**“Out of the Silent Planet” – by C.S. Lewis**

**Chapter 7**

EARLY NEXT day Ransom again took his seat on Augray's shoulder. For more than an hour they travelled through the same bright wilderness. Far to the north the sky was luminous with a cloud-like mass of dull red or ochre; it was very large and drove furiously westward about ten miles above the waste. Ransom, who had yet seen no cloud in the Malacandrian sky, asked what it was. The sorn told him it was sand caught up from the great northern deserts by the winds of that terrible country. It was often thus carried, sometimes at a height of seventeen miles, to fall again, perhaps in a handramit, as a choking and blinding dust storm. The sight of it moving with menace in the naked sky served to remind Ransom that they were indeed on the outside of Malacandra - no longer dwelling in a world but crawling the surface of a strange planet. At last the cloud seemed to drop and burst far on the western horizon, where a glow, not unlike that of a conflagration, remained visible until a turn of the valley hid all that region from his view.

The same turn opened a new prospect to his eyes. What lay before him looked at first strangely like an earthly landscape - a landscape of grey downland ridges rising and falling like waves of the sea. Far beyond, cliffs and spires of the familiar green rock rose against the dark blue sky. A moment later he saw that what he had taken for downlands was but the ridged and furrowed surface of a blue-grey valley mist - a mist which would not appear a mist at all when they descended into the handramit. And already, as their road began descending, it was less visible and the many-coloured pattern of the low country showed vaguely through it. The descent grew quickly steeper; like the jagged teeth of a giant - a giant with very bad teeth - the topmost peaks of the mountain wall down which they must pass loomed up over the edge of their gulley. The look of the sky and the quality of the light were infinitesimally changed. A moment later they stood on the edge of such a slope as by earthly standards would rather be called a precipice; down and down this face, to where it vanished in a purple blush of vegetation, ran their road. Ransom refused absolutely to make the descent on Augray's shoulder. The sorn, though it did not fully understand his objection, stooped for him to dismount, and proceeded, with that same skating and forward sloping motion, to go down before him. Ransom followed, using gladly but stiffly his numb legs.

The beauty of this new handramit as it opened before him took his breath away. It was wider than that in which he had hitherto lived and right below him lay an almost circular lake -a sapphire twelve miles in diameter set in a border of purple forest. Amidst the lake there rose like a low and gently sloping pyramid, or like a woman's breast, an island of pale red, smooth to the summit, and on the summit a grove of such trees as man had never seen. Their smooth columns had the gentle swell of the noblest beech trees: but these were taller than a cathedral spire on earth, and at their tops they broke rather into flower than foliage; into golden flower bright as tulip, still as rock, and huge as summer cloud. Flowers indeed they were, not trees, and far down among their roots he caught a pale hint of slab-like architecture. He knew before his guide told him that this was Meldilorn. He did not know what he had expected. The old dreams which he had brought from earth of some more than American complexity of offices or some engineers' paradise of vast machines had indeed been long laid aside. But he had not looked for anything quite so classic, so virginal, as this bright grove - lying so still, so secret, in its coloured valley, soaring with inimitable grace so many hundred feet into the wintry sunlight.  At every step of his descent the comparative warmth of the valley came up to him more deliciously. He looked above - the sky was turning to a paler blue. He looked below - and sweet and faint the thin fragrance of the giant blooms came up to him. Distant crags were growing less sharp in outline, and surfaces less bright. Depth, dimness, softness and perspective were returning to the landscape. The lip or edge of rock from which they had started their descent was already far overhead; it seemed unlikely that they had really come from there. He was breathing freely. His toes, so long benumbed could move delightfully inside his boots. He lifted the ear-flaps of his cap and found his ears instantly filled with the sound of falling water. And now he was treading on soft groundweed over level earth and the forest roof was above his head. They had conquered the harandra and were on the threshold of Meldilorn.

