

Robert Müller

TROPICS – THE MYTH OF TRAVEL

AS DOCUMENTED BY A GERMAN ENGINEER

*EDITED BY ROBERT MÜLLER
IN THE YEAR 1915*

<https://beyond-alexanderplatz.com>

Müller developed a voracious, avid, fast-moving, inimitable future German style.

– Robert Musil (1924)

The reader's expectations are continually subverted ... Programmed by the Foreword to be a detective, the reader is diverted by a jungle of expressive language-thickets and delirious speculations that undermine every narrative thread.

– Ingrid Kreuzer (1981)

TROPICS vigorously addresses the most elemental issues of human existence, indeed the foundations and determinants of human existence itself, and does so in the most driven, complex, hypertrophic way imaginable.

– Florian Krobb (2015)

*Complete German text available online at
<https://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/tropen-5270/1>*

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

We alternate something, we make it different, absurd, upside down, and look, it is *still* something. We think a thought perverse, and it is pure as a virgin. ... Learn how reality scans! Equal rights for paradox! It opens up new worlds, it brings good fortune, it broadens possibilities; and to the *artificial Paradises* that a Viking of the mind experiences or has experienced because the old Paradise became over-populated, we add *artificial realities*, for a census has shown that normal reality is full up!

Robert Müller: *Tropics*, Ch. V

The Viennese literary activist, writer and publisher Robert Müller (1887-1924) was singled out by Alfred Döblin in a brief overview of modern novels:

Some modern novels. The explosion of styles. As much happens on one page as once in whole books. There's an incredible capacity to depict things, especially among the Viennese; Robert Müller for example is a dazzling wordsmith.¹

Intrigued by Döblin's reference to an unfamiliar writer, I discovered online texts, including the most significant fiction from his short but intensely productive life as essayist, novelist, publisher and cultural activist (e.g. he organised Karl May's final public appearance in March 1912). Though the modern edition of his works covers fourteen volumes so far, after his untimely suicide in 1924 Müller lapsed into obscurity. Not until the 1980s did scholars of literature begin to explore his writings. Attempts to reprint *TROPICS* foundered for years on the dubious claims of a Viennese writer to hold the copyright; his claimed intention to produce a collected works never materialised, and only in 1990 did *TROPICS* at last reappear. As far as I know, at present the only translations of Müller into English are this book, and the intriguing short story *Manhattan Girl*, published by *The Brooklyn Rail* in January 2020. (I am working on further translations.)

First published in 1915 (the same year as Döblin's first great epic *The Three Leaps of Wang Lun*), Müller's novel *TROPICS: The Myth of Travel* is seen by German critics as his *magnum opus*, a milestone in modernist German prose. It purports to be an account of an expedition by three White adventurers into the Amazon jungle in search of lost Conquistador gold. The surface action (which takes up around one-third of the text) is accompanied by pools and bogs and sun-drenched clearings of interior speculation, hallucination, reflections on consciousness, on civilisation and its discontents, on art, on barbarism, on life vs. technology, on love and eroticism, and much more. The language, as Döblin noted, is incredibly vivid, vigorous, and disconcerting.

The narrative is framed as a "report" by the only survivor (but not for long) of the expedition: Mr Average German Engineer Hans Brandlberger. The "report" is

¹ 'The Boy Blows on his Magic Horn', in *Die neue Rundschau*, June 1920.

accompanied by a Foreword by someone called “Robert Müller” who is clearly not the author Robert Müller. This Foreword primes the reader for expectations that young Hans’ report then subverts – Hans is clearly not a dependable narrator. So along with linguistic virtuosity, we have layers of fictivity which keep readers on their toes, and allow the text to explore controversial topics while distancing the (real) author from necessarily identifying with them.

The expansion of European empire-building from the mid-19th century up to the Great War was accompanied by enormous self-deceptions as populations all too easily swallowed propaganda narratives: *We are civilising the natives. Resistance to our armed incursions is treachery. No miscegenation: the purity of the White race must be preserved. Economic necessity requires firm discipline of the workforce. Brutality by Europeans is caused by tropical fever, not moral failings. The anthropologist’s task is to measure the “other” against European “normality”.*

Müller’s novel dismantles just about every such trope.² The libidinous drives of colonialism are laid bare. Claims to philanthropic rationality made by the colonial powers are refuted. The shallow exoticism of so much trashy literature (dusky maiden on palm-fringed tropical beach; valiant White explorer besting devious natives in the midday sun) is now of merely historical interest. But Müller’s novel can still be valued today as a work of art. Its pointed unveiling of the gap between jittery European preconceptions and the reality of other robust cultures, scornful of these interlopers, provides the reader with a great deal of fun. Alongside this we have young Hans’ adventurous – indeed vertigo-inducing – musings on evolution, the imagination, dreams, and reality. The disorientation begins early on, as the quotation at the head of this Introduction shows, and becomes ever madder: for example, Hans speculates at length that butterflies are the degenerate descendants of dragons.

Once the three heroes find the supposed hiding place of the Inca gold, and it is not there, the narrative becomes a tense murder mystery, replete with bad-faith reports, distractions and red herrings. And then right at the end, Brandlerger, only survivor of the three adventurers, announces that travel is superfluous anyway:

Is there a yearning for distant lands, for other lands, for marvellous Dorados and adventurers’ lairs? There is not! Whatever a person finds he finds in himself ... If you were to ask the future human if he was ever in the Tropics – Ah, what Tropics! he says, the Tropics, that’s me!

C. D. Godwin
Summer 2025

² ‘Tropen’ means “trope” as well as ‘Tropics’.

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

In 1907, an Indian uprising broke out on the border between Brazil and Venezuela, in the source region of the Rio Taquado. European and North American travellers who found themselves in the insurrection zone were exposed to assaults and maltreatment, and were rescued by Venezuelan government troops in the nick of time from certain massacre. At the head of the tribes taking to the warpath against the ever more blatant encroachments of civilisation stood a priestess named Zaona. Her enigmatic prophecies proclaimed the victory of the Indian cause, and stirred the savage tribes of the jungle nations.

In San Francisco, California, where I was residing at the time, and in other advanced parts of the globe, these events, which in those regions were nothing out of the ordinary in any typical year, would have gone largely unremarked had public attention not been drawn by the extent of the unrest, together with the circumstance that white-skinned foreigners had fallen victim. An expedition of seven North Americans and three Germans had set out with the intention of founding a so-called Freeland colony, and had secured military escorts from the governments of the republics concerned; in the end they were wiped out along with their squad of protectors. The colonisation plans of this little group had originated with a German engineer, Hans Brandlberger, who, backed by American capital, hoped to turn into reality his grandiose ambition: to open up to white farmers fertile regions of the South American interior now still cloaked in endless primeval jungle, and institute over the cultivated regions an ideal government on Communist principles. Brandlberger shared the fate of his companions.

Newspapers reported the event in extra editions with big red headlines. At first the name Brandlberger, identified as the leader, slipped by me. Then, as I acquainted myself with the enormity of the horrors recounted in such extensive detail, my mind was seized by the fact, remarkable in itself, that this grandiose and fascinating scheme – the Freeland enterprise – described so lovingly by the press had been developed by a German. The name Brandlberger preyed on my mind. It was no heroic or even merely distinctive name, and hardly augured a heroic explorer's sensational fate. It was perhaps common enough, and rang more of a cosy enjoyment of life than any zeal for action.

But I sensed a connection with this name. Had it belonged to a friend at school? My memory was tormented as by the wickedest of sins. But no, I was never acquainted with anyone of that name! What tormented me was the pencil I had just put down and was now mechanically hunting for. I searched on and under the desk, I inspected the wastepaper basket, I peered, knowing in advance it was hopeless, into the workings of the typewriter; finally I wrenched open the drawer where manuscripts lay piled ... and, summoned by this action, a memory shot through my head, and now the pencil was of no concern. After some exploratory shuffling through dusty papers, I held in my hands the extensive typescript that Hans Brandlberger had passed to me in person a long time before.

This occurred in the three rooms, fitted out well enough for their purpose, that announced themselves the Three Worlds editorial suite. Three Worlds, for which at that time I was tasked to read manuscript submissions, was an international monthly devoted to philanthropic goals; it appeared in Peking, Frisco and Berlin, in other words in the most important and widely spoken of the world's languages. It published every kind of work of the writer's craft according to commonly accepted principles. A brief glance at the manuscript Hans Brandlberger had given me showed it unsuited to our goals. The progress of the narrative is interrupted by tedious excursions, and the delivery technique wanders off here and there into such monstrous philosophical digressions that it seems doubtful whether the writer ever aimed at anything like a narrative style. But this was not the entire reason why Three Worlds declined to accept and publish the work, despite its relevance to current events. The magazine's publisher, the eminent and wealthy head of a Protestant mission to whom I passed the manuscript, which I had now read more thoroughly and backed with my passionate endorsement, returned it to me, noting in a few places concerns about the content. He argued that it went against the philanthropic principles of the periodical (funded by rapacious millionaires).

Now, annoyed perhaps by the casualness with which dogmatic objections are raised by editorial offices against works of a free and independent cast, often after only the most cursory consideration, I have decided to publish this ownerless manuscript in book form. I am well aware that in doing so I am contributing little of value to literary history – but perhaps to the history of mankind. Other artistic intentions that one might term acute and profound are not apparent here, as is only to be expected of a man who pursued studies in the natural sciences and technology. And if occasionally we discern an effort to create something that could be termed a product of art, I would point to the author's own exhaustive testimony: that no doubt one of the things he was trying to do was report his experiences with the highest degree of objectivity and immediacy. He was not a man of transparent and explicit aims, as his writing shows only too clearly. Perhaps in setting down his testimony he tried also to do too much else, for he possessed one virtue: he was thorough! To the extent that his labours, although no work of art, can nevertheless be accorded the status of a documentary record.

He bears witness to a type, and this happens seldom enough. Hans Brandlberger was a young man at the beginning of the 20th century, and was through and through like all young men of that distant age. Even now I recall his physical appearance clearly enough. He was small, slim, but with solid shoulders, and his longish pale face was fitted with a rather strong eyeglass. His hair was very blond and combed to the left. His right cheek bore a small fencing scar, and this blemish was the attribute by which people took stock of him. He seemed a typical young German; but a reading of his book somewhat gives the lie to that impression. He was more than just one of those young German gentlemen with convictions, a lack of pocket money, and prospects big or small of a career in civilian or government service; perhaps he was also less. He was a brooder. As a type at the start of the 20th century, before the Great War, he was a man of no real gifts and no character, indeed hardly a man of intellect – if by intellect one understands a

harmonious admixture of judgements both free and constrained. He was too free, too much the burrowing creature, to be an intellectual. But he possessed that mental energy characteristic of the early years of the century. He was deep: that is, pedantic; for all his strongly ethical interest, amoral; and in more than one sense, liberal. He was always a little angry and irritated with himself. He was analytical.

But not to go too deeply into his defects, he was honourable. This is perhaps the most common, and today no longer the most exculpatory, excuse for his weaknesses. And he, I venture to say, already suspected this. His relationship to Jack Slim, the American, became for him problematic. He came so extraordinarily under this man's influence, worked his way so thoroughly into the role of follower of this man who was so much his opposite and whose nature therefore was not alien to his aspirations, that Slim must almost have seemed a free invention of his speculative drive, his intensely monologuing inner life. Indeed, having been made alert, suspicious and sensitive to connections by the reading of his manuscript, I would without hesitation simply make such a bald assertion and point to passages that support it – were it not the case that Jack Slim was an historical figure of whom most of us have heard and formed a judgement.

We know who Jack Slim was: perhaps the most unusual man since Cagliostro attracted all Europe's attention and smiles. He was notorious for his political eccentricity, his impossible prophecies about the evolution of the human race, and his efforts on behalf of Theosophy. He had contacts in every corner of the world, was a friend of Tolstoy, knew Gauguin as a student, sat in Viennese coffeehouses at Altenberg's table, and advised the German Kaiser. Today we know that it was he who prompted Kaiser Wilhelm II to issue the menacing telegram that so offended England at the outbreak of the Boer War. One or other of his many paradoxes had made him a political foe of the English; perhaps only because his Oriental origin, which he liked to identify with India, was stronger than we know.

For the origin of Slim the American is in fact pretty well attested. His grandfather, Selim Bukabra, an Arab from the Hejaz, was an officer of the Sultan just at the time when the Prussian captain Helmuth von Moltke was in Turkish service. He was one of the most intelligent and capable soldiers of the reorganisation period, and when the Prussian returned to duty in his German homeland, Selim accompanied him as a friend. He married the daughter of a German officer and went off with her later to North America where he made a career in the Navy. He used a mangled version of his forename as a surname. His son Jack, drafted into the Union Navy, later joined the Merchant Navy and relocated his activities mainly to Peru. This was the father of the historical Jack Slim. The background of Jack Slim's mother is obscure in every respect. All that has come to light is her origin among the native hoi-polloi and the fact that she was never married to Jack Slim Senior. Young Jack, like his father, was brought up on an American training ship, and later went out into the world.

His affection for the German people is well known. All his political projects were concerned with the future of Germanism. He had three ideas which he promoted with persistence. He advocated the creation of a great German colonial realm in still-

unexplored Arabia. He, alongside Palgrave the greatest of Arabian explorers, was given to assert that Arabia presented the same manifold promise as Canada or Siberia, and that the German nation could undertake there a cultural mission that would leave even India in the dust. His second notion was linked to the mystical side of his temperament. He was a Catholic, and was able for a while to exert a strong influence in this direction even on the Kaiser; to him, being a Catholic and a man of the world were the same thing. His pamphlet on the future of the Austrian state climaxed with the challenge that, if the Papacy wished to become more digestible for the nations of Germans and Slavs to the north, it should move its seat to an Austrian province, to Styria or the Tyrol. With this statesmanlike stroke he hoped to achieve a complete upheaval in the way spiritual matters were heading; it was thus, in his opinion, a matter of close interest to an Austria corroded by Liberalism. Here we may mention his related idea of creating a Jewish state on the Black Sea, to be conceived firstly as a reserve for the Jewish people and an antidote to their dissipative effect on the rest of the world, and secondly as a buffer state against future Asiatic entities in Tibet and the Caucasus. Crucial here, perhaps, was sympathy not only for the pure type of Western Aryan, but also for the Semitic element which constituted a good part of his own being. Only with difficulty can even the freest spirit shake off such influences. Slim had no wish to shake them off; on the contrary, he saw in them the values of all cultural development. The strangest thing happened: here was a man whose spiritual experience, blood composition and education destined him for Nihilism, and yet we see him acting as a conservative type. It is as if after struggles, mixings and dislocations, Nature sought to create in him a truly mature type.

Those who followed this interesting life asked themselves ever and again how it was that, in spite of everything, all Slim's plans for building the world anew came to naught. Not one of his plans has so far been realised; perhaps not even himself. Now, having read the German engineer's manuscript, I think I know why. His stride was too long. He never let normal natural developments come near to him; in consequence, people less gifted than he, and who were unable to follow him, in general made better progress. What no one could have suspected from his appearance, which revealed a practical, active and audacious man of flesh and blood, becomes clear from a remark he makes about himself to the engineer: that he is a thoroughly theoretical person, for whom even the loftiest and most brutal activities are merely emblems of intellectual development.

It is in this revelation by a historical person, whose rich and bizarre life has occupied everyone's attention, that I seek the value of the present narrative, which relates a banal and inglorious end. There is no doubt that the Jack Slim of the book and that other Jack Slim are one and the same person. If I am honest, I must confess that this surprise became the final and most pressing reason for publishing such a defective manuscript. Slim fell victim to jealousy. Think of three white men, who with the heat of the tropical sun in their veins compete for a native woman – I recall that her name was Zana. Whether she who bore this name was identical with the priestess Zaona, who years after the events narrated here unleashed the great native uprising, could not be ascertained – she may well have been, for we have only one written version of her name. If so, we would

actually have before us another of those strange threads concerning human relationships, one of those threads in which this enigmatic book is so rich.

And it is enigmatic, this book. It avoids giving expression to certain deep and wicked things, and thus forestalls their becoming moralistic. It clearly strives for honesty, and is thereby patently disingenuous and indirect. The writer's intention to leave the brutality of the deepest actions to a supplement rather than to the narrative seems to have been the guiding thought and his most awkward embarrassment. So how Slim and the Dutchman died – here, along with the writer, I anticipate a great deal of the reader's understanding and tact.

This, then, is the story of a German engineer.

Robert Müller

Vienna, 1915

PART 1: On the River

I.

Girls and women of every land and race have I seen, coloured beauties of the most varied charms, but the supernaturally strange influence that emanated from Zana I have never encountered elsewhere. And yet Zana was only a pitiable Indian woman, primitive from the splendid skirt that encircled her otherwise naked loins, to the strong fingertips that knew how to grub pitilessly in the wounds of men.

And then there was that man Slim, the American. He had courage, but a conscience too, was like a man out of his time filled with a mediaeval passion for adventure, belated heir of the conquistador race, cool and fiery, tall as a tree, strong and intimidating. From his father, an American sailor, he had inherited Northern brains and willpower, from his coloured mother the whims of the blood. This unusual combination in Slim's heritage made him a characteristic personality of that Central and South American zone which even now is a gathering ground for brutal male natures and piratical types.

The year 19-- found me on the island of Curaçao, blown thither by a technical mission for the United States up north. I had been briefed in advance on the thrills and peculiarities of that semi-civilization, and eagerly awaited what was to come. There I came to know a Dutchman named van den Dusen. He had been an officer in the colonial army on Java, then a merchant by profession, with that not at all unmodern admixture of the mercenary who stakes his energies and ingenuity on the most reckless acts in the service of foreigners. Even at this point he carried in his head a whole list of ventures which he made no effort to conceal from me, and which would in his opinion earn him sensations and riches to the end of his days.

My doubts showed. He was almost offended, mentioned a proposal, coughed up details. "It was two years ago," he said, calculating. "I was in Cartagena at the time, where I had dealings with a man called Slim. He toted around with him the most outrageous notions – it was then I got to know them. All a man had to do, listen well now, was literally carry gold away from where it lay. Millions in gold, mark my words!"

"Nice," I said, "and why doesn't he go and carry it away, as you say ...?"

"Well," the Dutchman replied, falling suddenly from enthusiasm into a cool distant logic and, as the expert, had now to dismiss this possibility once and for all with a shrug of the shoulders, "he can't haul it away by himself, and it takes money to make it happen, money;" and he added in a tone of regret, "he's been playing a poor hand for a while now."

"Hm. Anyway, where's this gold supposed to be," I asked, only half interested.

I already knew that legends of treasure in South America and thereabouts were as common as mosquitoes. The Dutchman's face turned sly, and he looked at me in amusement. "Secret!" he hissed. We let the matter drop.

Two weeks later I came face to face with Slim. He arrived on a Dutch mail steamer. Van den Dusen greeted him like an old friend, and in a meaningfully raised voice asked how his affairs were doing. Now, Slim did not seem put out. It occurred to me that any who thought it worthwhile focusing their curiosity for a moment on him – a picturesque figure even by Roman standards – were regarded by him with glowering suspicion. And at once it was out in the open. He was, he said, surrounded by spies, and every form of free action was thereby closed to him. I saw the intrusive strangers grow bashful under his gaze, they walked away discomposed, not one daring to look back.

The vulture-like face with the piercing dark eyes interested me. He was either a scoundrel, or a thoroughly unambiguous man well adapted to life, who knew what he wanted and (for all that it betrayed his own nature) remained a solitary actor. The remarks he made about the treasure tale, more report than narrative, fluent, precise and plausible, brought me for the first time closer to him, and tipped the scales of my undecided friendship towards the more sympathetic alternative.

On one of his many wanderings, during a Columbian revolution he had saved the life of an Indian soldier from somewhere in the interior, who had been torn by violence from the peaceful huts of his tribe. Enough such individuals find themselves among the buccaneering armies put together by the generals of feuding South American parties; they resist at first, are then forced into service with the whip and maybe death threats, and later go along willingly because they know they could be hung from the nearest tree if somewhere or other, on their own in a village or among the always unruly mob of a strange town, their uncivil profession should become known. In gratitude the brown lad, who sometime later did not after all evade his fate, gave his officer a curious earnest of fortune: a baked mass of sand, a kind of tile on which a jumble of mysterious Indian signs performed a dance.

The tale he told sounded mythical, but Slim swore that things in his life even weirder than this had turned out true. The hieroglyphs, he declared, were a facsimile of an inscription on a rock in the Guianese interior. A waterfall cascaded there from an overhanging rock ledge; the roaring waters shot in an arc of silver tines into a brown polished basin hedged in by densest jungle. But behind the endlessly rolling silvery film lay heaped the treasure of a caravan whose white escort, centuries ago, had put the Indian guides and bearers to the sword at this spot once they became surplus to requirements, and then in the end had succumbed, to a man, to the bloody vengeance of the survivors of that tribe which later produced the Colombian mercenary.

