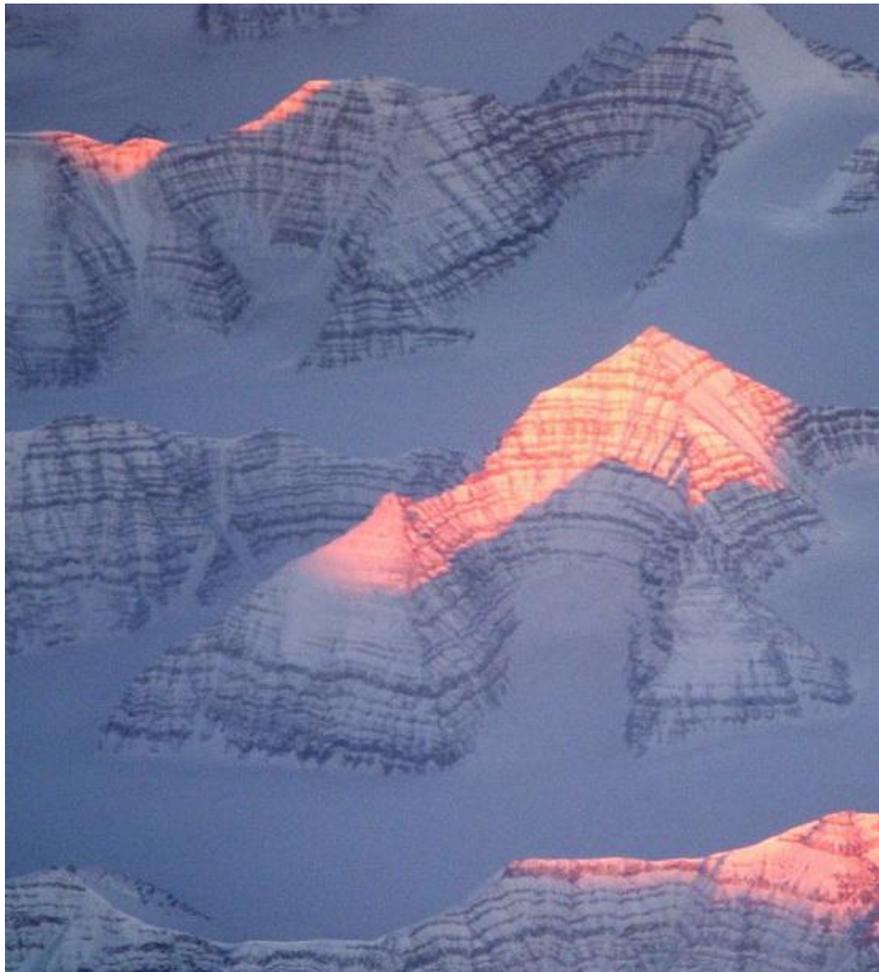


**Alfred Döblin**

# **MOUNTAINS OCEANS GIANTS**

**Translated and edited by C. D. Godwin**



**PART SEVEN:**

**THE DE-ICING OF GREENLAND**

*Berge Meere und Giganten* by Alfred Döblin  
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## PART SEVEN

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## TO GREENLAND

RELUCTANTLY the ships pulled away from Iceland, very slowly entered the mighty waters of the Atlantic. Their ears still rang with that deep abysmal booming. It was like a seashell pressed to the ear. They sailed the open sea which months ago, endless long months, they had crossed from the Shetland Islands to the 60th parallel. The sea that battered coastlines with shingle and sand, Ocean, wide hundred-mile water, dark wave-dappled being, set in motion by tenuous breezes and overflowed by creatures flapping mewing. Once before, ships had left behind Muckle Roe and Foula, Mainland, the craggy isles of Yell, Samphyra, Uyea, Unst, wheeling bird-islets receding. Their big bleak searching eyes saw the sun again, that unchained Fire, incinerating Hell of everything that crawls flies hops, white seething sea of flame, hurling metallic clouds that fall back as slag. Metals that chirp, firebreath upon firebreath, primal beings blooming free, Helium Manganese Calcium Strontium.

They stumbled between deck and cabin, sniffed the cold nor'easter blowing up, gazed wondering at the waves. Memories unclear of what had been left behind. They came from Brussels London, city-states in the south; were brought together there. Had flung bridgeworks across Iceland. Towns, they remembered towns. What strange people those Settlers are. It is for them we were sent here. The sea flowing down there; good that it flows. They had no desire for towns. How strangely everything was coloured: senates townzones factories machines. Marduk the great tyrant fought in the Marches; Zimbo came after him. The zones yielded to the Settlers; that's why we were sent here, to Iceland, Greenland. What sort of people are they back there. Hear nothing. Keep on across the sea. Greenland, to Greenland.

The Arctic Mediterranean lay in two deep basins. Between Spitsbergen and Greenland the Arctic Basin reached a depth of three miles. A broad underwater ridge running barely three hundred yards below the surface, Thomson Ridge, divided the Arctic basin from the Atlantic Ocean. From eastern Greenland the ridge ran to Iceland. To the northeast the ridge separated the Arctic deep from the basin around the New Siberian Islands. Following the east coast of Greenland at a distance, the ships of the townzones sailed through icy seas. The warm tropical Gulf Stream with the ocean behind it sent its waters up against Iceland, curled around the island, flowed past the southern tip of Greenland. Alongside it, over it from north and east flowed the East Greenland Current carrying driftwood and ice; the frigid Labrador Current came from the west to merge with it. They flowed high above silent abyssal deeps.

And suddenly they all became aware of the Tourmaline vessels, the floating cargo that had come among them. The bowels of the ships were packed full of webbing charged with heat from the volcanoes, snatched hurriedly from raging huffing plains of fire. Dear roaring Iceland sailed with them. Eight-domed Hekla, lava spilling from the Thjorsa River down to a hissing sea. Ships of the Myvatn flotilla sailing with the fleet had named the group of Tourmaline carriers after the volcanoes from which they had drawn their power. There was the Leirhnjúkur Class. Broad-shouldered Herðubreið, terrible Dyngja. Katla, gigantic Öraefa on the southern edge of Vatna glacier. There was, the people thought to themselves, some reluctance in them, in these webs, to travel to Greenland, to give away this life and blood, spread it over the land at the behest of the townzones. Herðubreið Katla Hekla Myvatn were sailing with them, had been placed under their protection. None of the leaders suspected that some of those who sailed with them down the southward-flowing East Greenland Current had a notion to shield the Tourmaline vessels with their love. That they meant to blow open the cargo holds. The Tourmaline-class vessels sailed in a long line, guarded by personnel transports. Smaller vessels broke a passage for them through pack-ice. They steered their way cautiously past icebergs. Always there were boats from every ship swarming about the Tourmaline carriers, always near at hand like the hands of a nursemaid.

Then, after a week of aimless sailing, came the sudden order: prepare all machines, spread out systematically all around Greenland from Melville Land above eighty degrees north to Cape Farewell below sixty degrees. They were to pass along Denmark Strait in the east, and up Baffin Bay in the west to Ellesmere Island. There was a further order: assign a few guard ships to the Tourmaline vessels; no one was to approach the great freighters too closely.

Those who wanted to scuttle the freighters thought at first they had been caught out. They soon saw that something else had nudged the leaders to these precautions. The hulls laden with volcanic heat pressed steadily on through the water. They began to acquire remarkable company. Not far from Iceland the crews of escort and guard vessels had noticed great numbers of fish shoaling around the fleet. They thought: it must just be the track we're following. Two or three days later they noticed that the fish showed special interest in the Tourmaline vessels. Brown seaweed clung to the hulls, resisted the action of waves. When ice floes shaved part of the bow clear, new clumps of seaweed appeared almost at once as if drawn by a magnetic force, seemed almost to spring out of the massive hull. The Tourmaline freighters wore the seaweed like trailing beards. When they slowed, the hulls were surrounded by a wide fringe of brown green grey vegetation. The screws shuddered and shook their blades free; but the plants gained entry to the long shaft tunnels, invaded dark narrow channels deep

into the enormous vessels, wound around the heavy smoothly spinning steel shafts. Men had to go down to the freezing spaces, hack away with hooks and knives the growth that threatened to smother the ships. They hauled heavy streamers up on deck, past the astonished crew. These were not gelatinous filaments of the delicate algae that floated in the waves below, dense as meadowgrass, colouring the sea olive-green. Rather they were arm-thick shrubbery, many-branched, equipped with sharp teeth inches long; they produced berries big as apples that served as swim-bladders; these lifted like heads. Cleaning details set to work on every freighter. They had to push heaps of algae from ladders with brooms, beat them from spars with sticks.

All around the Tourmaline ships, as if summoned by signal-call or smell, whales swam, kept the freighters company, broke the surface with a wavelike arcing motion, pushed blindly past the escort ships. You saw them swimming with open maw, propelled by rapid strokes of the tail fin. Scythe-shaped curving long narrow teeth by the hundred, honey-yellow in the great jaws; water swept between the teeth into the throat, sprayed in a fountain from the black skull's blowhole. Seething of dark shiny backs, water spouting high. The timid creatures followed the transports with grim determination. When boats from the escort vessels set out with harpoons that they had made for fun, the creatures slipped away. But when the boats tried to block them from the freighters, they let rip with their angry sweeping tails.

During these days the lighting and communications facilities on the freighters degraded. Engineers understood that the disturbance must lie in the volcano ships themselves. No heat was leaking from the mountains of mineral webbing. People went down into the holds where the webs hung across the whole width. The oily insulation was nowhere defective. Other substances, unknown, were being radiated. At night the volcano ships glowed dimly, sailed in a haze; lamps flickered went out for hours at a time. Then the leaders, uneasy now, ordered an end to aimless cruising; everything was to be made ready for the assault on Greenland.

But the volcano ships, pitching heavily through wastes of ice, were touched by a spell. They seemed to want to sink into the ice. A night of slow sailing was enough to secure the vessels to the sea as if with hawsers. Floating scraped-off dying seaweed came to life again, put out new stems and leaves. The edges of ice floes were overrun by these algal populations, which sent long stalks and organs like palm-leaves up the sides of the ships, clamped the vessels to the ice. The freighters were freed with fire and explosives.

People on the freighters and nearby were strangely distracted. Soon it became impossible to draft people onto the Tourmaline ships. After less than a day they went about in lethargy, a

kind of obsession that no amount of movement and washing could fend off. Like opium smokers they sat here, sat there, plodded laboriously about their tasks. It became hard for them to move their faces. These mask-like expressions were a symptom of the condition: internally they were sweetly moved, kept gazing through ladders doors through walls and decks, up to the sky, saw landscapes of toppling trees, clouds stretching long, warm drops falling on their bodies, lips; they licked, swallowed. A violent, soon irresistible libidinous feeling ran through them. Men trembled in a chill of passion, women shook themselves, went slowly twitching. Every limb was filled with lust, every movement brought frenzy nearer. They embraced, and when they had mingled their bodies and uncoiled again they remained unsatisfied. They kissed cuddled ropes, rubbed and bumped arms and legs and torsos against ladders. Huge algal stalks reared over the rails; they hauled them in, it was these they desired. Blissful whimpering, desperate sighs, anxious inconsolable groans. Then they laughed again, let go of themselves and everything, went about their work in a daze. But spittle drooled from them, such a soft twisting behind the forehead, the head was flung back. In order to continue through the ice, by the end of the second day people had to be forcibly removed from the freighters. All inessential crew left the volcano ships. The fleets plunged through the ocean towards their designated targets.

Now at night you could see with the naked eye what lay inside the giant volcano freighters. When the sun went down and lights glimmered from the other ships, the vessels Hekla Leirhnjúkur Dyngja Katla Myvatn, on which no lamps burned, sailed as if sheathed in a pale light. You could make out the whole extent of the vessels down to the keel in the dark water; a delicate white light shimmered on screws spars lines, on encroaching masses of vegetation. The intensity of the emanation grew hour by hour. In the dark you could see water lit up for many yards around the ships. The personnel transports and escort vessels left an ever-widening gap between them and the floating warehouses; small teams risked crossing to them for no more than a few hours at a time. Everyone was nervous. They lay around, conscience-stricken. What should they do? What should be done with the terrible volcano-holds dragging along behind them, looming like monsters over them? No one thought now of blowing them up. They begged the leaders to ram the Tourmaline freighters into thick ice, and flee. But what would happen to the webbing. Maybe the energy stores would melt, drift south in the current, the insulation might break down; they might send fearsome beings of fire and radiation against the continents. They must be done with them, but cannot abscond. On to Greenland. And leaders and crew shuddered at what was to come, how it would unfold.

They sailed on. Shoals of fish flashed like metal in the water. Salmon blue-grey with dark wagging fins. Schools of mackerel-pike, pursued by tuna and leaping chasing bonito. It seemed that the meadow-plants of the seafloor had torn free and floated up to cling to the hulls. Their live weight impeded the progress of the giant Tourmaline freighters, but they seemed not to notice. The bow lifted ever higher out of the spraying ocean, slid at night through the water like glowing living creatures, pursued by the rest of the vessel; it seemed to be readying itself to fly over the sea. In an inexplicable manner, causing alarm in the accompanying fleets, the volcano ships towered over the rest. The bow, the exposed hull slid smoothly over the sea's surface as if on rails. The keel would surely soon reach the waterline, screws would spin free in air.

And as they loomed mountain-high over the rest of the fleet, their bodies began to buckle. The ships reared up savage, rutting. There was a raging clattering around them, the engines in their bowels laboured, a dauntless crew, relieved hourly, kept them working, bit back all fear. The stringy stalks of weed that lay over decks and spars were torn in two by the onrushing vessels. They shrugged off the ice that snuggled up to them, welded itself to them. For miles around the freighters seabirds swarmed; they pounced on the structures, sat on creeping algae, scratched mewing twittering screaming at the stalks and leaves that covered the hull. Great northern divers in their thousands, screaming shrilly, flapped on wires ropes, through hatches deck-windows, covered the accommodation ladders with their twitching feathered bodies, hopped unhelpfully about, clustered thickly around the hull. Jostling speeding fish forced them aloft, spouts from whales' blowholes sent them whirling into the air. Birds rode the wind over from icy Greenland.

These were not ships now. They were mountains, meadows. And the ships crackled. They crackled with the same sound the webs had emitted when the flier-squadrons hauled them up from Iceland's sea of fire. The clear even sound rang eerily through all the beating wings cawing twittering, hissed softly gently like steam from a turbine's nozzles.