A short walk brought them into a kind of forest 'ride' - a broad avenue running straight as an arrow through the purple stems to where the rigid blue of the lake danced at the end of it. There they found a gong and hammer hung on a pillar of stone. These objects were all richly decorated, and the gong and hammer were of a greenish-blue metal which Ransom did not recognize. Augray struck the gong. An excitement was rising in Ransom's mind which almost prevented him from examining as coolly as he wished the ornamentation of the stone. It was partly pictorial, partly pure decoration. What chiefly struck him was a certain balance of packed and empty surfaces. Pure line drawings, as bare as the prehistoric pictures of reindeer on Earth, alternated with patches of design as close and intricate as Norse or Celtic jewellery; and then, as you looked at it, these empty and crowded areas turned out to be themselves arranged in larger designs. He was struck by the fact that the pictorial work was not confined to the emptier spaces; quite often large arabesques included as a subordinate detail intricate pictures. Elsewhere the opposite plan had been followed - and this alternation, too, had a rhythmical or patterned element in it. He was just beginning to find out that the pictures, though stylized, were obviously intended to tell a story, when Augray interrupted him. A ship had put out from the island shore of Meldilorn.

As it came towards them Ransom's heart warmed to see that it was paddled by a hross. The creature brought its boat up to the shore where they were waiting, stared at Ransom and then looked inquiringly at Augray.

"You may well wonder at this nau, Hrinha," said the sorn, "for you have never seen anything like it. It is called Ren-soom and has come through heaven from Thulcandra."

"It is welcome, Augray," said the hross politely. "Is it coming to Oyarsa?"

"He has sent for it."

"And for you also, Augray?"

"Oyarsa has not called me. If you will take Ren-soom over the water, I will go back to my tower."

The hross indicated that Ransom should enter the boat. He attempted to express his thanks to the sorn and after a moment's consideration unstrapped his wrist watch and offered it to him; it was the only thing he had which seemed a suitable present for a sorn. He had no difficulty in making Augray understand its purpose; but after examining it the giant gave it back to him, a little reluctantly, and said:

"This gift ought to be given to a pfifltrigg. It rejoices my heart, but they would make more of it. You are likely to meet some of the busy people in Meldilorn: give it to them. As for its use, do your people not know except by looking at this thing how much of the day has worn?"

"I believe there are beasts that have a sort of knowledge of that," said Ransom, "but our hnau have lost it."

After this, his farewells to the sorn were made and he embarked. To be once more in a boat and with a hross, to feel the warmth of water on his face and to see a blue sky above him, was almost like coming home. He took off his cap and leaned back luxuriously in the bows, plying his escort with questions. He learned that the hrossa were not specially concerned with the service of Oyarsa, as he had surmised from finding a hross in charge of the ferry: three species of hnau served him in their various capacities, and the ferry was naturally entrusted to those who understood boats. He learned that his own procedure on arriving in Meldilorn must be to go where he liked and do what he pleased until Oyarsa called for him. It might be an hour or several days before this happened. He would find huts near the landing place where he could sleep if necessary and where food would be given him. In return he related as much as he could make intelligible of his own world and his journey from it; and he warned the hross of the dangerous bent men who had brought him and who were still at large on Malacandra. As he did so, it occurred to him that he had not made this sufficiently clear to Augray; but he consoled himself with the reflection that Weston and Devine seemed to have already some liaison with the sorns and that they would not be likely to molest things so large and so comparatively man-like.  At any rate, not yet. About Devine's ultimate designs he had no illusions; all he could do was to make a clean breast of them to Oyarsa. And now the ship touched land.

Ransom rose, while the hross was making fast, and looked about him. Close to the little harbour which they had entered, and to the left, were low buildings of stone - the first he had seen in Malacandra - and fires were burning. There, the hross told him, he could find food and shelter. For the rest the island seemed desolate, and its smooth slopes empty up to the grove that crowned them, where, again, he saw stonework. But this appeared to be neither temple nor house in the human sense, but a broad avenue of monoliths - a much larger Stonehenge, stately, empty and vanishing over the crest of the hill into the pale shadow of the flower-trunks. All was solitude; but as he gazed upon it he seemed to hear, against the background of morning silence, a faint, continual agitation of silvery sound - hardly a sound at all, if you attended to it, and yet impossible to ignore.

"The island is all full of eldila," said the hross in a hushed voice.

He went ashore. As though half expecting some obstacle, he took a few hesitant paces forward and stopped, and then went on again in the same fashion.

Though the groundweed was unusually soft and rich and his feet made no noise upon it, he felt an impulse to walk on tiptoes. All his movements became gentle and sedate. The width of water about this island made the air warmer than any he had yet breathed in Malacandra; the climate was almost that of a warm earthly day in late September - a day that is warm but with a hint of frost to come. The sense of awe which was increasing upon him deterred him from approaching the crown of the hill, the grove and the avenue of standing stones.