Slim, whose pathos had begun to draw me in, explained that two fruitless attempts to locate the treasure already lay behind him. One difficulty was to avoid discovery by the tribe, whose medicine men and priests even now had to guard the secret.

The story of the rockface with the chiselled signs sounded not implausible. Everywhere primitive memorials to Indian quarrels, duels and arcane events of tribal politics loom along riverbanks and inhabited oases in the jungles of inland South America. Whatever scepticism I might feel about the purpose of such an expedition and the achievement of its final goal, my urge for adventure had received a jolt; I grew nervous, appeared dissatisfied, my brain began to speculate, and soon the cafés of the provincial Venezuelan towns in which the three of us were knocking about became to me the most odious jailhouses in the world.

But one day we began to gather supplies, my urge for activity acquired scope, this lasted a month, and then suddenly all fell silent around us, uncannily silent, the jungle closed over our heads, and the world of machines and conversation was just a dream of a relentlessly active imagination carrying back into those cultures a stream of gold.

II.

We found ourselves during those days on the brown rippled waters of the Rio Taquado. Four Indians – experienced rivermen and jungle guides – paddled us in two canoes. The margins of the water that played lazily against our keels as we headed into the current were nowhere to be identified with certainty. Lagoons trespassed onto the land and caught in their brown glassy mirror the drowsy steaming calm of a silently waiting jungle that wove miles-long systems of vines into an exuberant leafy curtain. Islands and promontories came creeping, on their backs clumps of giant entwined plants and trees that presented a hazard, forcing us to steer a meandering course. But once we had gone past and the waves from our swift canoes reached them, what had appeared solid began to rock. Slimy black glistening shapes dipped in and out, wormlike branches that had menaced like spears in the clear water set up a rhythmic bobbing, and grasped spasmodically at us.

The river's course, snaking along in wide curves, was a pearlstring of lakes big and small, an unvarying scenario of inlets and bays. These became swampy shallows from which the heartleaf-shaped paddles stirred up bubbles and cloudy eddies; and then we were confined in leafy tunnels in which the water seemed motionless, dark, unwholesome and greasy as it palpably bore us along.

For this was what such places stimulated: they suddenly summoned to consciousness one's own weight. You could feel the wide stubborn resistance of the steaming watery mass against the hull. While the water's surface, as the vessels glided harmlessly over it, seemed firm and secure as the surface of dry land, the observation now was of an indeterminate hovering. The usual feeling of being at the farthest edge of everything, which you know in yourself in the face of the endless All of the sky on the highest mountains – this feeling was lacking here. Here was a hovering over impure depths, and a detachment that was habituated to only the one side now transposed itself to a second.

In shallow places, warty lizards and alligator families floated in clumps, so that from a distance they looked like cliffs of karst. The beat of the paddles exploded them teeming into gyrating water, pearls shot up from airbursts and set themselves into white and pink foam-eyes. Right and left, ahead and behind, the forest held its silence, the broody air disturbed only by the dropping of ripe fruit and the wiry scrape of gnarled dead branches collapsing. Where a terminus appeared, at an unspoken magical spell the grey leaf-wall suddenly opened out, and as the canoes shot forward it peeled back like an illusory curtain to reveal a dazzling new stretch of riverine landscape. Behind us the banks closed in as if forever, evil, aroused, other than we had found them, disturbed by this uncanny force: people bringing shuddering vibrations to their habitual smoothness, and nightmarish disturbances to their dreams ...

Hold on; what's that? For a moment slumbering psychic forces were aroused, my lethargy plopped like a fruit pod into the silent brooding forest, for six whole seconds I felt fresh and bright as on the Sunday pavement of a pretty Central European town, thinking an unknown thought. An insight, transient as lightning, had come to me, a memory tried to compose itself, a few concepts coming vaguely together in a judgement ... and now the white light of day became more grey than white, it towered into a sensuous wall of resistance against which the thought broke apart. I pulled myself together, forced myself to the narrowest possible focus, but the grey mass of thoughts, seeming now to mimic the monotony of the external world, refused to budge. My tension slackened, dissolved again into that uniformly gross sentience, into a voluptuous vanishing away, an eager stupefaction.

But this ecstasy of desolation was clouded by a lurking interest. Under these conditions I was no longer able to revert to a rational enjoyment of life, there was something awkward about this sweet numbness, a residue, an uncomfortable originality; at the base of my consciousness hung ballast that made difficulties. The thought that had slid away from my out-of-practice powers before it could ripen under the searing heat – it returned now, became bothersome: suddenly my ears were filled with its humming as if someone had spoken it aloud. The thought was: *All this I have already experienced*. These balmy languid waters once washed about me. This illusory light, this sweetness, this mood, this fading into the unexpressed – it was nothing new, it encountered a human memory, it was ... a replay.

But where, where had I been a participant in this tropical condition, these scenes of unwilling growth, where, where?

It was hot, ha, hot, probably the river was just now crossing the Equator; this ridiculous certainty, ridiculous because I had to – was able to – assure myself that *I have never been here*. But now I begin to doubt, inwardly I laugh, but I begin well and truly to doubt. Could I be mistaken? I'm simply unable to quit. I can't do my *special thought* an injustice, I really was once present in a searing brooding light-drenched situation. Present ... hm. I have a strong memory that lacks an outline. Yes, I am a citizen here, here I stand and fall, I need not let my consciousness dictate to me. Good grief! So how is it when, say, a person goes insane? Terror paralyses me a little, I keep

still so I don't bump into the threatening madness, at this moment everything is unclear, and maybe I don't even exist. Maybe I'm only one of these braids that swirl so remarkably in the water, one with a brain, a sick bad brain ... But at the same time a kind of malicious glee rises in me, hehe, I am tralala, tralala – pssh – embarrassingly enough, I believe, I really have been singing, trilling like sweet Ophelia, hm, hm, hm, hm ... I'm overtaken by a gentle righteous glee. It is not implausible ... and yes, I have been here. Been here, been here ... I want to sing it, in my glee I want to chew and eat it. I shouldn't recognise any of it, this drowsy lassitude of water plants floating, bobbing, trying to rot in the steaming heat, all these fleshy detached bodies of flowers, creatures and water-beings, all this slavering and slobbering so vivid I can feel it on my skin, experience it with my whole body ... and I'm not supposed to recognise it?

A chill shudder of pleasure ran down my spine. In the raging heat of the sun? Was I feverish? For a moment it didn't bother me. The main thing was to celebrate my return. This drowsy heavy joy was an old dear friend of mine, of me who came from such a jittery constantly disconcerting un placid city! I strained my eyes to renew acquaintance with details of the scenery. I stared and stared the soul out of these suddenly familiar things; but alas none would yet place anything specific in my memory. Instead, the contours of the foliage acquired a ruddy fringe, and the air began to ripple before my eyes like an over-delicate veil. The only result of my exertions was to make me see a kind of rainbow in the harsh light.

How it happened eventually that my *special thought* came fully formed into view is almost beyond my control. After I had dragged myself for two days through this misery, lacking any appetite, the affair was settled just like that. We continued snaking our way along the river whose banks, as undefined as those of a swamp, never and nevermore meant to settle into a nice cosy parallelism. Enticed out of the jungle realm were always a couple of trees standing in water. The imperceptible current moved between them smooth as flowing honey, more inundation than riverbed. The depths still held their riddle, I hadn't yet sorted things out with them. Islands of water lilies turned on their axis, drifted slowly on, maybe to a more nutritious stretch of water, maybe into sunlight, maybe into shade, then brought their languid spinning to a halt and began, as if spring-driven, to gyre in the opposite direction. Sturdy lianas embraced the overhanging trees and nourished a coterie of lewdly ogling blooms. Orchids spread their thick little snouts through clumps of foliage, the limbs of strangely shaped flowers swollen with juice bent down to hairy leaves big as hands.

A world of little horrors moved in the water. Grey green gristle, rampant stigmata, heads that had begun to split so that tiny sharp tongues peered out of gaping brains. Uncarded fabrics fraying, fingers with webbing between them, immobile living bodies, bodies of an uncanny inestimable life, with humanlike traces and features striving to evolve. As in a dream I saw things that grew more familiar the closer they came. That I was able to touch them restored something of my composure ... but then they lay again behind us, bristling full-cheeked as the waves from our boats rocked them up and down. They spun around, a hundred ghostly eyes watched us, and in those cold

eyes lay a rebuke. The eyes pronounced a sentence of death, a scream of vengeance. Their peace, the majesty of their horror had been disturbed, they stared angrily and began to look ridiculous, like the desecrated halo of a comfort-doll, a compromised comfort-doll, haha, a stupid stiff panopticon-figure ... these foetuses, half of them quick-witted and viable, knowing and becoming, the other half abandoned, left behind, leading a sated and soulless arrested existence of potentialities, dreamy, sluggish, revolving unresisting and drunk with submission and well-being ...

Ah! What was that ...

... as the light dawned in me, yes, an unearthly light now dawned. So this is it! This is the secret I have in common with the corrupt deceptive nourishing waters of the deeps! This is what celebrates the reunion of life's morning and evening! In the mineshafts of my consciousness, in the mountains of my origin there slumbered a mood from the prehistory of a myriad beings; the river's motherly nursing and watering, the brooding heat of the torrid zone and the helpful calm of indolence had caressed my simple instincts. How long ago was it ... I had to go back twenty-three years and nine months to reach the plane of existence of one of these knotty sticks of cells. My identity with this state was certain. In these viscous depths there lodged beings whose dear colleague I once was. Long, long ago the ancestral cell settled in one of these primordial jungle ponds, freeloading as a tiny ball on the rim of other plants, let its little eyelash-feelers wiggle in water barely stirring, and its feathery muscle-threads go fishing for other organisms, strangling a little plant, a little microbe, a little flea, sucking all its juice through the one pore which perhaps is all it consists of. Or it was a wonderfully compact little bud with a plump camisole of petals, a calyx slowly unfolding its fan of colourful beauty, drawing its nourishment and enjoyment like a good citizen through a domestic system of roots that have set up home in a stink of brackish water or a hunk of wood grown spongy, and on a simple fare of tenderly prepared nitrogen stills the appetite that must of necessity be bound up with the beauty of a glowing red, or a violet shading away in waves.

All these living beings, all this around me across the board, *I once was*. Now it lies there, abominated by my purity instinct, a cast snakeskin on my evolutionary path!

III.

After two days of discontent and insanity I managed to rehabilitate my senses. My belief had proved correct, against my better judgement. India, the antipodal tropical land, after exercising this consciousness on the technical aspects of its daily life had formed from it a world view: *tat tvam asi*: Thou art That! No, the great German philosopher,³ in etherealising this principle, had never discovered as much reality as that ancient Indian belief. Between me and the life all around exists perhaps not just a *metaphysical*, but even a very obvious and quite *material* identity: these flowers and I

³ Schopenhauer.

are in fact very distant cousins. My nearer relations meanwhile have brought it on much farther, thanks to favourable circumstances; these, on the other hand, had bad luck with their earliest ancestors, and clearly the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children.

As I search systematically back through memory, I gradually allow consciousness to fall away, and thereby arrive at this one fact: I am a greedy sweet-toothed bundle of cells lying in water. This fact is the core of my familiarity with every somnolent state. My tepidity and my indolent mind find here an explanation. Even today work is odious to me, and even today I would a hundred times more gladly lie on the sofa smoking a cigarette, if vital interests are not exactly at stake. But if one day they are, then my vegetative drive to self-preservation and the robust strength of my ancestry stand revealed. My nerves run and bifurcate so infamously, with such refinement, exercise just as tirelessly in searching, grasping and throttling as the slender heron-shaped pincers of little water creatures, as the sensitive sliding grasping arms of these foolish little blobs of jelly that represent nothing more than a blister not even bothered to find its own daily bread.

The water's as warm as my own blood. My heart is a bag of meat pumping a red warm nourishing fluid through itself. Do I not swim in my own blood, am I not a little architectonic island in the blood's streaming, a scaly figure half-emerging from it? What matter if the wetting surfaces lies inwards, it's the highest most brilliant eversion of a principle, a practical solution to a question of nutritive economy. It's a mechanical invention of the first order, a method that saves both space and time. The principle of a nutrition-supplying current is preserved, but whereas once I loitered in a basin with everything else, now I have a little river for my own use, which delivers so much substance that I can artificially refresh the river on demand. The advantages of this setup are palpable, and anyway everyone has experienced how the most varied things can be reversed and yet still make very productive sense.

The feeling I have now towards this tropical landscape is more or less that same smug nostalgia that a modern locomotive feels when it catches sight of James Watt's tea-kettle. I *am* a tropical landscape, improved in multiple ways. Wherever I go or stand, I carry with me a normal temperature of thirty-six degrees, a profusion of well-targeted juices, a vegetation of sultry magnificence. Did I ever suspect this? My first dreams as a child were of the sun, of plenty and opulence. I had a snivelling distaste for vexations, cramps, contortions; the external life of sustenance seemed governed in automatic and self-evident ways. It was about pleasures, not work, about a buffet of experiences, not a bowl of soup. My tropical cossetting still lurked in every limb. History told me of ancestors, Nordic barbarians who with ice in their blond hair and beards and a quartz frost in the greedy hungry wicked eyes poured tumultuously down into the south, and I felt empathy for them. I was forever indulging morose daydreams about such a congenial existence. And now that the first strong impression of a southern scene finds me in a receptive state, my own prehistoric existence stirs in me, and from the depths makes reply in mood-sounds.

The river forcing its way through veins between outposts of forest represented a mighty heart. Quietly though it flowed, gently as in its descent it lapped against the indefinite banks, it conveyed and gathered nourishment for a zealous medium of humus that swelled up towards the sun in the strangest configurations of cells, trees, growths, creatures. The silence all around was uncanny, it glued up the ears. A smacking plop, a gurgle beneath the hairy overhang of a muddy indentation in the bank, the slurping of dubious cavities that now and then punctuated the long-spun thread of time like a detonation – these attested to the endless monotony of the proceedings. Out of the forest itself came a rhythmic rustling. There great Pan still made his music.

My pulse became excessively slow; I felt myself into empathy with the joyful growing. We continued like this for a week upriver, the scenery unchanging. Indolence took complete possession of me. A time came when my *special thought* no longer interested me. Now as we sat in the canoes, the sun stood over the last of the swirls. Things remained sweet and came forward to enchant, but observation began to slacken. Everything became more solid and banal. So all right, I bear the tropics within me ... but is it not an unjust disadvantage, an unnatural handicap, am I not thereby doubly exposed to the heat?

For generations my body had grown used to mastering its resistance to cold. Its combustion process was more specialised, its molecular activity livelier. The excesses of my brain attested to it, the sickly acute consciousness of mood and the cogitative apparatus that it set so extensively in motion. This might go on for a while and achieve a record in self-knowledge, as with the ancient Hindus. Their forefathers had returned as immigrating Caucasians to the jungles and estates of their present home, and had then created that remarkable system of telepathic-spiritualistic powers, pure manifestations of an exorbitant memory capacity. The surrogate – the brain – which was introduced for the original heat of the tropics, now reverted; it was caught in the dash and brio of inertia, and enhanced the degree of life for which it had formerly only compensated. This managed to last a while, and create cultures; the tropical sultriness that had taken refuge in the brain condensed when it came upon remnants of its own earlier form, and northern inwardness, when it came up against tropical outwardness, crystallised the enormous formations that we call culture.

But then the moment had to come when the machine habituated to outward-directed efforts started working; the absence of resistance was insurmountable. Did not all conquerors and creator-races come out of the north: Chinese, Hindus, Hittites and Jews, Hamites, Turks, Germans? Did mankind not become hard when it unwillingly abandoned the south for the north? But did this hardness not spark and blaze when it fell back upon the south? Did not the highest organisations in the world emerge? And fall to pieces? The machine could not cope for ever with this absence of mechanical resistance; it wore itself out. It could no longer handle this little bit of sun, but was ruined by it. The human-machine that came out of the north, unlike the indigenous human organism of the torrid zone, was unused to bowing down to Nature.

The latter organism produced not only its own electrical field, but also its own sources of illumination and nourishment. The sun rose and set on its horizon. But the sun-child, the boldest, most agile, best and most capable type of any human so far invented, was a creature of the farthest of all Far Norths. In his skull there burned eternally a glowing ball of desire. His imagination kept him warm.

But people close to the Equator are prosaic and practical, and at the same time in some strange way they lack the capacity of the woolgathering Northerner. They are never adventurers in the romantic meaning of the word, but either poseurs of explosive effect, or narrow-minded philistines with casually ruthless business principles. Any man who might have sought an experience for the sake of its inward content, or launched his solitariness for its own sake into the maelstrom of life, would have become unfit for society. And women? Society women were as glittering and false as their diadems and great clanking jewellery, they were cold, lacked erotic imagination, and always in their own mind treated the hammock as merely a boring kind of swing.

Does not the favoured hammock with its crescent-shaped gracefulness represent in and of itself the quite barren physical and mental indisposition – totally unsuited to outbreaks of temperament – of the type of woman confronted with the symbol of a handy sofa, as solid as it is rich in possibilities? But this is the hammock as experienced by the American, the western-oriental woman, this pendulum-swing between debauchery and chill, this unheroic emblem of the sweetest and stormiest situations whose pleasures are never exhausted, never savoured to the full, never consumed to the end. This literary sort of love which is never taken to its conclusion, but before the act recedes slowly into dreams. This corrupt and inhibited desire, this sweet frailty and philistine moral force is the hammock, the Creole's dressing-table, a fabric of bad blood, a sickly surface of vicious miscegenation on the body of a race. The hammock is the Northerner's most disappointing experience. What more or less bourgeois female fates might have been offered to the practised serial seducer or the boldly investigating chronicler from European circles was as good as drowned in hooch or absorbed into the business of marriage. The glamour and inventive content of Central European amatory relations was – even when undertaken in a spirit of exotic adventure – everywhere sought in vain.

I calculated: how long was it since I had measured life by worldly pleasures? A week ago we were passing time in a small garrison town in Dutch Guiana, in the company of the few white officers there and some Negresses. Three weeks ago, in Rio with van den Dusen, I had visited a dance hall for the last time. And a month ago, reckoned exactly from today, I was with the Manhattan girl, a spectacularly spoiled little creature, on the great roller coaster, the Loop the Loop on Coney Island, sent reeling again and again ... hup, we're upside down, hup, we've come full circle, hup, we speed beneath the Vertical, stomach in the mouth because it wants to stay up there!

Hup, how my thoughts were leaping, how my brain was taking a mad descending curve on the great roller coaster of life! So now here I sat, feeling that the Equator was

really a burning tyre eating through the entrails. I must confess, I sat there in gentle sated lovingness. How strange: my relationship to this environment had erotic overtones. For the first two days it was passionate ardour. I could feel the depths, seek them out. The maternally nourishing character of the landscape, demonically stirring primordial memories, had the stabbing charm of a desired woman for whom golden gates spring open before sky-blue destinies. Nature here could be recognised in the allure of the mother giving birth, in whom a man seeks the first beginnings and final meanings of the Ego.

Eroticism, as practised by the cleverest and profoundest minds of a culture in which the altruistic experience of true love has been lost, was and for a long time will be a search for the Ego in others. What is modern love at its most magnificent, love without and in contrast to sexuality? A monstrous, unnatural act of vanity, but in its decadence even more moral and creative! The demand on one's strength does not relate to the problem of how two people live together, but of how the one, through the other, can arrive at the enjoyment of a higher and more refined consciousness. Is this permissible? It is permissible. It is above all better than nothingness, it is, on average, better than the isolation of truly altruistic love. The more one is capable of considering feasible this gold-bearing, rare, Sabbath-day case, the more greedily does the striving grow to fill the erotic portfolio and see the mission through to the end. That case is so exalted, so very much beyond every normal measure that it's uninteresting; it's the object of idylls such as are no longer written today but must await another heroic and absolutist age. It is complete in itself, it's settled, it needs no reporting of any kind, it needs neither confessions nor missions. But it is the small, the uncompleted cases that have left to the human species the mission of bringing them to completion, so that we can turn once again to the big, uninteresting serious cases.

In this sense I too have adopted an erotic mission; I am prepared for the good of the commonality to bear a sizable portion of its inferiority, to experience it, feel it, but above all depict it and thereby teach a lesson. I am convinced that with boundless honesty I shall provide a notable service to humanity, and I won't hold back on my own erotic natural history, and may thereby succeed in picturing to myself later ages, when the very eroticism that today preoccupies us so greatly will be considered antediluvian.