The land they sought between longitudes thirty and forty west was out of sight. A thick barrier of ice had gathered in front of it. From the direction in which it lay came a biting chill and ever more new white ice. Bright glassy ice pushed across the ocean's surface in blocks floes crags. The closer the fleets came to the east or west coast of the Greenland continent, the taller the icebergs they had to evade. These drifted white and blue from unseen coasts. Pack-ice came humped and jagged, speeded by northerly gales, floes twisted about, ground and crashed together, piled up atop each other, overturned, sloshed up and down in open water. Mountains and battlements approached, tall towers of floes jammed together. They gleamed

out of the night. The same water which had made them washed high over them, dripped from them. It poured in torrents, cut crevasses deep into them. They moved like creatures of fable through the twilight, icicles hung arm-long from their balconies, chinked glassily; suddenly a fragile gallery would fall with a crash onto heaving floes.

The seafarers sought Greenland. As they trailed in the wake of the leaping ramming icebreaker auxiliaries they were already in that land's realm: these were advance parties of the icecap. Like a lush ancient tree that year after year bears its fruit, apples emerging always new out of the soil, out of the same trunk, formed and born of the same being, so did Greenland lie on the black water behind the twilight, thousands of miles wide, pregnant. Ice grew on it, the land did not tremble; out of its abundance, in silence, masses slid into the sea.

Then to the east behind the great ice barrier the coast appeared, wild Alpine land. The fjords dark water-mirrors; black peaks. From every height glaciers crept into the depths of rocky defiles. Pyramids of ice soared over mountain crests. Forked valleys filled with white rubble. A flotilla pulled into Gael Hamkes Bay at the 74th parallel, in panicked terror of the Tourmaline freighters they were escorting. They were consumed by a furious notion that they must flee from these vessels. Rid themselves of the Tourmaline at any cost. Clavering Island lay in the bay, craggy and glacier-covered like the mainland. Onto the rocky floor of the coast the people, demented now, welded lightweight poles and pylons. On cliffs around the shallow coastal waters they laid auxiliary girders. They flung the crystal webs from their ships over the pylons poles girders, at once set fire to the emptied ships. They were like people with blood on their hands after a murder, and their only recourse is to hack off their fingers. Feverishly they spread plates beneath the webbing to take up the electrical potential; fell over one another to splice conductors from the great cable the fleet was hauling behind it. Within a single night current flowed from the cable over the plates. The insulation around the webs melted. White-red flash. Earth-shattering thunder. The island flung up white clouds, steam glowed red from below; it shot up wildly in endless gusts. Installations destroyed, pylons and girders all melted. Torn webbing scattered askew across the glacier, eating into it.

The glacier did not lie still: crevasses opened, the webs sank into the depths. The glacier lurched over them; ice steamed. But then two mountain peaks bent their heads to the webbing, already shredded by the warmed slipping blocks of glacier ice. And as they spread their arms over the smouldering humming crystals down into the cloudy stew, plunging onto the webbing like a wrestler onto the body of his felled opponent, the crystals burst smashed asunder. The mountain masses began to slide as if something living lay under them. They crushed the crackling tatters of webbing beneath them, rolled shoved collapsed upon

themselves. With a crash they gaped open over the buried defunct webbing; steam spouted as from a chimney. Hour after hour a white and black haze of smelted particles hissed over the island in writhing plumes. The maddened teams from the nearby flotilla were hurled with their ships across the bay, onto cliffs, jammed between ice-floes.

Around the same time as these events, a panic seemed to seize all the fleets. Despite the sobering outcome of the events in Gael Hamkes Bay, on many ships they set urgently about similar acts of violence. Reversals of certain flotillas, the rout of attempted advances on the mainland were reported. De Barros Kylin Wollaston remained stone-faced; they appeared among the crews, who were looking to halt operations. Persuasive enchanting women went with them around the fleets, importuned the desperate: "Think of Myvatn, of Herðubreið. Think what you've already achieved and overcome, what lies behind you. We shan't give up. None of us shall give up. We shan't be defeated. You shall not forget who you are." Sobbing people swallowed, gritted their teeth. A terrible time endured until the oil-cloud ships arrived.

## OIL-CLOUDS

IT WAS AT the gathering-grounds of the European fleets, the Shetland and Faroe Islands, that the idea came which first enabled the continuation of the expedition and the wider use of Tourmaline webbing. Here on the technical ships with their laboratories toiled men who had inherited the ideas of Angela Castel of the March, inventor of the smokeblower weapon. She was the first to develop on a large scale sluggish clouds that she used to envelop and pin down large armies. Castel's black heavy violet smoke-clouds lacked viscosity; they dispersed after a while, had no buoyancy. Castel had struggled, to no avail, to make the smoke-mass compact enough to suffocate the shrouded pinned-down enemy units. Now, during these weeks when western physicists biologists chemists went about in gloom, depressed by the sombre events on Iceland, the dangerous news from the fleets, the idea of sluggish smoke was advanced significantly by the Londoner Holyhead, who would soon vanish from sight. Driven by certain impulses he succeeded in finding the specific mix that would move like a gas through air, hold tenaciously together like gelatine, and would fill space with its own specific electrical potential, maintain a given height in air, an intermediate being between gas and fluid.

Hearing of the plan for this new expedition, a Syrian called Bou Jeloud flew with people of his tribe to the region of the northern townzones. He came from the steppe south of Damascus. He was a product of the deserts Al-Harra Al-Laja Dirat-at-Tulul. Across the flattened mounds, black boulders of the dried-up baking landscape he swept every summer

like a bird with the Anaze, his tribe, remnants of which had come together again. In winters they rode over the steppe to Arabia, put villages to the torch. Only once had he come to a body of water: the Dead Sea. He had ridden only horses and camels. These tawny men, sinewy, with stringy black beards, sailed in delight over the storm-tossed sea north to the gathering grounds in the Shetlands. They pointed out to one another the waves at the bow of their ship, the wash at the sides, the spray at the rudder. It was a desert, another desert. Eyes could never feast enough on the rippling rocking criss-crossing surging. Dunes that the wind lifted and levelled. They understood them well, these waves. Then jellyfish appeared, brownblack multi-armed cephalopods, shoals of fish zigzagged. They had no wish to change a thing. They liked to stand on deck, longed to be down in this water stroked by the wind.

Oh for a horse, a camel that could ride across water. The tawny people, as they spread their white burnoose over the lands of ice, frowned and smiled: "Black steppe of Dirat-at-Tulul. Oh the air here is cold. How good it would be to ride in a line across the water." They murmured among themselves.

Holyhead, taciturn engineer from London, smiled at Bou Jeloud: "I'll make some ice for you. Then you can ride over the water as far as you like."

"You know my thoughts?"

"I'll blow sand under your feet. I'll spread sand on the frozen water. If you want, you'll walk or ride to Greenland."

"You promise me the moon. Ha! What are you peddling? The whole nonsense! Sure, you can do anything at all. But I don't care what you can do. Not much."

Holyhead smiled a sincere friendly smile as the lean tawny people went away. But something lurked in him. He wanted to do Bou Jeloud a favour. They were so lovable and childlike. He wanted to entrust to them what he could. They would smile on him again. Holyhead, dumpy black-bearded melancholy stooping man, was already numb, like many on the gathering ships. He was not deceived by the silence of the senates about the expedition's fate. The terrible events on Iceland, the mysterious people-devouring disaster shook him, weakened him, made him tired. What was life for. He went to his construction ship. If Bou Jeloud would only smile again.

One morning he met the Bedouin in their usual stance, lounging curious friendly affectionate at the ship's rail. Water swept by below, wind gusted around them. Ice-floes driving down from the north. Bou Jeloud thrust his hands under his belt. "Not stay on the ship.

We wait a week, maybe two, until our fleet is together. I can wait that long. And then the voyage.”

El Irak, older stockier: “We shall be patient.”

“Why, El Irak? No one forces us to be patient.”

“What do you mean?”

“This is not my affair. El Irak, I am a prisoner. I stand at bars and look down. I don’t like the ship.”

“Well, Jeloud.”

“I shall not stay much longer.”

They whispered darkly together. Suddenly, laughing El Irak was gone. And as Holyhead approached young Jeloud, lanky man in a burnoose, was staring at the water, calling out, waving his arms: “Look! There! Irak there! El Irak! El Irak!”

The rail crowded with cooing chattering people. Empty boat below. Stocky Irak on an ice-floe, scooping water, spraying it high around him. He trod the edge of the floe, laughing. Cheerful cries of advice from above, they stamped their feet. The floe drifted, drifting around a cliff. It sped sideways away. They stretched their necks. Irak on the floe appeared again: he had tumbled in, was climbing out. His burnoose had come loose, he waved it anxiously at the ship. The Bedouin cried out. A flier took off from the afterdeck. Irak’s floe drifted close to another over open water, this one sloping, mountainous, crowded with gulls. Irak’s flooding sheet of ice cracked against the sluggish white iceberg, drove splintering up its side; gulls flapped screaming in the air. El Irak vanished under glassy rubble. Fliers and boats in the water. Stately floes and fragments of ice drifted on the sea. The gulls came back down, hopped on the edges of the iceberg.

For the next few days Holyhead avoided the Syrians, who held hours-long prayer sessions on a roped-off corner of the deck. A woman with full brown arms stood beside angry Jeloud.

“You do not have good feeling with us, Jedaida. You would rather be in Al-Harra.”

“Oh Jeloud, I would rather be in Al-Harra.”

“I too, Jedaida. We are a bunch of donkeys. The townzones want to make a new continent. What has this to do with me.”

Jedaida pouted her full lips: “The wind is nice. The water could be nice as well. It’s not too cold.”

Jeloud clenched his fists: "I shall leave the ship. We all want to leave the ships. I do not let them mock and tempt me like they did El Irak. I shall go home. Jump in the water. I hate the ship. Maybe they will tempt us to jump. I won't stand around like a tethered horse. Enough, Jedaida."

Her eyes were sad. The sea crashed rolled heavily, licked over reefs.

"I'll make him smile again," thought black-bearded Holyhead. Jedaida from Damascus in her yellow robe, her fine golden face looked at him suspiciously; she drew the veil across her mouth. "Oh she's lovely, this Jedaida. They are in mourning. If only they don't leave. So much nicer to do them a favour, than to think of Greenland."

The technologist touched Bou Jeloud's arm; he turned to face him. "I haven't seen you since El Irak's accident, Jeloud. Are you avoiding me?"

"You? Who are you?"

"You said you'd feel no pleasure if I were to blow sand over your feet, on the frozen water. You said you didn't care."

Bou Jeloud laid an arm on Jedaida's shoulder: "See this man, Jedaida. He wants to melt Greenland's ice. With me he makes jokes."

The woman, looking at the deck: "Come. Let us go below."

The white man looked down too. "I was unable to save El Irak, Jeloud. But I would like to ask if you can be patient. Will you be patient, Jeloud, and you, Jedaida?"

The brown Syrian, bored, shut his eyes: "What does the clever man from London want?"

Holyhead lifted his gaze, he savoured Jeloud's grief: "Come over to my construction ship, Bou Jeloud. I want to show you something."

Jedaida tugged at Jeloud's arm: "Don't go."

"I won't come, Holyhead. You'll tempt me to jump in the water, like Irak."

"I mean you well, you and your wife Jedaida. I'm not too bothered about Greenland. Who now cares about the affairs of the townzones. Come, you too, Jedaida, if you want. We'll do something that will quieten your longing for the desert of Al-Harra. The sea too is beautiful. You'll be happier."

"I tell you, Holyhead, cunning white engineer. You think I am a brown simpleton to be dazzled by ten words. I shall come to your ship. I am not afraid of you. I am not afraid of him,

Jedaida. He thinks I am like this one or that one. I come with you, Holyhead.” Jedaida stepped back. Her head was still bowed, arms crossed at her breast. Whispered: “Promise me, Holyhead, that nothing will happen to him.”

The black-bearded engineer: “You come too, Jedaida.”

“Promise me nothing will happen to him.”

And Bou Jeloud went with the delighted inwardly trembling white man. His tribe saw nothing of him for days on end. One evening he went down on his knees before Jedaida, buried his head in her lap, pressed his lips to her breast, rubbed his face against her cold cheeks, groaned. He was in good form. “Sweet homeland. Lovely desert. Lovely crags. Lovely sand. We are coming to the waves, dear Jedaida, to waves to waves, just think, it’s happening.”

She looked down at him. What has he done to him.

But Bou Jeloud pulled her into his cabin, embraced her until she melted. He slept for hours with her in the cabin, closer than they had been since coming aboard.

She left him lying there asleep, hissed at Holyhead: “What is up with Jeloud?”

“You tell me, Jedaida.”

“He groans. He is crazy. He lies in his cabin.”

“He was happy. He made no complaint to me.”

“You promised me nothing would happen to him. I – I do not like him so.”

She returned to the cabin where he was still sleeping, lay gingerly at his side. After listening to his breathing she pressed against him. “Jedaida,” he muttered, dreaming into the dark, “I shall ride on water. Water shall feel our hoofbeats. We can do it. Water. Ride to Greenland.” She turned away.

Now Bou Jeloud kept to the engineer’s ship. The woman slipped across once to observe him. Outside a door was a thin wreath of smoke. The smoke was evanescent as a spider’s web, but it pushed Jedaida’s veil back over her head. She touched it. It was like rubber, resisted, let itself be stretched, sprang back. The black-bearded white man Holyhead came to the door in his lab coat, drew back his lips when he saw the woman. His eyes on the woman, he gathered the smoke in his arms as if it were a delicate little animal body, held and stroked it like a kitten. Some strands came loose at this sudden grasping, he gathered them in, held them to his chest.

“Come, Jedaida. Jeloud is here. We’re glad to see you. We keep no secrets from you.”

She stood uncertainly at the door that he held open for her, gazed around at the air, at Holyhead's arms. "What was that? The smoke. What was that?"

"Come, Jedaida. Please come in. Don't stand in the doorway."

"What is this smoke? What will you do with it? You hold it in your arms."

The white man smiled. "Yes, look. This is smoke, and no smoke. We made it, Jeloud and I. Pretty, isn't it? But do come in, join us."

The brown narrow-shouldered woman stood there, could not lift her eyes from the smoke, her head high. Tonelessly she said: "Thank you. I shall go. I came just for a moment." And as Jeloud's voice sang out in the swirling room she quickly turned and ran back up the steps, at her side a smoke-wad from which she shrank back with a cry. Two sailors chased the wad. They caught it. Suddenly it hung motionless over a step. The laughing men tried to push it higher. Lunged, pushed at it with their shoulders. Jedaida, frozen by an irresistible urge, seized with fear, close to breakdown, watched from above, both hands at her veiled throat, watched them strike playfully at the wad with a crowbar, push the iron from below into the soft mass until it clanged against the step. The crowbar swung like a pendulum with the rocking of the ship, unsupported. The men convulsed in laughter, bent their knees, beckoned her down. She ran across the deck.

