which had already assailed me several times, leaped upon me with a sort of demoniac violence. Here was my retreat left open, positively inviting me. Now was my chance. If anyone expected me to go into that house and sit there alone for several hours, they were mistaken! But then, as the thought of the return journey began to take shape in my mind, I faltered. The idea of setting out to traverse the avenue of beech trees again (it was really dark now) with this house behind me (one had the absurd feeling that it could follow one) was not attractive. And then, I hope, something better came into my mind—some rag of sanity and some reluctance to let Ransom down. At least I could try the door to see if it were really unlocked. I did. And it was. Next moment, I hardly know how, I found myself inside and let it slam behind me.

It was quite dark, and warm. I groped a few paces forward, hit my shin violently against something, and fell. I sat still for a few seconds nursing my leg. I thought I knew the layout of Ransom's hall-sitting-room pretty well and couldn't imagine what I had blundered into. Presently I groped in my pocket, got out my matches, and tried to strike a light. The head of the match flew off. I stamped on it and sniffed to make sure it was not smouldering on the carpet. As soon as I sniffed I became aware of a strange smell in the room. I could not for the life of me make out what it was. It had an unlikeness to ordinary domestic smells as great as that of some chemicals, but it was not a chemical kind of smell at all. Then I struck another match. It flickered and went out almost at once—not unnaturally, since I was sitting on the door-mat and there are few front doors even in better built houses than Ransom's country cottage which do not admit a draught. I had seen nothing by it except the palm of my own hand hollowed in an attempt to guard the flame. Obviously I must get away from the door. I rose gingerly and felt my way forward. I came at once to an obstacle—something smooth and very cold that rose a little higher than my knees. As I touched it I realised that it was the source of the smell. I groped my way along this to the left and finally came to the end of it. It seemed to present several surfaces and I couldn't picture the shape. It was not a table, for it had no top. One's hand groped along the rim of a kind of low wall—the thumb on the outside and the fingers down inside the enclosed space. If it had felt like wood I should have supposed it to be a large packing-case. But it

was not wood. I thought for a moment that it was wet, but soon decided that I was mistaking coldness for moisture. When I reached the end of it I struck my third match.

I saw something white and semi-transparent—rather like ice. A great big thing, very long: a kind of box, an open box: and of a disquieting shape which I did not immediately recognise. It was big enough to put a man into. Then I took a step back, lifting the lighted match higher to get a more comprehensive view, and instantly tripped over something behind me. I found myself sprawling in darkness, not on the carpet, but on more of the cold substance with the odd smell. How many of the infernal things were there?

I was just preparing to rise again and hunt systematically round the room for a candle when I heard Ransom's name pronounced; and almost, but not quite, simultaneously I saw the thing I had feared so long to see. I heard Ransom's name pronounced: but I should not like to say I heard a voice pronounce it. The sound was quite astonishingly unlike a voice. It was perfectly articulate: it was even, I suppose, rather beautiful. But it was, if you understand me, inorganic. We feel the difference between animal voices (including those of the human animal) and all other noises pretty clearly, I fancy, though it is hard to define. Blood and lungs and the warm, moist cavity of the mouth are somehow indicated in every Voice. Here they were not. The two syllables sounded more as if they were played on an instrument than as if they were spoken: and yet they did not sound mechanical either. A machine is something we make out of natural materials; this was more as if rock or crystal or light had spoken of itself. And it went through me from chest to groin like the thrill that goes through you when you think you have lost your hold while climbing a cliff.

That was what I heard. What I saw was simply a very faint rod or pillar of light. I don't think it made a circle of light either on the floor or the ceiling, but I am not sure of this. It certainly had very little power of illuminating its surroundings. So far, all is plain sailing. But it had two other characteristics which are less easy to grasp. One was its colour. Since I saw the thing I must obviously have seen it either white or coloured; but no efforts of my memory can conjure up the faintest image of what that colour was. I try blue, and gold, and violet, and red, but none of them will fit. How it is possible to have a visual experience which immediately and ever after becomes impossible to remember, I do not attempt to explain. The other was its angle. It was not at right angles to the floor. But as soon as I have said this, I hasten to add that this way of putting it is a later reconstruction. What one actually felt at the moment was that the column of light was vertical but the floor was not

horizontal—the whole room seemed to have heeled over as if it were on board ship. The impression, however produced, was that this creature had reference to some horizontal, to some whole system of directions, based outside the Earth, and that its mere presence imposed that alien system on me and abolished the terrestrial horizontal.