I have before me one such instructive case. I am connected to a Nature that is entirely female. Sexuality sweeps across the waters, and I blend blood-songs into a choir. The forest is the great heart, and the brown water of the river is my most sacred heart's blood. Love arises from its flowing, a love in which I am a participant; but it is not the great spiritual altruistic feeling, it is a raging, savage and greedy love, it is a worldly and cruel love, base, interesting, and very instructive. In its ambit there ensue – insofar as a primal forest, a river and a sun are masculine – incidents of the most shameless kind I can imagine. Murky secrets surface in the soul of a man, and I sense humiliations, confusions, absurdities, poetical powers that demoralise, desires that wear down self-regard with their sharper teeth; as I sway I already detect extensions

that are not given by space and time and what urban man knows of these. Feverishly I breathe worlds, impossible to say where: behind my own world, left, right, above, below? ... and tumble into existences that were made into reality primordial eons ago.

The rampant sexuality of original Nature, mother and whore at the same time, challenges my masculinity: I reveal myself, testify, and *go travelling*. I am assiduous with my soliloquies, because they provide clues to the texture of my mode of eroticism which may prove useful later. For this story, like every proper story, concerns a woman. I'm not even thinking here of Zana, who was perhaps the first to trigger it all; I think of the forest, the primeval jungle, the sensuality of this Nature, its rawness, its primitive élan, its terrible disorienting drive; I think of *the drivenness*, the tropics in the white man's disposition. Woman, for her part, has never left the tropics; and just as surely as the white man represents an utterly altered system in relation to his jungle origins, so Zana surely differs in no essential respect from a lady of the boulevards. But it is also certain that the female nature of the tropics recurs in the female of the modern big city, and that the step from the most European Europe into the jungle turns out to be not as adventurous as one had supposed. For whatever one experiences, it's always the same adventure; it makes no difference whether one falls under a panther or under a bus, but the matter of greatest indifference is whether *she* is called Zana or Miss So-and-so. But I won't get ahead of myself; this is what I have come here to prove.

I shall reveal this much: I come with laudable intentions. The task is to record how insidiously tropical conditions exert their effect on the life of northern nerves; or posed as a question: How does one become insane in a distingué manner?

Calm down! *"The strange profound glimpses into my interior vouchsafed to me during the various phases of maturity bring me (just as when for the first time I began to understand the jungle-language that is called life) to the notion that it was a matter of a kind of erotic commutation, a kind of more sane hysteria. I now think that love and eroticism are never foundations, but consequences. Human evolution has been reduced to the sex life, and it is asserted that people begin to be concerned with themselves at the very moment when they fall in love. This seems to me flat out wrong: one becomes erotic at the moment when one becomes mature enough for self-observation. Man looks about for a tool and discovers it in some female creature whose passive temperament is as strong as his active one. In this way she studies him in herself; he studies himself in her. The higher the level of the intellectual man's intellect, the less his erotic foot-races have to do with those round-the-world travels called Love."* – This I shall write.

Please note that I am making a report conveying the thoughts of a brain seared to ashes by the heat. I depict a man who in the midst of blessed hazardous circumstances, as he sees it, writes the book that he is first going to experience. I was this man. With visionary force I sped on ahead of my own future. I travelled with the river as my writing desk, and our speed, in some small measure, confounded time. But my brain, let me say in my own defence, was the focal point of a dozen ambitious suns, all offering themselves to a battle for world dominion.

IV.

All this happened, this and nothing else, mere thoughts born of a great majestic tedium, as one day on a South American river located on a latitude quite close to the Equator, surrounded by jungle, I formulated the comparison between importunate Nature and the secret of mothers. Were I to compile an exhaustive account of my condition at that time, I would angle it towards the fact that it was totally devoid of humour. With the grumpiest diligence, with the most extravagant solemnity I plunged into logical enterprises which barely turned a profit, but I declined to await the satisfaction of my suppositions, and instead continued uninhibited on. There was no longer a trace of humour in my soul. For humour is a creation of the North, it requires bad weather, changeability and caprice. The South with its uncapricious beauty of life, its unvarying vastness, is unfavourable to humour. Only thus can the dour earnestness of Eastern philosophical axioms be understood, from the Talmud to the Mahabharata to the curlicued ornateness of Arabian logic. I devised axioms like a Moorish theologian, sedulously mixed concepts and symbols like a flowery Farsi poet. My cheeks were puffy with silence, and I no longer stretched them in a smile.

The unbearable heat was to blame, the heat and the silence. Silence, this dreadful silence – on one occasion my attention was drawn as if of its own accord to the fact that the others too were changed. Slim as good as never said a word. On the first days van den Dusen had tried his Low German humour on us but, failing to draw a reaction, in the end he too tired of it and stayed silent the whole time. I had already grown wise to his bombast, and the fact he was no model of veracity; but he was good-tempered and to some extent a *gentleman*. Now he brooded dully along with us, sighed and yawned and was sullen like Slim.

Our four Indian scouts conversed drily in low tones in their incomprehensible dialect. They weren't going to pep up our company. Two of them paddled us in a torpedo-shaped canoe hacked from a massive tree trunk; the laden provisions boat followed behind with the other two. On wider stretches the two vessels proceeded side by side. I urged the Dutchman on to a little race, and we wielded the heartleaf-shaped paddles as we had watched the Indians do to force our vessel ahead. But the water rebelled in muddy clouds that gathered beneath us uncannily like thunderheads, and the canoe began to roll and take on water. Slim grunted a little moodily, and we gave up. But the thunderstorm that had formed beneath us aroused my imagination.

Suddenly I felt that I and my surroundings were unreal; playfully I cast off the centre of the world that lay in me, I understood through my chilled nerves the insignificance of my person and its abode: for beneath me lay a world that in a curious fashion engenders its own thunderstorms and elemental events when a human beyond its bounds paddles badly and disturbs its course. Maybe my thunderstorms were stirred by an alien entity's clumsiness; who at that moment could swear to it, or to its opposite? Perhaps God paddled badly? But how insignificant God was just then, how

insignificant every Ego, every mind! A cheerful drowsy abandonment came over me, I felt my tricky old Ego vanish, and dissolved myself into a sensitivity – endless, and held together by no known being – to the vigorous self-centred life all around. Like someone from ancient India lost in a oneness gained from Primal Being, I saw with a thousand eyes and perceived myself through the thousand senses that God possesses ... and during all these moments I was plagued by a miserable tedium.

Lethargy lay in all my limbs. As a consequence I slept badly. During the day we landed, assuming it was possible, only to take meals, or when a bird that had made itself visible only by chance and very infrequently, and then sat erect and magnificent among the foliage like a primordial venomous sponge, had fallen to shots fired from our canoe. We would not expend ammunition simply for the relief of hearing a noise, for ahead of us lay a quite uncertain expedition, no doubt involving encounters with men and beasts of whose demeanour we could never be sure. And so we were sparing with the thrill of the chase and our powder, and denied ourselves an excuse to go ashore and take exercise.

So just when the sun no longer shone on the water itself, but with its copper flames kindled a sharp and slanting silhouette in the treetops, we began to inspect the bank for a place to camp. The instinct of the Indians was the decider. In those ten minutes when the sun took itself off, a change came over the forest. If we hadn't been expecting the swift onset of night, the oceanic stirring that now engulfed us on all sides would by itself have served as a signal. There was a souging in the foliage, the rustling advanced, seething life poured itself from day into night, an army of serpents seemed on the march, tuneless birdcalls howled across each other like the whining of dogs, their toadlike noises reverent and feuding.

All at once it was revealed: here was life in the big league, here the deceptive silence concealed a teeming plenitude of animal beings. Monkey nations began to bicker and scold, invaded the groves of other tribes, snapped dry twigs on purpose. Birds rose clumsily for brief flights above the ocean of foliage, to relax at last from the strenuous discretion that governed their daytimes. Was it mockery, a kind of gratification, that now lifted all their voices in dreadful outrage? One thing was certain: the entire phantasm of gloriously intense colours, the entire voluptuous explosion of a painter's palette, engendered not a single pleasing sound. But down at ground level lizards and reptiles were on the move, the ear was accosted by the horrible slithering of a thousand bodies pushing through from sunny spots where they had warmed themselves back into muddy holes; it set the teeth on edge: an image offered itself of cold muscle-beings dragging themselves across fissured logs. Now the sun had set, and the manoeuvre was already complete. From time to time a cat-body thudded to the ground; behind the garland of flames that shut us off from the land and the jungle came angry hissings. A puma screamed long arias. Otherwise it was quiet, quiet again, not exactly as quiet as in daytime, but still quiet. The chuckling and gurgling of the water could clearly be heard. And in the gap above the river the sky stood as a white

breathing glow; a falling star whooshed down somewhere nearby, it broke through there to the left, we held our breath: will it quench itself in the ink-black waters?

In the morning, around a quarter of an hour before sunrise, the same theatre will wake us up; the whole forest will sound Reveille. Until then we can sleep undisturbed. But to keep fire-watch we take three-hour shifts during the twelve hours of darkness. The one whose turn it is can make all kinds of observations. He can tune his ear to the forest's tone; it will become clear that certain noises always occur at the same intervals. A specific rhythm governs every utterance of these wild beings. A moaning swells up, fades away. A great chest breathes in, a capacious snoring rolls faintly away into the blue fever of the starry firmament. Pan lies on his back, catches his breath, has vivid dreams. Who is this Pan? Is he a savage, an Indian, a Greek literatus from a Socratic coffee house, with a defective nose?

I become aware that only one of the six sleeping bodies at my feet is snoring. I take a look: it's the Dutchman. He's lying flat on his back. I glance across at the Indians: they are curled on their stomachs, on hips and shoulder joints. Zorre, the fifty year old, is lying on his side. Unlike the others, his breath is irregular, the air breaks against aged cartilage, his organs are no longer smooth and supple. The others with their tough wiry figures lie like big children, and even when they stretch and turn on the cosy camping ground their manly forms still seem childlike. Their legs are of the most select slimness, thin, unhaired, copper-coloured, a beautiful muscle-snail clinging just below the back of the knee. Bring on a prima ballerina, she can learn how to look after her legs! How much more fragile must these limbs be than those jolting lampposts at the Vienna Court Opera! And yet their owners, when needs must, can carry small mountains on their backs. If every little bone and vertebra is as delicate, then of course the breath must flow freely. The organs are clearly made for combat. The big bellows above the thighs is not stiffened and squeezed by fat. The entrails lie directly beneath the glacé-leather skin, and once the evening meal has filled them they form a slight bulge. But Mynheer there is pointing his little belly like a football at the starry heavens, he's lying at attention on his shoulders, his back like a soldier's, his chin hangs hinged like an opened drawbridge while his ribcage, in which there's apparently enough room for three Indian lungs, drums up one autumn gale after another.

He who keeps watch has the floor. He can observe. Oh those ripe swelling nights with the Southern Cross overhead! The night breeze wandering between water and forest is sharp and sour with the scent of trampled leaves; but suddenly sweet waves emanate from some big shrub and ascend to a little twinkling star! Blood pulses tepid and quicksilver-heavy at the temples; then it's over, the sleepers in their dreams heave twitching sighs, in the forest sonorous contentment offers inventive thanks.

Slim has stirred! His face is sallow in the glow of the fire, his nostrils have quivered a little. Careful! Easy now! The power of observation lies in my hands, can I slyly smoke the enemy out, just when all life lies open to me? Is he my foe, this Slim, is he my friend, my brother, have I made a correct and fair assessment of his uniqueness, to my disadvantage or advantage? Who is this Slim, an imposter, a man, a savage – a

refined and controlled brain-machine of the latest race, or a brutal life-instinct with the blood of primeval humans in him? The way Slim lies there, muscles untensed, Indian-like with a total appreciation of how to rest, he is more the son of his mother than of his father. The Creole woman bequeathed him a murky ancestry, a bony savagery in his features from the interior of America, the blood dark, red, maybe black beneath the sallow skin and the deep-seated manner in which charm and hauteur share the same glance. What's the point of betting she wasn't even pure Castilian?

Slim's sleep is uneasy. Maybe he has a bad stomach, a normal legacy from a North American father. The longer I ponder, the stranger my view of Slim starts to become. I ponder, and Slim's person begins to grow. He's creepy as a murderer, as ridiculous as a poet, as likable as a normal citizen. In my hour of weakness, seeing him lie stretched out so full of power, so comfortable, so much at home in this land that is only half his, for half is alien to him and necessarily always a little hostile – how in this weak reflective hour his spirit grows, and I see before me the prototype of a future human, familiar features, characteristics of a modern culture, a cerebral *tension*, mixed with the singular *relaxation* of primitive man. Now he sighs, turns over, a kind of fury seems to rage in his body; and at this moment, when he becomes as ordinary as any hobo, I can pity him, my respect diminishes, and I blame him for his American dyspepsia. One night when I was on watch he jumped up, his sleep-drunk eyes stared into my face, he lay back down and slept on. Often for me he's a symbol of the sympathy that I as a white man feel for this wild world all around me, but soon the fellow is repugnant. He's the expression of thoroughly mixed and unclear feelings.

The warm languid night softens my mood, I forgive little acts of ruthlessness, and am for the Great. So I vote for Slim, Slim shall live and have my good will. My eyes drift away from him and over the rest of the gang. When they encounter the young Indian they suddenly take fright and move away quickly to the other side. He's good looking, and I don't know why I'm frightened. I become conscious of a sense of deprivation, hardship and solitude, suddenly it's menacingly clear to me that I'm here in the wilderness, I lack friends, lack a warm hand to hold, lack a soft slight creature to take in my arms; the way back to the civilisation that serves me so well is dangerously barred. A breeze blows warm from the riverbank, animal noises take on a hint of human deprivation, the bleakness of my situation can be felt as the counterpart to all this overflowing Nature, the heavy delicate fragrances make their irrelevance to me all too clear. The more wonderfully the night advances, the more desolate I feel. When Slim finally receives a prod in the ribs to clear a space for me by the fire, I am a beggar sinking hopelessly into an overcrowded powerful sleep.

We tried to orient ourselves to Slim's maps. These had come from travellers, from books, or were sketches in which some government official had noted his vague idea of a location. There were some proper maps, to be sure, but the places we could have made use of were blank. We ourselves marked a few distinctive spots as best we could. Our river became a single finger-length line that spared us all its caprices and confined itself to suggesting the general direction. We'd brought along no surveying equipment,

for our expedition and its goal had to remain secret, and the sourcing of conspicuous items would have made a mockery of caution in the little hick town that was our starting point.

Nothing ever happened; we had come through this far unchallenged. The tedium began to grow oppressive. Slim was fixated on his treasure, evidently tormented by it; he brooded, devised one speculative venture after the next. I attributed this obsession to his Yankee blood, and was flattered he had made such an important space in it for me. His patronage made me proud, I was young, tractable, open to adventures, and if in the hypocritical depths of my heart I believed not at all in this treasure – or in any other, apart from whatever resides in an extensive commercial enterprise – thanks to my Anglo-Saxon education with its sideline in American technology-boosting and romanticism, I was ready for whatever occasional poetry our travels might throw up.

But as I have said, I felt myself truly human only in the tried and tested German scepticism of the real Hans Brandlberger. The fact that Slim appealed to me came from the desire, contemporaneous with my generation, for a Renaissance humanity. It was only natural that alongside this there lurked in me a certain irritation at this brilliant being, this modern Pizarro. But these travels have taught me to understand people. Are there still surprises in store for me, about myself or others of my kind?

It's impossible to express in conventional terms the relationship that developed in this phase between Slim and me. But doubts will always persist within me as to how I came through all the distressing events that today erect barriers to my pen. In the presence of ladies, I say it was the heat. Among libertines I maintain that we are all human, and should not be ashamed of the feelings the sun has given us.

As we pushed on to the river's upper course, while at an impasse that started on the tenth day since our departure, I identified a peculiar mood that had beset all of us Whites. I suddenly came awake, but my wakefulness was occasioned by a sudden disconcerting discovery. Was it possible, were heat and an unaccustomed climate to blame, or must a fellow admit to a mistrust of his manliest and truest instincts? I began to experience a violent unrest, a hunger for brutality, which I indulged scandalously by shooting at the eyes of floating alligators. In my excitement I no longer knew myself, I was greedy for raw sensuous joy, a vivid physical sense of power, and had to restrain myself from giving the young Indian a kick in his strongly-built rear. Once it went through me in a lightning-flash of understanding. Slim regarded me with a long, long ambiguous look. With such a look one inspects a thing – a slave, a horse, and only in the last resort a woman. It was the opaque look of a man about town. I sat there for a moment empty and inwardly disreputable. But then ... no, I did not redden, I became cheeky. My most inward being turned outward in a shocking display of cheek. I became strongly physical, seized with a brutality and a self-assertive craziness of an unknown kind; an affected delight in the observation of fleshy rhythmically moving bodies trickled wellbeing through me. So there it was – a monstrous extravagant taste for life burned on my tongue, in my loins, my fists. The streets of a glittering town flashed before my eyes, shapes stirred beneath masses of

advertising for fabrics and styles and sped towards me, everything flesh, rotating around me like a gigantic machine with pistons pumping, a furious flambeau partying between dusk and the harsh white light from electric lamps.

But here it was the sun, the stupefying symbiosis of putrefaction and glory, the breath of desire, the scent and stink of lust, the lascivious wilfulness of a general abandonment that turned the blood spicy, over-light and full of explosive power so that it whistled through the veins as a red glowing gas. Now I knew: we were hungering for submissive bodies, we were worn down by an over-production of delicacy, meanwhile indifferent to facts that offered us nothing. We were ravenous. It was the first attack of the dreadful oppression that descends on a man and turns whole caravans mad, when at the last frontier of civilisation even the tender neck of the woman left behind disappears!

I turned, I wanted to see what kept van den Dusen so quiet. Stupidity lay on his slack face, his eyes were sickly, elusive, uneasy from communion with wicked desires was how I put it to myself. He was deeply withdrawn, in contrast to Slim and me. Slim seemed indolent, but he was thriving. He was putting on fat, which didn't suit him; he thrived in an unclean way, like all bodies designed to be lean. Clearly he wasn't consuming the material this soft easy life stored in him. But van den Dusen dripped like a hot candle. The heat hit him severely, perhaps a certain deprivation robbed him of the comfort to which his body seemed naturally suited. Where was our elegant Dutch officer, who had supposedly paid court to Javanese ladies and Pacific island beauties? His sturdy shoulders had melted like a bar of bronze, leaving behind a slag of bones and clavicles. The white tunic no longer sat smartly, and his nut-brown hair, once a dead-straight officer's cut ironed smooth as a woman's around the coronal bone of marble, was a temptation for any pair of pocket scissors. The round well-proportioned head showed traces of exhaustion.

And so it went with us white men. In the course of two weeks we were transformed into abnormalities. But our Indians remained consistently hard, untemperamental and wiry. They never exerted themselves, but remained in balance and let the rhythm drive them. Zorre, in his fifties, was flexible, and had retained in its entirety a young man's body. By contrast his face was as rough as old bark, and eaten up by tattoos. The other was a beauty, Checho by name, of maybe sixteen Indian summers. He was as slim and long as the letter "I". His back was in front of me. On the neck, separated by a finger's width, were two long parallel scars. Otherwise the red-brown skin was sleek and smooth, stretched taut over the little muscle-snakes that popped up beneath his armpits as he moved, and retracted just as swiftly. This back, which narrowed soulfully towards the buttocks, the childlike throat, the girlish spine, this graceful kaleidoscope of muscles in motion would have made a monkey swoon in adoration. The lad was a young god. His shoulders were slender, posing as full spheres above the deep chest. The shanks, narrow and stringy when he stood, spread wide on the bench. The kneecap rose proud over the high-seated calf, lacing up with enchanting panache the longitudinal ridge of the extremity. That was why he was called Checho. His eyes were

green and black and fresh from the jeweller's hand, still totally unsullied, unaroused, an unimpaired oval. He was absorbed in rhythm, weaned and raised on rhythm, driven by rhythm, and for his whole life had likely been played by an internal lyre into a savage mellowness. Where in us a brain sits, in him there sat a precision metronome.

I have firm reasons to believe I was not the only one who saw in him a young god. And we had a mutual understanding, without feeling particularly exposed. We were in the wilderness, and every sense had permission to partake of what suited it. That evening for the first time a conversation unfolded around the campfire. Van den Dusen regaled us from his inexhaustible supply of smutty stories, jokes of a truly bar-room provenance with leaden punchlines, and we listened eagerly. Hungry as we were, talking offered a slight relief. Theories of how matters usually went on long expeditions and ocean voyages were proffered and debated. Particular cases of how the captain behaved, and the sailors and the men deep below deck, those outcasts of humanity, were sketched out in detail, as well as the role typically played by the ship's cat in such circumstances. Longing made us coarse, the submissiveness normally called forth by instinct when prospects are favourable made us cruel. Untroubled by the level from which we had dredged up our utterances, we lay down, somewhat happier than usual, to our dreams.

V.