Jeloud, proud young Bedouin, her husband, did not ask after her, saw little of her. He stood among the other Bedouin glowing, boastful. Wildly elated, eyes wandering like a drunkard's, he sometimes chased after his wife, tried to catch her now fully-veiled form. She fought him off, begged hesitantly, softly: that he not neglect his work, that he not allow himself to sink to unworthy amusements. Jeloud clapped his hands: "Did you hear that? My work, she said. Yes, it is my work, and Holyhead's. You are sweet, my lady Jedaida. Soon all, all of you will see what we have made."

"Who are this 'we'?"

"Holyhead, my friend Holyhead and me. Oh he can do so many things. We shall create something wonder-wonderful."

She whispered: "Yes, I am proud of you." Gritted teeth.

"We shall ride over the sea, Jedaida. It will happen. What do you say. Already my horse in the hold has double, triple rations. It will rejoice with me in this great hour. There, look at the water."

"I have seen it, Jeloud."

“Take off your veil. You can see nothing through the veil.”

“I can see through the veil.”

“Not clearly enough. Come, give. Give. Look, there it is, now you see it. Now you’ll see. Look, Jedaida my sweet wife, my honey, my balm, those are waves. Grey and green and white. More beautiful even than our sands in Al-Harra. One day I shall go down onto them with my horse. Just think, it will happen. I shall go down like El Irak, but I won’t fall in. Not I. By Allah, not I. I shall leap onto my bay, sit in my saddle like before, Jedaida, when I fetched you. But why are you crying?”

“Am I crying? Give me back my veil.”

“You think I shall fall in, Jedaida? Just like El Irak! Hoho! Have no fear, my sweet. I shall not fall in. You are so lovely. Don’t cry. We test everything well, Holyhead and I.”

“Give me my veil!” she cried, “give me my veil. You are my husband. You cannot deny me my veil.”

“Here. Here it is. It’s yours. I wanted to show you the sea. But I’ve made you cross? How? Now I can’t see your face. Now I must imagine how lovely you are.”

She let him take her hand. Her shoulders were heaving. But as she left he raised his arms in triumph: “She is sad! She’s afraid for me! Yet I will succeed at this.”

A new personnel transport fleet had set off for Greenland. Holyhead’s laboratory ships stayed behind. It was known at the gathering ground that Holyhead, the Englishman, had had a remarkable unprecedented stroke of luck: a Syrian had become his assistant. One afternoon, launches from all the vessels arranged themselves around Holyhead’s construction ship. Portholes were opened amidships; close to the waterline big flue-like tubes projected. From their funnel-shaped mouths white smoke poured in wide full puffs; they sank as they left the funnel, panned out, spread across the water, covered the surface. The smoke lay level and dense over the water, on the water. It lifted with the waves. At its edges the rocking cotton-wool mist bulged and fluttered, became ragged; nearby boats were nudged aside by the vapour. They hit at it with oars; these at once rebounded from the encroaching emanation as if from solid rubber or cork. A wooden walkway was laid aslant over the water. A horse was driven down, stood neighing in fear, leapt circling on the unyielding dented misty layer. A tawny man in a burnoose with coloured ribbons at his waist strutted waving down the walkway. Stroked the nervous shying beast, held it fast, mounted, rode a circuit around the layer of mist. Whistles, hooting sirens from the jubilant ships.

That evening Holyhead solemnly joyfully took the Syrian's hand. Jeloud embraced him. It was almost too much for the white man. They celebrated all night. Next morning Jeloud wanted to carry out his plan, with an escort of ships: ride across the sea; if possible up to Arctic waters.

That same morning Jedaida, who had been in seclusion, left her cabin. Sought out Holyhead, still sleeping off the night before. She waited patiently on the deck of his ship. Around noon she saw him; walked beside him: "How much longer do you think to live, Holyhead? Black-beard devil, what are you planning? You are not afraid of me."

"Jedaida, I can't see through your veil whether you're serious."

"I joke with you the same way you joke with me."

"Jedaida."

"That name is not for you to say. Not for you."

Holyhead gazed speechless at the trembling woman. Softly, hand on his heart: "Come to my cabin. Don't stand here."

She slipped along behind him, closed the door, threw the veil back over her shoulder, stood breathing deeply against the wall. He squatted on a stool: "What have I done? Have I made you cross? By giving Jeloud this pleasure?"

"You are a devil. I do not need to answer you. They should chase you back to your zone. But now you have ensnared yourself. Now it is over."

Holyhead looked at her, looked at his hands, sighed: "Oh, I am so sad."

"Say nothing. Your soft cursed voice. Hypocrite. Cunning villain. Seducer, despoiler, like all Whites."

"Wife of Jeloud, if only I could ask your forgiveness."

"Mockery, all mockery, Holyhead. I can take it. Regret, you will regret, by Allah." She ran across the cabin, veil flying behind her. Her hands felt over the table, in the wall cabinet: "What do you have here? You must have a weapon. To poison or drug or seduce or kill me. Show. Where is it?" She ran to him, pulled him to his feet: "It's around your neck. Take it off. Take away the leather. There." She grabbed the gun – it was like a revolver, turned it over. His eyes were closed. She waited. He kept them closed. She shook herself in disgust: "What were you going to do to me?"

The gun fell at his feet. Holyhead bent down for the gun: "I shall kill myself."

She clenched her fists: "Do it. You deserve it."

He stood, breathed, metal in his hands: "I deserve it. Who knows anything of this? In life surrounded by death. I don't know if I deserve death. But I have made some sort of contact with you."

She paced up and down: "What does he have here? What? Machines to lead astray, cast spells. Show them to me. Open up the cabinets, I will see it all. So. Jeloud saw these. Must I now jump in the water? You made all of this. Let me look at you."

She stared at him, tried to penetrate the bleak expression. "Allah! A white man with a long beard. I must go to Jeloud." She groaned, leaned wearily against a cabinet, whimpered: "I am lost. What must I do?" Suddenly she pulled herself together, her face blank; she smiled an empty smile: "What am I doing. All is well. All well." Her head was hot under a sense of desolation, a rising darkness, a fear – what fear. Holyhead stood by the door. "I shall tell you, Holyhead, what will happen now. You have led him astray. Why did you do it? Why did you take him from our ship?"

"I wanted him to smile."

"And I? I was his wife."

"I have taken nothing of yours. Am I a woman?"

"Good!" she cried, "well said. Did you see him? Did you not see Jeloud? Proud Bedouin, an Anaze, ha! Glowing, dancing; riding on clouds! Did you see, are you too under a spell? That was my husband. I am no longer a wife. You said well. I hate him, hate him. Tomorrow he will ride his horse down there. He feeds it himself. What if it drops dead. If the wooden walkway breaks. If your mist is useless, and he is swallowed up along with horse and is gone."

She held the veil over her face. Holyhead leaned against the table, breathing heavily: "I shall quit. Oh I can't take any more. I shall quit, Jedaida."

She sobbed, tore her hair: "I cannot live."

"Oh. I'm leaving now."

She held his hands, pulled herself up to him, whimpering groaning: "Wait a moment, gentle tiger. I shall look at you, gentle tiger. Don't run from me. You have made me poor. You kept me back from you, from him. Regret what you have done."

"I have no regrets. It was a joy for me. A sweet joy."

"You see. You can say this to me. Will you do what I want?" – "Yes, Jedaida."

“Will you kill Jeloud?” – “You’re crazy.”

“Kill Jeloud.” – “No.”

“Do it,” she hissed. “Yes, do it. For me, Holyhead, end his life. I beg you. You can do anything. You made the cloud. End his life, do away with him. For me.”

“I shall not.”

First her sobbing became unrestrained: “For me, for me.” Then she grabbed his beard. Face rigid with hate, empty blind eyes. She squeezed his hands: “You must. You must – be with me. There is no other way. So you must be with me. Then I shall not leave your side. Then you come with me. What do you say?”

“You want me to be with you.”

“Yes, come with me. We leave today. Or tomorrow. To my country. You shall not see Jeloud again.”

That evening Holyhead took leave of his engineers technologists physicists. The Shetland Isles disagree with him, he’s going away to recuperate, that’s all. He looked crushed, as if poisoned; maybe he had been exposed too long to the novel substances. When Bou Jeloud the Syrian undertook the first ride over the sea next morning with an escort of boats and ships – pictures of the proud stunning event were despatched to every townzone on the continents – Jedaida and Holyhead were already flying over the German Plain, headed southeast. Population centres and giant cities became rarer. Blue warm sea came, little islands. The coast of a new land appeared, sere mountains, wide empty sands. At Damascus they mounted horses. For the whole journey the white man had not seen Jedaida’s face. When a swarming group of Bedouin stopped them on the stony plateau, Jedaida gave her name, the white man was taken away into the company of males. Anaze of Jedaida’s clan were camped by Ed Daba.

The woman made a report, declared to the sheikh: “You wanted to see Bou Jeloud, my husband. He is not with me. He busies himself with clouds that he wants to ride on. He has no connection with us anymore. Is no longer Anaze.”

“Where is he now?”

“I hope he is dead. He wanted to ride to Iceland, where the townzones are tearing the Earth apart. I hope he is drowned with his horse, or burnt to a cinder.”

“You hate him very much.” The judge glanced at Holyhead: “Touch your forehead to the sand before you speak. Who is this man?”

“He led Jeloud astray. A creature –,” she broke out in grieving tears, “I wish the sea had swallowed him before we met. We only meant to travel, Jeloud was curious, I couldn’t hold him back. This man put Jeloud under his spell and made use of all the evil in Jeloud. Until he was no longer my husband but a servant, servant to this monkey, this monkey, a mirror to his hateful goat-beard face. You dog, bark, tell them why I brought you here. Spit it out, if you can manage it. There stands the judge.”

Holyhead, hands tied behind his back, flanked by men with spears, regarded the woman from empty brown eyes. Said nothing. She threw herself down: “Give him to me. I want revenge. Is it not a shame to me, to lose Jeloud to such a one. For this he deserted me. Give him to me.”

The judge whispered at length with the other men. “Jedaida, we are sorry you have returned without Bou Jeloud and cannot report to us on the ridiculous actions of the townzones. And how the great Greenland expedition they make such a fuss about is progressing. Your brothers say the death of this man would console you. We do not mean to interrogate him. There is no profit in hearing the words of an infidel. Take him. Do what you want with him.”

Jedaida’s brothers assigned two mounted men, each with a drum at the saddle. They lifted the bound Holyhead onto a nag. They rode with him out into the deserts and high plateaux, southeast towards Beni-Sughra, drumming through camps and settlements.

Jedaida rode in widow’s weeds. The bound white man groaned. He was gagged, almost never opened his eyes. Never asked for food or water. He sat slumped forward and to the side. The horse jolted him, almost threw him; they had to tie his legs under. At nightfall they forced water and mushy dates into him. He never slept. Knelt half the night, cursed himself, his fate, the cities where he had lived, his parents, his body and his soul. His black beard grew long, his cheeks became sunken. He lacerated himself, tears streaming down his face. At daybreak Jedaida shook him awake, looked hard at him. He did not see how she sometimes ran from him, hid away, bit her fingers and did not cry. When he allowed himself to be shaken like a lump of wood and stood there tottering, she hissed: “I don’t want you like this. What’s wrong with you? Are you a man? Ha, you. We ride on. Look at me.” But he would not look at her. They bundled him onto the nag. The woman rode beside the ragged dangling white man. Children at camps threw sand and sticks at him. Bedouin women knew how to hate, they boxed his ears, urged him to hang himself, spattered him with horse dung. Jedaida beside him like his shadow. Watching his every move. Mistrusting, eyes hooded, menace in her silence.

At Beni Sughra the men, seeing the dangling speechless human baggage, wanted to put an end to it: lure the insatiably vengeful woman away on a pretext, and kill him. Jedaida noticed the whispers and lurking groups. That night she squatted with a dog outside the tent where the white man lay. The men dared not push past, felt bitter. By means of false directions they kept her close for some days. From one of the drummers she learned that they had agreed to shoot the white man at Tal Reinah. "Shoot. From a distance. That I can believe. Bandits!" When it was dark she awoke the drummers, they were to ready the horses. She felt her way in the dark to Holyhead's tent, shook him.

"Holyhead, it's me, Jedaida. Get up. We must be away."

"What's happening?"

"Up. We must leave. They want to take your life. Oh Allah. Listen. Get up. This is a nest of robbers."

"They, they want to kill me?"

"Any minute! Quickly, Holyhead, no time to lose. Who knows what they will do to you."

"They want to kill me? Then this is the place! Hour of my blessing. My blessed night." He knelt in the sand. She grabbed his hand, pulled at his shoulder, covered his mouth.

"I don't want this. Oh Allah. Stand up. Don't shout, Holyhead, don't. You will not shout. They're listening. You have a fever, you don't know what's happening, what you are saying. You wouldn't eat, now you are so weak. They'll shoot you, they are Anaze, but robbers, they'll shoot from a distance. I don't know why or when. Maybe because you are a white man. They are wicked. Stand up."

"I don't want to! Don't want to. Shan't."

"Allah, Allah, what should I do?" In the dark she lay on the ground, strewed sand over herself. His bound hands felt for her, his hair hung matted over his face. He stammered, his voice cracked, he was almost babbling. "The game's up. Should I laugh now? You can leave me. It's the end. They'll shoot me. And you – you want to keep it going. You're a sweet girl, Jedaida, sweet. But now you must let me go. They'll shoot me. You can't stop them. Here, touch me. I'm still Holyhead from London, engineer physicist who made the oil-clouds. Soon he'll lie in the dust, a nothing, like his glorious townzones. But I'm glad. I can give the order. One two three – and I'm shot." He felt for the tent wall, climbed to his feet. "And you – have you had your fill now, my Jedaida?"

She let him pull her up, murmured shivered: "Terrible what Allah has hung over me. I cannot leave you. Cannot. Cannot. You must live. I must keep you with me. Terrible what Allah plans for me."

He swayed, groaned: "What is it? My God, I said it's over. And you won't leave me." He opened his mouth wide, growled in a horribly cracked voice: "I – don't – want to."

Now rage surged through the woman. She jumped to her feet, pummelled the man's tottering body, wrestled pushed pulled him round, threshed whimpering: "No shouting. You come with me. I cannot leave you here. If I have to throttle you." She stuffed his mouth with her veil as she squeezed him; she wept stroked kissed: "Allah help me. Forgive me for what I do. Allah help. Come, come with me, say yes. You are my soul. It is you. Don't hit. I shan't kill you. Allah help."