I had no doubt at all that I was seeing an eldil, and little doubt that I was seeing the archon of Mars, the Oyarsa of Malacandra. And now that the thing had happened I was no longer in a condition of abject panic. My sensations were, it is true, in some ways very unpleasant. The fact that it was quite obviously not organic—the knowledge that intelligence was somehow located in this homogeneous cylinder of light but not related to it as our consciousness is related to our brains and nerves—was profoundly disturbing.¹ It would not fit into our categories. The response which we ordinarily make to a living creature and that which we make to an inanimate object were here both equally inappropriate. On the other hand, all those doubts which I had felt before I entered the cottage as to whether these creatures were friend or foe, and whether Ransom were a pioneer or a dupe, had for the moment vanished. My fear was now of another kind. I felt sure that the creature was what we call “good,” but I wasn’t sure whether I liked “goodness” so much as I had supposed. This is a very terrible experience. As long as what you are afraid of is something evil, you may still hope that the good may come to your rescue. But suppose you struggle through to the good and find that it also is dreadful? How if food itself turns out to be the very thing you can’t eat, and home the very place you can’t live, and your very comforter the person who makes you uncomfortable? Then, indeed, there is no rescue possible: the last card has been played. For a

1. In the text I naturally keep to what I thought and felt at the time, since this alone is first-hand evidence: but there is obviously room for much further speculation about the form in which *eldila* appear to our senses. The only serious considerations of the problem so far are to be sought in the early seventeenth century. As a starting point for future investigation I recommend the following from Natvilcius (*De Aethereo at aërio Corpore*, Basel, 1627; II. xii.); *liquet simplicem flammam sensibus nostris subjectam non esse corpus proprie dictum angeli vel daemonis, sed potius aut illius corporis sensorium aut superficiem corporis in coelesti dispositione locorum supra cogitationes humanas existentis.* (“It appears that the homogeneous flame perceived by our senses is not the body, properly so called, of an angel or daemon, but rather either the sensorium of that body or the surface of a body which exists after a manner beyond our conception in the celestial frame of special references.”) By the “celestial frame of references” I take him to mean what we should now call “multi-dimensional space.” Not, of course, that Natvilcius knew anything about multi-dimensional geometry, but that he had reached empirically what mathematics has since reached on theoretical grounds.

second or two I was nearly in that condition. Here at last was a bit of that world from beyond the world, which I had always supposed that I loved and desired, breaking through and appearing to my senses: and I didn't like it, I wanted it to go away. I wanted every possible distance, gulf, curtain, blanket, and barrier to be placed between it and me. But I did not fall quite into the gulf. Oddly enough my very sense of helplessness saved me and steadied me. For now I was quite obviously "drawn in." The struggle was over. The next decision did not lie with me.

Then, like a noise from a different world, came the opening of the door and the sound of boots on the door-mat, and I saw, silhouetted against the greyness of the night in the open doorway, a figure which I recognised as Ransom. The speaking which was not a voice came again out of the rod of light, and Ransom, instead of moving, stood still and answered it. Both speeches were in a strange polysyllabic language which I had not heard before. I make no attempt to excuse the feelings which awoke in me when I heard the unhuman sound addressing my friend and my friend answering it in the unhuman language. They are, in fact, inexcusable; but if you think they are improbable at such a juncture, I must tell you plainly that you have read neither history nor your own heart to much effect. They were feelings of resentment, horror, and jealousy. It was in my mind to shout out, "Leave your familiar alone, you damned magician, and attend to Me."

What I actually said was, "Oh, Ransom. Thank God you've come."

The door was slammed (for the second time that night) and after a moment's groping Ransom had found and lit a candle. I glanced quickly round and could see no one but ourselves. The most noticeable thing in the room was the big white object. I recognised the shape well enough this time. It was a large coffin-shaped casket, open. On the floor beside it lay its lid, and it was doubtless this that I had tripped over. Both were made of the same white material, like ice, but more cloudy and less shining.

"By Jove, I'm glad to see you," said Ransom, advancing and shaking hands with me. "I'd hoped to be able to meet you at the station, but everything has had to be arranged in such a hurry and I found at the last moment that I'd got to go up to Cambridge. I never intended to leave you to make *that* journey alone." Then, seeing, I suppose, that I was still staring at him rather stupidly, he added, "I say—you're *all right*, aren't you? You got through the barrage without any damage?"

