

to-morrow. And remember," he added reassuringly to Lenina, "they're perfectly tame; savages won't do you any harm. They've got enough experience of gas bombs to know that they mustn't play any tricks." Still laughing, he threw the helicopter screws into gear, accelerated, and was gone.

Chapter Seven

THE MESA was like a ship becalmed in a strait of lion-coloured dust. The channel wound between precipitous banks, and slanting from one wall to the other across the valley ran a streak of green-the river and its fields. On the prow of that stone ship in the centre of the strait, and seemingly a part of it, a shaped and geometrical outcrop of the naked rock, stood the pueblo of Malpais. Block above block, each story smaller than the one below, the tall houses rose like stepped and amputated pyramids into the blue sky. At their feet lay a straggle of low buildings, a criss-cross of walls; and on three sides the precipices fell sheer into the plain. A few columns of smoke mounted perpendicularly into the windless air and were lost.

"Queer," said Lenina. "Very queer." It was her ordinary word of condemnation. "I don't like it. And I don't like that man." She pointed to the Indian guide who had been appointed to take them up to the pueblo. Her feeling was evidently reciprocated; the very back of the man, as he walked along before them, was hostile, sullenly contemptuous.

"Besides," she lowered her voice, "he smells."

Bernard did not attempt to deny it. They walked on.

Suddenly it was as though the whole air had come alive and were pulsing, pulsing with the indefatigable movement of blood. Up there, in Malpais, the drums were being beaten. Their feet fell in with the rhythm of that mysterious heart; they quickened their pace. Their path led them to the foot of the precipice. The sides of the great mesa ship towered over them, three hundred feet to the gunwale.

"I wish we could have brought the plane," said Lenina, looking up resentfully at the blank impending rock-face. "I hate walking. And you feel so small when you're on the ground at the bottom of a hill."

They walked along for some way in the shadow of the mesa, rounded a projection, and there, in a water-worn ravine, was the way up the companion ladder. They climbed. It was a very steep path that zigzagged from side to side of the gully. Sometimes the pulsing of the drums was all but inaudible, at others they seemed to be beating only just round the corner.

When they were half-way up, an eagle flew past so close to them that the wind of his wings blew chill on their faces. In a crevice of the rock lay a pile of bones. It was all oppressively queer, and the Indian smelt stronger and stronger. They emerged at last from the ravine into the full sunlight. The top of the mesa was a flat deck of stone.

"Like the Charing-T Tower," was Lenina's comment. But she was not allowed to enjoy her discovery of this reassuring resemblance for long. A padding of soft feet made them turn round. Naked from throat to navel, their dark brown bodies painted with white lines ("like asphalt tennis courts," Lenina was later to explain), their faces inhuman with daubings of scarlet, black and ochre, two Indians came running along the path. Their black hair was braided with fox fur and red flannel. Cloaks of turkey feathers fluttered from their shoulders; huge feather diadems exploded gaudily round their heads. With every step they took came the clink and rattle of their silver bracelets, their heavy necklaces of bone and turquoise beads. They came on without a word, running quietly in their deerskin moccasins. One of them was holding a feather brush; the other carried, in either hand, what looked at a distance like three or four pieces of thick rope. One of the ropes writhed uneasily, and suddenly Lenina saw that they were snakes.

her existence. The writhing snake **hung** limp again with the rest. The men passed.

"I don't like it," said Lenina. "I don't like it."

She liked even less what **awaited** her at the entrance to the **pueblo**, where their guide had left them while he went inside for instructions. The dirt, to start with, the piles of rubbish, the dust, the dogs, the flies. Her face **wrinkled** up into a **grimace** of **disgust**. She held her handkerchief to her nose.

"But how can they live like this?" she broke out in a voice of **indignant incredulity**. (It wasn't possible.)

Bernard shrugged his shoulders **philosophically**. "Anyhow," he said, "they've been doing it for the last five or six thousand years. So I suppose they must be used to it by now."

"But **cleanliness** is next to fordliness," she insisted.

"Yes, and civilization is **sterilization**," **Bernard** went on, concluding on a tone of **irony** the second hypnopædic lesson in elementary **hygiene**. "But these people have never heard of Our Ford, and they aren't civilized. So there's no point in ..."

"Oh!" She **gripped** his arm. "Look."