She fetched the drummer, they put the bound man on a horse. They slipped away through the night on muffled hooves.

For two days they wandered in the stony plain. Until El Habis lay behind them, the buildings of Damascus came into view.

So fearful was the woman that the Anaze would rob her of the man that for a long time she kept moving in the great city-state, from one quarter to another, until the drummer led her to a friend of her brother's.

He was half dead, the man she brought from Beni Sughra to Damascus. He lay bewildered in the room she made ready for him. Around his neck were amulets from her: blue pearl, magic fish magic swords. She was not allowed near, the drummer attended to him. When he could stand, focus his eyes, one morning he turned his ghostly face to her when she appeared in the doorway. "Jedaida! Jedaida, come in. Am I a prisoner?"

Entering, bowing her head, she murmured very pale: "Go where you like."

"Really?" And stomped past her leaning on sticks, down the stairs, said not a word. Grinding her teeth, wailing, whimpering, she lay defeated in the doorway.

When he knocked several days later, she pulled the wide fringe of her dark cloak over her head, greeted him demurely. He sat by the window silent, stony. She tender, imploring, tried to pull him back to life. A rapture that was almost terror glimmered in him. When she looked at the black-bearded sunburnt man a shiver ran through her: images of the Anaze camp, him tied to a nag, lying among animals; how he'd shouted, wanted to die in the night at her hand. She could not rid herself of the sweet tormenting thought. And Bou Jeloud himself, proud

handsome Anaze whom this man had loved. Had he not come across the sea, was it not him? Her heart brimmed. Jeloud, young, childlike, across the water. Riding to her, he's coming; she's at his side, they are united. Jeloud and she riding as one, embraced welded together, to Damascus, where something dark, a violent rapture awaits her, a monstrous joy to devour her.

"Love me, Holyhead, as you loved Jeloud. I shall be to you what he was to you. Love me as you loved him. Just the same. Hold me!"

And as he held her she groaned in bliss: "Good, good. This we suffer from you. How well you love. How sweetly you punish us."

The man from the mighty western townzones trembled, looked deep into her face, explored her slender form: "Two arms, two breasts, two thighs. Whose arms, whose breasts? A human's. Two arms, a throat, nothing but these. And this, for a human, is enough."

Now she went about the streets his slave. He gave her a pointed gilded bonnet, over which she laid a white shawl. She wore a bright jacket over a white muslin shirt. Brass cylinder between soft dark eyes. She looked at her dainty sandals, knelt beside a neighbour, smiling showed her gleaming teeth, took a deep breath: "Ah Badudah, I shall stay, no more wandering. Give me another horse-hair, so nothing will happen to me. Ah Badudah, there is nothing so sweet as to serve a man."

## MASSIF OF GNEISS AND GRANITE

GREENLAND, massif of gneiss and granite thrust like a wedge from the Pole into the waters of the Atlantic. Its surface covered eight hundred thousand square miles. The primordial mountains of its body had been worn away by wind, streaming water, frost, shuddering glaciers, their mighty folds ground down, planed flat. The elements still tore at the sturdy torso. The land shouldered an icecap thousands of feet deep. A line of high mountains loomed along its eastern edge, drift-ice barricaded the coast; torrents poured down valley floors over cliffs. In the west was a mountainous region with sharp peaks and ridges. Huge glaciers crept through the mountains to the coast. They descended through winding valleys, climbed broken with crevasses over rocky sills. Their surface swelling, wavelike. They flowed from corries of compacted snow slow as snails down to the sea, invaded fjords, blocked bays.

Seven miles wide, forty long, the Frederikshaab glacier plunged into the ocean; it swept a broad swathe of rubble before it.

Store Karajak. It advanced forty feet in a day.

At the 70th parallel the Jakobshavn glacier, Upernavik at the 73rd, Ulaksoak at the 78th.

TorsukatakAssatakTuarparsukTasarminatUmartorsikKangerlussuaqItliarsuakUlangordlak.

They pushed earthen ramparts ahead of them, spread debris broken from the mountains and the till at their base as moraines all around them, scraped away cliffs. White rivers emerged from under them, carried silt and gravel that would sink to the floor of the fjords.

Water had wedded itself to this swelling of the Earth at the North Pole; unlike the other continents water had not abandoned the land and withdrawn to the seas. It scabbled hammered tore at primordial rock. Dropped swirling unceasing from dark and daylit air, snow, myriads of shimmering six-branched crystals stars motes, sprinkled pressed softly silently down on giant stolid domes peaks hollows. And as the motes sintered and froze they congealed, cemented together into greenish glacier ice that laid itself over the older ice sheet. And through its gaps new water flowed, froze again in the depths. The mountain of ice grew. Everywhere ice growing in silence across the vast bare land. Deserts of ice spread across the interior. Black peaks – nunataks – rose out of the great frozen water that kept climbing thriving on old snow up to the high plateaux, pushed glaciers down to the fjords. Towards the north the ice-plain hunched highest. Stretched away in huge undulations from the 60th to beyond the 80th parallel, between twenty and sixty degrees west. Expanses of slush, dry snow-deserts lay on the surface, ice hummocks at higher altitudes. Into them were set water-filled sinks, fringed by heaps of deep wild snow. Lakes glacial brooks emptied into these and roared over rents in the ice down into bottomless clefts, wells whose blue walls fell vertically away.

White-blue the sky over this continent. The glowing gasball of a sun gave warmth and light here for a few months only. The land lay in twilight, through which the silent moon and distant twinkling stars looked down and the shimmering Northern Lights danced as in a fairytale. Winds hurtled over mountains plains glaciers, the foehn bringing warmth, northwesterlies that whipped the snow into clouds and drove it on like a curtain. The sweeping storm dug channels in old snow and glaciers, modelled the ice-masses, created dunes with shallow slopes. Planed the frozen ground smooth.

Animals and plants braved the polar waste. Forests of kelp grew in the depths of the Polar Sea. The baying polar fox, migrant reindeer brown in summer, polar bears scavenging birds' eggs on islands. Lemmings owls shaggy musk-ox seal elk guillemot.

Mossy lawns crept over the ground on sheltered slopes. Grey lichen clung to cliffsides. Populations of single-celled algae spread over snow, over little stars and slivers of water; they coloured the ground grey brown pink violet.

From Europe, from the coasts of Belgium and Britain in an endless line along the sea-lanes came black-tarred construction vessels, floating factories, oil-cloud ships rocking over the ocean. Icebreakers flanking them, and ahead. Soundlessly they cut the water. They divided north and south as they passed burning Iceland, encircled Greenland. And just as the ice cast a barrier all around Greenland, so they barricaded the ice with their black deep-hulled structures. New arrivals streamed in. When they reached their positions, greeted in silence by the crews of the Iceland fleets, they blew the heavy smoke from their portholes, Holyhead's oil-breath, its white mass infused with coloured swirls, greenish blue red. The ships probed tentatively, first with this colour then with that. The smoke lifted slowly, the wind barely able to shift it sideways, new smoke blowing continually, building up, waiting like a horse outside its stable, maintaining an even height. The coloured smoke-masses climbed, their motion slowing until at a certain height it faltered. They gathered themselves, little by little spread horizontally, like oil on a sheet of water.

At Scoresby Sound on the east coast, at the southernmost point, at Disko Bay in the west tests were carried out to ascertain the height of oil clouds of particular composition. The plan was they should rise above the highest ice-fields, blanket the whole continent as evenly as possible. Once the optimum mix of gases was identified, the ring of ships around Greenland set to work. Heedless of foehn winds and icy storms, they pumped dark smoke clouds that gathered at enormous height and were pushed inland by more clouds coming behind. Clouds drifting out to sea were rounded up by lines of fliers with squall-bombs. The corralled gas-balls stuck tenaciously together. Ever darker masses settled in a plane, as they piled up ever denser became ever more fixed. They were an unyielding space-filling thing intermediate between gas and solid. Rain falling on them could not penetrate the burgeoning banks of cloud. Water and snow gathered in hollows, spouted onto the fringing lines of ships, but had no effect on the elevation of the gas. Attrition from the edges remained the greatest danger. Squadrons of fliers and cargo airships were stationed at horrendous height, always in danger of becoming trapped by the rolling clouds, capsizing crashing. They had to set a constant barrage of explosions all around the gas zone to prevent the smoke from blurring fragmenting. The engineers' fear that the buoyancy of the clouds would gradually diminish with height, that the cloud-masses would begin to sink, proved unfounded. The enormous dark cloud-bank over Greenland maintained its elevation; would support rafts as buoyantly as the sea.

The Iceland expeditionaries went about their aerial work in their usual grim dogged silence. They averted their gaze from the horror of the luminous Tourmaline vessels; not a word was said about them. The ships were stuck fast. The newcomers did not see these

monsters as ships, so overrun were they with bright algal tree-like growths, occupied by swarms of birds. At their destinations the Tourmaline vessels had been clumped close together away from the rest of the fleet, as if infectious. The immobile structures had long become overgrown; the growths had thrown bridges between them which were only rarely severed by shifting ice floes. Birds strutted and nested on the grey red bridges; molluscs and fish became caught up, sported and died. The resting vessels loomed like grassy hills into the icy air. As they lay there in the bays, at the entrances to fjords, they looked like steep hunchbacked islands. Sometimes the grey and red hulks were seen to twitch and shudder.

The Iceland expeditionaries laid great wide boards on top of the oil-clouds. And when they stepped onto them they pulled in nearby boards, aligned them and pinned them together. Now and then a raft on which they stepped would wobble, slide sideways into a depression in the cloud, rear up, overturn. The castaways scabbled in the grey pink violet smoke. They tried to work free of the gelatinous spongy boggy stuff, threshed about, paddled hand over hand towards the boards, could not extricate themselves. New masses of gas drifted in, bumped about them, over them. They were bedded in, cemented, flailed at chest nose mouth from which blood flowed, were squashed as the head flopped wheezing sideways. At the start many up there in the air stumbled, lay sprawling arms dangling on the billowing gas. The murky upwelling nudged at their bodies, here stuck fast to a limb, tore it from the body, stretched the body with its scabbling hands treading feet ever longer longer as it was drawn down. At the edges the fabric frayed; sometimes a suffocated black-faced flier or a twisted torn-off body part fell onto ice or into water. Up there they ran about, laid board after board.

The battle with the winds began. The northeaster with fog and thickly swirling snow tore at the outer fringes of the cloudbanks, blew ragged fragments away. Small groups and solitary figures were swept to the land far below, perished. People stood on the flattened cloud, stumbled; it was worse than at sea. Were tossed with their board rafts up high, then down, from side to side. They had to make terrible haste to lay board after board on the vaporous foundation growing out into the land. Often they stood insensible up there, flung themselves in, vomited, were tumbled whirled around, carried by the surging wallowing boards that sometimes sped apart as in a game, were piled atop one another by a knot of cloud, crashed together. At the edges they hung over the immense land of ice. The watery mirror of the fjords lay far below, in the east rocky peaks soared with the rigidity of death almost to their feet, jagged crests almost touching them. The icy breath of old snow wafted up to them. Blue-white glaciers moved sluggishly down over the white plain, through the rocky defiles they had abraded. Scree and avalanche debris hung askew over rock terraces like giant carcasses. Just as

on Iceland once they had thrown up bridgeworks from the coast to Myvatn Krafla Leirhnjúkur, to Eyjaf Bay, up from unlucky Heroðsfloi, had swayed in ash-swirling air as bridges collapsed above the Jökulsa River, on the Fiski plain, over the eastern glaciers, just as they had crested mighty Vatna before its sky-splitting fiery eruption incinerated them and blew them away, so now did they clamber across this silent land. Winds howled over the ice. The land lay dormant, like a blind man awaiting the workings of fate. From every coast the layers of smoke reached out yearning towards each other. The people aimed to steer the billowing masses together, leaving just one gap like an island in the middle.

At Disko Bay, above Umanak Fjord, bluish oval clouds appeared under the dark banks of oil-gas, driven by a foehn wind. They were spotted by pilots of the cargo airships. The air grew calm and warm. The gassy masses sank, slowly at first, then at a rush. Like canoes in a wild torrent – the boatmen stand there with their long pole, push away from dangerous shoals, shove off from below, spring this way that way – the workers on the skywards-rearing heaving boards steered clear with poles, pulled nearby boards to them. The gassy masses undulated, people tumbled rolled. The layers not yet thick and dense enough, they were blistering. People struck out with their poles, plunged this way and that. The motion was coming from far below. Dense round pellets of snow were set flying by the advancing foehn. Something was working with ever-growing strength at the surface of the ice, scrubbing the surface swab after swab, jab after jab. Snow flew in irregular lumps large and small, surf covered the snow-plain. It rose from the ground like steam and blew away. While up above they pinned boards together. While smoke blew sluggishly from the construction vessels along the coast, slow, helpless, blew across, was pushed aside by the drumming air, turned spiralling about itself and broke apart. Along the edges high above, balls of vapour swirling sky-high escaped abruptly, shot up on the warm current like little cotton-wool clouds, shredded beyond repair. The foehn chased the tenuous dissipating layers of gas out to sea. Loosely-laid boardwalks were lifted and whirled about like paper in a gale. The storm drove people poles boards before it, carried them like a lion in its mouth for miles on the evaporating gas before dropping them onto raging black water, onto jostling ice-floes. Fliers pursuing them were tossed about, shot up like rockets, were hurled aside by the wind. Amid this fury the ships continued to emit their wretched smoke, only to be shredded by the storm. The ships were themselves jolted lifted snatched shoved. Crept quaking around each other, tried to hide, protect themselves, while up above a leaden sky appeared, in its emptiness red and blue-black clouds, coloured rags gleaming dissipating. Cloudbank over Disko Bay blown away north and south; banks deep inland torn apart. People reeling, sliding down, legs arms threshing eyes pinched mouths

tonguing biting spitting, overwhelmed by the gas. They peeled it off like skin. In the air, the howling foehn, they tussled with the gas, were swaddled in it, bundled round as a hedgehog. They plunged down onto ice, flattened slowly out as the ice freed them.

From the Faroes and Shetland more oil-cloud ships came chugging, formed a second cordon around the Greenland massif. The shimmering cloud already lay thick on the land, undulating slightly, a mass of dough. Gales shrieked as if against a wall of stone. Above the bank, as it had for millennia, the sun moved for just a few hours. Its light no longer penetrated. The continent was cut off from the ancient white sky, the silent moon, shimmering Northern Lights, twinkling swarms of little stars. Water vapour from the land gathered at the underside of the cloud-bank, spread out very slowly, resolved itself in snow flurries, muddy rain. It could not escape; a heavy damp haze blanketed the land, the temperature rose.