"The barrage?—I don't understand."

"I was thinking you would have met some difficulties in getting here."

"Oh, *that!*" said I. "You mean it wasn't just my nerves? There really was something in the way?"

"Yes. They didn't want you to get here. I was afraid something of the sort might happen but there was no time to do anything about it. I was pretty sure you'd get through somehow."

"By *they* you mean the others—our own *eldila*?"

"Of course. They've got wind of what's on hand. . . ."

I interrupted him. "To tell you the truth, Ransom," I said, "I'm getting more worried every day about the whole business. It came into my head as I was on my way here——"

"Oh, they'll put all sorts of things into your head if you let them," said Ransom lightly. "The best plan is to take no notice and keep straight on. Don't try to answer them. They like drawing you into an interminable argument."

"But, look here," said I. "This isn't child's play. Are you quite certain that this Dark Lord, this depraved Oyarsa of Tellus, really exists? Do you know for certain either that there are two sides, or which side is ours?"

He fixed me suddenly with one of his mild, but strangely formidable, glances.

"You are in *real* doubt about either, are you?" he asked.

"No," said I, after a pause, and felt rather ashamed.

"That's all right, then," said Ransom cheerfully. "Now let's get some supper and I'll explain as we go along."

"What's that coffin affair?" I asked as we moved into the kitchen.

"That is what I'm to travel in."

"Ransom!" I exclaimed. "He—it—the eldil—is not going to take you back to Malacandra?"

"Don't!" said he. "Oh, Lewis, you don't understand. Take me back to Malacandra? If only he would! I'd give anything I possess . . . just to look down one of those gorges again and see the blue, blue water winding in and out among the woods. Or to be up on top—to see a Sorn go gliding along the slopes. Or to be back there of an evening when Jupiter was rising, too bright to look at, and all the asteroids like a Milky Way, with each star in it as bright as Venus looks from Earth! And the smells! It is hardly ever out of my mind. You'd expect it to be worse at night when Malacandra is up and I can actually see it. But it isn't then that I get the real twinge. It's on hot summer days—looking up at the deep blue and that thinking that *in there*, millions of miles deep where I can never, never get back to it, there's a place I know, and flowers at that very moment growing over Meldilorn, and friends of mine, going about their business, who would welcome me back. No. No such luck. It's not Malacandra I'm being sent to. It's Perelandra."

"That's what we call Venus, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And you say you're being sent."

"Yes. If you remember, before I left Malacandra the Oyarsa hinted to me that my going there at all might be the beginning of a whole new phase in the life of the Solar System—the Field of Arbol. It might mean,

he said, that the isolation of our world, the siege, was beginning to draw to an end."

"Yes. I remember."

"Well, it really does look as if something of the sort were afoot. For one thing, the two sides, as you call them, have begun to appear much more clearly, much less mixed, here on Earth, in our own human affairs—to show in something a little more like their true colours."

"I see that all right."

"The other thing is this. The black archon—our own bent Oyarsa—is meditating some sort of attack on Perelandra."

"But is he at large like that in the Solar System? Can he get there?"

"That's just the point. He can't get there in his own person, in his own photosome or whatever we should call it. As you know, he was driven back within these bounds centuries before any human life existed on our planet. If he ventured to show himself outside the Moon's orbit he'd be driven back again—by main force. That would be a different kind of war. You or I could contribute no more to it than a flea could contribute to the defence of Moscow. No. He must be attempting Perelandra in some different way."

"And where do you come in?"

"Well—simply I've been ordered there."

"By the—by Oyarsa, you mean?"

"No. The order comes from much higher up. They all do, you know, in the long run."

"And what have you got to do when you get there?"

"I haven't been told."

"You are just part of the Oyarsa's *entourage*?"

"Oh, no. He isn't going to be there. He is to transport me to Venus—to deliver me there. After that, as far as I know, I shall be alone."

"But, look here, Ransom—I mean . . ." my voice trailed away.

"I know!" said he with one of his singularly disarming smiles. "You are feeling the absurdity of it. Dr. Elwin Ransom setting out single-handed to combat powers and principalities. You may even be wondering if I've got megalomania."