An almost naked Indian was very slowly climbing down the ladder from the first-floor **terrace** of a neighboring house—rung after rung, with the **tremulous** caution of extreme old age. His face was **profoundly wrinkled** and black, like a **mask** of **obsidian**. The **toothless** mouth had fallen in. At the corners of the lips, and on each side of the chin, a few long **bristles gleamed** almost white against the dark skin. The long unbraided hair **hung** down in grey **wisps** round his face. His body was bent and **emaciated** to the bone, almost fleshless. Very slowly he came down, pausing at each rung before he **ventured** another step.

"What's the matter with him?" **whispered** Lenina. Her eyes were wide with horror and **amazement**.

"He's old, that's all," **Bernard** answered as carelessly as he could. He too was **startled**; but he made an effort to seem **unmoved**.

"Old?" she repeated. "But the Director's old; lots of people are old; they're not like that."

"That's because we don't allow them to be like that. We preserve them from diseases. We keep their internal secretions **artificially balanced** at a **youthful** equilibrium. We don't permit their **magnesium-calcium** ratio to fall below what it was at thirty. We give them **transfusion** of young blood. We keep their **metabolism** permanently **stimulated**. So, of course, they don't look like that. Partly," he added, "because most of them die long before they reach this old creature's age. Youth almost unimpaired till sixty, and then, **crack!** the end."

But Lenina was not listening. She was watching the old man. Slowly, slowly he came down. His feet touched the ground. He turned. In their deep-sunken orbits his eyes were still **extraordinarily** bright. They looked at her for a long moment expressionlessly, without surprise, as though she had not been there at all. Then slowly, with bent back the old man **hobbled** past them and was gone.

"But it's terrible," Lenina **whispered**. "It's awful. We ought not to have come here." She felt in her pocket for her **soma**—only to discover that, by some **unprecedented** oversight, she had left the bottle down at the rest-house. **Bernard's** pockets were also empty.

Lenina was left to face the horrors of Malpais unaided. There came a standing in an

proceeded to make open **comments** on this **revoltingly viviparous** scene. Ashamed, now that the effects of the **soma** had worn off, of the weakness he had displayed that morning in the hotel, he went out of his way to show himself strong and **unorthodox**.

"What a wonderfully **intimate** relationship," he said, **deliberately outrageous**. "And what an intensity of feeling it must generate! I often think one may have missed something in not having had a mother. And perhaps you've missed something in not being a mother, Lenina. Imagine yourself sitting there with a little baby of your own. ..."

"**Bernard!** How can you?" The passage of an old woman with **ophthalmia** and a disease of the skin **distracted** her from her **indignation**.

"Let's go away," she begged. "I don't like it."

But at this moment their guide came back and, **beckoning** them to follow, led the way down the narrow street between the houses. They rounded a corner. A dead dog was lying on a rubbish **heap**; a woman with a **goitre** was looking for **lice** in the hair of a small girl. Their guide **halted** at the foot of a ladder, raised his hand **perpendicularly**, then **darted** it **horizontally** forward. They did what he **mutely** commanded—climbed the ladder and walked through the **doorway**, to which it gave access, into a long narrow room, rather dark and smelling of smoke and cooked **grease** and long-worn, long-unwashed clothes. At the further end of the room was another **doorway**, through which came a shaft of surdight and the noise, very loud and close, of the drums.

They stepped across the threshold and **found** themselves on a wide **terrace**. Below them, shut in by the tall houses, was the village square, crowded with Indians. Bright blankets, and feathers in black hair, and the glint of **turquoise**, and dark skins shining with heat. Lenina put her handkerchief to her nose again. In the open space at the centre of the square were two circular platforms of **masonry** and **trampled** clay—the roofs, it was evident, of **underground** chambers; for in the centre of each platform was an open **hatchway**, with a ladder emerging from the **lower** darkness. A sound of **subterranean** flute playing came up and was almost lost in the steady **remorseless persistence** of the drums.

Lenina liked the drums. Shutting her eyes she **abandoned** herself to their soft repeated thunder, allowed it to invade her **consciousness** more and more completely, till at last there was nothing left in the world but that one **deep pulse** of sound. It reminded her **reassuringly** of the **synthetic** noises made at Solidarity Services and Ford's Day celebrations. "**Orgy-porgy**," she **whispered** to herself. These drums **beat** out just the same rhythms.

There was a sudden **startling** burst of singing—hundreds of male voices crying out **fiercely** in **harsh** metallic **unison**. A few long notes and silence, the thunderous silence of the drums; then shrill, in a neighing **treble**, the women's answer. Then again the drums; and once more the men's **deep savage affirmation** of their manhood.