Rhythm is a strange thing. It seems to represent the essence of all those cultures that are set against our own, and which we seek to disavow: those of South and East. But rhythm brings out in the human body accomplishments against which we have nothing similar to offer; which in their stiff and inimitable (by us) one-sidedness can be compared only to our own speciality: technology. Whoever penetrates into the essence of jungles and savages, or even any cultures of a different race, finds that a much bigger meaning is accorded to the concept of rhythm in the life of these people than is usually the case with us. Anyone who undertakes travels of some duration and rigour can discover this. But I made a further discovery: I have fructified for our culture rhythm and all that goes with it – emphasis, accent – and have acquired the insight that we are already on the path to success, and will only have more to learn about it.

I sat in the boat second from the stern, with the two Indian paddlers in front of me. They poked the water with their blades, that was more or less the style of their paddling. They set to and jabbed as if the task was to carefully spoon out smooth big slices of soggy pudding. The bloated sluggish water behind the blades acquired little eddies; smooth-skinned warty embossments trailed in our wake. One of these times, just off to my side, they appeared as furiously spinning plates, dragging similar shapes along behind them. Their motion was so round and picturesque that I was fascinated, my attention was drawn irresistibly to them. With every paddle-stroke they appeared the same distance apart, coming up like the arm-ends of a great undershot wheel.

Really, everything might appear to us up here as normal, but our progress depended on the action of this wheel; it was a casting made of water to propel us mystically along. Was I on the scent of one of our most grievous miscalculations? No, the world below us was no undifferentiated watery space, there were agglomerations somewhat of a star shape, unobservable by our eyes, and these were the famous waterwheels I had discovered! From below they move a boat that above is steered by human arms, they pick up the rhythm from above, they support it, but then again perhaps they first set the rhythm, they are primary and it is their activity that tips the scales. Human activity is a mirage, a swindle, a lazy imitation of free will menacing down to where the secrets, the dark invisible causes, come menacing up ...

So intensively did I imagine this glimpse down below, into the inversion, that I felt a bit nauseous. At that moment a disturbance came in the line of whorls ornamenting the slick oily surface, a mistimed paddle stroke had created a kink and the spell was broken. I awoke with a slight attack of seasickness. The reflection from the smooth white glare of the surface must have caused a transient dazzlement in my consciousness. My sight became over-acute, sickly ... and I was thereby enabled to see, as it were, into the motif of an utterly novel reality. With a little effort I was able to slip back into this disposition: and again there it was, and then, like a railway passenger who in his mind lets the train stand still and the landscape move past him, I had the absurd and subjective impression of sitting in a boat whose crew with their blades made contact with a wheel beneath the water. I practised a little and soon was able to flick back and forth like a sheet of tinfoil. This hallucination went perfectly. A simple switch of emphasis ...

Emphasis, that's it! Now I had it. Emphasis opens entire perspectives, entire realities rest upon it. By means of a so-called hallucination, this world can be everted into another. Who can now say *this* is the proper one and *that* the imposter? Who can show where the anomaly lies, and where normality? But who among us Whites can explain what *anomalies* enable a Hindu fakir to demonstrate with his body unnatural accomplishments from which no sensible *consciousness* can be adduced? This is unresearched and remarkable territory; to encompass the whole prospect, no hypothesis is adequate. Nevertheless I have one, but it is more refined than sensible, more mystical than scholarly – in exactly the way that seems to me to fit the situation.

What I discovered here was nothing other than the symbol of *paradox*. We alternate something, we make it different, absurd, upside down, and look, it is *still* something. We think a thought perverse, and it is virgin-pure. We shift an emphasis, and the new that arises is a newer world than any America. And pray, how was America discovered? Through a paradox. Columbus was voyaging to the Orient; what came of it was the Occident. Tick tock says the clock; but can it not just as well go tock tick, simply because we want it to? It all depends on our preference, on our creative will to alternate, and I can prove that we too alternate: *one age is the paradox of another*. Now we let the train move, now the landscape. Learn how reality scans! Equal rights for paradox. It opens up new worlds, brings good fortune; it broadens

possibilities; and to the artificial Paradises that a Viking of the mind experiences or has experienced because the old Paradise became over-populated, we add *artificial realities*, for a census has shown that normal reality is full up!

So turn, waterwheels! Holy humbug, I greet thee. Pregnant, deceiving and productive art thou, like these embossments gliding down a tropical river! Is this river not just like a bar of copper, and does it not meander for us too, beneath the press of the ethereal dome reflected in it? Is it worth nothing if we speak in symbols and similes, is the refreshment within the fruitful lie worth nothing? Down with opponents of the Grand Delusion! We who know of her, we who have collaborated with all her temptations, we affirm her, we silence her mouth by letting her poetise, we think technically and raise out of her a booming industry! Our race is not presumptuous, no, it will not exhaust all wisdom, it wants to make headway, won't cast all about but will pray to any god who promptly brings it miracles. Surely it doesn't matter a damn whether credit for our progress is claimed by a waterwheel or by two hired Indians, provided that we do make progress, even if for no other reason than to give succour to our highly-strung nerves! For in the end we all swim in our own blood – which is itself an inversion of Nature, a paradoxical distortion of the primordial reality before us; we wallow in it!

And with this we're making headway, I feel it already! Hey! I proclaim the mirror, perversity, paradox! This shall be my other great work for humanity. It's all to do with the mirror! Emphasise the mirror! Be vain, do your exercises in front of mirrors! Ogle yourself from many and all sides, prance this way and that! Stand still and let the world rush by; rush on and overtake the world! Let yourself be moved by real paddles and by invisible powers, become seasick from praying to the unknown and to the light of madness, build mills with waterwheels, grow drunk and stay dry, fantasize and be cynical, fall in love against custom and be moral, come from the north and bear the south within you – this I say to you, for I write the catechism of our crazy nerves, these nerves I have discovered to be the offspring of primordial jungle!

Yes, we were making progress! I felt it already. Our trip suddenly made a projection into the emotional. I hurtled downhill into the tropics of humanity, into the primal condition of forces, into an enormous business enterprise of growth and becoming. What was Slim's treasure to me? Was the journey for me not already a success, had I not already found my treasure? Symbols, emphasised reflections were a full-value substitute. Both were our way of shaping for ourselves the rhythm, the tempo of the world. Was this nothing? Old practical Slim will never find his treasure. I, the ideologue, have won. It will become evident that rational idealism is superior to romantic materialism. Waterwheels can be measured in horsepower, cultural delusions shape the blood. This race is returning to its forefathers, back to its jungle!

PART 2. At the Village

VI.

And then the river trip did at last find its end, and we came to the forest. The theme of endearments acquired new variants. *Indian maid, sweet savage, thou loveliest of women, thou model of femininity, to what shall I compare thee?* To that great evil somnambulist the jungle, thy home, to that cunning splendid unconscious beast? For thy sake I forsook the simple German mountain forest with its cool shaded springs and mystically souging trees, and was smitten with the corrosive allurements of a treacherous being. No; fealty and soul are not to be found in thee, sweet native of the tropical jungle.

One day the river grew ever narrower, the two banks showed an inclination to merge, lianas linked them with flying bridges, and we laboriously forced a way through with flashing machetes. Then a little river joined from the right, an indeterminately meandering brook. We climbed out and concealed the boats by standing them upright like masts between forked branches. Two of the Indians made a litter out of sticks, to which we roped knapsacks and provisions. With axes and machetes we flung ourselves hurra! headlong into the forest.

The jungle reverberated to our violence. Untrodden forest responded to our incursion with dull thick silence. Slow and inert at first, solitary and irregular, within the silence came peaks of blunt noise when a blade flew at a young green stem and bounced back from the damp springy wood. Now and again a rotten branch exploded, this boon of success strengthened the nerves, the snap and rip of sighing wood fibres brought bone-deep joy with its brute music. The path is cleared to a meter's width. Sweating, backs bent, we charge on like bulls, try to spear the forest with our heads, and are gently repulsed by the superior force of a trampoline of interwoven twigs. It's like charging at mattresses. There's no recoil; all the energy disappears as if down a drain somewhere into the ground. Everything is dreamy-slow, and the impotence of this dream-heavy expenditure of energy is enough to make you weep.

The forest is dense, a basket through and through. Whoops, we're tangled! Hey, get on, *adelante*, look smart, there, here, left, no, right, left damn it ... now there's some vim. Watch out! What's that scrabbling through the jungle there, what is it that scurries, flits, spraddles, extends these irregular tunnels, these two uncouth breaches through the undergrowth, what created this gaping triangle in the cross-section of a brief clearing? A caravan of seven humans has broken in!

Now we have it, we have it, we have the *pace* of the work, our enthusiasm storms us on, we are neither sluggish nor snivelling, the rhythm rattles like a drumroll into us as effectively as a revitalising massage. Flip, flop, the axes cleave and leap, *fsss* the

machetes hiss as they part leafy lianas so that vinestrings fall to left and right. We march on elastic calves, our thighs taut, never again will our knees straighten. At evening it will do us good to stretch; by morning our legs will be stiff as trees. Then fifteen minutes of reluctant forced exercise, and vigour returns to convert a caravan of humans into a steam-plough. Can I guess where my Indians acquired their ballet-dancer legs? Already below my knees on the inside I can feel a pretty almond forming, and sinew-spurs swathe my shins. Minute by minute we leave trampled ground behind, crushed foliage and fruit stomped into the earth, pale patches where branches and young saplings have been snapped – their spiral lesions like the cramping tongues of drowning men could break your heart! *The forest collapses like an epileptic!* But the terrible blood of the Tropics surges through us, and our detestation of the forest overcomes all weariness and all disgust. Simply to maintain the beat, our axes fall on slender yielding shoots, and machetes strip the green wounds at the forefront like the arms of a reaping machine; out of pure zeal they work briskly so that the duel should not come to a stop. Fluids trickle from moist earth, the slime of slithering creatures glimmers like mother of pearl among roots and weedy moss. Twilight reigns dense and waxy as a skin beneath the foliage, and rolls the tunnel along behind us like a great steaming barrel in the flicker of the breaches we have made. Steam rises from every jungle pore, the air is thick enough to slurp, and waves of warm soup swirl around the body wherever a beam of sunlight has fought its way to the ground.

Animals flee. Wild sows tumble through gaps and holes in the undergrowth as if in play. A puma waits with a puzzled nose and legs splayed out front ready to retreat, until we come into view. Then it skedaddles, runs as if fearing its own shadow, it makes a beeline through the trees, a straight path branch after branch at a gallop, like a tightrope walker not pausing before he leaps. Snakes dart to the side and stupidly leave the shameless tail right before our feet. Suddenly one shoots up like a released clock-spring. The old Indian at the front jumps back, the machete whistles and the separated halves of the snake-body curl grieving, suffering, soulful into thick spools.

From their secure perch on a balcony-branch of some monarch of the forest, monkey-hermits set up a spirited surveillance which involves bombarding us with chunks of bark, twigs, nuts, or clumps of leaves squashed into a ball; they peer down with scholarly faces to note our reaction. Their nostrils radiate the joy of discovery. Now and then we are forced to deter these insults with revolver shots; they clutch the banner of disgrace and scatter screaming away, only to return with minds completely changed, and behave quite calmly. Now a hand to the hip suffices to chase them off. Then they've had enough of us, demonstrate their contempt with a niftily crafted product of digestion, and abdicate their perch to some other folk.

A delightful maiden, or is she a woman, shows her consummate charms, consisting of a wonderfully pretty golden fur which on the inner side of the thigh gives way to soft rosy skin. I call her my little Lorelei, because of the way her long elegant fingers travel so coquettishly through her fur, and I even feel inclined to dub her my *lass o'*

gold and lay my poesie at her feet. I really believe this monkey-woman thinks she's a temptress, so knowing are the eyes from which such sparkling glances stream.

Towards midday the forest becomes lonely. Nothing there but the spurting of juices into cells, the green rampancy of chlorophyll in the foliage, the sprout and growth of stalks, stems and shoots. All this abundance was in a desolate state. Not a leaf was stirred by a breeze; heat and sultry steam flowed steadily from the strainer of black soil and the layers of putrefaction. Day hung from the trees with a dull gleam. Wherever a hole gaped in the leafy roof, or an uprooted elephant of a tree crushed everything around and formed a clearing, a flood of sunlight poured down as if over a weir. A steaming motionless mass, the jungle brooded over its abandonment.

Ho, and how the axes crunch again now on juicy timber and skid uselessly from too-young greenery! They are blunt already, and evening will be the time for careful attention to cutting edges. Hallo, here's a way, the path goes here, there, cut this liana for me, drat, arm and machete are tangled in it; keep going, lads, we'll soon be through; a few hours more and we'll be in Dumara territory! In the afternoon, after food and rest, even these cries no longer sound. Our toil is silent and ecstatic. Our hair drips with sweat and steam. The sombrero with its high straw crown dangles flapping behind, secured there to prevent a thousand leafy hands from stealing it away at any moment. Vexation and rage are etched in our faces, our features are as wild with neuroticism as any native's.

And at last on the fourth day, like a vision of grace, we saw a woman, a human woman. Slim's sharp eyes spotted her first. Before he said a word, we understood in a flash what he was pointing to. We scented the women, for we could barely see her, she was a good fifty paces off in the undergrowth that fringed a clearing. The Indians held a short conference in breathy whispers. Blades tucked into belts they began to feel their way carefully forward with their hands. We crept behind, following their example. Even so we were spotted. The woman, who had a bundle of dry sticks under her arm, froze suddenly in an attitude of scrutiny. For a whole minute she crouched to the ground, her head peered forward between her shoulders and her eyes picked out with painful concentration the changes she had detected in the wall of vegetation from which we were about to break out. Perhaps she simply intended to make herself invisible by not moving, pretending not to be there: and now already we're off the leash, storming into the clearing, and she ... well, the female crouches at that moment down on her toes and clasps her arms behind her head. She offers her pretty neck to our machetes. We leap in the air, I emit cries of rage, swish the machete crosswise through the air and let it hop onto a brown neck ... and as I stand there snapping at air, Checho is already conducting a formal, heavily-aspirated conversation with her.

Would I really have been surprised or upset if one of us in his zeal had actually courted disaster and let the machete perform its usual grisly work? We'd been toiling to the edge of madness, neurotic enough to be certified. Embarrassed by the situation and my bad conscience, I glanced across at Slim. The tiny metal worm I knew so well was glinting in his eyes. I understood him. Such seductive meekness made one weak

with lust. The Dutchman had a greasy smirk. Now I acknowledged once and for all that our hearts beat in unison with the savage instincts of the jungle, and had adopted its customary recreations. We had become barbarians.

Checho, being the youngest and no doubt most innocuous, and being also perhaps the most presentable, at once took over the negotiations with his Indian gobbledegook. Aha, the motherly creature took pity on his catarrh, the kindly soul harrumphed and hawked back at him to show she understood; it's also possible that these outbreaks of coughing were actually a token of peace. Anyway, the crouching figure got to its feet and turned out to be a mature young lady. Her breasts, which had sat on her knees as on a gun carriage, did seem a little longer than normal. But I at once conceded to myself that two handspans represent the typical size for the charms of a female bosom. To which I must add that I had never seen such perfect shoulders. Her limbs were dainty and pleasing, the legs without character and no wider than the knees. A pronounced belly folded down over the loins. I confess that it is only after the shock of this cunningly presented specimen of natural female beauty that I see myself from now on qualified to judge a woman's quality.

Checho and the Indian woman left the forest fringe, walked across the clearing and disappeared into an island of big fan-leafed palms. A wall of straw gleamed pale yellow, a group of huts, still amorphous, met the eye.

Dogs bark with ever-renewed outbreaks of hatred, and now a troop of people emerges from this castle of straw. It makes a dignified progress towards us. Checho speaks, Slim speaks, we clap in rhythm and make a bow. "Rah, rah," a United States cheer for our hosts! Slim hoists his sombrero into the air; it has a Stars-and-Stripes ribbon around the crown, he pulls it off and speaks and makes reverence to it before the prince, probably he's proclaiming it's the flag of God, the banner of the all-highest Sun Deity, a scrap of the heavenly vault; he describes a big arc in the air, flings his hand far, far over the forest, for that's where we've come from, from the end, from the beginning: we are emissaries of a terrible power. The dogs feel it too. They snuffle dubiously at our legs; but at last we are led into the centre and our arrival is complete.

We are assigned quarters roughly in the middle of the village; the shack consists of a right angle – literally a right angle, formed of two palm-straw walls. The floor, likewise covered with faded palm leaves, slopes down to the entrance. We bend, step in, unpack. A base! I look out, which means bending down a little. Outside a tribe of skinny monkeys is assembling, and skimpy little skirts flap red and green – the tribal colours – on both men and women.

VII.

A deep melancholy was my lot. I awoke one morning to find myself beneath a sheltering palm roof where for the moment it was still cool, while outside the sun baked the earth to bone-hard brick. Light chewed its way through holes and joints,

trickled like poison through flimsier patches of wall. There was a sweet smell of dust and crushed palm leaves. Enclosed in the warm shade I felt despondent. I was no longer on the map! My bad mood focused on this ridiculous thought. I was lost to Geography. Yet I had always held Geography in high regard, and during my schooldays it had been my passion. It symbolised the alluring ferment of scientificness and research, it held a frisson of big space-conquering discoveries. A little circle on the map represented my town, represented me. I was a little jagged crown with so and so many thousand inhabitants among a confusion of other characteristic points, I was a capital city, a royal residence, I expected nothing less than that Europe's gaze would turn to me without requiring me to emerge from my own anonymity, relinquish my humble state and move on.

Now as I recalled this childish feeling, I came to know it from the other side, from its absence. And why, I objected, had this crazy mood pushed its way to the surface again just at this very moment, after such a long interval? I felt abandoned. In the age of the jagged crown I enjoyed all the advantages of the majority to which I belonged. We two things each represented the other; it was an incredibly blissful and precious relationship. Anyone with the map in his hands was connected to me, whether he took notice of us or not. My existence was guaranteed, entered with indelible marks in the Book of Reality. My confidence in life, my self-consciousness grew as I sat moist-eyed before the map, forever identifying myself anew, concocting a pretended confusion and forgetfulness in order to experience again the joy of discovery. And now here I was alone, no longer on the map, and no longer one of the majority! This frightened me so unreasonably, yet so violently, that my heart began to pound. And it was probably not even this absurd train of thought that frightened me; rather my fear arose from a despairing consciousness of my abandonment when, grown huge as in a dream, I slid down an endless rabbit hole.

I was alone; and because I was alone, I began to observe.

Slim and the Dutchman were already awake. They were brewing tea, and biscuits crunched behind the gaunt faces in which the beginnings of a beard all the way to the eyes hachured the tint. Our Indians had gone out. Slim thought they were trading, swapping stuff. Just then he set off with his hieroglyphic tile to gather information from the settlement's experts. Van den Dusen suggested we spruce ourselves up.

An hour later we were spick and span, as far as it went. Van den Dusen took his reconditioned Madonna-face, its brown eyes grown quite mild from all our hardships, out into the sunburnt lane, all this and his restored clean-shaven look, his pomaded skull and crumpled linen suit. I selected a bandolier and slung it artist-style over my shoulder. A pith helmet completed the effect. Ready. March! We'll conquer this land! We represent the most up-to-date state of affairs in matters cultural, we take possession of the beauty of this territory and will by-and-by make a map of it. Respect our knowledge, our abstract profundity, our humanity, or you'll be shot! Full stop. Amen. We are a race of overlords.

The clearing in which the village lay formed a rectangle of two hundred by six hundred paces. A stream with soft brown water and eroding banks flowed through it. The village stood beside the stream with its back turned. Part of the clearing was garden land, of which half was devoted to tapioca and indigo. The other side of the river was littered with broken granite, over which a small faster-flowing brook traced a path of rapids.

It's good here, we said. Van den Dusen cast a critical eye, made remarks on the location, the agriculture, sniffed a little uneasily at the stink of fish from an area of the bank sprinkled with bones and scales – but five minutes later we had decided to build a Dutch town here, and give Progress a considerable boost.

In the fields we encountered Indians, who didn't follow us with their eyes as they persevered with their wooden implements, but still evinced more interest in us than good breeding and pride might have deemed proper. Their silence expressed a slight discomfiture, a gestureless defiance. Van den Dusen said: "Foretaste of conquest! I recall my time with the garrison at home and on Java. The first few days we officers felt like enemies and conquerors. Behind the mutual formalities lay something disquieting, like hostility. Later we were all on first name terms." We laughed and exchanged mocking glances. We'd have a job to find any such familiar friends among these creatures.

But the presence of people did cheer us up. This little settlement was a miniature Paradise. There was movement, a certain bustle spread its virus and posed a refreshing risk of infection for the mind. A tempo was detectable, whose measure we couldn't yet catch. We walk through the village with its fifty triangular huts, and see! this set of shiny skittles displays an enhanced life-tone. Fifty little columns of smoke creeping sideways from the hut tops, all pointing in the same direction – sunwards. The smoke seems ready to spread its wings, it's in a dreadful hurry.