"I didn't mean that quite," said I.

"Oh, but I think you did. At any rate that is what I have been feeling myself ever since that thing was sprung on me. But when you come to think of it, is it odder than what all of us have to do every day? When the Bible used that very expression about fighting with principalities and powers and depraved hypersomatic beings at great heights (our translation is very misleading at that point, by the way) it meant that quite ordinary people were to do the fighting."

"Oh, I dare say," said I. "But that's rather different. That refers to a moral conflict."

Ransom threw back his head and laughed. "Oh, Lewis, Lewis," he said, "you are inimitable, simply inimitable!"

"Say what you like, Ransom, there *is* a difference."

"Yes. There is. But not a difference that makes it megalomania to think that any of us might have to fight either way. I'll tell you how I look at it. Haven't you noticed how in our own little war here on earth, there are different phases, and while any one phase is going on people get into the habit of thinking and behaving as if it was going to be permanent? But really the thing is changing under your hands all the time, and neither your assets nor your dangers this year are the same as the year before. Now your idea that ordinary people will never have to meet the Dark Eldila in any form except a psychological or moral form—as temptations or the like—is simply an idea that held good for a certain phase of the cosmic war: the phase of the great siege, the phase which gave to our planet its name of Thulcandra, the *silent* planet. But supposing that phase is passing? In the next phase it may be anyone's job to meet them . . . well, in some quite different mode."

"I see."

"Don't imagine I've been selected to go to Perelandra because I'm anyone in particular. One never can see, or not till long afterwards, why *any* one was selected for *any* job. And when one does, it is usually some reason that leaves no room for vanity. Certainly, it is never for what the man himself would have regarded as his chief qualifications. I rather fancy I am being sent because those two blackguards who kidnapped me and took me to Malacandra, did something which they never intended: namely, gave a human being a chance to learn that language."

"What language do you mean?"

"*Hressa-Hlab*, of course. The language I learned in Malacandra."

"But surely you don't imagine they will speak the same language on Venus?"

"Didn't I tell you about that?" said Ransom, leaning forward. We were now at table and had nearly finished our cold meat and beer and tea. "I'm surprised I didn't, for I found out two or three months ago, and scientifically it is one of the most interesting things about the whole affair. It appears we were quite mistaken in thinking *Hressa-Hlab* the peculiar speech of Mars. It is really what may be called Old Solar, *Hlab-Eribol-ef-Cordi*."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that there was originally a common speech for all rational creatures inhabiting the planets of our system: those that were ever

inhabited, I mean—what the eldils call the Low Worlds. Most of them, of course, have never been inhabited and never will be. At least not what we'd call inhabited. That original speech was lost on Thulcandra, our own world, when our whole tragedy took place. No human language now known in the world is descended from it."

"But what about the other two languages on Mars?"

"I admit I don't understand about them. One thing I do know, and I believe I could prove it on purely philological grounds. They are incomparably less ancient than *Hressa-Hlab*, specially *Surnibur*, the speech of the Sorns. I believe it could be shown that *Surnibur* is, by Malacandrian standards, quite a modern development. I doubt if its birth can be put further back than a date which would fall within our Cambrian Period."

"And you think you will find *Hressa-Hlab*, or Old Solar, spoken on Venus?"

"Yes. I shall arrive knowing the language. It saves a lot of trouble—though, as a philologist I find it rather disappointing."

"But you've no idea what you are to do, or what conditions you will find?"

"No idea at all what I'm to do. There are jobs, you know, where it is essential that one should *not* know too much beforehand . . . things one might have to say which one couldn't say effectively if one had prepared them. As to conditions, well, I don't know much. It will be warm: I'm to go naked. Our astronomers don't know anything about the surface of Perelandra at all. The outer layer of her atmosphere is too thick. The main problem, apparently, is whether she revolves on her own axis or not, and at what speed. There are two schools of thought. There's a man called Schiaparelli who thinks she revolves once on herself in the same time it takes her to go once round Arbol—I mean, the Sun. The other people think she revolves on her own axis once in every twenty-three hours. That's one of the things I shall find out."

"If Schiaparelli is right there'd be perpetual day on one side of her and perpetual night on the other?"

