

14.Mesa Verde

The drive across the plateau to the Mesa Verde site was exciting in itself. The name means 'green table' and the trio found it hard to imagine the plateau covered in farms and crops. It was now purely a national park, devoted to tourism and archaeology. Their first stop was the visitor centre where they got all the information available in leaflet form and planned their day.

They decided to visit The Spruce Tree House, because it was still summer and they could go there without a guide. Adam, in particular, hated guided tours and always explored without their benefit if possible. He liked to feel he was one of the original inhabitants, something that was less possible with a twenty-first century commentary in his ears. Besides, he could read.

Their other choice was the Cliff Palace, the largest cliff dwelling in North America, on a guided tour with a ranger. They chose it instead of the Balcony House because it was the biggest, though the Balcony House looked enticing, with the long wooden ladders for access. However, they couldn't do everything. A party was about to leave for the palace and that suited them. Niki pointed out that they could pick the ranger's brains before setting out on their own exploration. The tour would also help them to orient themselves on the site.

Their vehicle was approved and they followed the convoy to the starting point of the tour. All of them were used to off-road driving in Europe, but Adam ended up taking the wheel. He was exhilarated by the imminence of something that had always just been something in books. Something exotic and intriguing and old.

The Anasazi had lived on the plateau and in the sandstone caves between 600AD and some time in the fourteenth century, when they had inexplicably up and left. The ranger suggested drought - the plateau had meagre water supplies and even a people used to conserving every drop would have found it hard to cope with a seriously dry year. Vlad suggested Goa'uld in a low voice and the others were hard put to it not to laugh. Tour guides, in Adam's experience, had little sense of humour. The 'high civilisation' of the ruined palace belonged to the last seventy five years or so of the seven hundred year history and was in some ways reminiscent of Mohenjo Daro in Pakistan, with its city living, sophisticated techniques and mysterious abandonment. They talked about the Goa'uld idea quietly. It might bear looking into when they got back to base.

The palace looked like a toy village from a distance, and even in among the ruins the size was disorientating. The doors were too small, the paths too narrow...It appeared that like their counterparts in mediaeval Europe, the Pueblo Indians had been slight. Adam remembered small suits of armour and Niki mentioned museum costumes with tiny waists. Poor nutrition? Evolution? It was amazing to think these people had built cities and palaces, behaving much as the 'old' world did, and had then disappeared, leaving their descendants to be mocked as savages by the brash new Americans from that same 'old' world.

Adam was reminded of modern day Setenil, in Andalucia, its houses built under and into the cliffs, almost invisible until the visitor drove down the winding roads. These buildings were even less accessible, requiring climbing and scrambling to be appreciated. But they were beautiful, meticulously constructed from bricks with mortar and traces of a kind of plaster or paint finish. Archaeologists were working as they watched, trying to explain and celebrate the ruined palace.

The tour was interesting but all-pervading. They were never allowed to forget their modern setting and submerge themselves in the history. There were too many people, as well. Archaeologists, tourists, guides ...Adam tried to imagine real people living here, eating, working, fucking ...The guide's voice intruded and he gave up.

Back on the road, they headed for the Spruce Tree House, glad to be free of the restrictions of a guided tour but glad, too, to have learnt a little more about this intriguing place. Adam had already checked that his friends knew as much and as little as he did. The so-called house, more like a compound or hamlet, had been discovered, of course, by men searching for strayed cattle. They took turns nominating other similar 'finds', starting with the Lascaux Caves, and ending with the terracotta army in China. Niki wondered aloud why it was that archaeologists and historians never seemed to find anything on their own. Stray cows or dogs seemed such a hit and miss way to discover the past.

The house itself was fascinating, and they explored every corner. Niki tactfully distanced himself so that Adam and Vlad could wander hand in hand, enjoying the ruins and each other. When Adam's mobile rang, he stared at it in disbelief, but answered it. After all, it could be an emergency. It was Siler, who obviously had an emergency of his own.

"Where are you, Fenwick?"

"In the Spruce Tree House at Mesa Verde."

"So you can't come down and help me?"

"Not exactly right now."

A long silence, then a sigh.

"Look, Sergeant, I'm on holiday. Seeing something of your country for the first time."

"For the first time?"

"Yes, and I'm officially on leave, however brief."

"Sorry. I hadn't realised. Enjoy yourself." Another sigh and he cut the connection.

"Stargate Command is owning you now, English," said Niki, who had rejoined them when he heard the phone.

"Then they are fighting me, I think," growled Vlad.