The clearing with the little village busy at its cooking presented itself as a teapot-laden gift tray. Anyone for a drop of Indian Village? When you looked at your own portion, its essential rationale became clear. I found three ring roads, laid out in concentric circles around a grand building in the middle, a large painted hut. The various huts opened onto these streets, paths had been trodden smooth through the clods, dust and broken stones. A system of diametrical prospects flowed together to the midpoint of the big hut. Along each prospect, with the big hut as the backdrop, the smoke vents propagated themselves, and all kinds of rubbish and supernumerary items were stowed between the side walls of the huts. Just one particularly broad and seemingly well-tended diameter led towards the big hut. So here we had something like planning and layout, ho, a pretty little bit of technology, so to speak?

We walked up to the big hut. It was surrounded by man-high wooden walls; fantastical figures with monstrously distorted limbs were depicted in carnal splendour. Bodies in delightfully firm lines, an evident play of muscles, and patches of paint in harmonious colours were a fine testament to the Impressionism of naïve art. The

painter had a feeling for a big lanky race of people, the upper body, long and cylindrical, not lacking a certain aristocratic air. His men had exaggerated chests; they were gaunt, the ribs showed through, the nipples sat high like a fountain of muscle right beside the armpits. The women had arms flat as T-squares and seemed not yet out of the virginal stage. Babies with heads like helmets and small goblin-like children could be made out. I sensed a crib-cult.

The open side of the big hut was closed off by matting. This was constructed of colourful berries, a bright string curtain, it dropped straight down to within a hand's breadth of the ground. At this moment it shook, moved by an unseen will. First a little gap in the strands, then a handful of humanity became visible. I peered forward and recoiled. Two eyes on a flat nose glinted past me out of the gloom. The mat fell back, my boorishness had been punished. As we moved away, in the gap between threshold and matting we saw a pair of dainty bare feet.

We walked all around the village, made our own introductions all by ourselves; this in acknowledgement of the admirable decorum shown by its inhabitants, to which I felt I must respond with enthusiasm. Here we were placed under no moral constraint, neither robbed of all we had, nor humiliated by pretended friendship. Little children playing between the huts vanished inside at our approach. And now cautious and unobtrusive eyes followed us everywhere from the premises. This was a good method, an excellent education in foreign tourism. Female voices shouted and the children retreated from us.

And then Slim came along. He seemed not exactly in a good mood. "Leave your damn shooting irons at home," he called out from some distance away. "You're scaring the people off. Mothers are frightened for their kids, and the old people have no desire for your wisdom, when they see such behaviour." Aha! So it was all because of our revolvers? We each carried one such long-barrelled piece, American made, cowboy-style on a wide leather holster dangling at the hip from the loose belt. What links good manners and revolvers? A question for psychologists and politicians.

"Hey Slim, what's happening about the treasure?" we asked. He gave a little shrug with eyes and ears, as he often did when in a bad mood. "Nothing at the moment. But – have you seen Zana? Such a marvellous wild bird, she must come with us, I'll stake my life on it!" No, we haven't seen Zana yet. Who is Zana? Well, Zana is ... we should make our way to the big hut in the centre, Zana is the priestess and that there, the painted structure, is the Holy of Holies.

We headed back to our hut, which lay on the second ring. It seemed a little elderly, the roof sagged like a hammock, but it was spacious. We could be content, we were lodged in a respectable building, as Slim said, no doubt about it; we sat lounging outside the entrance, rolled, tamped and lit our cigarettes, and spoke over the shoulder to our Indians idling in a corner. It was idyllic. So where were the great adventures? We made fun of our situation; Slim spoke of his hopes using coarse expressions. Zana, haha, who was Zana to us? Zana, now I ask you, Slim seemed

besotted with this ghostly figure in the great hut. How could anyone look with favour on one of these smelly sweating stark-naked creatures? No! Never! Not likely! Did she look anything like the pictures around her wigwam, was she a woman with T-squares for arms and legs, and the udders of a goat? No, Slim here, you know, van den Dusen, I actually suspect that he – Slim's perversity was clear as day. We came to a decision and a clarified conscience. We laughed, we laughed all three, amid this harmlessness after all the torments and exertions of the past few days, forgotten now. We felt like princes, our good fellowship strong enough that even success could be mocked.

VIII.

Then came days when we no longer laughed. Strange random events occurred, and acquired a method. Moods timid and cowardly frothed up in us, like those that dwelled only in depressing memories of earliest childhood dreams. Character traits came to light, asserted themselves, emphases leapt about, barbarous life-forms acquired documented rights; wherever hollow spaces had spread in the soul they were filled with obscure twitchings and spillovers from wastelands of the blood, primordial stirrings.

And then came the great event, fever consumed the last sparks of civilised consciousness. Van den Dusen and Slim went away, and Zana vanished. The tribe's singing was no doubt in mourning for her; let the artist who poetised and painted her step forth; the crowd follows breathlessly the motion of his implements, and one day maybe Zana's likeness will be worshipped as the Goddess. But I stand even now on holy German cultural ground, my foot treads unobstructed asphalt, and my mind proceeds on its enquiring way at the tempo of piston rods and propellers through the depths of mysterious yet most intimately knowable machines.

Zana was much simpler, she was made of a few palpable desires, and yet she was less palpable. I tormented my brain to say what Zana was. What was Zana to me? No, Zana was nothing, a beast in human form, a demonic half-monkey, a brightly-coloured toad, retarded cretin. It was not on her account that it all happened, as I had believed until quite recently. And yet, wavering and torn and bewitched by my memories, I shall always come back to her. The Tropics, the heat and neuroticism of this intolerable climate were to blame, and our own obscure pasts, our human ambiguities.

Zana is innocent. Zana is just a name, a caption to an episode. Zana, I loved you, and you shall stand pure before my white brethren. Everything happened as it must, and if our obscure instincts had not become captivated by the mysteries of your body and your wild soul, we would have come unscathed through this land of harmless peaceful people.

To a whole sequence of events I ascribe the name Zana, but as I do so I think of the great forest, the jungle. And precisely because I think of the jungle, I write Zana, for the one stands for the other, and the causes of the catastrophe that fell on our little

expedition are so tangled that I can make them somewhat visible only by using life-sized images and symbols. But at first of course we were not in the jungle but on the great lush plain of the Limo, and so I begin the sequence of my passions not with Zana, with Zana whom I loved but never attained, but with sweet plump Aruki, who represented the domestic realm; Aruki, whom I did not love, but attained.

Maybe she was good enough for me, and I should never have raised my sights to the priestess. In the midst of a life of unknown and alien existence-values, in the long run we could not but lose our balance. We went, so to speak, to the dogs, we forfeited the good opinion of society, and had no practice at compensating for these losses with more ancient and savage virtues. No, as could have been predicted, people like us were out of place here, and never have I had a better overview of the Whole than on those bright advancing equatorial nights when, restless and consumed by the grief of an objectless passion, I looked out onto the moonlit façade of the village which, small as it was, had grown for me into something significant ever since I came to dwell here, among creatures whose narrow, incomprehensibly narrow horizon was now mine.

IX.

Another night came. I lay awake in my hut. A smoky haze pressed down on me. I rose and dragged my palm-straw pallet to the entrance. Here I lay on my back looking up at the sky, and cooled in its silverweed my sore sleepless eyes. Pensively, through spaces filled with white gaseous brightness, I climbed from star to star. Here and there in the firmament a sfumato blaze swelled, huffed narcotic mugginess into the endless vacancy between heaven and earth, flashed like pale damp lightning over the regions of the world. It was like the false flaming of a consumptive chest. But the tall palm tree stood nearby splaying into the light its stiff green daggers, greedy bundles of lightning-conductors. A great dry mouth, it sucked in the heavy dew that precipitated from the air. Hard and hungry, unromantic and devoid of desire, the palm stood in a landscape of improbable poetry; but the novel of the night was made complete by its uncomprehending aridity. For a long time all was still, not a breath stirred. Then suddenly something seemed to happen in one of the huts, a baby cried, a dog slunk past in the shadows, one of the wolfhounds they raise here, small as a marten, foul-smelling but racy; perplexed it padded away, tail between its legs, as soon as it sensed my attention.

I was now my own master, master of a new hut. It lay, like the former, on the second ring. I had come to a household all my own from our first lodging, which as I later learned was the big assembly hut. Checho was with me; this hut was smaller, but had room for the two of us. Slim had acquired a fine hut on the first ring, the Dutchman like me was on the second. Was this random, or did it represent an assessment of our characters? My ambition received a treacherous blow. I felt the contempt of the people alight on me; now, in the splendid night there came to me the meaning of various little observations I had made. The Indians were no longer as in

those first days. Ever since our supplies of tacky trade goods, of empty tin cans and cigarette packets, had gone into decline, our fame had faded. Good manners were no longer so zealously maintained, our incipient poverty demoralised the people. The bunches of bananas brought to us were no longer of such astonishing size as on those first days, the dozen pineapples offered us were a droll joke considering the superabundance of this fruit, miscultivated by a village several hundred strong. And the handfuls of berries were horrible to look at, scary as a disease, disgusting as an atrophied limb, they represented the outer limits of contempt, they were contempt itself. These people! The people thought little of our mental activity, our life-desires, the force of our appetites, the ambition of our claims. With what effrontery were these people treating us?

Kelwa, the shield-painter, comes along one day bringing me the shoddiest kitsch from his studio – I'd seen the pieces lying around in a corner. He wanted my pistol for them. I took the pistol, and handed it to him in such a way that as soon he touched it, it fired. The bullet crashed through the palm-straw roof, dust and chaff drifted down on us, Kelwa trembled. Kelwa, bold warrior, you paintbrush-novelist of war ... Kelwa left hastily, and now when we meet, he goes right past me with black looks. Blood rushes to my head when I witness your contempt, Kelwa, this superiority of the well brought up redskin over the Caucasian lout. Your eyes clearly ask: would you ever have behaved like that, ruined a tender offer, a noble and extremely reasonable trade, with an unseemly round of gunfire? I know, I know, you have more tact, my red friend; you consider yourself refined, I declare you a schemer, you treat me like a beggar and can't understand, ha, how anyone could cosy up so shamelessly to a tribe of strangers. Ha, have I seen into the depths of your soul? Well then, my brown stalk, my pretty artist-flower, I declare that you could turn up just as you are in Europe, you Pharisee, you better person ... poet ... rogue ... rogue, damned red rogue of a painter ...

This is the tropical night and its fever. Hatred, a sense of guilt, conscience, disgust. Weakness, the misery of insight, senseless self-accusations come into the world from heat and sleeplessness to flagellate the uprooted man, the shifty man, the traveller. Groundless pangs of conscience pursue him. Anger and absurdity send blood streaming the wrong way to the heart, and no doubt the wrong way back again. It squeals like a stream, a succession, of fractious axles. I lean smouldering on my left arm, and grind my teeth. The movement alarmed a dog that was snuffling around. It had the fright of its life, fled to the side and collided with the entrance matting of the hut opposite. Unsettled by this act of nocturnal disturbance in a respectable Indian village, it howled from an outstretched throat, and shot away when I snapped my fingers.

And now there was a stir across the way, a head pushed through the mat under the porch and showed a familiar face. It was Aruki, pretty Aruki; she was fat, and I thought: shame she's married. But Aruki seemed worried, came – and now I was alert – closer on silent tiptoe. What was it? What was Aruki up to? What path was sweet Aruki walking? As she approached, something like an ache of bliss arose in me. Where was

she off to, who was she looking for ...? How her little scurrying steps jolted me! Probably she failed to notice me until she stood in reach of my hand. She jumped back, suppressed her shock without a sound. But it was already too late. Moonlight slid over the bare skin, a little woven skirt of pearls and berries dangled at her loins.

Cicadas sang. All of a sudden I could hear them. All at once I was so enfeebled that the slightest noise affected me like a thunderclap. I could sense the bright vibrancy of the tropical night and see the silvery shower pattering across the night's blue back. Aruki's sturdy calves stood just over my head, I could feel them with my hair. My desire spoke in tactile sensations, a hunger for solidity came over me, a deep-seated demand for curves, shapes, rotund resistances. I acted quickly; with an uplifting feeling my fist closed tight around an ankle. Aruki stumbled forward across my chest, her ample form flowed yielding around the embossments of my system, my well-toned muscles and bower of bone sank devotedly into a delightful bed of flesh and fat. My head lay at her hips, I linked my arms dreamily about the wide waist and kissed folds of sleek skin.

We struggled in silence, in hatred and ardour, and spoke heated words of love, soulful vulgarities into each other's bellies. Then for a moment my breath came free; the welded din of cicadas at work drilled into space like a great auger. I felt a nasty mosquito bite on my leg and gave a start. This was followed at once by a slap to my cheek. I still had Aruki's ankle tight in my fist, she bent quick as a flash between the starry sky and me and ... damn and blast ... I let go, and she was gone.

Off she went down the path of my melancholy, strolling in the rosy beam of light that radiated from my heart. I scratched desperately at the leg where mosquitoes had slipped under my trousers. My yearning played tricks on me. Ow! My forehead, throat, back of my hands all started to itch. I climbed to my feet to fetch the mosquito net from the pile of baggage. The light from my electric torch showed that Checho had gone out somewhere. I found the net, crawled under it and sat glumly down by the entrance.

One of the children in Aruki's hut was whimpering – she was the mother of ten. Now she took one, the littlest that she always carried on her back, she picked it up and put it to her breast to suck. Aruki was no beauty, my God, but I found Aruki pretty. I loved her, and she boxed my ears. So Aruki, this knot of modesty, possessed a temper. Wonderful, truly wonderful was she, a priceless jewel of womanhood! What other wish had I than to bring her home to my hut, toil and hunt for her, make her the mother of my children, and lead at her side the life of a warrior worthy of her? Her modesty was impressive, distinctive, original, even at that moment when we emerged from the jungle and like a frightened game bird she yielded herself to strangers! I see her in my mind's eye always thus, on crouching knees, arms crossed behind her head ...

My recollection is accurate, life is full only in its savouring. Another person's beauty is at bottom an expense of energy by the observer, one's own beauty is a treat

made ready for savouring by someone else. Everyone conspires with himself to set aside inhibitions in respect of another's passion, in order to enhance his own. Long live passion, ecstasy of the foolish blood! Sensual splendour and sole wisdom of the flesh! You came to me out of the tropical night, out of the steaming heavens and swarming stars, out of the fecundity that wells and spurts in the jungle's ancient pith, and out of the proliferating carnality, out of the constant eddying of tepid air set quivering by the gigantic rasp that is the membranous wings of cicadas, you came to me from the splayed palm leaves overhead, or from Aruki's dangling breasts!

Sweet mother, how the baby sucks! For the sake of the sweetness and the sleepy lust that dwells between a woman's thighs and blooms from the opium-poppy of her loins, I want to become a father and escape the world of my origin. A native hut and the joy of modesty received shall limit my sights. On lustful violence and unthinkable modes of surrender shall I nourish my joy. Aruki, I love you, but if you can't be mine then another will do. They say Zana's the loveliest. I'll try to see her that way. Such falsity comes easily to us Europeans. True, she's slim and tall, and her posterior wiggles wantonly as she walks. She's a child, a daughter, a little sister. Yes, and Aruki, my heart is breaking ... but you, Aruki, for whom I weep here, you are the mature one; I love your gentle flaccidity, the sunken rims of your black eyes, the fissures that fork your cheeks like the lines of a beloved hand. There you sit, singing to your whimpering child the song of the slender moon-maiden who swells full and pregnant to ripe motherhood and at last lays bare her silver fullness in pale shadows and blemishes. I love your damaged beauty, I feel a blissful compassion for the fading orgy of your glorious form, my heart bounces at the sight of your bouncing breasts, I thrill to my marrow at the sad mystery of broken teeth, I swoon before the yellow tusks of a young boar that grow so solemnly from the delightful scars on your upper lip. Thou my beloved old girl, I sense in thee the sensual depths of a people that for the first time match the depths of my own intellect. And see in your makeup only a clever technique which perfectly exploits our incomplete and sickly humanity.

Here am I, living among savages, among these not even wholesome animals with superstitious bodies. I am a foreigner come from the other side, from over there where the attempt to fabricate pleasure through intellectual means has failed for millennia already; from over there, where the periodic breach of a residuum of reluctance through always the same mode of operation, namely Progress, meets always with the same rebuff. Here, however, I find myself among animals whose physical refinement might well be deemed Spirit in the same degree as the European way of dealing with the problem: it possesses depths that correspond with Existence. Distractions, diversions from the most important questions of life contravene good manners. Here the white man is seen as indolent, and brown glances contain an accusation of his inferior worth because he fails to throw his whole being at the burning question: how to extract from Existence the honey of physical presence.

For this life seemed drenched in pleasure, growth and abundance.

Here was an opportunity to revert to a figure of my thoughts that I had discovered earlier, the so-called waterwheel. I saw: life is driven by mill wheels that were never built! Keeping still is the quickest way to get moving. At issue is a *conflict between the spirits of two races*. I boarded a steamer, tramped through jungle, ran the gauntlet of sweat, hardships and fever, in order to give the World Spirit a nudge. I have come at the right moment to experience the victory of non-white thought, and plant my foot on the neck of my own race! Shall I be proved right about my waterwheel, symbol of the irrelevance of human management? Are we facing the wrong way, tapping blindly along, are we monstrous tumours in the bright discerning eye of humanity?

My case is clear. This is my case, the case of a 23-year-old life, during which I have prayed for the moment of a consummated transgression. Fervours and joys remained a pale shadow, between these and myself was my brain, by means of which I governed the altruistic machine with astonishing virtuosity, while exhibiting not the slightest trace of a talent for enjoyment. Moments of temptation had always concealed an indelible residue of failure whenever preparations approached the anticipation. The result that was being striven for on behalf of the person devoured the person, set itself in his place and, instead of serving him, made him subservient to his happiness.

The cure lay with these animals. Their genius was simply to elevate sickness to the level of enjoyment and beauty. The happiness our humanity strove for was achieved in them by egoism. They unfolded themselves to each other's indulgent lust. There were examples. Why did Kelwa the artist, coward and henpecked husband, beat Rulc, this strange woman, this horrible picture of elegant ugliness, this fashionable owner of three immaculate boar's teeth and claws in her nostrils?

Why do I now love Aruki, who boxed my ears? How did I arrive at this point? My passions began at the age of six, and in my dreams I was the tyrant of my actually very tender relationships. At ten, when books of battles and adventure came into my hands, I sought in them like a dashing hero for submissive female characters in order to quieten my hungry imagination. It was then that I consciously put together the dream which cast me up against a sweet savage woman in a state of primordial morality. I dreamed it again and again, at length, and always it was a dusky foreign maiden to whom I gave credit for pleasures taken to their consummation. During insipid bourgeois tours with a host of soul-crippled women, I had forgotten – had violated and wasted – the bliss of these germinating childish profundities. The tropical night and Aruki's strange sweetness has brought them back to me. In my heart, the battle of the races and senses is already decided.

I bow before the superior breeding of these savages, before the spirit that lurks in their exuberant savouring. I renounce the culture of the bourgeois German. I shall speak to these born *priests of the senses* as to brothers, and insist on my worthiness before them! Ha, after a boyhood filled with crushing battles I shall at last do justice to my desires, which demand of me that I grab a woman by the hair and pluck stars of joy from swooning glances!

All was now quiet over in Aruki's hut. Then the mat was pushed cautiously back and out she stepped herself, Aruki. The palm tree's shadow concealed me. Aruki ran down the side alley, out towards the forest. An enervating unease seized me, I was morose and gazed tearless into the flickering starlight, into the cool number-like lines of the Southern Cross. An hour or so later Aruki came slinking back, listened at the entrance for any sounds within, then vanished inside. It had grown chilly, and a kind of cold malaise came over me. I stood, went back into the hut, and threw myself wearily onto my pallet. Ten minutes later Checho appeared in the pale light of the entrance, and crept silently to his place.

X.

Slim became more nervous by the day. He was quick to blow his top, had scandals at every fingertip, and seemed unable to sort out his treasure business. His mood brushed off on us. I could see that even we two were seriously inclined to leave. And then our economic capital began to dwindle. But that wasn't the problem. What troubled me most was my awareness that we were suffering. A mild depression weighed us down, a state of psychic blockage had suddenly appeared, and external life seemed to stall along with it. This shock-therapy of sensations had not been good for the constitution. But no escape valve was available in the form of trading or production. We were suffering.

And why? Because of various trifles and fatal differences from the tastes that prevailed here. In several respects our ambitions found no entry. Let no one say that we – van den Dusen and I – failed to do our utmost as representatives of our civilisation. And yet the sweat of fear always lay ready to ambush us as we strode through the village. What must we endure next? It was a most uncomfortable feeling, living among a crowd with whom one has nothing in common. The vilest thing about this mood was the blunt sense of our lack of autonomy, the humiliating knowledge that one was beginning to find one's own race a little ... awkward.