He nodded, musing. "It'd be a funny frontier," he said presently. "Just think of it. You'd come to a country of eternal twilight, getting colder and darker every mile you went. And then presently you wouldn't be able to go further because there'd be no more air. I wonder can you stand in the day, just on the right side of the frontier, and look *into* the night which you can never reach? And perhaps see a star or two—the only place you *could* see them, for of course in the Day-Lands they would never be visible. . . . Of course if they have a scientific civilisation they may have diving-suits or things like submarines on wheels for going into the Night."

His eyes sparkled, and even I who had been mainly thinking of how I should miss him and wondering what chances there were of my ever seeing him again, felt a vicarious thrill of wonder and of longing to know. Presently he spoke again.

"You haven't yet asked me where *you* come in," he said.

"Do you mean I'm to go too?" said I, with a thrill of exactly the opposite kind.

"Not at all. I mean you are to pack me up, and to stand by to unpack me when I return—if all goes well."

"Pack you? Oh, I'd forgotten about that coffin affair. Ransom, how on earth are you going to travel in that thing? What's the motive power? What about air—and food—and water? There's only just room for you to lie in it."

"The Oyarsa of Malacandra himself will be the motive power. He will simply move it to Venus. Don't ask me how. I have no idea what organs or instruments they use. But a creature who has kept a planet in its orbit for several billions of years will be able to manage a packing-case!"

"But what will you eat? How will you breathe?"

"He tells me I shall need to do neither. I shall be in some state of suspended animation, as far as I can make out. I can't understand him when he tries to describe it. But that's his affair."

"Do you feel quite happy about it?" said I, for a sort of horror was beginning once more to creep over me.

"If you mean, Does my reason accept the view that he will (accidents apart) deliver me safe on the surface of Perelandra?—the answer is Yes," said Ransom. "If you mean, Do my nerves and my imagination respond to this view?—I'm afraid the answer is No. One can believe in anaesthetics and yet feel in a panic when they actually put the mask over your face. I think I feel as a man who believes in the future life feels when he is taken out to face a firing party. Perhaps it's good practice."

"And I'm to pack you into that accursed thing?" said I.

"Yes," said Ransom. "That's the first step. We must get out into the garden as soon as the sun is up and point it so that there are no trees or buildings in the way. Across the cabbage bed will do. Then I get in—with a bandage across my eyes, for those walls won't keep out all the sunlight once I'm beyond the air—and you screw me down. After that, I think you'll just see it glide off."

"And then?"

"Well, then comes the difficult part. You must hold yourself in readiness to come down here again the moment you are summoned, to take off the lid and let me out when I return."

"When do you expect to return?"

"Nobody can say. Six months—a year—twenty years. That's the trouble. I'm afraid I'm laying a pretty heavy burden on you."

"I might be dead."

"I know. I'm afraid part of your burden is to select a successor: at once, too. There are four or five people whom we can trust."

"What will the summons be?"

"Oyarsa will give it. It won't be mistakable for anything else. You needn't bother about that side of it. One other point. I've no particular reason to suppose I shall come back wounded. But just in case—if you can find a doctor whom we can let into the secret, it might be just as well to bring him with you when you come down to let me out."

"Would Humphrey do?"

"The very man. And now for some more personal matters. I've had to leave you out of my will, and I'd like you to know why."

"My dear chap, I never thought about your will till this moment."

"Of course not. But I'd like to have left you something. The reason I haven't, is this. I'm going to disappear. It is possible I may not come back. It's just conceivable there might be a murder trial, and if so one can't be too careful. I mean, for your sake. And now for one or two other private arrangements."

We laid our heads together and for a long time we talked about those matters which one usually discusses with relatives and not with friends. I got to know a lot more about Ransom than I had known before, and from the number of odd people whom he recommended to my care, "If ever I happened to be able to do anything," I came to realise the extent and intimacy of his charities. With every sentence the shadow of approaching separation and a kind of graveyard gloom began to settle more emphatically upon us. I found myself noticing and loving all sorts of little mannerisms and expressions in him such as we notice always in a woman we love, but notice in a man only as the last hours of his leave run out or the date of the probably fatal operation draws near. I felt our nature's incurable incredulity; and could hardly believe that what was now so close, so tangible and (in a sense) so much at my command, would in a few hours be wholly inaccessible, an image—soon, even an elusive image—in my memory. And finally a sort of shyness fell between us because each knew what the other was feeling. It had got very cold.

"We must be going soon," said Ransom.