It grew darker. Unease gripped animal life. Herds of reindeer crossed the ice, abandoned their grazing grounds, went wandering. The herds could not sense direction, more packs joined them, they stood nervously on coastal islands. Bears and foxes were driven from their lairs. They were fearful, ran about sniffing the air, found nothing changed, were not calmed. Anxious cries of ravens. Sleek seals emerged, pulled themselves over the ice, sought new water. Animals became more wary of each other; where enmity existed, attacks were fiercer. Ever more cloud strata drifted over the mountains and ice-deserts from east south west, met by ragged streamers from the opposite side. Occasionally an isolated unfortunate board-layer floated over land on a detached hunk of cloud, reached the oncoming bank safely. But when with their own eyes they saw others on the banks, there was no calling out, no waving. Some slumped exhausted.

The gas-ships reinforced the clouds. Towards the end of August they withdrew. The abandoned Tourmaline vessels had to be secured. There were no problems detailing gangs from all the fleets to attend to them; tensely, as if spellbound, the Greenland expeditionaries did everything necessary without need for orders.

But overwhelming horror as the little boats brought them closer to the bright buzzing islands. The outlines of a ship could no longer be discerned. Whales hampered the approach to the vessels. Explosives had to be thrown; the water turned horribly red; dark bodies floated for a while on the surface. The islands were entangled in a mass of hanging seaweed like the net of a birdcatcher. They had to cut hack burn their way through. Boats carried the severed stems and netting out to the open sea. Step by step they tore loose the rampant vegetation; layer upon layer had to be dragged away. The boats changed hourly; always some people failed

to overcome their enthrallment and had to be escorted forcibly back. At last, after demolishing the seaweed bridges and clearing the surrounding water, they reached the vessel's hull. How strangely everything was changed. The deck was laid bare, you could see, now that the bridges and heaviest masses of seaweed had been cleared away, how the freighters twitched, moved slowly from the spot, made jerking backward upward movements.

Soon the ships moved more easily, boats following them; there was a fear they would lift themselves onto, out of the water. All the brass of the railings was gone, all the planking burst open. Tendrils branches slender trunks sprouted through the hull from inside and outside. The few cabins on the main deck seemed full of steam; but this was merely appearance: actually they were filled with a kind of spider's web. At the anchor points of the grey-white webs along its edges, the proliferating panelling of the walls, doorframes window-frames had played their part with a maze of filaments. But no spiders could be seen in the cabins. And when they tore at the webs with hands and sticks they realised it was the finest hairlike grasslike emanation of swollen leaves, hollow ducts and skeins of wood from lockers ceilings floors. Well away from the wood the plants had constructed wall-like organs. Every cabin was as flimsy as pith scraped from a stalk; in time it must collapse, lignify.

They stepped on shaky ground. When they opened the deck for access to the holds, choking gases welled up. The decks were as soft and porous as sponge. Knots in the masts had produced rampant new branches with strangely hairy satiny leaves; these were often packed tightly together like petals. Beetles and ants pullulated. No need to search for the holds. From the depths of the ships came an intense unevenly throbbing growing light, an often blinding glare that made artificial light superfluous in the general gloom. They smashed through the decks to the holds with axes saws fire; ripped open the thoroughly mouldy matted bulkheads. Lumps of wood and brass were thrown in the sea, fish pursued the flotsam, swam close with open mouths, chewed at it, carried it on their backs.

Mountains of webbing lay exposed to the air. Magical sight, stretching away through all the ship's bays. The walls of the holds had been clad in smooth rolled steel. The steel was magically changed. It was no longer smooth; had buckled, thrust out blisters boils globules. From the surfaces of the undulating bulging protrusions emerged long radiant glittering needles of crystal that drew metal about them, leaving nearby surfaces chapped and pitted. The steel grew from the walls in towards the luminous webs. Terrible glare from the webs, their pulsing darkening flashing. Stink of mould, upwelling heat. The fliers stretched out hooks to the webs that hung as placidly as when they were packed away. Web after web was

drawn up through dark rain-dripping air. Already on the oil-clouds the plates had been laid which would bring them to incandescence.

At hundreds of points, wires were hauled up from the vessels onto the cloud layer; these would connect the main power cable to the webs. Everyone worked feverishly, close to exhaustion. By the beginning of September the Tourmaline holds were empty. The freighters were already covered in mould again; several collapsed.

Now the oil-cloud ships and personnel transports pulled away from the gloomy icebound ice-extruding coasts, ploughed southwest, southeast. Scattered well away from the Greenland over which they had cast dark night, lying astern with its whimpering fearful fauna under the bank of oil-clouds and the glimmering webs. Squadrons of fliers and airships tore wildly ahead of the oceangoing vessels. The ocean must be crossed as swiftly as possible. They sailed for two days; the western fleets skirted Baffin-land, the eastern crossed the 10th degree west.

On the night of the third day, current from the power cable was unleashed on the insulation of the webs. At that moment every vessel slowed, fliers came down to the decks and foaming water. Shudders and trembling went through the people pacing the dark decks in groups, running from their cabins.

The end had come. Krafla Leir-hnjúkur Herðubreið Katla Hekla had been blown up. Iceland torn apart, Earth's furnaces opened. On the mobile bridgeworks, hundreds of people just like those standing on the decks had been turned to ashes blown across glaciers drowned. More ships and throngs of people had trooped here from the Continent. They had not rested. The island yielded up its heat. The webs were charged. The terrible Tourmaline glowed and sang. Drew to it fish birds algae in the sea, tried to fly. At last Greenland had appeared, across the water. They had to spread clouds over the land, build boardwalks. How many had died, had plunged to Earth.

Now as sirens blared they stood on deck above the rolling sea. Tremors drumbeats slithered around behind their throats, so that they groaned and their legs grew weak. Their eyes were open wide in fear, bulged white barbaric. Corners of mouths turned tensely down, lips pursed. They ducked. Hot flushes ran over their bodies, drenched backs and necks. "Disaster. What a disaster. Oh dear Heavens, such a disaster. What have we done. Sweet night, sweet life. Lovely spars, lovely railings, mercy. Lovely people planks sails brasses. Lovely jacket, rough wool, mercy. My fingers, my body, lovely arm, lovely throat. My throat, my little throat, my skin, my chin, mercy. Ah what a disaster."

And now they were knocked back as if by a hand, staggered. Now, behind them, it happened.

The sea remained smooth. A wave of light stepped over the horizon. They lay on their faces. Horror sorrow in the breast. Every throat choked. Unstoppable terrified whimpering as the glow on the horizon rose and rose and rose unrestrained. At the same time a yearning twitched in them. Onward! We yearn for the fire! Iceland's fire! Terrible beloved land! Leirhnjúkur Myvatn Krafla: they are here. Fire soaring, soaring! They wanted to head for the island, their yearning beyond measure: "What is life. Our fire. Our fire."

Some lay, and would not raise their eyes to the blinding light, did not want to see the light. If only it would disappear. Gnawing fear, near to madness. If only you could wash it away. They were guilty. Away with the terrible glow.

The leaders too, men and women, turned away, stood trembling, cursed. Beat their breasts: "I am not to blame." Their teeth chattering, grinding, ears and nose cold, no sensation in the fingers. Sobbed; dragged numbed feet over the deck, stamped so as not to lose themselves. Eyes opening closing in uncontrollable rhythms. But then they pulled themselves together. Look to the light. The light, the fire, higher and higher over the endless vault of the heavens. The eyes must see it. Eyes on the blinding white soaring light. Swallow it down wide-mouthed like a drowning man the water. Take in the whole wave with a gaping whale-mouth, swallow, swallow. Hold muscles tight, keep eyes steady, legs planted firmly on the deck. And they managed it, the eyes did not screw shut. It was all right. Burning there was the Tourmaline webbing. Call a spade a spade. Tourmaline sent from the Continent, smelted spun mineral, clever work. It lay over the oil-clouds. These were no new inventions: Angela Castel had already used them in war. Here are the smoke-blowers. The things people can do. Feet regained sensation, they could move their toes, turn round, relax their shoulders. The Greenland mission was accomplished. Now scoop air slowly, breathe in, breathe in, breathe out. They looked sidelong, heads still lowered. People lay around them, hands over eyes. Paralysed shattered. Say nothing yet.

The vessels steamed rudderless for hours through the lit-up water. Then the people stirred themselves. Raised head from breast, as if receiving judgement. The engines shuddered through the hull, pounded rhythmically through their limbs. Gazes glowered, not meeting, looked wondering into water. On the water lay an ineradicable all-encompassing glow that made the waves glitter. It devoured the sky, the boreal vault. What had happened. They plodded on, straightened clothing, spat. Grim eyes. To work.

## OBSERVATION SQUADRON

THE FLEETS assembled off the Faroes and Shetland. For days they lay idle. People were still morosely avoiding each other when an instruction came from the fleet leaders to form an observation squadron. There was no attempt to expedite the task. The gloomy the lethargic were not harried. It was noticed that as in Iceland and around Greenland, despite the enervation, the burgeoning horror and shock, no one demanded a return to the mainland.

Two weeks later light craft set off. They were accompanied by a few fliers. They took the familiar route north.

They headed towards the growing brightness, which their mood quietly acknowledged. With each degree of latitude the brightness grew. It was a pink almost white light, spread across the northern sky and ocean. When the flaming ball of the sun disappeared below the western horizon, the reddish white glow had already risen in the north, more radiant every minute, its stunning brightness opening like a flower. And when they cruised at sixty-five degrees north, sunlight was no longer visible. It was overwhelmed by the northern brightness, like stars in daylight. In this new rosy light they floated on the floodlit ocean. A roaring took them in, enveloped them, a gigantic music, distant clear bass notes crashing and mingling, interspersed with tinkling clanging high notes. No sky overhead, just the even pink-white light. Now and then twilight and darkness came up behind them; it must be evening and night elsewhere on Earth. Now and then the darkness was parted by a pale haze, veiled, to the south: this thin pallid grey brightening must be Earth's day.

They stood on deck. They were travelling by boat, free earnest happy, happier hour by hour. Had no thought – it had been wiped clear in them – how it had come to this, what it was there burning, what had happened. They felt themselves absorbed into the tinkling high-pitched song, the thunderous organ sound. Light of blessing, of which they partook without becoming sated. They were already in the zone that once was filled with icebergs. It did not strike them how gently the water now flowed. As ever the air blew cool, sometimes cold. But several of those in the boats, as if in the Tropics, stripped to the waist, felt a sense of well-being, at night forsook their cabin.

The wind moved strangely over the wide ocean. The Greenland furnace was making itself felt. All the winds had changed. The sun-like fire at the pole sucked in airstreams as if at the Equator; they blew strongly northward often even at ground level. Air masses sliding low over

the sea flicked at the sinkhole of the northern glow. They gained in strength with every degree north. To the swelling and falling away of the roaring crashing tinkling was added the gentle sostenuto hum of the air, its moaning calling singing. Air slurped at the sea's surface, playfully pulled the caps off waves, with sudden gusts blew depressions, bored craters in the water, tore free with a shriek, surged raged helplessly on. Must speed on ever faster. Air masses at different heights became entangled; all must speed on. They rose vertically, at a slant, veered away; stretched themselves long, long. Disappeared with a lurch, a tug. Were swept away, sped flush with the surface, flattened the sea, pressed down so that the air piling up behind it in a house-high flood tumbled over and found its feet again.

As the people floated across the sea, their ships pouring powerful energy into the engines to resist the strong northward pull, often sailing backwards cleaving the whistling wind, now and then the air darkened under a fog of smoke. A slobber of unprecedented heat licked at them. They welcomed it laughing. So joyful were the crews of the observation squadron that at the 70th parallel they could not be moved to proceed further. They were supposed to approach the coast of Greenland. But all they wanted to do was relax on the delightful water.

A number of ships in the squadron were specially fitted out for hazardous duty. They were equipped with defences against unusual oceanic water events. These would be activated in the vicinity of Greenland and its collapsing avalanches to withstand the crash of monstrous glaciers, onrushing icebergs. The crews of these ships, softened and dazzled by the blissful water, the rosy light, spellbound by the gently nudging wind, went their own way. They put the elaborate equipment to their own use. They would, they decided, stay here, grub around on the seafloor. They would not go back, not ever. Nor did they want to go on to Greenland to await the delights of the new continent. On this spot, at this moment, they had their land. They felt they were strong and brave. The mulatto Mutumbo was their leader. They headed towards Jan Mayen at ten degrees west and above seventy degrees north. Their soundings identified a mountainous rise in the seafloor. Here in the shallows under the light of blessing, they dropped anchor. Once again, the leaders declared, the loathsome powers of the great townzones will be put to work for our own benefit.

Mutumbo encircled the area with his twenty-two ships and auxiliary vessels, and like a horned bull in a meadow began to gore the liquid ocean. The leading ships were sheathed now in panels of flame-resistant basalt, lifted by snorting cranes high out of the holds, slatey grey plates clamped like rigid visors onto the hull. The plates were fitted from bow to stern, thrust out like balconies to make a platform over the main deck. Machines were mounted on each of the twenty-two vessels, to which a tangle of cables ran from the hold; they resembled herons

and whooping cranes. A long thin neck turned on the plump firmly-nested body, extended forward over the bows, plunged down past the grey basalt cladding into the green-white ocean stream. The neck was hung with a thick long tangle of lines and wires attached to chains: they looked like a mane. When the mane dipped into the salt water, brushed against spraying whitecaps, the sea cried out like a sleeping beast stung by a scorpion in the jaws, between open lips and teeth. It tossed about, awoke, roared. And at once came to a boil: water rose from the raging surface in a hot fountain, a white shivering lurching cloud, shot high as it scabbled blind, beat savagely about itself. And ever again, never ending, the cranes stabbed and bit, the manes cracked and smacked, furious boiling screeching spraying, steaming veering gasping, hissing high, roaring spume.

White cloud-masses miles thick, a mountain of cloud over the circle of ships, ready to collapse down into the steaming hole below. Squalls chased after them. The fountain of steam reached as high as the stratus clouds; it hardly felt the cold for the rushing squalls sent by the ships on its tail, a cross-fire from exploding head-sized black inulite bombs, shot thundering from tiny mortars, splitting the air with a tremendous jolt. The soft quivering clouds felt themselves jostled, pushed back like a plate from a table, a dog from its bowl. And then they returned snorting, these white ragged fluttery masses, swirled together in a single downpour, a loose wide boundless downpour grey and black back into the leaping water. Poured down fast and relentless, so that flocks of seagulls were tumbled down by the wet hand pressing on their fragile striving slipping bodies; all their fluttering neck-stretching sharp-beaked struggles to no avail. And even when the birds still had strength to fly, they were choked by the shining fountains that fell on them from the over-saturated air. The sky, normally the medium for flight, its tenuous airy delights filled with sunbeams and the flickering Aurora, the sky torn apart by volcanoes and a crater spewing water turned all its guns downward, hurled everything down to the sea's surface.