"Among a million people it's no great feat to be solitary. It's a matter of course. But just try it among a hundred wolves – you can't simply howl along, no, only when you're one of the gang will you hear the harmony in the whole score. You learn all too soon how to value the amenities of life. You see, what we have now is the 'small horizon', we're stood again on a sort of map, we've identified ourselves once more with an easily read number. Do you remember your schooldays – the Geography lesson, you know ... do you see what I'm saying?"

Such were my bright excited utterances to van den Dusen, after days of the most difficult reflection. Yes, he remembered. We were on the path back to the village. Already we were surrounded by a crowd of good-humoured children begging and playing tricks on us. They thronged about with innocent faces, and fell shamelessly on their backsides as soon as we gave the gentlest nudge. Their tumbles were a mystery,

they lost their balance for no visible reason. I accidentally trod on one rascal's rubber leg; I thought, now he'll start screaming; but to my surprise he kept quiet as a mouse. Worried, I pulled him to his feet. The others at once twigged the fun in this game, and what happened then must have been intensely entertaining to the little creatures. There was in their jargon something like "*play being-picked-up*", which consisted of a clever plan to sit down as we approached in order to be helped back on their feet. As we did so, these little scraps of humanity uttered such hellish screams that mothers peered out from the huts. Their smiles brought a frown to my brow. Bubba, bubba, I said tenderly as I hoisted up the first, second, third urchin. He lifted his feet and let himself be swung back and forth like a well-bucket. Now I became worried: I couldn't spend my whole life swinging little kids.

Furtively, feeling vengeful, I gave the fourth a pinch, at the same time saying sweetly, "Ah there's a poppet" and squinting a little towards his mama, who was standing by her hut and seemed to find my affection for her child totally justified. But this maternal stance was the last straw. I pinched a little harder, at first without the desired effect. On the contrary, my spiteful tenderness seemed to make the game considerably more attractive. My temperament drew little lovers to me, boys and girls. At our wits' end, we'd just pulled number ten to his feet and he'd at once landed back on his bottom, when Slim appeared on the scene.

"Hoy," he shouted, "are you crazy? Go find something else to play with! But gentlemen," he said in a lecturing tone, "please don't make us look ridiculous! This is how you do it." He lifted one of the brats up and threw him to the ground. He bounced to his feet like a ball and ran terrified into one of the huts. "It's not as bad as you think," said Slim, and drew our attention to a remarkable phenomenon. No child, be it lying there ever so helplessly, had to use its arms to stand up. Heidiho, they simply gripped with their feet and up they were. Deflated, we cast backward glances at our tenfold betrayed humanity of heart and legs.

This kind of experience, which almost became the order of the day, slowly dragged me down. Then came a state of devilment, my rebuffed coquetry fanned itself to utter madness, and roused in me vengeful thoughts against my own person. I'd squandered my nobility, thrown it away with both hands, and now there was a surge of opportunities to see things clearly. I was poor as a beggar, bankrupt already. There'd been a huge calamity: what it was I couldn't say in my own language. I should never have let myself dream that there was any position in the world I'd be unable to fill. Where were my plans languishing, where now the cultural annexation of this country for which our brains had concocted such gigantic chimeras? As I remained inwardly so tangled and day by day, night by night railed against my fate, I received several blows to the head. Veritable blows, which broke the neck of my self-consciousness and put my good sense to flight once and for all. First it was the healing fever – from which I would awaken sixty days later in Panama – that relieved this morbid over-stimulation. But the blows came from Slim.

Today all this lies behind me. I have a wide circle of acquaintances and am well placed to assess the cut of a man's jib. And yet I shall have difficulty portraying Slim, having got to know him in such fragmentary ways. During the time we were in contact, I took it for granted that his glamour was no less banal than that of any other South American bravo I had come to know. His brio seemed to me trite, and his raciness boorish. He stood with both feet in elegance, clanking and cuirassed from top to toe, impulsive, cynical and, so it seemed to me then, humourless. And yet I could form no definitive judgement, however much that judgement would have helped in overcoming my meekness. Then I admitted to myself once that in the course of those days I had avoided every occasion to pay tribute to him. No doubt Slim was a great man; I saw him at all hours of the day and in all kinds of situations; he seemed at one moment inconsequential, and the next moment bowled me over with a simple grandeur that achieved expression in a word, a thought, an action. And I came to give free rein to my unacknowledged admiration. I was ready to surrender without a struggle the superiority that is the healthy attitude of every man who knows himself unmatched in at least one special sphere. This healthy, if disingenuous, overestimation of oneself is a gift of God; without it the significant beta-class would be suppressed, and every grenadier would have hated his Napoleon. How much need of it do enthusiasts and admirers have, in their devotion to another's greatness? But my healthy self-satisfaction had gone astray at the very moment when my cultural self-assurance abandoned me in this clutch of Indian huts. There was therefore no longer any devotion in me; I fed on little doubts about Slim's personality. And yet, Slim was and remained extraordinary.

He was full of contradictions, but even today was the most interesting person I could imagine. He gave the impression of a capricious lack of conscience, and in the end a method could be seen in his inconsistency. He had great physical strength, which showed itself, not always without menace, even in dealings among us whites. It seemed to me he often made the most parsimonious use of it. He unleashed his immense rage on the Indians, where it was harmless, and on another occasion gave us a lecture because our roistering with the Redskins demeaned his status and made us unloved. He relished cynical remarks, and I considered him dull. I was satisfied with this result ... and that selfsame hour he spoke from a profoundly visionary spirit. I stood ashamed of my dim-witted smugness!

For example, one day we were strolling close by the spacious homestead of Kelwa, the artist. Sounds of uproar came from within, the entrance matting had been pulled back, and we saw the artist hit his little wife in the face with his fist. The submissive creature uttered not a sound. I knew that such domestic scenes often occurred here, and no one raised objections. Slim stood two heads taller than me, with massive shoulders and long arms; he just gave a dirty laugh and let Kelwa, a skinny gentle little fellow, carry on. Did he think it was a game? I said something of the sort. "Oh, don't be so silly," was his answer. "Kelwa's researching, you wouldn't understand. He's a troubadour, and knows his gallant duties. Where else is he to find a source for his

ingenious pictures? This mood needs as much practice as any other. Haven't you seen how tenderly he works the tormented bodies in his pictures? The humanity of perception in the skewed heads on the long bodies?" We walked around the walls of the yard, and eyed the panels set up in state there.

In fact, Slim was teaching me to see. I began to understand the artist-soul of this savage. The heads laid at right angles were the weepiest I'd ever seen. The lines yearned, entire heavenly realms of suffering were revealed in the dreadful scenes of cruelty they depicted. Muscular men had their way with submissive grateful females. The deeds of a most savage tenderness shown in this artistic guise could break your heart. Never had gracefulness been depicted in such honeyed tones, and never violence with such sweetness. The women were made of swelling brushstrokes, and succumbed to the strangling hands and dagger-thrusts of their bald-skulled worshippers. The men were ecstatic hero-figures, the upper bodies like fine champagne flutes, unattractively thin at the loins and frothing meatily at shoulders and chest like foaming bubbly. The skulls were bald down to the backbone, apart from a fringe of little tufts at the forehead that looked rather like a set of grinning snarling teeth protruding from the brain. The bodies of both sexes were entangled in poignant carnality, parted breasts reared steep with desire and wiry thighs loomed out of the tangles. One of the paintings reeked of amatory splendour and energetic desire, with a wretched dog running up to sniff fleetingly at the couple. This dog was the doggiest achievement ever offered to dogdom, doggier than any dog ever, the purest delectability that was ever made flesh. It was composed of five brown brushstrokes, four legs and a spine, and finally a long muzzle. An entire doggy life lay in that muzzle. It sniffed and stretched its body. "Can you feel how much ... *soul* is there?" asked Slim. I almost understood.

That evening the three of us sat together outside Slim's hut. Our cigarette papers had run out, so we smoked pipes to keep the stupid mosquitoes at bay. Every moment one or other of us slapped at an afflicted body part. Mosquitoes are the born enemy of great men, they have the ability to bring down genius. Not that I'd have granted Slim that accolade – he was just then madly swiping at his own ears even as he let fall pithy comments of appalling incisiveness. No – because everything he said I had actually intuited already, and so as he spoke he was really only reciting me. No, I said to myself, I grant him his intelligence; the only difference between us is that I have the delicacy to keep silent when I know something clever, while he lets it out at once.

But I couldn't help it when I saw mosquitoes crawl into Slim's collar and start ploughing his tawny pelt. I suppressed my triumph, but he at once bobbed back to the surface as if greased. I wept tears of rage at my hateful soul, but had to look helplessly on. My self-education had gone to the devil, my nobility had been crushed to useless dust at the first rudimentary tropical lesson, and boyhood's petty crudeness dared to raise its head again. This was the effect of the 'little horizon', this was the poison in the few cramped square meters of the settlement! How long before I would turn tattle-tale, sneak along to Kelwa and report how Aruki, wife of Memes, was having an affair with

– ah? ... and clap my hands like a woman when van den Dusen whispered in my ear that he'd seen Slim creep by night into the hut of that stinking bitch Zana?

Mosquitoes are a foundational fact against greatness; so too are tawdry affairs. But Slim earned my admiration to some extent by the manner in which, as mosquitoes danced the cancan on his shins and wrists, he responded with equanimity to this descent from the heights into the grotesque. The heat and the tropical tedium failed to grate on his nerves; he had a fantastically concrete goal in mind, and by his demeanour produced the most countervailing moods. The village never got him down. He felt at home here, and yet was no different than on the parquet floor of some consulate in an eastern city. He operated like an *hidalgo* and a businessman, like a soldier and an expert, he was as banal as only a practical tourist can be, everything exotic and debilitating in our surroundings bounced right off him. So here he was too at the zenith of the age. His civilised consciousness must have been on the highest alert, must have taken in the simultaneity of every fleeting event.

In a word: he knew no moods. Now I had him: he was no poet. In his progress I saw the rhythm of wheels, in the penetrating objectivity of his cynical remarks I heard a train whistle. But I, the engineer – I had chosen the wrong profession. I should have been a poet, poesy was my natural element!

This thought contained an enormous stimulus. My mood at once turned gracious. I was the poet, Slim the man of his time. His father, the ship's captain, was a Yankee, his mother Chilean, a Hispanic halfbreed. There's nothing more cordially prosaic than the southlander, nothing more stolid than this tanned son of the sunlands. This is the source of Slim's drily incisive characteristics. As a poet I'm empowered to attest that it makes him quite *à la mode*. I almost have a responsibility to do so, as a poet. One who himself isn't much to look at satisfies his ambition by becoming the *impresario* of one who is. Mister Slim, it doesn't in the least diminish respect for my genius that you *are* that which I carry within me as an *idea*, a schema for which you provide the content; and I'm also an ethical sort as regards my own affairs, meaning a psychologist, and so this is a private matter and no one need know about it. If I considered myself a knave, that would be reason enough to be one. I know there's some shabby business behind all this, but to others it must seem no less honest and dignified than anything else. Already I foresee the unwonted readiness with which I accept the irony I deploy against myself. To me it's evidence of my contribution as *impresario* of the Modern Human; were I one jot less original, I'd be all by myself the inspiration for a whole rat's nest of *impresarios*. Because, ladies and gentlemen, *the poet is always more of a genius than his creations*. But since I'm not helpless ...

The mosquitoes were once again becoming a nuisance, for the sun was setting and this was their playtime. Darkness fell swiftly, and a blue acrid smoke began to rise between the huts, driving the insects back. Big men and small women, baskets of fruit on the head, were coming back from the fields.

At this advanced stage of our stay here, they paid us little attention. On the first day we had been politely ignored. Later I realised that hostility and mistrust are often what good manners hide best. For hardly had Slim, via Luluac the chief, arranged our introduction to the tribal parliament than polite formality was turned on its head and we had to make our way through a period of the most aggravating siege conditions, gauntlet-running and other ethnological procedures.

Silent and inwardly seething with rage we had to go on show, and sat there growling. Slim now and then explained some idiosyncrasy of the tribe we belonged to, while we squatted on folding stools and served Science. As a particular cultural symbol we had to keep loaded revolvers in our hands. The psychological reason for this measure, which I instituted, was something else. At any moment I was ready to leap to my feet and give a little performance, whenever the scientific curiosity of our visitors went too far. For their urge to investigate was systematic enough to want to delve into the secrets of our underwear. Especially as even our trousers aroused enormous interest, being a fantastical mutation of the loincloth worn hereabouts.

On one occasion it led to a bizarre incident in which van den Dusen could only with difficulty be restrained from the violence innate in us Europeans. It happened when one day one of the ladies approached and began innocently to unbutton his embroidered silk suspenders. The fat Dutchman burst out with a dreadful laugh, in a kind of hysteria he began to fumble with his revolver and declared between tears and laughter that he'd been tickled, yes, they were trying to tickle him, he'd noticed it for a while now, for the lady savages this was a still unsolved problem that piqued their curiosity. But he wouldn't be humiliated that far, he'd shoot, right now, he wasn't going to let it happen, now or ever. The inquisitive little savage schoolgirls giggled mightily to see him so agitated. They couldn't understand how anyone could be so crazy, so ungallant or whatever it might be, as to stand in the way of Science. But the Dutchman insisted they'd tried to tickle him. Slim had to fling his arms around him to forestall a disaster.

Slim managed us pretty successfully as a European Show. I knew he'd once earned a tidy sum managing a Buffalo Bill Show at the World Exposition in Paris. I could see the posters: "Today! Grand Exhibition: 'Europe in Pomacco'! Free entry for children! The world's whitest Indians! A tribe without feet, only one of its kind! The world's fattest man, special attraction for the gentler sex, big or small! Roll up, roll up! Never before in town! First and last appearance of the stupidest and clumsiest fellows on God's earth! Greatest show of the century! Roll up, roll up, one and all!"

Entry was gained by means of game meat, spears, arrows, bananas, flatbread, chicken pâté, vegetable soup, and other bringers of ruination. But this lasted only until the day the attraction outlived itself and the village economy pivoted to another sector. And so a period began when our hunger could be stilled only at the price of sardine tins, glass beads, cigarette packets, brightly coloured scraps of cloth, mechanical components, pencils, old clothes. When, as at the start, no one took any more notice

of us, they set village urchins on us, and gave themselves over to an unembarrassed jollity at our expense, the causes of which led to endless speculation.

The evening sessions made our situation clearer day by day. But nothing about our stay here aggravated ... annoyed ... embittered me more than when at night I saw Checho creep across to Aruki, pay court to her and flaunt his youthful ribs. It cut me to the quick when they laughed together and I didn't understand why. True, Checho was handsome. But this business was a little matter of grammar, as far as I could tell. Checho spoke respectable Indian, he was a born seducer, I saw right through him.

What I didn't understand, however, was Meme, that giant of a man. Even when it had grown late he sat diligently in his curious posture before his weaving frame, feeding yarn rhythmically left and right. His long calves squashed down onto flattened soles, and the upper body hung between them like the letter M, a supple pyramid of slender bones, muscles and nerves. His feet were big and well-formed, as he sat the blood-pulsing veins stood out like pale twigs on the darker skin. He too could lift his strong body effortlessly with no support from the hands and no change of poise, probably from the elemental power of the muscles in his boyish haunches. On his feet he was a giant, and beside him Aruki was a little plump woman. His upper arms were broad, and rested like flattened axes on the chest-rings. Measured against him, Checho seemed wretchedly lacking in strength, and I couldn't tell if Meme feared the stranger, or if his zeal for work made him an inattentive husband. Now and then his eye alighted on the two of them, but his face showed not a flicker of movement. Aruki often sent stealthy despairing glances his way. She was just now exploring Checho's back, he was proudly pointing his thumb at a particular spot. Aruki seemed impressed. It was a pretty back, to be sure, but what could have made it so especially attractive?

I drew Slim's attention to it. "His scars," he said. "Haven't you noticed? There are two scars on his neck, where his tribe put him to the test at some ceremony, he had to loosen the skin and let them wedge an arrowhead in his back. Firstly it's heroic, secondly, these fellows regard it as a capital delight. For these tribes, every kind of wounding and cruelty serves as an object lesson. Zana ... you know her?" – his face couldn't hide a false expression – "Zana has a PhD in this discipline. Wound fever is a kind of euphoric drug. Every fever ... you'll have the opportunity to test this theory," he added, looking me attentively in the eye. He paused, his gaze dropped suddenly to my wrists, and I noticed they'd grown pale and yellow. This was the first time I shrank from Slim and recognised the power, the definitive power of suggestion that resided in him. Now he stared ahead empty-eyed; he seemed to be resisting with great energy an evil inward force not entirely under his control; his face showed a trace of unhappiness. Then he rejoined the abandoned path of the conversation and said in an offhand tone: "In principle, the way they pep up their lives in these parts is no different from our civilisation. Were you ever in Asia? Have you ever studied the methods used by ecstasies and dervishes? Not one of these human races knows the sweet poison of reason; and they're also nothing less than erotic; but their epileptic mannerism is

precisely the same divine elevation of health into sheer sickness at which we aim, in our own way, in our big cities.”

Health, he said. He had already used this word in front of the pictures of the vicious artist Kelwa. “Health, hm!” I mocked him.

He said nothing more. I felt he was unwilling to cast his wisdom before a stupid cur – anyway, I might be wrong. He again eyed me intently, as if interested in someone who might be worth talking to but only after subjecting him to careful scrutiny. And suddenly, across the way, Meme stood up. He stood up and pushed his apparatus noisily back. Really, his giant stature seemed intimidating. Hallo, Checho, look lively now! But Meme hung his chain of finger-long vulture beaks around his neck and went bent-kneed out of the hut along the street, nimble, agile, hips swaying, and refrained from dignifying the goings-on under his roof with so much as a glance.

From this moment on Aruki became more taciturn than ever. Slim sensed my interest in what had happened and said: “That woman asks for nothing more than to be lumbered with the tall man. Do you still not understand the old truth? If a man doesn’t beat his woman at least twice a week, he’s pronounced a devastating verdict on her.” This sounded more uncouth than new, and I looked him in the face. And recalled a situation in the canoe, on the slow jungle river, in the silence, when Slim’s frog-look had felt me over. His hard masculine face with the untidy handlebar moustache had at once become the most evil rakish grimace ever.

Van den Dusen, who’d been busy doing something among the baggage at the back of the hut, came out just then. “Slim,” he yelled into our conversation, “stop it, you want us to play at cannibals. We think you want to, as well. Didn’t another lady just now bite into her fat thigh and shove through her nose boar’s teeth that might well have been named for her grandmama?”

“And if that were true,” Slim said with a laugh, “I wouldn’t exactly let it bother me. Just take care, Mynheer, even in this idyllic spot people have already dined à la bête. Take a look at these tall fellows, the men, and these tiny females. The females were once a tribe of Arawaks – a small, not much favoured breed of people. Then the Caribs came, tall warlike ruffians, first class human material, and literally ate the admirers and husbands of the Arawak maidens away from under their noses. Then weddings took place, and this poetic relationship has propagated itself down the generations ever since. The boys grow tall, the gals remain dainty little beauties. Out past the third ring, in the defensive ditch with the proles, the base-born and the oppressed – they’ll be the first to know when a hostile tribe comes to overrun the village – there the remnant of Arawak masculinity dwell even now. Lackeys and floor-sweepers who one day, at a sign of divine inspiration, will be salted down by the tribe. But it can’t be excluded, van den Dusen, that next time you’ll have cause to believe it!”

“Hah,” the Dutchman whistled, “damn it, Slim, you have a really stupid sense of humour. Won’t you rather tell us what people are saying about Aruki? Checho’s paying court to her. Whether she lets him ... And she has nightly assignations over

there at the edge of the jungle. Mosquitoes play the wedding march. Aruki puts on her finest dress, you really should see her, and traipses merrily home around midnight. Once she was limping; Checho must have a remarkable way of dislocating an ankle. I myself looked on once as he, so to speak, called her his sweetheart!"

"So?" said Slim, looking away.

"Tcha," snorted van den Dusen, with a knowing lift of the eyebrows. Suddenly Slim leaned forward. "What's actually going on," he asked offhandedly between his teeth; "where do you stroll off to at night, young Charlie my lad?"

"And who makes calls on Zana?" the Dutchman smirked. I had the impression I was not the only one, that we all three had our adventures.

What secrets, indeed, did the village still keep hidden? This thought improved my mood. For now I could perhaps really experience something, carry a little memory back to my homeland – a serenade beneath Brazilian palms, a tête à tête in a native hut – a delightful experience pleasing to nerves and senses. Just then I was a poet, and now began to speak, ask questions, allowed Aruki's skin to work its effect on me as it gleamed in the firelight; gave lively expression to my desire to know all about the life and motivations of this little tribe. Painting with my words, striving for colour, I wove Slim into the excitement; he was suddenly dear to me as an authority on such matters; and I felt already that in some way we were of one heart and one mind.