"Not till he—the Oyarsa—comes back," said I—though, indeed, now that the thing was so near I wished it to be over.

"He has never left us," said Ransom, "he has been in the cottage all the time."

"You mean he has been waiting in the next room all these hours?"

"Not waiting. They never have that experience. You and I are conscious of waiting, because we have a body that grows tired or restless, and therefore a sense of cumulative duration. Also we can distinguish duties and spare time and therefore have a conception of leisure. It is not like that with him. He has been here all this time, but you can no more call it *waiting* than you can call the whole of his existence *waiting*. You might as well say that a tree in a wood was waiting, or the sunlight waiting on the side of a hill." Ransom yawned. "I'm tired," he said, "and so are you. I shall sleep well in that coffin of mine. Come. Let us lug it out."

We went in to the next room and I was made to stand before the featureless flame which did not wait but just was, and there, with Ransom as our interpreter, I was in some fashion presented and with my own tongue sworn in to this great business. Then we took down the blackout and let in the grey, comfortless morning. Between us we carried out the casket and the lid, so cold they seemed to burn our fingers. There was a heavy dew on the grass and my feet were soaked through at once. The eldil was with us, outside there, on the little lawn; hardly visible to my eyes at all in the daylight. Ransom showed me the clasps of the lid and how it was to be fastened on, and then there was some miserable hanging about, and then the final moment when he went back into the house and reappeared, naked; a tall, white, shivering, weary scarecrow of a man at that pale, raw hour. When he had got into the hideous box he made me tie a thick black bandage round his eyes and head. Then he lay down. I had no thoughts of the planet Venus now and no real belief that I should see him again. If I had dared I would have gone back on the whole scheme: but the other thing—the creature that did not wait—was there, and the fear of it was upon me. With feelings that have since often returned to me in nightmare I fastened the cold lid down on top of the living man and stood back. Next moment I was alone. I didn't see how it went. I went back indoors and was sick. A few hours later I shut up the cottage and returned to Oxford.

Then the months went past and grew to a year and a little more than a year, and we had raids and bad news and hopes deferred and all the earth became full of darkness and cruel habitations, till the night when Oyarsa came to me again. After that there was a journey in haste for Humphrey and me, standings in crowded corridors and waitings at small hours on windy platforms, and finally the moment when we stood in clear early sunlight in the little wilderness of deep weeds which Ransom's garden had now become and saw a black speck against the sun-

rise and then, almost silently, the casket had glided down between us. We flung ourselves upon it and had the lid off in about a minute and a half.

"Good God! All smashed to bits," I cried at my first glance of the interior.

"Wait a moment," said Humphrey. And as he spoke the figure in the coffin began to stir and then sat up, shaking off as it did so a mass of red things which had covered its head and shoulders and which I had momentarily mistaken for ruin and blood. As they streamed off him and were caught in the wind I perceived them to be flowers. He blinked for a second or so, then called us by our names, gave each of us a hand, and stepped out on the grass.

"How are you both?" he said. "You're looking rather knocked up."

I was silent for a moment, astonished at the form which had risen from that narrow house—almost a new Ransom, glowing with health and rounded with muscle and seemingly ten years younger. In the old days he had been beginning to show a few grey hairs; but now the beard which swept his chest was pure gold.

"Hullo, you've cut your foot," said Humphrey: and I saw now that Ransom was bleeding from the heel.

"Ugh, it's cold down here," said Ransom. "I hope you've got the boiler going and some hot water—and some clothes."

"Yes," said I, as we followed him into the house. "Humphrey thought of all that. I'm afraid I shouldn't have."

Ransom was now in the bathroom, with the door open, veiled in clouds of steam, and Humphrey and I were talking to him from the landing. Our questions were more numerous than he could answer.

"That idea of Schiaparelli's is all wrong," he shouted. "They have an ordinary day and night there," and "No, my heel doesn't hurt—or, at least, it's only just begun to," and "Thanks, any old clothes. Leave them on the chair" and "No thanks. I don't somehow feel like bacon or eggs or anything of that kind. No fruit, you say? Oh well, no matter. Bread or porridge or something" and "I'll be down in five minutes now."

He kept on asking if we were really all right and seemed to think we looked ill. I went down to get the breakfast, and Humphrey said he would stay and examine and dress the cut on Ransom's heel. When he rejoined me I was looking at one of the red petals which had come in the casket.