He ceased ascending about half way up the hill and began walking to his right, keeping a constant distance from the shore. He said to himself that he was having a look at the island, but his feeling was rather that the island was having a look at him. This was greatly increased by a discovery he made after he had been walking for about an hour, and which he ever afterwards found great difficulty in describing. In the most abstract terms it might be summed up by saying that the surface of the island was subject to tiny variations of light and shade which no change in the sky accounted for. If the air had not been calm and the groundweed too short and firm to move in the wind, he would have said that a faint breeze was playing with it, and working such slight alterations in the shading as it does in a cornfield on the Earth. Like the silvery noises in the air, these footsteps of light were shy of observation. Where he looked hardest they were least to be seen: on the edges of his field of vision they came crowding as though a complex arrangement of them were there in progress. To attend to any one of them was to make it invisible, and the minute brightness seemed often to have just left the spot where his eyes fell. He had no doubt that he was 'seeing' - as much as he ever would see - the eldila.  The sensation it produced in him was curious. It was not exactly uncanny, not as if he were surrounded by ghosts. It was not even as if he were being spied upon: he had rather the sense of being looked at by things that had a right to look. His feeling was less than fear; it had in it something of embarrassment, something of shyness, something of submission, and it was profoundly uneasy.

He felt tired and thought that in this favoured land it would be warm enough to rest out of doors. He sat down. The softness of the weed, the warmth and the sweet smell which pervaded the whole island, reminded him of Earth and gardens in summer. He closed his eyes for a moment; then he opened them again and noticed buildings below him, and over the lake he saw a boat approaching. Recognition suddenly came to him. That was the ferry, and these buildings were the guesthouse beside the harbour; he had walked all round the island. A certain disappointment succeeded this discovery. He was beginning to feel hungry. Perhaps it would be a good plan to go down and ask for some food; at any rate it would pass the time.

But he did not do so. When he rose and looked more closely at the guest-house he saw a considerable stir of creatures about it, and while he watched he saw that a full load of passengers was landing from the ferry-boat. In the lake he saw some moving objects which he did not at first identify but which turned out to be sorns up to their middles in the water and obviously wading to Meldilorn from the mainland. There were about ten of them. For some reason or other the island was receiving an influx of visitors. He no longer supposed that any harm would be done to him if he went down and mixed in the crowd, but he felt a reluctance to do so. The situation brought vividly back to his mind his experience as a new boy at school -new boys came a day early - hanging about and watching the arrival of the old hands. In the end he decided not to go down. He cut and ate some of the groundweed and dozed for a little.

In the afternoon, when it grew colder, he resumed his walking. Other hnau were roaming about the island by this time. He saw sorns chiefly, but this was because their height made them conspicuous. There was hardly any noise. His reluctance to meet these fellow-wanderers, who seemed to confine themselves to the coast of the island, drove him half consciously upwards and inwards. He found himself at last on the fringes of the grove and looking straight up the monolithic avenue. He had intended, for no very clearly defined reason, not to enter it, but he fell to studying the stone nearest to him, which was richly sculptured on all its four sides, and after that curiosity led him on from stone to stone.

The pictures were very puzzling. Side by side with representations of sorns and hrossa and what he supposed to be pfifltriggi there occurred again and again an upright wavy figure with only the suggestion of a face, and with wings. The wings were perfectly recognizable, and this puzzled him very much. Could it be that the traditions of Malacandrian art went back to that earlier geological and biological era when, as Augray had told him, there was life, including bird-life, on the harandra? The answer of the stones seemed to be Yes. He saw pictures of the old red forests with unmistakable birds flying among them, and many other creatures that he did not know. On another stone many of these were represented lying dead, and a fantastic hnakra-like figure, presumably symbolizing the cold, was depicted in the sky above them shooting at them with darts. Creatures still alive were crowding round the winged, wavy figure, which he took to be Oyarsa, pictured as a winged flame. On the next stone Oyarsa appeared, followed by many creatures, and apparently making a furrow with some pointed instrument. Another picture showed the furrow being enlarged by pfifltriggi with digging tools. Sorns were piling the earth up in pinnacles on each side, and hrossa seemed to be making water channels.  Ransom wondered whether this were a mythical account of the making of handramits or whether they were conceivably artificial in fact.