"A story!" I demanded. A Homeric mood, a gentle desire simply to listen came over our little circle. It was seldom that we Whites, though thrown so close together in the intimacy of our travels, came so truly to ourselves as on this calm good-tempered tropical evening. It was now that I learned a good deal more of the real Slim. Already the evening was sinking to a deep blue glow beyond the huts, while the interiors were little forges of domesticity; bent fleeting figures moved about the flickering flames, freely swinging breasts showed clearly in the firelight, and shadowy haunches were in motion through little skirts woven from glass beads and berries. I was sat among savages and feeling not particularly alien. And thus began one of the longest and most significant conversations I ever had with Slim.

He began by asserting that in the savage's being there was one additional piece of good fortune: namely sexual pleasure. They were experienced in it, and had thereby more culture than Paris, the most cultivated city in the world. "Take for example just one circumstance, the fearsome physical superiority of the male. I dare say that where this is lacking, something's not right with the sex life. But what is 'right'? Right, meaning healthy, is the person with the most multifarious sex-instinct untainted by morality. But European civilisation and its offshoots lack physiological enlightenment; people don't know the meaning of 'healthy'. They don't understand the primal concept; thousands of years of thinking and systematic value-judgements and they still haven't arrived at a full-blooded picture of these matters. I've come across just one man among all of them, a wise man in a Vienna coffeehouse. He wrote a book on the Ashanti, in which the soul of Africa ..."

“Aha,” I said, “I know him. He’s called, wait a minute, he’s a great writer ... but he was never there ...”

“Pooh,” Slim pursed his lips and blew air from his cheeks. “But even so, he knew what needed to be known, and what can only be learned in Africa. He said, I still recall the general sense of it, something like this: a genuine invalid is more valuable than a fake healthy person.” A short pause ensued, during which Slim looked at us expectantly and with open scorn. Then he went on, brusquely curtailing this redundant exchange and coming at once to the practical conclusion: “Here’s the point: in European civilisations they lack a physiological enlightenment. To some extent they still conduct witch hunts against humanity’s loveliest seductive characteristics!”

At that moment van den Dusen brusquely turned to me. His was the excitement of someone for whom the incomprehensible ways of a third party have gone too far. “So that’s what we should know,” he cried, shaking with unfeigned mirth, “this logic of a Slim, this speciality of the rotter as philosopher!” Now surely Slim’s cynicism, the literal child of his soul that he preferred to disguise as profundity, must come to the surface! I was alarmed. Tensely I watched Slim. And as I affirmed to myself what must be going on in him now, I suddenly took him to my heart. He didn’t become loud, or threatening, or nasty. On the contrary, his face took on a weepy smile, he was helpless and confused. Had his presence of mind deserted him? At this moment I became certain of the absolute sincerity and guilelessness of his character and disposition. It should never and in no way have to bow to illegitimate advantage, nor brace for unexpected personal innuendos. I loved Slim now for his gentleness, and because he did not expand on his theme with a personal clincher, but after a stuttering pause came safely back to his object. He struck back at the Dutchman by matter-of-factly misunderstanding him.

“No,” he said, “healthy ... normal ... these terms are so inexact. It’s all so devilishly – how should I put it? – *insipid*. You’ll concede that you can call healthy a hand that is in every sense in full possession of its ten fingers. You can apply this image to any human talent. Now, the culture that deems itself the only real and present one is a right-handed culture. It tends to the extreme, it’s unbalanced, it’s unhealthy in its value judgements. It applies to the atrophied side a derogatory label, calls the ‘left’ – the ‘sinister’ side – evil, and attributes to the preferred side everything that fits. In every civilised language, ‘right’ and ‘righteous’ have the same power to judge and pronounce verdicts. But in assessing the value of an abstract capability, there is no left or right. The physical left-hander is regarded as abnormal, and yet has a complete and healthy constitution ... Do you follow?”

“Sure,” I quickly replied; “what’s hard to follow?”

“No, then you don’t understand,” said Slim. “I thought you already knew it.” He stared at me, and suddenly I sensed his gaze as a magnetic force lifting me and rendering me powerless; the dreadful feeling seemed to me false and ridiculous, and I must have given the same little smile I saw him give. His look, so pure and ready to

pounce, had had the same effect on me, I recalled, at our first meeting in the east. That moment, which must have been rich and multifarious, stayed in my memory only as something horrible but totally blurred. The notion that this man had power over my brain didn't occur to me then, but for the first time today. So natural, so humdrum was this incomprehensible incursion at the time.

Suddenly Slim laughed sweetly: "You don't know it yet, eh? I'm disappointed. I thought you'd have known it already." He pondered for a moment. "Now, let's see where we stand." His face became bright and open. "I'm about to become rather boring. Are you game?"

"Oh yes, of course," I replied, and felt a sincere inclination to hear him out.

"Well," Slim began, "imagine a point, a real point with no physical content; such a point is synonymous with Existence. Now, please, set the point in motion: now you have a line, and from there a surface, and from there, by the same process, you have Space. Now imagine Space is likewise moved: Time appears. Time. Time in motion equals Life. Life in motion equals Consciousness. So, as the final dimension, we acquire consciousness. But what is the content of this consciousness? Let's start with the penultimate stage, Life. Life, conceived at its most fundamental, is the Ego; the ego conceived at its most basic level is Appetite. Appetite is the most straightforward content of consciousness. Because, to state the method at the outset, 'last things shall be first'. It's a profound concept, this motto, mark it well. But the deepest content at the other end of consciousness is Existence. Emanating from it is a motion that we can well term Decadence. For the second dimension – the line, the basis of form – is an already degenerate Existence. Like all subsequent forms. But let's stick with Appetite, meaning Life; here the content is Time, meaning motion in a narrower sense, or rather Change ..." Slim had found the better term. He went on: "Space, now we have it easier, it's already a less original dimension, for which the grammar still serves us well ..." Now he broke off, gave me a polite look and asked: "Do you already know all this?"

I was shocked. His eyes were steely, and enlivened by a curious fervour. I found it remarkable that I was shocked, for our camaraderie gave no grounds for it, and all normal sensations were taking their wonted course. I said quickly: "Yes, yes, I understand all right. I've been thinking these matters over so much recently; one does so much thinking here, the sun tangles up the thoughts so mechanically, it's a fever, thinking here, and one arrives at such crazy notions. Do you find this too?" I spoke rapidly, without premeditation; it just occurred to me, but was all quite confident. I was a little surprised at Slim's evident curiosity.

He gestured imperceptibly with eyebrows and ears, and went on: "This is now really one single point that underlies everything. The grammar has been rumbled: it's the ancient mystery of the Logos. 'The first shall be last'. Emphasis is everything."

"Of course," I stammered. It was strange and uncanny that Slim should express it like that. But it seemed to me as if I'd already talked it over with him. And suddenly

for a few seconds I had the strangest feeling: I felt I'd actually experienced all this already, as if I'd sat here with Slim long eons ago, cultivating this same conversation.

Slim went on: "In one place the sequence has been broken. The human being comes crashing in as the bearer of consciousness, and at once sets up his business of gathering appetites. Crudely speaking he quadruples the dimensions; the first time he opens his eyes it's an act of caprice. He shreds and halves the whole, meaning life, and creates effects for himself: left and right. You find this plausible?"

"Of course," I burst out, "it fits my case exactly. Now at last I must tell you about my discovery, I call it the 'waterwheel', it's a technique for a kind of paradox ..."

"I see, well..." said Slim, and his eyes became sharp as grappling irons; then he became distracted and sank back into his own train of thoughts. He was quiet as a flywheel spinning to a stop. For a while silence reigned. Then he smiled, the ghastly smile of one utterly depraved and unrestrained such as I had never seen from anyone but him. A less handsome and noble face than his would never have been able to smile in such a dreadfully repellent way.

He said: "That's the way people talk, or prattle. The brain, this storehouse of appetites, is the most phenomenal dialectician. Ah, what if a man could come with all their phrases, all their bombast, to the intestines and the organs! If he could tame their effects, he'd be the greatest of artists. Has it never struck you what a load of excuses, poor memory, hysteria, cataleptic bad habits still infest our most solemn wisdom? How our reasoning proceeds dialectically, trying out, flattering and buffing up ten times as many more horrible thrills? Earlier I alerted you to an ancient but very clever idea; now I'll remind you of another, the one that says 'the wish is father to the thought'. This law applies to our case word for word. So, for example, I'm well aware that my theory of dimensions is full of very obvious errors. I create for myself a standpoint beyond any explanation, one that is not localised within it. In so doing I err against Nature. Nothing is external to Being. There is no complete thing that does not carry within it this harmony of its being and its explanation. The only complete thing is, what shall I say? Feeling? Belief? A happy solution, a question answered. What significance does any intelligence have in the end, compared with Feeling? What we really experience, what really rouses us and creates us, is just feeling. And feeling completes itself in a ridiculously independent way, it flows and falters and reacts like a gland that people describe – dissect – cure – treat with arrogance, but they can never manufacture it as a life-form. Thinking is simply an outflow from this gland called Feeling, its significance is tactical, but never strategic. And now I commit the error of seclusion, like a philosopher. Philosophers take themselves off to Mars in order to describe the Earth, but now they never come away from their spot, they leave themselves out, they forget to count themselves in, they're egotistical in a very refined way. They write a novel about life on Earth ... people are always writing novels about life on Earth. All the time, with all kinds of strong thoughts. With their own spittle they knead a ground-up life-powder, and draw form from it. Form! When I say form I feel a kind of derision. And yet I value form above all else; and yet ..."

Again he gave me a searching look, as if trying to distract a sacrificial victim; there was mental coquetry in his gaze, a blend of cunning and naivety. “But my theory is a practical one,” he said suddenly, with a frivolous twitching about the mouth as if he relished the mental complexities of his leaping transitions. “It has operational possibilities. It performs work, as science would say. It’s an aid to discoveries.” A pause ensued. Now the grimaces the Dutchman had been making throughout the conversation caught our attention, and we saw we’d been neglecting someone trying his utmost to be composed of mixed feelings. Van den Dusen sighed, because it was hopeless engaging with us and we’d obviously got carried away with the ambition of our dialogic profundities. He was far above needing such mental futility!

But an icy hardness came over Slim’s face; a barbarously developed muscle of contempt such I have never seen on any other man (although perhaps on certain upper-class ladies) spread expressively and unmistakably up to his forehead. This moment exposed the deep antipathy between the two men, and with astonishment I noticed for the first time how covert and corrupt forces were at work in our little European community.

“I’ve placed in your hands a theory,” Slim turned to me with obvious preference, “that could make you happy ...” He let the word ‘happy’ drift in a singsong tone and smiled a gentle smile. “A life has two hands. We’ve developed the right hand. Other races, the left. Adopt this neglected culture of the left, you’re young, maybe you have a future.” Now his look became grave, but in a way that made one feel duty bound to notice the gravity with a sense of shock. Again a suspicion arose in me about Slim, which dissipated at once in the sincerity with which the next sentences were spoken:

“The life of the left – is nearer the heart ... One should not dismiss the whimsy, the false syllogisms of language. They contain the most awesome profundity. I confess myself a fan of word games, I’m as proud as anyone of the personal flavour of one’s superstitions. Napoleon’s star twinkled in another system than the astronomical; and superstition has always hated superstition most of all; faith alone is the grand seigneur. And words are amulets, with secret powers to attract the depths as the seed attracts substances: who knows why and how it grows and fills itself?”

We kept silent. Van den Dusen fiddled with the gold capsule at his throat.

Slim began again: “My theory is circular. The ‘will to sexual pleasure’ is sophistical. This phrase is an insight born of appetite and striving towards appetite. It has no validity outside its own *per se*. In it I acclaim what I use it to deny. Now you must really think me coy, Johnny, you consider me frivolous. That’s not what it is. I am the coming mystic. I don’t deny this culture of Europe’s; I don’t rail against reason, I don’t despise these things, the analytical malleability of the tiger-striped brain, the doubt-stained knowing, this tired bloodthirst of conviction; I praise them, I celebrate them in song, I magnify them to an ever new horror and marvel – and Johnny,” he said, for the second time deliberately addressing me by name while his eyes became narrow as seal-ring bezels, “don’t let yourself be persuaded by anything I say: it’s really a culture,

the culture of the brain. And I have only one objection: that it's not sufficiently colourful and excessive ..."

"Culture is a simpler and stricter version of spirit," I interjected censoriously, although I felt that my reply failed to attain the same high level as the conversation.

"So it is. But if your culture were more excessive, it would be simpler and stricter than it is. It's just not particularly excessive or heroic. Don't you see, Johnny, how for me excess and the highest degree of health are identical, and that the simple is really the excessive? That's exactly why – I've already said you shouldn't believe me, I'm all too ready to mislead – that's why your culture is a culture just because it is excessive, it over-emphasises the brain. And it is not a culture – try to follow me, you can do it – because it over-emphasises too little. It's so upright, so philistine, so concerned with the right hand ... It wasn't always so. But that's how it is today. And it's like that today because all around it something else is moving. *Ever since this culture outwardly stepped up to world domination, it is no longer the strongest.* Very different things, things remote from it, alternative global perspectives, concepts of race and culture totally opposed to it have raised their head ... No, not the head, how should one put it: the most appropriate organ. The cultures of the left hand are on the move. Something frightful is happening on the Earth, the emphasis is undergoing a reversal."

He smiled gently and seemed to be reading my face. Words were stuck dying of thirst in my brain and throat, unable to flow. "Look around you! And understand: your reason is the only thing that can hold its own as an instrument of appetite comparable with the life you see here. Consciousness," and now his face expressed disgust and wisdom like that of an old wasted fakir, "is an appetite-machine. Just try to take reason away from one of your lot: he'll keep scratching away at the place where he imagines it to be. And anyway, your level of reason is nothing so very new in this world. It's an age-old sharpened hunter instinct, a lurking predator awoken within your neurotic condition. The neurasthenic is an atavistic hunter-nature; but that's the monumental joke of all reason, all psychology and likewise all Nimrodism: the best hunter must be able to become the game. He must laboriously learn every species of pleasure in order to arrive at his own.

"Now, and," Slim stretched, "number four in the sequence is what you call eroticism. Other cultures, pardon me, other races achieve this result more quickly. They've developed the physiological side of their life with no artificial aids. Their consciousness has not become socialised in the brain, and you can't see it because it doesn't form a metropolis but sits provincially in the various limbs. In this way they've preserved for themselves one aspect of appetite that you lot have sacrificed. To horror. Truly, bliss and terror are bedmates. The joy of being spellbound no longer circulates in Caucasian bodies! Your women embrace no dangers. But here, shudders are a primal need, just below the surface."

I looked across to Aruki; she was working sullenly, longing raged in her limbs and made her unhappy. Actually help might have been at hand from the big man squatting

imperturbably at his weaving-frame. But was this the entirety of Slim's wisdom, and was this all that he identified with so emotively? Why did he keep saying "you lot"?

"Why do you keep saying 'you lot'?" I asked him.

"Because here we are not the same people. Our minds work differently. Our reality is healthier. We're a threat to you lot – oh, the artists among you sense it. When I was traipsing around Paris as a young student, I came to know a remarkable fellow. He was a painter, and had his own way of seeing – and I mean, way of seeing. He began to paint, set it aside, and one day took himself off and landed up somewhere in the islands. I bumped into him again in Tahiti. He studied colour-perception and surfaces from the natives and gave himself up to the sensuous beetle-life Paradise of the islanders. In his opinion they were the only young unexhausted race remaining in the world. A view which after so much travelling I have also adopted. Take a good look at this spot beneath the stars: when Europe has become a single huge metropolis of factories, the people here will still know how to live."

Slim ended abruptly, as if overtaken by sudden boredom. His face showed dissatisfaction, perhaps embarrassment. Perhaps he should have given expression to that as well. With a lightning-fast understanding I comprehended all the human connections of his personality that allowed him to be just as much a child of the intellect-drenched Parisian air as a figure compatible with this hunter-idyll. In him lay a universality that goes back to the deepest human foundations. His nervous system was a relic of the Tropics, in him the spirit of the boulevards had again become one with its primordial form, the animal depths of life. I sensed in him the harbinger of a new humankind. As for his relationship to these native customs he understood so well, he might have fallen victim to a coy mistake. I reclaimed him for the technical continent. In him, analysis had become a new energy.

As Slim gazed out over the curving street and I gave free rein to my racing thoughts, Zana came along. Slim said loudly: "Zana's coming." Crickets sawed away tirelessly at their millions of tiny violins, and the sky hung blue over the huts. At the rim of the horizon, stars lay thick together; the silver-pricked zenith was framed by a chalky white-blue glow, as if reflected off a blurry wall. Zana went past, and we stared after her with a slight emotion. So that was Zana! I must admit I was a little disappointed. For I saw at once how she achieved this curious effect: she walked from the legs, which were hardly wider than the knees; the backs of the knees became flat and wide at each step, like little drums. She had neat calves, but there again were the feet! She played disquietingly free with them, like the hands of a pianist over the keys. The little red-green pearl skirt swung cool and trim in the groove between her thighs. She went right past us, we saw her tattooed back and the tautened backs of her knees, and as she followed the bend in the path she vanished with a swing of the shoulders. Her buttocks were visible for a moment in their full glory. They were the buttocks of an animal, globular and compact.

Zana! We tamped our pipes and slapped at mosquitoes. Smoke drifted over from the hut vents, now and then stung our eyes. I felt strong because to me Zana was not attractive. She could do me no harm. Aruki was to my taste just now. I belatedly recalled that Zana had a small crumpled dog's face: wide nose with a deep bridge. And her breasts? I really couldn't remember, likely not much to see there. Unlike Aruki's!

I tried to find my way to the savour of this situation. Was it not a curiously exotic affair to be sitting here outside an Indian wigwam exchanging profundities with Slim, the first man of the modern age, as women walked past and with every bodily motion sought my favourable opinion? Let us now kneel to this mystery, in which I distinguish three aspects: myself, the exotic mood of the surroundings, and the totally new thoughts I'd just uttered aloud to Slim ... well no, but had at least communicated covertly. But suddenly I notice that something about this three-leafed clover is not right. Suddenly it is gone, the mood has flown. All at once I was seeing differently, seeing things in their terribly clear totality. Was it the super-sensitivity of my consciousness? – In which case, following the strange conversation we had just had, it must be to do with a particular pleasure. And really I was facing a new kind of euphoria: the ability to see. I was relaxed, accepted it as it came. But how did it come? In whatever way I needed it. I needed secrecy, certainty and reality. And there it was. The exoticism and the moody atmosphere that had so strongly oppressed and bothered me were now overcome. Now I knew everything as it really was. Zana had quite feminine legs and was no demon, and I realised how heavily such an abundance of the unknown had weighed on me. But now it was gone and I could breathe more easily. I was done with the exotic. It was an out-of-date attitude. Impressionism? It was false, a defect of observation. It wasn't deep, not at all deep. Oh you exotics, do I have you pinned? What stuttering cries, what surprises and perspectives, what tawdry joy of vagueness would you poetise about America if you were in my shoes? What melodies would your ears catch in this existence-in-itself? What does the desert look like to you, to your mangy hearts that yearn for oases? Three hundredweight of sand in your lying mouths is as much as you should have.

I hear and see with clarity. Was it possible that Zana, the unknown woman, could have unsettled me for so long? Ha, Slim and I, we are both modern people. Analysis in our hands has become a kind of energy. Now I stand up, calmly tap out my pipe, and betake myself hungrily to Slim's eatery. I think he's been hunting today. Yes, a wonderful evening, isn't it? The Southern Cross is near enough to hook down with a pole, if I were to stand on a cloud. A cricket must be squatting deep in the nearby palm tree. Such a little thing, such a black, intrepid motor neuron! I love Aruki. But maybe I could love Zana too. She looked at me. Anyway, there's something about her knee that moves me. Was there a touch of rickets there? Maybe it's just ugly. Whatever. There's a heap of desire in every real thing. Yes, now moods are done for, once and for all.

Human consciousness is horrible. It kills moods, loves surgery, wounds and operations. I look at this village, and it doesn't occur to me to find it exotic. Forget the

sky: is the village on an Alpine snowdrift, or beneath the equator? Here there's work, activity, business, and trading. A small, low-grade technology. The main thing is, it all revolves rather narrowly around the point of existence. An ant's nest could not be more devoid of moods. Yes indeed, observation is everything. Slim's right, for our sort this life is basically not so alien – it's just more complete. "Now, Slim, what do you say to dinner?" I sensed that I would feel at home here for once.

"Watch out," said Slim. "Zana will be ... coming with us!"

XI.