Queer—yes. The place was **queer**, so was the music, so were the clothes and the **goitres** and the skin diseases and the old people. But the performance itself—there seemed to be nothing specially **queer** about that.

"It reminds me of a **lower-caste Community Sing**," she told **Bernard**.

But a little later it was reminding her a good deal less of that **innocuous** function. For suddenly there had swarmed up from those round chambers underground a **ghastly troop** of monsters. Hideously **masked** or painted out of all **semblance** of humanity, they had **tramped** out a strange limping dance round the square; round and again round, singing as they went, round and round—each time a little faster; and the drums had changed and quickened their rhythm, so that it became like the

dancers broke out of the line, ran to a big wooden chest which was standing at one end of the square, raised the **lid** and pulled out a pair of black snakes. A great yell went up from the crowd, and all the other dancers ran towards him with out-stretched hands. He tossed the snakes to the first-comers, then **dipped** back into the chest for more. More and more, black snakes and brown and **mottled**-he flung them out. And then the dance began again on a different rhythm. Round and round they went with their snakes, snakily, with a soft **undulating** movement at the knees and hips. Round and round. Then the leader gave a signal, and one after another, all the snakes were flung down in the middle of the square; an old man came up from **underground** and **sprinkled** them with corn meal, and from the other **hatchway** came a woman and **sprinkled** them with water from a black jar. Then the old man lifted his hand and, startlingly, terrifyingly, there was absolute silence. The drums stopped **beating**, life seemed to have come to an end. The old man pointed towards the two **hatchways** that gave entrance to the **lower** world. And slowly, raised by **invisible** hands from below, there emerged from the one a painted image of an **eagle**, from the other that of a man, naked, and nailed to a cross. They **hung** there, seemingly self-**sustained**, as though watching. The old man **clapped** his hands. Naked but for a white cotton **breech**-cloth, a boy of about eighteen stepped out of the crowd and stood before him, his hands crossed over his chest, his head **bowed**. The old man made the sign of the cross over him and turned away. Slowly, the boy began to walk round the writhing **heap** of snakes. He had completed the first **circuit** and was half-way through the second when, from among the dancers, a tall man wearing the **mask** of a **coyote** and holding in his hand a **whip** of **plaited** leather, advanced towards him. The boy moved on as though **unaware** of the other's existence. The **coyote**-man raised his **whip**, there was a long moment of expectancy, then a **swift** movement, the whistle of the **lash** and its loud **flat**-sounding impact on the flesh. The boy's body **quivered**; but he made no sound, he walked on at the same slow, steady pace. The **coyote** struck again, again; and at every blow at first a **gasp**, and then a **deep groan** went up from the crowd. The boy walked. Twice, thrice, four **times** round he went. The blood was streaming. Five **times** round, six **times** round. Suddenly Lenina covered her face with her hands and began to **sob**. "Oh, stop them, stop them!" she **implored**. But the **whip** fell and fell **inexorably**. Seven **times** round. Then all at once the boy **staggered** and, still without a sound, **pitched** forward on to his face. Bending over him, the old man touched his back with a long white feather, held it up for a moment, **crimson**, for the people to see then shook it thrice over the snakes. A few drops fell, and suddenly the drums broke out again into a panic of hurrying notes; there was a great shout. The dancers rushed forward, picked up the snakes and ran out of the square. Men, women, children, all the crowd ran after them. A minute later the square was empty, only the boy remained, **prone** where he had fallen, quite still. Three old women came out of one of the houses, and with some difficulty lifted him and carried him in. The **eagle** and the man on the cross kept guard for a little while over the empty **pueblo**; then, as though they had seen enough, sank slowly down through their **hatchways**, out of sight, into the **nether** world.

Lenina was still **sobbing**. "Too awful," she kept repeating, and all **Bernard's** **consolations** were in vain. "Too awful! That blood!" She **shuddered**. "Oh, I wish I had my **soma**."

There was the sound of feet in the inner room.

Lenina did not move, but sat with her face in her hands, **unseeing**, apart. Only **Bernard** turned round.

The dress of the young man who now stepped out on to the **terrace** was Indian; but his **plaited** hair was straw-coloured, his eyes a pale blue, and his skin a white skin, bronzed.

"**Hullo**. Good-**morrow**," said the stranger, in **faultless** but peculiar English. "You're civilized, aren't you? You come from the Other Place, outside the Reservation?"

"Who on earth ... ?" **Bernard** began in **astonishment**.