The crane-heads bobbed and dipped all day long, the sea boiled, shot up in a white flatulent torrent. All day long the twenty-two ships toiled like horses galloping, hind hooves out behind them, to hold back the sea that tried to burst back in. As if driving wooden piles into earth, sinking iron girders into clay, shovelling sand from a pit, the ships heaved and braced, forced the water back. Their flanks were bare steel. But over the steel, at arm's length, held on supports, a net had been spread, hanging vertically into the water around the stern, stretching from ship to ship, a single giant net, barely visible, no thicker or heavier than a hairnet. It was the dull white of lead, flecked here and there with brown or black. The flecks were mementos of the burned animals and humans who had made the net.

The main component of the mass from which the filaments were spun comprised a substance extracted from bituminous shale. In the factories it had been recognised that to fix this substance, formed during previous epochs of the Earth by rotting dissolving bodies living organisms, contact with living bodies was better than with dead. Torn from the Earth, exposed to air, spread out on wood and metal, the substance slowly sweated, accumulated. Plants, the sappier the better, fat animals and humans were the best substrate for enriching the substance. But these living bodies were severely attacked. It ate them away. As netting weighed on arms shoulders knees – at night it was laid over cattle and horses, their skin shaved bare – they felt a burning. The wounded were replaced. The final five days of net-weaving, which took place in huge hangars in Mecklenburg, were a hecatomb sacrifice. People could stay in contact with the terrible white filament for only a few hours at a time. Efforts were made to fly in workers, male and female, from distant places. The newcomers, taken at once to the halls, were the quickest to succumb. Older workers, knotting wearily, lasted up to six hours. Then they lay fainting with cold hands, weak pulse, sunken cheeks. Foremen prised them from the webbing with glass hooks, rolled them aside.

It was on the final day that the brown and black flecks were incorporated into the webbing: the net, miles long and wide, was knotted together from its five great constituent pieces. And as if the power of the net once it was spread out increased a hundredfold, all life in the vicinity was annihilated with a speed and ferocity that would have made the final knotting impossible if it had extended over just one more day.

At six in the morning the first eighty people entered the hangar. By midday, on the grass behind the hangar, three hundred bodies were already laid out. But by five in the afternoon, the net now finished and suspended in the air from seventy cranes, few new corpses had been added to the three hundred dead and dying. For from midday on, none of those who came into contact with the net emerged alive. In an interval that grew ever shorter from midday on, finally reaching as little as a quarter of an hour, the people and every other moist thing evaporated into the substance. Evaporated after emitting a little cry. Their fingers clutched at the webbing, turned to charcoal there. Six foremen completed the final knots wearing hot dry fur coats, thick fur gloves as the surest protection. The webbing refused to knot under such dryness; they had to sacrifice their moist fingertips. One touch. And if they tried another touch it was already rippling through them. A third touch and they sank down in their furry armour. Steam and fog from cylinders of fur. Empty shells on the floor, steaming neck-openings trickling smoke. Arm-thick glass beams like flagpoles had been erected, leaning back aslant into the air. On these the leaden-white net hung, invisible at ten paces.

Now it hung taut, formed a wall around the twenty-two ships. Where the net touched the sea there was – no sea. Empty space many feet across. Filled by air that on both sides of the net was more transparent than normal, and in sunlight much brighter. Insects and birds could not approach this empty space. Water, the immense ocean, stood like stone, avid to fill the space, hurl itself at the ships as they slowly sank.

The circle of ships sank. The steam-makers excavated ever more water from the central basin, flung it aloft. The edge of the bank of ocean, lined with huge deposits of salt and seaweed, rose higher as the water in the basin vanished.

In a closed circle, like children holding hands, the colossal ships rocked up and down. At the bows, the sucking biting spitting cranes. At the stern, the ethereal net like a delicate smile aimed at the iron spellbound sea, the black wave-mountain looming groaning cracking in every joint. Soon the ocean hung like a mountain overhead, over the joyful people. The watery mass crashed slanting away. It stood foaming white against the net like a steed before the groom, before the net that rose untouched immobile higher and higher, already house-high over the decks of the twenty-two ships. So high were they encircled by the blackly swirling bulging groaning water-mountain. After five days they were in position in the still air of the basin. It was filled with the blissful pink light. The people laughed. They launched boats. Mutumbo gave the signal to build bridgeworks across the sandbanks.

## FIFTEEN VESSELS MET THEIR END

THE OBSERVATION squadron steered back south, at the leaders' urging. They had to flee from weakness, from possible breakdown. People implored the leaders, became withdrawn, insisted: the task was to reach Greenland; they must return north. But the leaders were afraid, and had enough sense to turn about. So the expedition sailed back into murk, into gloom. The gloom, shimmering haze, in the south often a dull black, came nearer, higher wider deeper. It approached like a gigantic cave. Here again was Earth, this special thing. They gazed groaning towards the north, the sea rippling in flames; how harshly the pink light shone. How it feasted on them, would not release them. The leaders themselves took over engine rooms, monitored the helm. The ships carried dragged resisting souls along. They were already sunk in twilight; the ships plunged relentlessly ever deeper into the pale strange undulating murk. It grew colder. The leaders were astonished: they were back home. Expeditions were real, they belonged to the expeditions of the Greenland campaign. Shetland icebergs Faroes continent townzones all were real. What was that blissful power into whose realm they had gone. It lit

up the north. They ploughed on, lamenting. The sea was violently disturbed. Over Greenland a great fire burned. They felt deep dread: holy fire they had taken from the volcano island. The fire of the volcanoes that had made this possible: they were enraptured almost to the point of transformation. The mountains of flame had stamped their feet, terrible the blaze their breath now spread across distant Greenland – but oh the bliss. The bliss. They dreamed ensnared, they yearned; let themselves be carried back to the Faroes Shetland.

Crowds heaving saw them coming. Shock, fear and sweetness plunged into the heart when they saw the joyous calm faces, heard about Mutumbo who had used his cranes and pelicans to make space on the ocean floor, and would not ever until his death forsake that magical light.

Kylin staggered, took counsel with De Barros and other leaders. Then the decision was made not to split up, the whole fleet that had endured Iceland and Greenland would be flung back north to prevail over the new situation, whatever it might be. The crews of the observation squadron together with a portion of the fleet would stay behind in the islands. “Have no fear,” mourned those left behind, “we’d love to come with you. You’re afraid to leave; soon you won’t want to come back. Oh the things you’ll see. Think of us.”

Enormous fleet, on into growing brightness. Day and night vanished. Air gently bobbing quivering, distant rumble. Then ever more clearly a wide swelling music, high notes mixed with jingling crashing. Strange sweet joy that came over them all the farther north they sailed. Smooth sheen of pinkly radiant water. What celestial things were these. They sailed boats, took off their clothes, sighed, were happy. They wanted to see Mutumbo, squatting there by Jan Mayen. How clever he was, Mutumbo, they must go to him, embrace him. The air grew warmer, they continued northward. Sky white-pink, and the air around them. Towards Greenland the light and its colours became stronger, were mixed with red and blue. They saw lightning, surging fading brightness suggested flames, copper-red flaring, bluish darkening, smouldering flickering. Hot tongues of air in the warm wind. The tongues licked smokily over the fleet, coiled over the sea. Now and then they brought a heavy acrid stench of burning.

Soon remarkable sights met the seafarers’ eyes. Feathers of seagulls and stormy petrels were piled by the wind on the decks of ships and boats. The feathers were of unusual softness, as if torn from very young birds, but their size and structure indicated fully grown creatures. Most were kinked, as if shrivelled and frizzled by heat. Then pieces of leaf came flying through the air, strong-ribbed hairy leaves, unidentifiable, and small enigmatic plant fragments, possibly the wings of air-dispersed seeds. The surface wind continued to blow towards Greenland, but seemed to have no effect on ocean currents. Near the boats there floated

colourful green brown red clumps that made them happy. They took them for floating algal colonies, detached kelp in which medusas had become caught up. But when they prodded these masses with an oar, probed among the layers, bright-coloured feathers came sliding along the oar. They grabbed at the bundled drifting tangle. It was kelp with living bryozoans, moss animals, nudibranchs, but birds lay on it, whole animal bodies undamaged, fully grown, hanging like berries from their little feet. And while they were observing this, living birds were already dropping onto the ships, whole flocks of bird-bodies slender and plump, all tangled together. Most were exhausted, died almost as soon as they were picked up. At times they came by so densely that they rained down on the ships. Like the feathers carried on the wind, the feathers of these creatures were of extraordinary softness; they shimmered green gold violet brown. Many of the birds had the brilliance of butterflies, dazzling blue on the wings with a sprinkle of gold, body and neck tinged with purple above smooth white legs. The wings were mostly scorched, in some places completely charred; these birds must have been carried passively on air currents.

They approached Greenland from the east and south, very slowly drew nearer to the clinking furnace. Up till now the wind had blown with varying strengths towards the north and west, licking into the sun-like blaze; now it dropped. Its slurping singing sobbing fell asleep; like an elastic band it lost its stretch, just now and then they felt a little twitch as it contracted. The droning hammering continued clear as ever. Restless air about them. They had to abandon the playful rocking of small boats. Clumps of white cloud drove across the sky. The air often darkened. Gentle rain. As the air grew murkier, torrents of water fell on the fleet. Gushing, easing for moments, now so heavy that people went about blind. They kept smiling, the joy in them was as if smelted from ore. They pressed on through the wall of rain. The air calm now, sky rent asunder with brightness.

But from Greenland, from where the whitest light flowed across the sky mixed with blue and red, there came towards the ships in the jostling cross-seas, in the swirling splashing up and down, there came – something. A darkness among little blue flames. A round blob, moving slowly east, south, moving towards them, moving around them. A hunchback of ever deeper black, growing out of the north, growing towards them. The sea silent. The steaming ships silent. The darkness, still rising like a shadow, tipped over the silent sea as from a sack, a cellar opening. And now, to the south, far to the rear of the fleet, a flickering paleness appeared, golden-yellow dusty light; day was breaking. It was the usual gloomy dawn over the Faroe Islands. It looked so small, like a child's face at a window. On the ships they took it in with wonderment, turned faces dreamily to the west.

The cloudy light-cloaking shield approaching from Greenland had acquired a glimmering halo. The glimmer danced at the edges of the encroaching darkest darkness of night. Rustling, squally souging, scrabbling, waves jolting. Flickering lights, blinding flashes through the onrushing shrouding blackness. Thunderheads bursting over the sea. With every flash more peals of thunder. Two drums: the sea, the sky; a hundred drumsticks rattling rolling up and down. The sky hung ragged black over the water, the sea moaned. Roaring struggling. Amid the lightless fog of battle only now and then bright eyes. Foaming seas high as mountains, greenish combs along their whole soaring width, as if moss-covered. The comb collapsed; the green slid shattering white over the tucked-in belly of the waves. Onrushing sliding, the wave grew with its thunderous advance. The sea, the wave-mountain rode shimmering green with outstretched arms across the ocean. Ran with the hurricane and ahead of it. The whirling tornado, casting green light before it, sped on. The body of the tornado, thundering between the sea's surface and the sky's blackness, cut a path southward at a speed of twelve miles an hour. It was a scythe. It was stronger than anything it encountered. It sucked the ocean high as a house, dragged the pile of water before it, shattered pulverised it.

It hit a part of the fleet. When it brushed against a ship with a sweep of the hem of its steely robe, it forced the ship below the surface, pummelled it with the piled-up mass of water, boiled and raged around it.

Edged with a glimmer, preceded by thunderstorms, the tornado sped across the Atlantic to the coasts of Scandinavia and Britain, turned west, traversed the whole wide ocean, reached the coast of North America, crossed Newfoundland destroying buildings, shredding trees as if with artillery, to burst onto the coastal mountains of Labrador. Twilight marked its path, the sky tinged copper-red.

The Greenland fleet fought through. The heated continent sent out more tornados. Then they entered a zone of thunderstorms. The pink light burned ever anew. They pressed forward through cataracts of rain. The sweet yearning feeling never left them. They accepted the tornados, the loss of ships. They desired no more than Mutumbo to leave the region where this light shone. They recalled their earlier existence. How stubborn and hard they had been. They wept, were unafraid to die here. When in the firmament the dark veil appeared that presaged another tornado – circles whirling in the veil – they prepared their ships. But even in the most terrible whirlwinds, those who manoeuvred beating and tacking never felt afraid.

They survived the zone of thunderstorms. Now they were close to land, where previously an ice-barrier had lain. Sultry warm air. Blinding brightness, harsh flickering day and night.

Green and brown masses floated on the water. The ships often heard a calling snorting moaning from the sea. Some watches reported: they had noticed coherent movement under the surface, approaching hesitantly and stopping when it reached the ships. Once a group of vessels was alarmed: people saw from the deck a well-defined yards-long stretch of sea violently threshing. A sound could be heard amid the crashing of water: squirling spitting moaning. They lowered boats, pushed off. The movement in the sea subsided, they found only foam and shreds of kelp.

Most of the fleet headed north of the 70th parallel, level with Shannon Island. The East Greenland Current flowed here side by side with the eastern Spitsbergen Current. The water carried big strange tree-trunks of a tropical character. Once or twice a whole island of trees, clearly torn away from land, passed close by. The trees on them were kinked and charred; some showed fresh bite-marks. Rowing around them they found fragments of leaf that seemed to come from palm-like growths. The ships engaged in livelier pursuit of the creatures causing the strange noises in the sea, which came ever more frequently. They must be unknown fast-swimming animals, whales, but with no blowing. Ahead of the fleet there once came an unusually violent bellowing and snorting. Six vessels went to investigate. Motorboats were lowered, sped towards the disturbed water. Water was spraying, but not vertically as from a whale's blowhole. Whatever was moving there spat horizontal volleys of water. The boats confronted the spraying water. And were at once capsized. From the sea emerged the back of a brown-green monster with gleaming scales, a long-nosed reptile, unblinking bird-eye on each side of the head, loose flaps of skin on thin forelegs. It rowed out of the water lifting its forelegs high over its back. The skin stretched and filled with wind. The snout lifted snapping, the body wriggled up from the water, the monster flapped its wings. Rose as dogged as a goose into the air, groaning spitting, low over the foaming surface of the water, vanished gurgling over the sea.