Adam laughed, and wondered how Vlad would fare against GCHQ in England. They owned him - had done since he'd signed the Official Secrets Act. But holidays were still allowed.

So, it seemed, was pleasure. Vlad pulled him into one of the tiny rooms and checked in a half-hearted fashion that nobody was near before holding him close and pushing gentle but insistent hands beneath the waistband of his jeans. A finger trailed between his buttocks then slid round the top of his thigh, lightly touching his balls and sending insane messages to his cock. Adam undid the button at his waist before it came off, and then gave himself up to the sensation of being explored. They were highly aroused by the time Vlad unfastened both zips, held their cocks together and brought them to an almost simultaneous climax. Possibly the gods of the place were watching over them – at any rate, they managed to avoid staining their clothes. Adam wondered if the old inhabitants of the room had experienced such happiness.

Then they heard Niki calling and walked out to meet him, deliberately brushing their fingers against each other as they went, tiny sparks of desire still arcing between them.

They stayed till dusk, extracting every ounce of enjoyment from their day. They might never come here again. Adam still hadn't come to terms with the vast distances between everywhere in America. It was a new concept for someone from an island that could be traversed from end to end in less than a day by car (assuming more than one driver). The Russians were more used to the idea and Vlad reminded Adam that the stargate took them even further in no time at all.

Vlad drove back while Niki and Adam watched out of the windows till the park seemed just a dream.

Dinner was good, and the wine was an excellent Californian. Adam felt mellow and happy till he remembered it was his evening for calling his mother. The Russians assured him that mothers were important, and he rang to tell her that yes, he was enjoying a few days off and was exploring America with some colleagues. She seemed more interested in the Best Western Hotel, forgetting that it was part of an originally American chain. Adam felt embarrassed by the banality of the conversation but Vlad reassured him.

"Even St. George is having a mother, English," he said.

"So what did she say when he went off to fight dragons?"

"Maybe she is asking if he take clean underwear." Vlad looked contemplative.

"I am thinking is more trouble when he is bringing home princess," added Niki. "Much work."

And Adam laughed as he tried to picture a princess in his mother's small modern flat.

Niki yawned ostentatiously and headed for bed. Adam felt suddenly shy. They were turning into a couple and it was all too new, too soon. Vlad must have sensed his mood. He ordered another bottle of wine and they carried their glasses through to the easy chairs in the bar area. They chatted easily with some of the other tourists about the ruins and the Anasazi then Vlad glanced at Adam.

"Is early start tomorrow, English," he said. "Am thinking is bedtime." With that, they left the bar and went upstairs.

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The journey home was as good as the outward trip. Mountains loomed close and threatening, then retreated, snowcapped and remote. The sun shone and the roads were almost empty. The slow speed limit imposed in the United States acted as a soporific and Adam dreamed his way through the ranges. Vlad, who was driving, was fortunately unaffected. When they stopped for a late lunch, Adam bought a postcard of dazzling peaks that would be sure to please his mother and another of Mesa Verde for Emma. He hadn't thought of Emma since the barbecue, and she seemed as remote as the mountain tops, or as the fourteenth century Indians. He would post the cards in Colorado Springs - they would probably go sooner that way.

As soon as he reached his apartment, late in the afternoon, Siler was in touch again. He really needed Adam. Adam was irritated but resigned. He took a taxi to the base while Vlad and Niki returned the hire car. The problem was easily solved, in Adam's opinion, but the men who watched him were awe-struck at the way he sorted out their mess. It was late when he finally reached home.

He wasn't certain whether to call at the Russians' apartment or phone Vlad. They hadn't made an arrangement and he was still unsure of their relationship. Not the sex. Just the relationship. But he had no sooner switched on the lights and the kettle than the door buzzer sounded. Vlad appeared to think he lived there. He walked in, shrugged off his jacket,

gave Adam a brief kiss and settled on the settee. Adam made coffee - he still hadn't had time to buy tea - and went to check his e-mails.

His face must have registered shock, because Vlad was there at once, reading over his shoulder.

Dear Adam,

Your mother and I have been talking and we think it isn't really sensible for you to come home for Christmas.

(Well, thank goodness for that).

You should experience as much of American life as possible while you're over there.

(Not to mention Russian. And alien).

Instead, I've decided to spend my holiday out there with you. I've booked my flights and I'll be joining you in the middle of October. Don't worry about the size of your flat. I'm sure we'll manage. I'm really looking forward to it. Till then,

Love,
Emma.

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