"That's rather a beautiful flower," said I, handing it to him.

"Yes," said Humphrey, studying it with the hands and eyes of a scientist. "What extraordinary delicacy! It makes an English violet seem like a coarse weed."

"Let's put some of them in water."

"Not much good. Look—it's withered already."

"How do you think he is?"

"Tip-top general. But I don't quite like that heel. He says the hæmorrhage has been going on for a long time."

Ransom joined us, fully dressed, and I poured out the tea. And all that day and far into the night he told us the story that follows.

3

What it is like to travel in a celestial coffin was a thing that Ransom never described. He said he couldn't. But odd hints about that journey have come out at one time or another when he was talking of quite different matters.

According to his own account he was not what we call conscious, and yet at the same time the experience was a very positive one with a quality of its own. On one occasion, someone had been talking about "seeing life" in the popular sense of knocking about the world and getting to know people, and B. who was present (and who is an Anthroposophist) said something I can't quite remember about "seeing life" in a very different sense. I think he was referring to some system of meditation which claimed to make "the form of Life itself" visible to the inner eye. At any rate Ransom let himself in for a long cross-examination by failing to conceal the fact that he attached some very definite idea to this. He even went so far—under extreme pressure—as to say that life appeared to him, in that condition, as a "coloured shape." Asked "what colour," he gave a curious look and could only say "what colours! yes, what colours!" But then he spoiled it all by adding, "of course it wasn't colour at all really. I mean, not what we'd call colour," and shutting up completely for the rest of the evening. Another hint came out when a sceptical friend of ours called McPhee was arguing against the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the human body. I was his victim at the moment and he was pressing on me in his Scots way with such questions as "So you think you're going to have guts and palate for ever in a world where there'll be no eating,

and genital organs in a world without copulation? Man, ye'll have a grand time of it!" when Ransom suddenly burst out with great excitement, "Oh, don't you see, you ass, that there's a difference between a trans-sensuous life and a non-sensuous life?" That, of course, directed McPhee's fire to him. What emerged was that in Ransom's opinion the present functions and appetites of the body would disappear, not because they were atrophied but because they were, as he said, "engulfed." He used the word "trans-sexual" I remember and began to hunt about for some similar words to apply to eating (after rejecting "trans-gastronomic"), and since he was not the only philologist present, that diverted the conversation into different channels. But I am pretty sure he was thinking of something he had experienced on his voyage to Venus. But perhaps the most mysterious thing he ever said about it was this. I was questioning him on the subject—which he doesn't often allow—and had incautiously said, "Of course I realise it's all rather too vague for you to put into words," when he took me up rather sharply, for such a patient man, by saying, "On the contrary, it is words that are vague. The reason why the thing can't be expressed is that it's too *definite* for language." And that is about all I can tell you of his journey. One thing is certain, that he came back from Venus even more changed than he had come back from Mars. But of course that may have been because of what happened to him after his landing.

To that landing, as Ransom narrated it to me, I will now proceed. He seems to have been awakened (if that is the right word) from his indescribable celestial state by the sensation of falling—in other words, when he was near enough to Venus to feel Venus as something in the downward direction. The next thing he noticed was that he was very warm on one side and very cold on the other, though neither sensation was so extreme as to be really painful. Anyway, both were soon swallowed up in the prodigious white light from below which began to penetrate through the semi-opaque walls of the casket. This steadily increased and became distressing in spite of the fact that his eyes were protected. There is no doubt this was the *albedo*, the outer veil of very dense atmosphere with which Venus is surrounded and which reflects the sun's rays with intense power. For some obscure reason he was not conscious, as he had been on his approach to Mars, of his own rapidly increasing weight. When the white light was just about to become unbearable, it disappeared altogether, and very soon after the cold on his left side and the heat on his right began to decrease and to be replaced by an equable warmth. I take it he was now in the outer layer of the Perelandrian atmosphere—at first in a pale, and later in a tinted, twilight. The prevailing colour, as far as he could see through the sides of