Many of the pictures he could make nothing of. One that particularly puzzled him showed at the bottom a segment of a circle, behind and above which rose three-quarters of a disk divided into concentric rings. He thought it was a picture of the sun rising behind a hill; certainly the segment at the bottom was full of Malacandrian scenes - Oyarsa in Meldilorn, sorns on the mountain edge of the harandra, and many other things both familiar to him and strange. He turned from it to examine the disk which rose behind it. It was not the sun. The sun was there, unmistakably, at the centre of the disk: round this the concentric circles revolved. In the first and smallest of these was pictured a little ball, on which rode a winged figure something like Oyarsa, but holding what appeared to be a trumpet. In the next, a similar ball carried another of the flaming figures. This one, instead of even the suggested face, had two bulges which after long inspection he decided were meant to be the udders or breasts of a female mammal. By this time he was quite sure that he was looking at a picture of the solar system. The first ball was Mercury, the second Venus - 'And what an extraordinary coincidence,' thought Ransom, 'that their mythology, like ours, associates some idea of the female with Venus.' The problem would have occupied him longer if a natural curiosity had not drawn his eyes on to the next ball which must represent the Earth. When he saw it, his whole mind stood still for a moment. The ball was there, but where the flame-like figure should have been, a deep depression of irregular shape had been cut as if to erase it. Once, then - but his speculations faltered and became silent before a series of unknowns. He looked at the next circle. Here there was no ball. Instead, the bottom of this circle touched the top of the big segment filled with Malacandrian scenes, so that Malacandra at this point touched the solar system and came out of it in perspective towards the spectator. Now that his mind had grasped the design, he was astonished at the vividness of it all. He stood back and drew a deep breath preparatory to tackling some of the mysteries in which he was engulfed. Malacandra, then, was Mars. The Earth - but at this point a sound of tapping or hammering, which had been going on for some time without gaining admission to his consciousness, became too insistent to be ignored. Some creature, and certainly not an eldil, was at work, close to him. A little startled - for he had been deep in thought - he turned round.

There was nothing to be seen. He shouted out, idiotically, in English:

"Who's there?"

The tapping instantly stopped and a remarkable face appeared from behind a neighbouring monolith.

It was hairless like a man's or a sorn's. It was long and pointed like a shrew's, yellow and shabby-looking, and so low in the forehead that but for the heavy development of the head at the back and behind the ears (like a bag-wig) it could not have been that of an intelligent creature. A moment later the whole of the thing came into view with a startling jump. Ransom guessed that it was a pfifltrigg - and was glad that he had not met one of this third race on his first arrival in Malacandra. It was much more insect-like or reptilian than anything he had yet seen. Its build was distinctly that of a frog, and at first Ransom thought it was resting, frog-like, on its 'hands.' Then he noticed that that part of its fore-limbs on which it was supported was really, in human terms, rather an elbow than a hand. It was broad and padded and clearly made to be walked on; but upwards from it, at an angle of about forty-five degrees, went the true forearms - thin, strong forearms, ending in enormous, sensitive, many-fingered hands. He realized that for all manual work from mining to cutting cameos this creature had the advantage of being able to work with its full strength from a supported elbow. The insect-like effect was due to the speed and jerkiness of its movements and to the fact that it could swivel its head almost all the way round like a mantis; and it was increased by a kind of dry, rasping, jingling quality in the noise of its moving. It was rather like a grasshopper, rather like one of Arthur Rackham's dwarfs, rather like a frog, and rather like a little old taxidermist whom Ransom knew in London.

"I come from another world," began Ransom.

"I know, I know," said the creature in a quick, twittering, rather impatient voice. "Come here, behind the stone. This way, this way. Oyarsa's orders. Very busy. Must begin at once.  Stand there."

Ransom found himself on the other side of the monolith, staring at a picture which was still in process of completion. The ground was liberally strewn with chips and the air was full of dust.

"There," said the creature. "Stand still. Don't look at me. Look over there."

For a moment Ransom did not quite understand what was expected of him; then, as he saw the pfifltrigg glancing to and fro at him and at the stone with the unmistakable glance of artist from model to work which is the same in all worlds, he realized and almost laughed. He was standing for his portrait! From his position he could see that the creature was cutting the stone as if it were cheese and the swiftness of its movements almost baffled his eyes, but he could get no impression of the work done, though he could study the pfifltrigg. He saw that the jingling and metallic noise was due to the number of small instruments which it carried about its body.  Sometimes, with an exclamation of annoyance, it would throw down the tool it was working with and select one of these; but the majority of those in immediate use it kept in its mouth. He realized also that this was an animal artificially clothed like himself, in some bright scaly substance which appeared richly decorated though coated in dust. It had folds of furry clothing about its throat like a comforter, and its eyes were protected by dark bulging goggles. Rings -and chains of a bright metal - not gold, he thought - adorned its limbs and neck. All the time it was working it kept up a sort of hissing whisper to itself; and when it was excited - which it usually was - the end of its nose wrinkled like a rabbit's. At last it gave another startling leap, landed about ten yards away from its work, and said:

"Yes, yes. Not so good as I hoped. Do better another time. Leave it now. Come and see yourself."

