

*The excerpt below is taken from Aldous Huxley's book Brave New World. The author describes a possible future of our society. People are no longer born – they appear from bottles; all people are divided into Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons – Alphas are the most intelligent ones while Epsilons are meant to do all dirty work. The society is governed by three Controllers who make all laws. All people are happy and when they are not they use soma – an official drug a certain portion of which is prescribed to every citizen. When work is over, everybody entertains. There is no such an institute as a family, people are supposed to change partners as often as they can – being with one and the same person for a long period of time is a sin. There will be two characters in this text: Bernard Marx – conditioning specialist in New World, an Alpha+ who is not sure if everything is all right with the society he lives in, and Lenina – Bernard's current girlfriend who is a typical representative of New World.*

*Read the text and decide which of the characters is closer to you.*

### **The Odd One**

ODD, ODD, *odd*, was Lenina's verdict on Bernard Marx... Pretty harmless, perhaps; but also pretty disquieting. That mania, to start with, for doing things in private. Which meant, in practice, not doing anything at all. For what was there that one *could* do in private. (Apart, of course, from going to bed: but one couldn't do that all the time.) Yes, what *was* there? Precious little. The first afternoon they went out together was particularly fine. Lenina had suggested a swim at Toquay Country Club followed by dinner at the Oxford Union. But Bernard thought there would be too much of a crowd. Then what about a round of Electro-magnetic Golf at St. Andrew's? But again, no: Bernard considered that Electro-magnetic Golf was a waste of time.

"Then what's time for?" asked Lenina in some astonishment.

Apparently, for going walks in the Lake District; for that was what he now proposed. Land on the top of Skiddaw and walk for a couple of hours in the heather. "Alone with you, Lenina."

"But, Bernard, we shall be alone all night."

Bernard blushed and looked away. "I meant, alone for talking," he mumbled.

"Talking? But what about?" Walking and talking – that seemed a very odd way of spending an afternoon.

In the end she persuaded him, much against his will, to fly over to Amsterdam to see the Semi-Demi-Finals of the Women's Heavyweight Wrestling Championship.

"In a crowd," he grumbled. "As usual." He remained obstinately gloomy the whole afternoon; wouldn't talk to Lenina's friends (of whom they met dozens in the ice-cream *soma* bar between the wrestling bouts); and in spite of his misery absolutely refused to take the half-gramme raspberry sundae which she pressed upon him. "I'd rather be myself," he said. "Myself and nasty. Not somebody else, however jolly."

"A gramme in time saves nine," said Lenina, producing a bright treasure of sleep-taught wisdom. Bernard pushed away the proffered glass impatiently.

"Now don't lose your temper," she said. "Remember one cubic centimetre cures ten

gloomy sentiments."

"Oh, for Ford's sake, be quiet!" he shouted.

Lenina shrugged her shoulders. "A gramme is always better than a damn," she concluded with dignity, and drank the sundae herself.

On their way back across the Channel, Bernard insisted on stopping his propeller and hovering on his helicopter screws within a hundred feet of the waves. The weather had taken a change for the worse; a south-westerly wind had sprung up, the sky was cloudy.

"Look," he commanded.

"But it's horrible," said Lenina, shrinking back from the window. She was appalled by the rushing emptiness of the night, by the black foam-flecked water heaving beneath them, by the pale face of the moon, so haggard and distracted among the hastening clouds. "Let's turn on the radio. Quick!" She reached for the dialling knob on the dash-board and turned it at random.

"... skies are blue inside of you," sang sixteen tremoloing falsettos, "the weather's always ..."

Then a hiccough and silence. Bernard had switched of the current.

"I want to look at the sea in peace," he said. "One can't even look with that beastly noise going on."

"But it's lovely. And I don't want to look."

"But I do," he insisted. "It makes me feel as though ..." he hesitated, searching for words with which to express himself, "as though I were more *me*, if you see what I mean. More on my own, not so completely a part of something else. Not just a cell in the social body. Doesn't it make you feel like that, Lenina?"

But Lenina was crying. "It's horrible, it's horrible," she kept repeating. "And how can you talk like that about not wanting to be a part of the social body? After all, every one works for every one else. We can't do without any one. Even Epsilons ..."

"Yes, I know," said Bernard derisively. "Even Epsilons are useful! So am I. And I damned well wish I weren't!"

Lenina was shocked by his blasphemy. "Bernard!" She protested in a voice of amazed distress. "How can you?"

In a different key, "How can I?" he repeated meditatively. "No, the real problem is: How is it that I can't, or rather – because, after all, I know quite well why I can't – what would it be like if I could, if I were free – not enslaved by my conditioning."