The unfortunate victims were picked from the water, now smooth again. Rumours of the animals spread through the fleet. Unspeakable dread lay on the people who had seen the terrible creature. It was certain: they were surrounded by beings of this sort. It was these, maybe others, that had caused the fleet unease for days, swimming among the ships moaning vanishing. Horror seized all of them. They no longer had the doggedness of the Iceland expeditionaries. Weeks of voyaging under blissful light had mellowed them, tears and laughter came easier. Now they whimpered, sobs erupted from throats, they crept about the ships, wanted to go no farther. What would happen. In their horror they remembered Iceland, the stomping raging volcanoes. It was those burning there above Greenland, they had created

these beings. Away from them, enough. What are the townzones up to, cursed townzones, what have they done to us. They gathered trembling about the leaders, who themselves could barely keep their feet, urged retreat to the south. And yet with the fear of the monsters was mixed another fear: of being forced away from this sea, forced to begin a new dead life. They were afraid of their return. The leaders did not turn back the fleet. They let it proceed into warmer and warmer air. Gusts of heat blew onto people now completely ensnared again in the fear that had rendered them speechless in Iceland. They laboured to make themselves numb; but the rosy light tugged at them.

The water beneath flowed blue-green. Everywhere swirling and swelling, grubbing and spraying. Floating tree-islands came from every side, pushed through between the vessels, evading them; no more were boats launched to check them out. Startled, fists clenched, they watched birds fly overhead, bright singing trilling birds, whole flocks. No one thought to shoot them. They stared, formed no impression, stood expectantly, half mesmerised. Stretches of water were so dense with green brown vegetation that they had to sail around. Sometimes they had to clear a path through the thick floating layers. Animal bodies were woven into them, meshed together with them: dead monsters, heads drifting on the mirror of the sea, peaceful lamblike faces with beards, washed by blue water. And in hours when nothing was happening, they were again flooded with the old happy feeling. Everything quiet, apart from the shrill cries of birds.

Now they were sailing through water of a dark red hue. The ships moved very slowly. For hours they merely drifted. It was very hot, not a breeze stirred. In the radiant skies they saw shadowy masses of cloud floating eastward at great height. The sea surface, lit with a burgundy glow, sometimes sprayed foam, but otherwise stretched smoothly away to the west like a loose dense carpet of lawn. This carpet, comprised of marine plants, was more tightly-knit than the brown-green one they had already passed through. Meadows, welling up from the depths, now and then reared glittering over the mirror of the surface, simulating land. The meadow lay calm; sometimes you saw a ripple bulge like a crease in clothing, then lie smooth again. The sailors watched in slight trepidation, always afraid that the sea would throw out another monster. The bright birds occupying the spars perched and leapt on the purple meadows of kelp. Stones and lumps of metal big as a fist that they threw down just lay on the meadow. Small animals not normally found at sea, bats, could be seen dropping to the lawn; airy white butterflies bobbed over the wet kelp, whole clouds, flecking the meadow white. Then a blackish swarm ran and rowed through the red. Little creatures, a kind of rat with coloured tufts on their heads. They hung suspended in the water, paddled close together,

clung to the algal stems, looked round out of little black eyes, tufts standing stiff as a comb. Among them glittering blue cicadas, jumping but seeming also to unfold wings. It was these that emitted the penetrating drone that sounded from the vegetation through the great steady distant rumbling and rooting. Creatures climbed onto the ships, avoided people. People ran, screamed; gave little gasps of horror; but then they laughed, thought themselves childish.

Sometimes the reddish carpet divided, then closed again. Ever more little creatures slipped aboard the vessels. Butterflies and birds occupied every deck and spar. In the water, when the carpet parted, you could see larger yellow and blue-white beings swimming. They did not look like fish, more like seals with smooth shiny bodies; they fought each other and with huge invertebrates, nudibranchs, that clung to the surface of the water to breathe. The two front feelers of these creatures had grown to strong warty arms: with these as they dangled they grabbed at the yellow swimming creatures; their suckers secured the darting yellow seal-like beings, which quickly lost their colour, and hauled them in. The water around the molluscs was always slick with scum.

Savage choking heat hammered through the air. On the rocking ships they struggled against stupor. They clung to spars and railings, stared grinning about them. They were near to collapse. They dreamed: let it come, whatever. The chest tight. Then the air in front of them quivered. The quivering disappeared, reappeared in another direction. It seemed to be nothing more than a shimmer of heated air; they remembered it from Iceland, breath of the fiery sea and the lava streams. Soon the vibration appeared close by, with no increase of heat. Sometimes the surface of the purple kelp meadow, the thick layer of marine vegetation, burst apart: then the tall quivering of the air appeared again, drifted. Everywhere along the path of this quivering the field of kelp parted, quickly closed again behind it.

On one occasion the quivering air mass suddenly halted by a ship, as it drifted aimlessly as if asleep on the meadow. The people on deck stared unmoving at the strange perturbations. There was a humming around the curiously swirling air. Then the people sniffed and wondered: a smell of tar and brine wafted in bursts over the ship. They watched as the vibrating mass drew near, as it grew out of the sea, saw that it was veined, indeed pulsating. They faltered. The airy being – now they could see it, were astonished but not afraid – floated high as a house on the sea. It was filled with small black entities, dissolving; these must be algae and living things trapped in its entrails. Birds, butterflies abandoned the ship as the transparent gelatinous structure approached, blue cicadas and bright-headed rats jumped squeaking away into water. But the mountainous being blew its tarry breath more strongly over the ship. Altered – now the people stood petrified, fell fainting – changed its position,

bent its top forwards. There it had a mouth-opening like some plant-animal, surrounded by a garland of flicking ribbons, a heaving glassy vault from which came blasts of tangy salty breath. The ribbons unfurled over the deck, wound themselves around spars girders people. The ribbons tipped the ship sideways, pulled it towards the creature's deeply recessed mouth. The ship capsized. It sank into the water, was caught by the gelatinous vault that pushed itself over spars and decks, closed over them. The ghostly medusa stood upright. Ribbons waved vertically in the air. The girders of the ship along with its massive steel its living beings were dissolved by the convulsing entrails as they swayed high and visible over the sea, were incorporated into the creature. Black specks floated through the delicate veinwork; the outer sheath was strongly creased. The shimmering flickering of the air faded. The creature sank back. Plunged on its side into the sea, slurped water. Purple kelp closed over it.

Fifteen vessels met their end on the hot red meadows. The main body of ships fled. Some sped across the sea of kelp, were held fast by the fauna, left rusting in the desert of flora. The ships dashed east, south.

## UNDER THE SHROUD

GREENLAND lay under the shroud placed by people over the eight hundred thousand square miles of the Earth's surface that jutted from the Pole into the Atlantic Ocean. Current from their Atlantic cable streamed through the webbing, surged up from the buoyant oil-clouds, from the embayments and blisters where it had gathered. The tension kept it stubbornly upright, swaying and shivering like an animal facing the trainer, with his whip and hard eyes. Sections of webbing twitched in pulsebeats. Exploded. Sparks flew. A spurting rattling around the broken places. Stabbing flames waist-high thigh-thick, blue then whiter, buzzing upwards in reddish spirals, sinking jagged back together, fading in every direction. Everywhere the net was melting. Flames spread. The fire flew outwards in circles that expanded at bullet speed. A great swathe of land was bathed in a thin layer of flames. Light from these hardly penetrated the black oil-clouds; the mountain peaks were only weakly illuminated. Now the plates beneath the woven Tourmaline shroud began to deform. They were melting. The light shifted up and down, heat increasing all the while. Suddenly a flood of flames erupted rampant house-high from sea to sea over land and mountains, swelled and grew together into a wall. The gas-clouds were torn apart, the drifting weather-clouds vaporised. Unearthly glow, bright as day. Thunderclaps in their thousands assaulting the zone of light. Lightning jagged through pink-white air. The air shook its burden of water down onto the Earth. A gale roared into the

fiery heat; it could not embrace the burgeoning flames, flinched back, flowed warm and contented. In the sea stood supports for the webbing, fragments of netting, still resisting the heat. The entire net rested on the oil-clouds of this narrow fringe.

The heat, enormous unleashed beast, plunged to the very depths of the icy land. Huffed at the land like breath on a windowpane. The air below grew foggy, vapour rose. The land swayed under grey and white clouds which, transformed to steam, imperceptibly climbed in hordes over the snow-plain, snuggled against the flanks of mountains, coiled seethed. They swelled swirling, eddies stretching away dense as milk, concealing the land, a rising gassy sea. Tendrils of vapour felt towards the heat. The white sheet of inland ice was drenched in damp. Dripping water tried to congeal again on the ice, but the heat held it, kept it soft. The ice-sheet had to surrender more. Runnels all over the plain. The snows of the desert disintegrated. Miles-wide expanses of slush were shaved by the heat. They flattened. Their pure white face, their filmy softness disappeared. The land took on a darker hue. Streams spread, chasms in the ice into which torrents emptied raging. Hollow crackling creaking in the enormous sheet of Greenland ice came humming to the surface, shot free. Crevasses opened.

Above it sat the great Power, summoned by a spark of the cable's current. It was discernible to the eye: a reddish brightness streaming, no longer climbing. Mountains, gouging rivers, the blue firn, deserts of snow, glaciers, eyeless earless without sensation, became most intimately aware of it. Heat, the great Power, did not stay above: it penetrated upwards downwards sideways, pushed its way into everything solid unsolid. It fell on all things like a sickness, or like love; they succumbed and swooned. It seized the mightiest smallest, the hard the liquid, like a shout in a valley it came echoing from all sides. When the great Power came down to the land it ran in the veins of all things, softened them, caused them to swell. Nothing was stronger than this. It knew nothing of fjords glaciers coastal ranges icesheets streams snow-covered plains, was blind to the gigantic the expansive; it made its way to the tiniest and there found access. In Store Karajak glacier it recognised water that could be turned to vapour. The grandeur of ponderously advancing Assatak Tuarparsuk Atlaksoak was as nothing. Blue the ice of the firn, a greenish light played in the rifts, plains of slushy snow stretched white into the interior: all was water. And could become vapour. Into gaps in ice mountains glaciers, into invisible gaps in the flowing fabric of streams lakes brooks springs, heat infiltrated itself. Harried them all to become gas vapour clouds.

Greenland rested on a massif of granite and gneiss, washed all around by cold ocean currents, on beyond seventy degrees north, between twenty and eighty degrees west. Beings that rose burning from the Earth's core, Silicic acid Magnesium Aluminium Oxygen had been

seized by that other dread primal Power, Cold, and never released. Cold was the greater Power, mistress of immensity, filling the ether. Shaper, progenitor of forms from which Fire allowed its heat to dissipate. Vast darkness and cold that held the stars, mere sprinkles in her immensity.

The flickering lights of the webbing over Greenland took up the battle with Cold. Placid calm was replaced by raging fury. High-pitched song of the flame-rutting nets; the flames seemed to turn everything, air ice mountains, into themselves. Water ran over the face of the ice. Rocky crags poking from the ice, nunataks, yielded their thin covering of snow, revealed black walls all the way down to their feet. Heat crept into the joints of the rock-hard structures of firn and glacier. It rippled over stored-up ice, slowly advancing ice-rivers. The radiant Power poured into mountains like wine into a drunkard. Tight-lipped they took it in. But Heat rippled in their entrails. Warmth permeated the burdened icy colossi, and everything that was in them felt itself seized. They perked up when it came over them, the new Power that they recalled from time immemorial. Firn disintegrated, sucking in air. Its hollow spaces dripped with water, expanded like lungs. It was tunnelled through with shafts and passages, undermined by vaults. It flowed away, the water into which it was transformed and softened. Merry white tinkling water. Foaming runnels in the firn-body; jingle-bells sleigh-rides. Waters poured liberated from wide glacial gates. They washed gnawed at the blue-white pillars of glacial halls, warmed-up melting relentless water. Vaults and firn trembled at the pounding force. Springs dug panting through the ice, cut channels in the white walls. Overlong pillars ready to collapse dripped white water, always more water. Mingled with the tinkling clanging of the shrouding cloud came now the chuffing booming of dying collapsing glaciers and firn-fields. Through their bodies, across the ice-fields rattled an irregular drumroll, excited water excavating. Haze lay mountain-high across the land.

Coastal glaciers speeded their advance. They thrust into fjords, pushed from behind by the inland ice. Ice piled up on their snouts and backs. A surging sea of ice now covered the inland. Floes and slabs crashed together, piled atop each other, slid away splintering. The inland ice, the firn had set off on their travels. They floated on thin layers of licking water. They had collapsed the vaults beneath them, but were unable to squeeze the water: it ran on ahead, bore them along as it surged. The ice-masses were melted from below: they had to glide, to float. Float on soft pliable water. Their strength had accumulated over millennia, in darkness, among long winters, short summers. Snow upon snow had fallen on them, borne on storms, melted, froze again. Wind no longer blew the snow away, ever more snow piled up on the ice, the mountains could not shake it off, ice tied them in, grew over their heads, besieged them.

And then the land was but a footstool for the icy mass: it squashed down smoothed all wrinkles. Now it was shaken loose, rose uncertainly from its seat. And was not alone. It could feel a shoving at its back, was lifted up, sent skidding from its place, levered up from below. Out of sight still, the mountain walls valleys sunken in silence, pushed up by the Earth to prevail over encircling seas. But the burden upon them was disappearing. Valley basins were filled with itinerant ice, ridges were climbed and overtopped. Now glaciers from inland were wending their way to the coast. Like a lady stirring up street dust as she gathers her skirts, sluggish ground avalanches took the measure of the Earth, unpicked crags and incorporated them in their mass. Flowed in heaps around the nunataks, nicked them, ground them, pulverised their debris.

Water, the great element, fought over with the greatest savagery by Heat and Cold, was on the scene. Dripping white muddy masses; this washing loosening dragging hurtling plashing. Water leaped ahead ten times, slid away, fell over, hurried on. With Heat it penetrated into glaciers the Earth, made everything loose. Veils of mist, damp gassy seas descended. At first as rain and then as rivers, water returning to the land. The last snowfields succumbed to the wet. Firn and glaciers that had not emptied their moraines into the sea could not stay where they were. Splintered and flowed, shaken up by soft water.

