

Malinalco, Mexico 1962

We set out yesterday for the Aztec ruins at Malinalco. They are not particularly old as Mexican ruins go—only 1470—but distinguished for being carved out of the rock instead of being constructed stone by stone. They are also distinguished for being almost completely inaccessible, although we didn't know that when we started out or we might well not have gone. The guide book told us to go to Tenancingo from where a road would lead to Malinalco. Distance 7 1/2 miles. Inquiring at Tenancingo for the way, we were told we would be unable to get there in our car. Was the road bad? *Medio feo* (middling ugly). Was it far? Twelve kilometers. Was it dangerous? No, not dangerous. How long would it take? About an hour. We finally negotiated with a taxi driver to take us there for 200 pesos and off we set about 2:30. A bumpy mud track full of pot-holes and water led us past a cavalry regiment barracks, past an old and broken dam, through lovely bush, very Canadian—the tree branches brushing the car as we passed, maidenhair and wild flowers in the hedgegrow. After some little distance of this we came to a canteen and a shrine to Guadalupe. There the poor drivers no doubt ask protection before going down, or offer thanks upon getting up. We paused briefly on a rock ledge which fell away before us in a series of rock terraces about 3000 feet to the valley below. A truly beautiful valley, moss green now because of the rains. A miniature church spire announced the existence of a hidden village.

The road down was loose rock, hacked from the mountainside itself, and it descended in a series of hairpin bends, with a sheer drop on the outside

and indications of rock falls on the inside. On one occasion we passed a bus; twice we passed trucks. Just how, I am not certain. That the brakes held, and the gears, can only be attributed to a miracle of modern car design. It took us an hour and a half to get down. At the bottom we crossed a river in full flood and then there we were in Malinalco—bananas, oranges, corn, beans. It was sweet smelling and green. Small barefoot boys ran alongside the car calling, '*a las ruinas*' as they ran, and their friends dashed out and joined them.

Nearly inaccessible though the village was, it had electric light and through the windows of the simple dwellings we could see beds. 'There is a lot of money here,' a small girl told us later and the lights and the beds rather bore that out. Moss grew over the cobble stones of the streets. By the time our driver came to a full stop, we had collected eight children of various sizes who accompanied us on our way to 'las ruinas,' through the outskirts of the village, past boys playing a game with tops and pennies, along the edge of a stream, past fruit trees and then back up 1000 of the 3000 feet we had descended. Meanwhile the little boys ran between our feet, the occasional charging pig nearly tripped us, the sweat dripped off us, and over and above all this, the sweet smell of wild lemons which the children picked and ate, and the burbling, humourous laughter of the small boys.

An old arrow pointing up to the archeological zone promised us the ruins we had come for but we could see only the goat track beneath our feet and the rocky mountain above. The children encouraged us, carried our cameras, offered us fruit, told us where to watch our step or look out for the ants, and finally, after a long and exhausting pull, that we had arrived. And we had. On a rock ledge, the first of the major terraces rising from the valley, at the top of a flight of steps, a circular temple had been cut into the rock. We entered by a door shaped like a keyhole. On the floor at our feet, facing us, was a stone bird, wings extended. And on a raised ledge that encircled the temple was a tiger's head, flanked on both sides by eagles. All these creatures, though carefully finished, were crudely carved. To the left, was a series of rooms the walls of which must once have been painted, for traces of color remained, although it was impossible to make out any drawings. And further on still, and cut out of the rock, was what the children called the Aztec Ballroom—a great level space with its immense rock wall smoothed and polished.

Unfortunately we could do nothing more than dash about glancing here and there for with each moment that passed it was, you might say, getting

later and the thought of the ascent hung over us, literally. It would be impossible to get up the hill in the taxi in the dark. So barely giving ourselves time to get our breath we tore down the hill again, the little boys tumbling like puppies between our feet, burbling and chattering, running ahead to hide and spring out on us with grass spears. Enchanting children, full of humour, courtesy and charm.

Exhausted and dripping we flung ourselves into the cab, tipped our eight children, and started off over the moss-covered cobbles. Our driver told us we were lucky it hadn't rained or the river would have been impassable, to say nothing of the road. Lurching, jerking, tires slipping on the loose rock, we somehow reached the top as darkness was falling, wondering why we had been so foolhardy, and thanking our lucky stars there had been no rain.