Ransom obeyed. He saw a picture of the planets, not now arranged to make a map of the solar system, but advancing in a single procession towards the spectator, and all, save one, bearing its fiery charioteer. Below lay Malacandra and there, to his surprise, was a very tolerable picture of the space-ship. Beside it stood three figures for all of which Ransom had apparently been the model. He recoiled from them in disgust. Even allowing for the strangeness of the subject from a Malacandrian point of view and for the stylization of their art, still, he thought, the creature might have made a better attempt at the human form than these stock-like dummies, almost as thick as they were tall, and sprouting about the head and neck into something that looked like fungus.

He hedged. "I expect it is like me as I look to your people," he said. "It is not how they would draw me in my own world."

"No," said the pfifltrigg. "I do not mean it to be too like. Too like, and they will not believe it - those who are born after." He added a good deal more which was difficult to understand; but while he was speaking it dawned upon Ransom that the odious figures were intended as an idealization of humanity. Conversation languished for a little. To change the subject Ransom asked a question which had been in his mind for some time.

"I cannot understand," he said, "how you and the sorns and the hrossa all come to speak the same speech. For your tongues and teeth and throats must be very different."

"You are right," said the creature. "Once we all had different speeches and we still have at home. But everyone has learned the speech of the hrossa."

"Why is that?" said Ransom, still thinking in terms of terrestrial history. "Did the hrossa once rule the others?"

"I do not understand. They are our great speakers and singers. They have more words and better. No one learns the speech of my people, for what we have to say is said in stone and suns' blood and stars' milk and all can see them. No one learns the sorns' speech, for you can change their knowledge into any words and it is still the same. You cannot do that with the songs of the hrossa. Their tongue goes all over Malacandra. I speak it to you because you are a stranger. I would speak it to a sorn. But we have our old tongues at home. You can see it in the names. The sorns have big-sounding names like Augray and Arkal and Belma and Falmay.  The hrossa have furry names like Hnoh and Hnihi and Hyoi and Hlithnahi."

"The best poetry, then, comes in the roughest speech?"

"Perhaps," said the pfifltrigg. "As the best pictures are made in the hardest stone. But my people have names like Kalakaperi and Parakataru and Tafalakeruf. I am called Kanakaberaka."

Ransom told it his name.

"In our country," said Kanakaberaka, "it is not like this. We are not pinched in a narrow handramit. There are the true forests, the green shadows, the deep mines. It is warm. It does not blaze with light like this, and it is not silent like this. I could put you in a place there in the forests where you could see a hundred fires at once and hear a hundred hammers. I wish you had come to our country. We do not live in holes like the sorns nor in bundles of weed like the hrossa. I could show you houses with a hundred pillars, one of suns' blood and the next of stars' milk, all the way ... and all the world painted on the walls."

"How do you rule yourselves?" asked Ransom. "Those who are digging in the mines - do they like it as much as those who paint the walls?"

"All keep the mines open; it is a work to be shared. But each digs for himself the thing he wants for his work. What else would he do?"

"It is not so with us."

"Then you must make very bent work. How would a maker understand working in suns' blood unless he went into the home of suns' blood himself and knew one kind from another and lived with it for days out of the light of the sky till it was in his blood and his heart, as if he thought it and ate it and spat it?"

"With us it lies very deep and hard to get and those who dig it must spend their whole lives on the skill."

"And they love it?"

"I think not ... I do not know. They are kept at it because they are given no food if they stop."

Kanakaberaka wrinkled his nose. "Then there is not food in plenty on your world?"

"I do not know," said Ransom. "I have often wished to know the answer to that question but no one can tell me. Does no one keep your people at their work, Kanakaberaka ?"

"Our females," said the pfifltrigg with a piping noise which was apparently his equivalent for a laugh.

"Are your females of more account among you than those of the other hnau among them?"

"Very greatly. The sorns make least account of females and we make most.