Mountains hills plains of the age-old sunken land, flooded, covered by mile-high seas, cataracts everywhere, revealed their ravaged face. Glaciers still plunged seawards over mountains; fell sagged back onto land. More glaciers, blind, groaning, swept on, their surface rumpled, and already they are flooded, lamed by the wet, come to a halt by crags, stumble, pile up against the rock, sink back, purr, grow smaller greyer, mere ice-floes floating away.

The land transformed itself into a desert of boulders. Lakes steamed, rocking with crumbled ice. The last remnants of glaciers grubbed in their depths. The inland now smooth and placid under the glowing air, here and there a few steaming hills. Water surged to the coasts, where glaciers had erected a wall of rubble and the dirt they carried on their backs. The waters had to break through.

The day when the first observation vessels came over the sea, the Earth moved. In utmost placidity Greenland, rocky massif projecting from the Pole out into the Atlantic Ocean, rose up. Lifted like a cork that has been pressed deep under water and then released. The land was free of the mountainous burden of firn and glacier that was the inland ice sheet. It lifted gently. Lifted from the heavy fluid masses of Earth's interior that shifted it into its new position. The land, mountains plains hills coasts, pushed up high and ripped apart from north to south.

Within a few days everything was settled. Greenland, just now still a continent, had split into two great islands separated by a shallow sea. Smoking islands slowly rose from the water. Other islands disappeared. A deep sea passage penetrated into the western greater island.

## EMERGENT LIFE

IN THE GIGANTIC circle of fire whose light was now dimming, whose heat was ebbing, Earth embarked on the migrations that would bring it closer to the heated isle. The world around Greenland invaded the zone of flame as if it meant to extinguish the fire. A rampart advanced on the islands of Greenland, dense enough almost to wall off the sea. From fringing regions huge stocks of living matter drew nearer to the furnace, ready like fire or water to infiltrate any space. They filled the air. Soon a lawn was there, a deep meadow miles across, soon a forest on the sea, a green sea-mountain pressing on. Whatever could not grow fast enough down below pushed itself to the surface, released creatures that scuttled swam flew. Layers of vegetation miles thick bobbed purple green brown on the sea. When they drew near to the hottest radiance, they were so dense that water penetrated only in channels; their surface was dry, washed only occasionally by a breaking wave.

In the west trees were pushed up by the rampant kelp; *lessonia* man-thick, with scarlet leafy crowns, twiggy branches dangling. In these water-saturated meadows, pleasant groves, countless creatures grew and died. Were incorporated in the mesh of vegetation. Hordes were added to the stock of vegetation. The floating meadow bobbed and dipped, pulled together, loosened. With every heave it seemed to breathe out thousands of seeds and creatures, sprinkled them on the water. They were snapped at by swimming things that lurked enchanted.

The forests and meadows of the sea grew into one another as a single breathing being. Fish worms crabs tried to saw through the leaves and stems; but the weight of the meadow was enormous. Creatures were squeezed flat, their juices dripped, mingled with white sap from broken stems, leached leaves.

In the tangle around Greenland there was no distinction between living and dead, plant animal earth. Plant grew on plant, held slowly swimming darting animals tight with tendrils, supportive efflorescences; the creatures became part of them. The plants had ubiquitous siphon-roots support-roots. From tendrils and hairs they built drinking-ducts feet jaws; were both plant and animal.

Crablike beings squatted on flowers. Sat quite still. From time to time they flicked with their tail-fans at tendrils that crept up on them. With two curving sabre-like attack-claws they bored into the flower, tore wounds in the stem, inserted the mandible, sucked. Several plants produced tube-flowers; grey crabs lurked in the bracts; they inserted their delicate mandibles in the ovaries; nourishment flowed to them from the plant-being's sap ducts. Sometimes on more open meadows they stepped away from the flowers; as if belonging to the plant they spread out and floated with tail-fans erect out of the calyx into water, and once again, when they were tugged and torn away, started boring with their little twisting digging motions.

Other creatures sat there on the plants: spiders. They emerged from under leaf-joints, spun silk to cling tight on nearby stalks. Cuttlefish, huge bodies with many arms, kept their eyes closed. The muscular mantle kept still, was inflated stiff. The vegetative network had pushed its extensions into the hollow body, surrounded the great veins, the creature was not dead. Its heart beat; the hollow columns of the plants ended in its guts; the sluggish heart pumped the juice of other creatures, other plants. Stems leaves buds were strangulated, limbs of medusas sea-stars; here the constituents were sucked up, there they were already captured by another being that could make use of a stray medusa-arm as trunk thorn leaf-cover sap-duct. Fine algae penetrated nudibranchs, they were snails no more: it was a bush of algae slithering over the soft ground.

On the islands of Greenland, rosily radiant, everything had changed since the great upheaval of the Earth. The land had been squeezed contorted. Strata and rock masses from earliest times had been laid bare. Animal remnants seeds plants, fragments of an age millions of years ago, were once again exposed to light; but another light. The sun that now hurled over-tropical heat onto mountains plains seas was more savagely powerful than the old distant gas-ball. Beneath this sun that lay close upon them arose what was just now buried, dead. The sun summoned it. Like the machines the Iceland expeditionaries had driven over their bridgeworks to bedazzle the crumbling rock-beings, like outcasts addressed in the street in their mother-tongue, like an ailing woman who feels an embrace, a warm word, or like a people who have been conquered and now find themselves again – they cry for joy – thus did the hot rosy light enter the rubble of the ancient Earth, flow wash over it, impose itself. Shoot straight to the heart.

A furious craving entered into things, made them bend and stretch. Rock strata slowly bestirred themselves. Plains lifted, everywhere strata became exposed, pushed high, overlay one another. More swift were mosses algae ferns grasses fishes snails worms lizards, large mammals. No new seeds drifted here across the sea; worn relicts of the Cretaceous, bones

plant fragments found life again. The furious light baked together in bodies whatever it found. Confusions of bone, shattered skeletons in the mud sucked in the glacial damp, pulled themselves together. Mud brought them substances that they could use to build their bodies, store up around them: earth, welling water, salts. Transformations took place in and on them, extending even to their body-type. The Earth clotted every residue and every relict into something living. So fierce was the drive to find bodies, to flow together and start moving, that everywhere the bare exposed surface of the islands burst open along whole stretches, here rolled together in a quivering mass, there, as if watered by rain, ran riot under tree-like forms. These were not beings that the Earth had ever borne before. Water salts earth agglomerated around exposed limbs, heads bones teeth tailpieces vertebrae, around fern-leaves pistils root-stumps; often these grew into creatures resembling the ancients of the Earth, often strange unknown beings turned this way and that, sucked at the earth, danced. They were heads skulls whose jaws had become legs, the throat a gut, eye sockets a mouth. Ribs writhed like worms. The living Earth streamed together around a spine, hardened. It was as if a network of veins radiated in all directions from the bony remnants, as if they were crystals, seed-points in a supersaturated solution. And what lay around the spine-thing, what was touched by the veins was grasped by it and drawn close, whether it wanted to become embodied or not. The worms that formed around the ribs, if they did not flee, were pulled by the spine-thing to its mouth, planted there next to its lips; they slurped and pre-digested for it.

Globular beings rolled down hills onto the land. They were a species of avalanche. The venosity played insatiably around them. As they rolled they baked into their body whatever they could seize hold of, sank veins into captured material. Many of these swelling beings clung fast to a hill, grew into and around the hill. Their intertwined exploring venosities had gathered whole storehouses of little beings that agglomerated under snail shells and around little sticks of coral; the globular beings armoured themselves with these.

Cliffs were burst open by the rampant power of seeds. There were creatures that moved gigantically ponderously, whole hills incorporated in their body. They carried along lumps of unformed soil that moved by themselves, trickled from them laying a trail of life. None had thoughts of attack and defence; they hauled themselves up, bumped into one another, rubbed together, formed slag, put down roots all tangled together. Rubble grasses leafy trees palms oleanders conifers were touched by the light. They attracted everything nearby, it came to them like a leaf curling in a flame. Remnants of desiccated smothered laurel trees lay on exposed sandstone, among scree from cliffs blasted by the sun. Living soil was sucked into their leaf-ribs, around a network of nerves. Enticement came from the leaf-ribs, the nerves; the

soil implanted itself among the ribs and nerves, layered itself in cavities, they became veined gaudy plants. Leaves rose from bare rock like cakes in a pan, broad and thick. They stood tall as bushes, their edges always turning as they sucked up earthy matter that flowed like heavy oil. The leaves stood erect, giant stuffed shapes. Often they began to move around. For under them grew armoured turtles, to whose backs they were anchored. And they wandered into the land on the backs of these creatures.

And landscapes stretching away, of succulent rosette trees with their dense foliage. They grew everywhere in the path of animals that spread their seeds. Grasses resembling trees shot up tall in dense thickets, impenetrable clumps, stalk after stalk from a single root; grass-heads drooped like lofty weeping willows.

Often trees and animals did not pull themselves entirely free of the soil, stayed put, were an intermediate thing between proliferating earthy matter and living beings. Often they dragged with them lumps of earth to serve as egg yolk, in pockets, whole sackfuls, on strings like umbilical cords, and when the yolk-sac became empty they fell prey to others.

Often shrubs confronted one another with threatening arms, seemed to want to kill each other. Then the movement broke their branches; they collapsed liquefying; their nourishment flowed into all the others; a larger creature stood up.

Lianas hung between ginkoes tulip trees. They spared no time to build leaves. Clinging flush to the tree, climbing around the trunk, they overtopped it. They enveloped alien leaves in their twining. They were greedy relentless beings. They secretly grew into the tree; it was their placenta. They received the juices of the Earth pre-digested. As the tree shrivelled under them, they sported their flowers like flags.

Silent gloom of the forests.

Pillars of leafless trunks striving vertically into the air, seamless roof of foliage; stripes of rosy light falling through. They twined like corkscrews around the woody vines of parasite plants. The vines joined trunk to trunk, crept over animal creatures and hung down from them like bats. Animals tore free from trees and ground and shrieked through the forests.

Plane trees on hot flatlands, mangroves breadfruit trees. Giant ferns stood producing offspring like inexhaustible mothers and fathers. Their leaves radiated in a circle like spokes of a wheel. These plants produced live births: buds sprouted on the underside of the sturdy leaves; seedlings dangled from the leaves like threads.

Trunks collapsing all the time. Often they broke under their load of leaves and animals, and liquefied on the ground. Sometimes they did not fall completely; carcasses stood left and right; stronger beings enveloped them. New growths sprouted in the gloom and darkness, raised their canopies above the tops and crowns of trees and spread new rustling foliage.

The forests, protective of animals, raised themselves high like shields. Often under the heat the colourful woody mass caught fire, fell burning to the ground. Slurped and sucked again, cast new darkness beneath it.

Giant beasts crashed through the forest, trampling everything in their path. Itinerant giant blobs of jelly from the seas settled along the coasts, devoured forests and meadows. Watery creatures that bridged whole rivers, let the river run through their body, squeezed it dammed it and sprayed it out again. Ponds were lifted up and taken wandering with all the reptiles and plants they contained; they jogged in the belly of a wheezing slurping eyeless giant that twisted and turned and stretched itself long like a bottle towards the light.

The islands of Greenland, drenched in rosy light under the tropical heat, were hardly land any more, bringing forth living beings. The islands as they foamed towards the light were a slowly encroaching half-solid sea, topped by waves now green, now purple. Sometimes a flame shot through the waves; then the sea sank back black and smoking. Ruttling flames ran in a jagged line across the islands, jumped narrow straits. They concealed little islands in the sea; when the smoke blew away the Earth was already in bright bloom again. Often the fire was not brought to the mountains and forests from outside. When the fury of the living wave grew too much, tree-crowns rampant sky-high above the ground, it broke out in the restless bodies themselves. Little flames stabbed licked from branches buds. Lianas reared up towards the light; their vines produced not heavy flowers but flickering flames that did not attack the plants but were fed from below, roared wider longer. Until a fearsome quarrel arose between the flame and the plant-being tree-being. The tree pushed up more strongly, the flame worked its acrid way downwards. The tree's fury fed the flame. Away with the tree and the plants around it. Their raging nourished the flame. It wheezed itself up to become a fire. Flame raged with flame, roared into the air.

Flocks of small birds and insects emerged from age-old Cretaceous rocks. Gaudy parrots, voluptuous pheasants flew about, snapping calling. Cephalopods sponges snails emerged alongside them from the earth, slid into water, mingled with other creatures that chased them.

Saurians coiled street-long serpent bodies across the rocks, plunged into water, beings pale at first, then streaked blackish-brown, with spines growing from a narrow toothy skull; they

paddled rutting grunting in the water with broad flippers. As these creatures swam they fought with others, had to assert themselves amid the jumble of emergent Life that trickled through them, beat about them. The monstrous creatures left the rocky plains behind, the burning smoking land where they were at first undecided whether to plant their tails and feet in the ground, then pulled their limbs from the ground as from a dough and looked dully around, regarded the trees, sank their giant jaws into soft trunks. They stood heavy on the burrowing Earth supported on a muscular tail, rammed and felled trees with the two horns on the head. They took mouthfuls of trees as if they were grass, chewed them, crowns parasite plants dangling animals and all.

Long-necked hunchbacked monsters plodded singly and in groups through noisy valleys, across flatlands. Their thunderous whinnying scared even themselves. Their backs supported a double row of tall bony plates, a bony collar protected the throat, but the huge head they moved slowly from side to side was sad, almost human. Water ran from their eyes. They pushed into the forest. But they trembled, stood still, flung themselves about when they were set upon by packs of animals like foxes that tried to insert themselves in eye sockets ears between teeth, and were shaken off, trampled. But the foxes kept running from behind and over their feet, leaping from trees when the monsters became entangled in a confusion of vines. They whinnied in pain. They flattened whole groves as they threshed about. They tried to cool themselves in riverbeds. Many lay shattered there. But the Earth continued in its state of arousal. And as they shattered, Life was already streaming and clotting about their limbs and setting off into the land.

Bird-creatures swooped from the highest crags onto this living blaze. Necks like gazelles, wings spread wide, they carried entire meadows and trees on their long crocodile heads. Mole-like creatures nesting among their flight feathers stayed with them as they flew. These teeth-baring bird-lizards needed no horns to ram and spear. Fragments of mountain that they carried on their heads thrust out points as hard as stone. They were assassins, these flapping clawing swooping beings that appeared over the blaze that was Greenland. Their fury was more terrible than the fire, they ripped open itinerant jellies, crushed animal masses that sank beneath them.

The life of the island had pulsed upwards. Now it began to flood overflow unstoppably outwards. Flocks of birds took flight. Legged creatures fled before the whirring crushing monsters. They tried to swim across water. Fled over the meadows of kelp. The animal mass rolled south east west.