the casket, was golden or coppery. By this time he must have been very near the surface of the planet, with the length of the casket at right angles to that surface—falling feet downwards like a man in a lift. The sensation of falling—helpless as he was and unable to move his arms—became frightening. Then suddenly there came a great green darkness, an unidentifiable noise—the first message from the new world—and a marked drop in temperature. He seemed now to have assumed a horizontal position and also, to his great surprise, to be moving not downwards but upwards; though, at the moment, he judged this to be an illusion. All this time he must have been making faint, unconscious efforts to move his limbs, for now he suddenly found that the sides of his prison-house yielded to pressure. He *was* moving his limbs, encumbered with some viscous substance. Where was the casket? His sensations were very confused. Sometimes he seemed to be falling, sometimes to be soaring upwards, and then again to be moving in the horizontal plane. The viscous substance was white. There seemed to be less of it every moment . . . white, cloudy stuff just like the casket, only not solid. With a horrible shock he realised that it *was* the casket, the casket melting, dissolving away, giving place to an indescribable confusion of colour—a rich, varied world in which nothing, for the moment, seemed palpable. There was no casket now. He was turned out—deposited—solitary. He was in Perelandra.

His first impression was of nothing more definite than of something slanted—as though he were looking at a photograph which had been taken when the camera was not held level. And even this lasted only for an instant. The slant was replaced by a different slant; then two slants rushed together and made a peak, and the peak flattened suddenly into a horizontal line, and the horizontal line tilted and became the edge of a vast gleaming slope which rushed furiously towards him. At the same moment he felt that he was being lifted. Up and up he soared till it seemed as if he must reach the burning dome of gold that hung above him instead of a sky. Then he was at a summit; but almost before his glance had taken in a huge valley that yawned beneath him—shining green like glass and marbled with streaks of scummy white—he was rushing down into that valley at perhaps thirty miles an hour. And now he realised that there was a delicious coolness over every part of him except his head, that his feet rested on nothing, and that he had for some time been performing unconsciously the actions of a swimmer. He was riding the foamless swell of an ocean, fresh and cool after the fierce temperatures of Heaven, but warm by earthly standards—as warm as a shallow bay with sandy bottom in a sub-tropical climate. As he rushed smoothly up the great convex hillside of the next wave he got a mouth-

ful of the water. It was hardly at all flavoured with salt; it was drinkable—like fresh water and only, by an infinitesimal degree, less insipid. Though he had not been aware of thirst till now, his drink gave him a quite astonishing pleasure. It was almost like meeting Pleasure itself for the first time. He buried his flushed face in the green translucence, and when he withdrew it, found himself once more on the top of a wave.

There was no land in sight. The sky was pure, flat gold like the background of a medieval picture. It looked very distant—as far off as a cirrus cloud looks from earth. The ocean was gold too, in the offing, flecked with innumerable shadows. The nearer waves, though golden where their summits caught the light, were green on their slopes: first emerald, and lower down a lustrous bottle green, deepening to blue where they passed beneath the shadow of other waves.

All this he saw in a flash; then he was speeding down once more into the trough. He had somehow turned on his back. He saw the golden roof of that world quivering with a rapid variation of paler lights as a ceiling quivers at the reflected sunlight from the bath-water when you step into your bath on a summer morning. He guessed that this was the reflection of the waves wherein he swam. It is a phenomenon observable three days out of five in the planet of love. The queen of those seas views herself continually in a celestial mirror.

Up again to the crest, and still no sight of land. Something that looked like clouds—or could it be ships?—far away on his left. Then down, down, down—he thought he would never reach the end of it . . . this time he noticed how dim the light was. Such tepid revelry in water—such glorious bathing, as one would have called it on earth, suggested as its natural accompaniment a blazing sun. But here there was no such thing. The water gleamed, the sky burned with gold, but all was rich and dim, and his eyes fed upon it undazzled and unaching. The very names of green and gold, which he used perforce in describing the scene, are too harsh for the tenderness, the muted iridescence, of that warm, maternal, delicately gorgeous world. It was mild to look upon as evening, warm like summer noon, gentle and winning like early dawn. It was altogether pleasurable. He sighed.

There was a wave ahead of him now so high that it was dreadful. We speak idly in our own world of seas mountain high when they are not much more than mast high. But this was the real thing. If the huge shape had been a hill of land and not of water he might have spent a whole forenoon or longer walking the slope before he reached the summit. It gathered him into itself and hurled him up to that elevation in a matter of seconds. But before he reached the top, he almost cried out in terror. For this wave had not a smooth top like the others. A horrible crest

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ISBN 978-0-7432-3491-7

\$16.00 U.S.



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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.