"But, Bernard, you're saying the most awful things."

"Don't you wish you were free, Lenina?"

"I don't know what you mean. I am free. Free to have the most wonderful time."

Everybody's happy nowadays."

He laughed, "Yes, 'Everybody's happy nowadays.' We begin giving the children that at five. But wouldn't you like to be free to be happy in some other way, Lenina? In your own way, for example; not in everybody else's way."

"I don't know what you mean," she repeated. Then, turning to him, "Oh, do let's go back, Bernard," she besought; "I do so hate it here."

"Don't you like being with me?"

"But of course, Bernard. It's this horrible place."

"I thought we'd be more ... more *together* here – with nothing but the sea and moon. More together than in that crowd, or even in my rooms. Don't you understand that?"

"I don't understand anything," she said with decision, determined to preserve her incomprehension intact. "Nothing. Least of all," she continued in another tone "why you don't take *soma* when you have these dreadful ideas of yours. You'd forget all about them. And instead of feeling miserable, you'd be jolly. *So jolly*," she repeated and smiled, for all the puzzled anxiety in her eyes, with what was meant to be an inviting and voluptuous cajolery.

He looked at her in silence, his face unresponsive and very grave–looked at her intently. After a few seconds Lenina's eyes flinched away; she uttered a nervous little laugh, tried to think of something to say and couldn't. The silence prolonged itself.

When Bernard spoke at last, it was in a small tired voice. "All right then," he said, "we'll go back." And stepping hard on the accelerator, he sent the machine rocketing up into the sky. At four thousand he started his propeller. They flew in silence for a minute or two. Then, suddenly, Bernard began to laugh. Rather oddly, Lenina thought, but still, it was laughter.

"Feeling better?" she ventured to ask.

For answer, he lifted one hand from the controls and, slipping his arm around her, began to fondle her breasts.

"Thank Ford," she said to herself, "he's all right again."

Half an hour later they were back in his rooms. Bernard swallowed four tablets of *soma* at a gulp, turned on the radio and television and began to undress.

"Well," Lenina enquired, with significant archness when they met next afternoon on the roof, "did you think it was fun yesterday?"

Bernard nodded. They climbed into the plane. A little jolt, and they were off.

"Every one says I'm awfully pneumatic," said Lenina reflectively, patting her own legs.

"Awfully." But there was an expression of pain in Bernard's eyes. "Like meat," he was thinking.

She looked up with a certain anxiety. "But you don't think I'm *too* plump, do you?"

He shook his head. Like so much meat.

"You think I'm all right." Another nod. "In every way?"

"Perfect," he said aloud. And inwardly. "She thinks of herself that way. She doesn't mind being meat."

Lenina smiled triumphantly. But her satisfaction was premature.

"All the same," he went on, after a little pause, "I still rather wish it had all ended differently."

"Differently?" Were there other endings?

"I didn't want it to end with our going to bed," he specified.

Lenina was astonished.

"Not at once, not the first day."

"But then what ...?"

He began to talk a lot of incomprehensible and dangerous nonsense. Lenina did her best to stop the ears of her mind; but every now and then a phrase would insist on becoming audible. "... to try the effect of arresting my impulses," she heard him say. The words seemed to touch a spring in her mind.

"Never put off till to-morrow the fun you can have to-day," she said gravely.

"Two hundred repetitions, twice a week from fourteen to sixteen and a half," was all his comment. The mad bad talk rambled on. "I want to know what passion is," she heard him saying. "I want to feel something strongly."

"When the individual feels, the community reels," Lenina pronounced.

"Well, why shouldn't it reel a bit?"

"Bernard!"

But Bernard remained unabashed.

"Adults intellectually and during working hours," he went on. "Infants where feeling and desire are concerned."

"Our Ford loved infants."

Ignoring the interruption. "It suddenly struck me the other day," continued Bernard, "that it might be possible to be an adult all the time."

"I don't understand." Lenina's tone was firm.

"I know you don't. And that's why we went to bed together yesterday – like infants – instead of being adults and waiting."

"But it was fun," Lenina insisted. "Wasn't it?"

"Oh, the greatest fun," he answered, but in a voice so mournful, with an expression so profoundly miserable, that Lenina felt all her triumph suddenly evaporate. Perhaps he had found her too plump, after all.

"I told you so," was all that Fanny said, when Lenina came and made her confidences. "It's the alcohol they put in his surrogate."

"All the same," Lenina insisted. "I do like him. He has such awfully nice hands. And the way he moves his shoulders – that's very attractive." She sighed. "But I wish he weren't so odd."

(Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*)