We stood at intervals of a hundred paces, breast-high in ferny weeds, and shot dead the puma prince that a crowd of Dumara tribesmen drove towards us. It had settled near the village, and recently abducted a child at the edge of the jungle. Now women came running, sang through its agony, kicked the slack belly and wrenched off the genitals.

Before I fired I allowed myself an imaginary scene. He was conducting himself in a way not unknown to me, like a canny neurasthenic; was alert and suspicious, often awkward, beset by impressions, an artist-soul in the matter of clever phantasy and observation. And yet at bottom he lacked all caution, and galloped blind straight in front of the biggest danger, my aimed and ready rifle. But I didn't shoot. A good hunter must be able to be the game. Here I stood amid ferns in a lush swirl of fibrous greenery, and as long as I didn't squeeze the trigger nothing differentiated me from a hunter of the Tertiary period. My entire system was tensed to the maximum, even two paces distant from this bandy-legged black-pelted tomcat I'd have maintained my cold-blooded composure.

It occurred to me that at this moment the cat and I had much in common, a single stage of life, as it were, represented in its polar opposites: for from the feline perspective I too, as a hunter, was no mere catering orderly but an observer. I experimented with my victim before giving free rein to my more conclusive wishes. All I needed now was for this sturdy feline too to be equipped with self-control ... In the event it conducted itself in a highly ambiguous and interesting way. Instead of tackling one of the beaters to clear a path through the resulting gap, it ran in twisting leaps this way and that, cutting long furrows in the tall weeds. It was too slow to act, hadn't caught the mood, at this moment perhaps occupied a higher philosophical level, considering all this uncalled-for bustle in its vicinity in poor taste. But as the circle tightened it completely lost its nerve, its mood was no longer spirited, it came to a halt in front of me, blinked and twitched its whiskers, finally tears oozed from the slit eyes and it vomited up a little bit of breakfast. At the same time it spread gases like a chemical plant at full blast. This annoyed me greatly, but since I saw it still wasn't mindful of what was left of its existence, I hesitated to slide the bolt. The beast still viewed it all as a mere bit of unpleasantness.

And there was something unaccountable, a droll absence of unease, a kind of savage bliss, and I had a pious memory of a childhood state when I waited in hiding for my comrades to find me and the next moment might so to speak be a matter of 'life and death'. This black humped beast on four bandy legs with its flat head had about it something decidedly quixotic.

The plot moved on. Arrows streaked into the weeds to greet my tom. I saw something like an evil pleated grin on his upper lip, and now the picture changed. An arrow hit him in the lungs and stuck there quivering. Unfettered terror overwhelmed him. He exposed his hindquarters, stretched his head high to the dazzling blue sky, and with a scream opened his jaws 180 degrees. The scream had a mystical aura, like an explosion of all the notes contained in a flute, and was dreadful enough to render me nauseous. It was a totally new discovery, the sound that cut loose here like a scrap of flesh hot from fangs thin as pins. Blood came dripping slowly through the teeth. Pain pulled all flesh, all skin back tight to the snout, a thread of spittle trembled like a silver harpstring between the widely separated fangs, and the silhouette of the skull was forced into the slender form of a crescent moon. The eyes were slits squeezed tight. For one, two, three seconds I looked at him, he captivated me, inspired me, then I remembered something, I felt ashamed and fired, sending all six Mauser cartridges one after the other from the jolting weapon into his body. I fired from the hip, and the shots landed badly. He scrabbled, uprooting ferns. Indians approached cautiously and stood respectfully on either side. The arrow with the long-feathered flight stuck straight up in the air as the beast expired on its back. Then the women came forward and wrenched and kicked the last little sparks of life out of the body until men snatched the black-pelted carcase from them.

And I had looked on, saw how their hands and feet set greedily to, and from the depths of my entrails longing roared in me like a suffering life-affirming puma. I felt my jaw muscles grow stone hard from the energy of a will to live that induced a joyful sigh from my diaphragm and rose with provocative force to the muscles of my shoulders and upper arms. Blood streamed to my hands, with a will of their own they developed a desire to grasp, their flesh tensed and hung heavy from my elbows. When I laid them on van den Dusen's shoulder, I almost knocked him over without meaning to. So must a puma's paws feel when they lust for meat.

XII.

But you can't stay forever hunting in ferny thickets. A catastrophic tedium opened out before us. Or was it a longing? My hands were slack, damp and sticky. I thought I noticed at this time that my fingernails were growing faster, and abandoned myself to the vice of nail-biting. For the panther-games were over now, they'd come a few hundred thousand years too late; equipping myself with claws was no doubt just an irrelevant habit of my sensuality. Ever since my species lost the savage force of its passion, we'd become nibblers, like all clawed creatures from whom the predator's

poise has been generically removed. And now for the first time I saw I had company. At Zana's place a little monkey and a parrot perched side by side on a ramshackle frame of branches, and snatched little treats from one another, their faces twisted with envy. But I felt even more intimacy with the lowly lepidoptera of the Llano, inferior creatures, degenerate forms of what were once surely fearsome races. Possibly they were direct descendants of the mystical Dragon; their finger-thick slightly bent bodies as they jostled were flimsy and meagre, little floppy telescopes dangling quite disproportionately between wonderfully latticed membranes that with their colours, spots and eyes contrasted so thrillingly with the ugliness of the rest. Butterfly of the prairie! The sucking proboscis, a veritable clockwork of meticulous and horrible complexity, seemed to correspond to the myths. Did I have here a small leakage from prehistory? When the creature began to sip like a cellarman through its unfurled tube, a blue flame seemed to speed along the spirals, and the stem of the orchid to which it clung like an addict began to shrink as if scorched and lifeless. Or was it camouflage? Was it a reflection of the steely shimmering butterfly-sails whose myriad scales were set in a web of fibrous cartilage? I stared nervously at the spiny mouth parts and the rigid body blaring out its ecstasy. I was shaken by a shudder of repulsion and attraction, and focused my fascinated gaze on this incomprehensible contrast of beauty and ugliness.

Then, as I looked on in horror, it grew to a monstrous size. The butterfly grew and grew, and there in my sight stood the prehistoric dragon. Who would convince me that this butterfly was not an endlessly etiolated version of a once dangerous being? Who had ever gazed closely on the dragon's thousandfold thickened butterfly-epidermis and managed to escape with his life? Who had ever saved himself from the danger just by composing a description of it in advance? Such a monster with all its amenities of weaponry – fangs, wings, snout, armoured beak – would never have allowed a puny human with his simple club to get away. The fiery breath was a misconception, arising from the mephitic vapours that must have emanated from the digestive system of such an omnivore.

So the older situation could be reconstructed based on what I now saw. Why did the dragon show such preference for maidens and youths, for especially conceited and princely beings? Probably it did not, but being strong and stupid simply devoured whatever sacrificial offerings were set out for it. But the marvellous shimmer of its wings attracted the curiosity of human children, with fatal results. Little ones, the most alert and sensitive, ran up to see the phenomenal colours. Was it the ruddy glow of evening in the gloomy canyons of the forest between tall trunks of pines, did a trove of rare magic stones lie there, had the rainbow taken up abode in the rugged cliff-caves of the Cretaceous lake, to accompany the waters in their course? Up they ran, and the beast lay in wait; suddenly there erupted a beating and flashing of wings big as clouds, fiery colours unfolded in the sky along with hot scorching gases, a monstrous hosepipe-mouth with ten openings came down to earth in the chalk-white moonlight, a purple twilight laid itself over the dreadful spectacle of doom.

Ah, was it sweet for the sweet things to die so horribly? Could it be made otherwise, to lend romantic wings to the dreams of children? Any who might have been able to say never came back. Any who saw from a distance became aware that death was joined here with an unbearably puzzling rush of colour. Back home at the hearth of his tribe he told of it, how the glow broke through pines apparently split down the middle. And youths and maidens went off in search of pleasure, never came back, and people, only half understanding, said: the dragon took them.

Now the butterfly here was a nymph of ugliness. Everything about it had softened immeasurably. A greenish fire still gleamed in the bouquet of its protruding eyes. It nibbled here and nibbled there, was unsteady, giddy. Its flight had no character, no goal, there was nothing industrious or tidy about it. It was the end result of the evolution from man-devourer to vegetarian. It had degenerated almost as much as our value judgements, as ourselves, as myself. I too was descended from a greater glory. The panther's roar was in my blood. O thou bandy black cat of the jungle! O thou butterfly of the Llano, little silken dragon among the flowers! We're a good match, we deserve this diminished age. What for my ancestor, the tropical feline, had been the creative power of the moment, for me is simply more talent. He hunted, I observe. He was heroic, I am profound. He was a realist, I have imagination, this jaded reality. Greatness dies out, talent endures. That's why it sits there so firmly. Yet my kind has, to a certain extent, brought it to something. We were the most glorious hunter race that Nature has ever produced and nurtured. Everything was our prey, our hunt was conducted not only to serve the immediate needs of the stomach, but provided surpluses and saved what was caught as keen observations. A panther doesn't go into the bush in order to eat, he wants to learn something. But the dragon splurged and guzzled and devoured whatever it found, and became no cleverer.

The drastic image of dwarfism before my eyes showed me the ruin of this world view. Such nibbling degeneration! The Llano butterfly was descended from ancient aristocrats of the flesh, the most glorious species of all organisms, beside which the human must always be a mere parvenu. But the initially modest activities of the busy human feline had achieved some success; it was not the guzzler and the gourmet but rather the primitive hunter instinct that streamed out so victoriously across the world. Once upon a time a wretched cat would have considered a dragon nothing more than a stupid inedible camouflaged fortress of flesh and shell, venting gasses from its orifices. But today was the day of vengeance; after millions of years we at last stood face to face again, the flaccid aristocratic versus the lively democratic principle. The gourmet and the hunter. One living and one observing. Flesh versus brain. Watch out!

Watch out! I unholstered my Browning pistol, metal replica of an ominous insect body, this adjunct to a real aristocratic phenomenon, this dumb but perfectly discharging danger. One, two, three! At the very moment I fired, the butterfly raised its blue sail-wings like a two-master before a stiff breeze. An instant later the bullet whistled through the pinions. The poor devil must have heard a frightful din, the breaching of the delicate gristly frames was drowned out by the detonation and the

train-whistle of the speeding projectile. Think of an express train hurtling through the Venetian blinds of a house-high glass façade, shattering the artificial system of reflective facets to disturb a nymph-like flexing tube of gluttony out of its mucous dreams! The butterfly tumbled helpless from the flower onto a clump of leaves, but swiftly pulled itself together and lurched zigzagging away with redoubled energy. Two big jagged holes gaped in the wings, the brittle membrane around the edges was ragged and colourless as horn. The black satin eyes seemed swollen, and its coloratura had vanished, like dunes after a storm.

I gazed curiously after it, and affirmed my hunter's deed with no sense of satisfaction. But it was still a success. I'd fired, and sealed the experience. The great path of evolution lay before me clear and unobstructed, misunderstandings were at an end, and the symbolic hunt had slain realities. Black panther of my heart, bright butterfly of my senses! I recognised a system lurking in my conduct, for which I bore no guilt; rather it was this that steered my feelings. Everything in me was directed at the natural and the necessary. I had stepped back down the ladder of evolution, and now I step back up it anew. Soon I shall be once more among humans of the future, after having been with prehistoric entities.

Mood, South American jungle mood – what was it? When I as yet had no acquaintance with the Tropics, I thought I knew. I carried it within me then, the Tropics were anticipated in me, somewhere in the mists of prehistory I must have experienced them as I lay in my mother's womb in a balmy climate, bathed in a nourishing ocean. Later I came along and saw things in situ, literally looked down into muddy water teeming with cellular life between forested banks. I encountered a panther and recognised in him the life-mode of my nerves. A Llano butterfly taught me that my somewhat shy-making democratic nerves, even if they were a sign that I was descended from insignificant stock, had nevertheless achieved a victory over the world-principle of fatheaded peace of mind and allowed me to envisage a great career. And the well-constituted people of an Indian village reminded me of my most distinct wishes: passion, the happy side-effects of my hunting instinct.

Everything was well graded. One more step on this ladder and I stood once again in a square in Paris or Berlin, and was a kind of statesman, given the way I could survey the life around me in all its primordial elemental impulses. I had been among cells and insects and predators, and lodged in the soul of the Indian, the loveliest of all savage peoples. Slowly I came back to myself – to the Caucasian intellectual, to the neurotic man of the North. And already I was away beyond myself and in the mind of Slim, the man of the world.

XIII.

Once these obvious facts had been settled, I wanted at last to step out on the long-planned conquest of this Indian village and its women. I was thinking especially of

Aruki; not perhaps because she was more easily available, but from a conviction of her unsurpassed bodily qualities. She had breasts; and each breast held its own attraction. The emotion called forth by their elongated form could be compared with only one thing: Zana's curious effect, her sturdy legs, her sturdy knees! There the village lay before me once more like a set of skittles, yellow and tan in its scraggy clarity beneath the ubiquitous penetrating sunlight. Was it an invitation to a game? I now, as it were, bowled the ball, nicely rounded by today's successful pursuit of an imitation dragon species, straight down the stamped surface of the main street and in among the huts. It was worth a queen-skittle ... and there indeed was Zana standing outside her door. As I approached she vanished behind the matting with an unambiguously dismissive gesture that put grins on the faces of the women standing around. I thought no, what's wrong with Slim's eyes, Zana's not in the least bit pretty! And retired to my hut where Checho was engaged in trying to pleat a rather large piece of blue packing paper tucked into the waistband of the lady of his heart, and cutting it with my scissors into wide fluttering tassels.

XIV.

The Dumara people held a big religious ceremony that doubled as wargames. Chieftain Luluac held a morning parade out on the savannah. The warriors, tall strong fellows, marched past one by one in single file. Each carried an ironwood spear tall as himself, and a shield, the outside of which in the case of important members of the troop was decorated with Kelwa's artwork. In the triumphal march of flesh, muscle and barbaric strength unfolding before our eyes, these figures gave expression to the true world view.

At a shout from Luluac, the human snake scattered into a hundred wildly racing men. They ran with long leaping strides out to a spot in the savannah. There they formed up in something like a phalanx, which advanced in a line of march. The performance delivered a concept of timing to which no Prussian guard regiment could come close.

Luluac had run off along with them, and approached now at their head. The big bodies swayed rhythmically left and right, the ranks broke into a light trot that brought knees up to the belly, the phalanx halted and marched in place from one foot to the other as if on velocipedes. The lanky limbs moved with extraordinary rapidity. Suddenly the whole troop stood under our noses, retired in formation, dropped to one knee presenting spears, stood up, alternated in parallel lines left and right, and accompanied the exercises with shouts now soft, now loud and inarticulate. In front of us, as our eyes were turned to the dancing savannah, sat the music: men with malformed bodies, disproportionate heads and protruding ears. They banged tuned blocks of wood together, beat on wooden gourds of various sizes to create a dynamic jingling pattering drumroll. All this time they were backed by women uttering ecstatic

cries, the whole ensemble homed in on the tempo, arms flinging, hips swaying, muscles beneath the soft skin moving in a rhythmic fervour.

I noticed Slim becoming restless; the fingers of his right hand tapped along in his left palm, and he jerked his skull awkwardly to all points of the compass. Van den Dusen followed the din cautiously with his shoulders. Then I succumbed to the neurotic discomfort arising in me, and freed my hands to clap in time with the women, marked time on the ground with my heels, sang along with the few never-changing notes, and uttered a joyful cry whenever in a fraction of a second I had calculated the musical charm of such an interjection into the singing. We were all of us possessed by a harmonic euphoria, a rapture of the muscles. The dance, the most animalistic, most profound and most liberating art form, came to us effortlessly and with boundless delight. By yielding to the expressive whims of our fibres, we were with every capability of our bodies shaping our human soul. The immutable elements of appetite beneath our epidermis took on a blissful form. Anyone who merely observed and sketched descriptions after the fact experienced the excitement of what we were watching in a narrowed and distanced way. We broke over ourselves like standing waves, we jackknifed our knees, worked our ears, the skin of our skulls, our jaws, and followed eagerly the three notes of the eternal flutes.

The dancing phalanx about-faced as precisely as if it were a hundred times the same man. Feathered girdles flew like out wheels and dropped all in the same slow measure back onto shining brown buttocks. After they had run out a good way into the savannah, the martial feathered headdress drooping over the eyes, they again set up the original rhythmic tap-dance. The bodies sweated, eyes rolled wildly beneath the red and blue notches between the brows, from nostrils flaring with effort, two feathers stuck out like little clouds of poison. The blighters danced and danced like the devil, they howled and wept with joy, and the veins in their calves were cramped and swollen. Then at a sudden signal from Luluac the show was brought to an end. The phalanx dissolved. I looked at my watch: a whole hour had passed and I was dead tired, as if I myself had danced the exhausting dance.

The tall fellows approached, and excited wives hung on their menfolk. In warpaint, with colourful designs on the thin faces in the concavity between chin and cheekbones, the Dumara people looked less creepy. The proof of art and strength they had just demonstrated to us made them a little cocky; they chattered loudly, ignored us Whites, and busily jabbed elbows into our ribs. I looked around at Slim, in order as it were to read in his face what rules of conduct to follow. But Slim was nowhere to be seen. Ah, there he is, standing among the women of Luluac's entourage and arguing with a little creature. It's ... yes indeed, it's Zana.

Van den Dusen came to me and poured out his heart about the natives' lack of respect. So I wasn't alone in my hypochondria, even the fat Dutchman was suffering under the contempt that emanated from these healthy bodies to humiliate us. It was the same with all savages. He gave me an example:

“Astonishment,” he said, “already indicates a heightened alertness. These people never really experience astonishment, are never filled with true puzzlement when they see something incomprehensible for the first time. Their minds are so dreadfully wholesome and self-assured; everything appeals at once to their sense of the ridiculous; like children, they find every novelty corny. I once brought a man from the Orinoco to the big cities, expressly to feast on his astonishment. What d’you think he did? He did nothing. He kept obstinately mum, with a Stoic calm that nearly drove me mad, acting as if there was really nothing to see there. We enjoy no great esteem in this society. I pick up enough from their chatter to know that they mock us. For, you see, we dress badly, we carry around the most superfluous objects, and on the other hand don’t even have the most essential boar’s teeth, or the most obligatory little stump of a quill sticking out of our noses! These savages, who lack any existence outside their customs and have no concept of a horizon beyond their own, are the most dangerous Philistines you could ever meet ...”

“Very good, but the wrong way round,” said Slim as he joined us. “A splendid idea, but much more profound than Mynheer suspects. However,” said Slim in his didactic way, placing a finger on the man’s chest, “what you say is an anachronism. Perfectly expressed; except it’s the Philistines who make the most dangerous savages. For precisely the reason you mentioned: the limited horizon, I believe, wasn’t it? The life of a native in city society, rude jungle habits, hm, passionate deformities, cheerful stupidities, all that, make no mistake, is savage and spicy in the extreme!”

The festivities continued. Men threw spears, shot arrows. They walked through the camp with springy steps, feet pointing forwards, and sped away on tiptoe. Their legs had a minimum of mass, and the calves were turned outwards like the limbs of a predatory animal. It lent authority and economy to their gait. They could come to a stop in mid-step and change direction like a cat.

In great excitement I felt my gaze directed towards van den Dusen. There he was walking away already, feet splayed outwards, hips stiff. He was having some sort of altercation with Slim, suddenly threw off his jacket, loosened his shirt collar and tugged at his trousers. God in Heaven, surely he wasn’t going to run a footrace? But as the competition raced away, he calmed down. They were stretched-out figures, greyhounds with unsightly shanks and long bulges down the outside of the calves. They ran. Their toes formed fists in the dirt and flung it behind them. They ran far out into the savannah. Van den Dusen declared himself unhappy with their technique. “Those are not legs, they’re paws,” he said. “I was the best runner in cadet school.”

Ten minutes later the pack came sailing back in. At their head was a lean fellow whose ribs jutted from his chest. Shoulders, stomach and pelvis were in some mysterious manner eaten away, but sinews crisscrossed the skeletal system like bandoliers. His lips, pierced with arrays of tiny metal plates in descending sizes like the shields along a Viking longboat, were almost retracted with exhaustion. But he tried to feign ease, blew on his metallic whiskers and controlled his breathing to emit not exactly the shrill cries that the savage produces from his sunken chest, but a high,

feminine descant. He was hardly human, rather a hunk of footrace. The women jabbered around him and cast loving glances, for which he thanked them in over-zealous birdsong. The musicians brought forth a fanfare for the runner, sang his praises and banged away like crazy on their wooden clappers.

The musicians intrigued me, they exemplified a quite different and no less interesting type. They were a physically inferior class of human. "Half-breeds, like all musicians," said Slim. I was starting to enjoy their music. A slight distaste for muscle-men arose in me. These musicians seemed much less malign. They had fine, intelligent, melancholy faces. I'd even say they looked more civilised, conducted themselves more modestly. My distaste for the obtrusive savagery of the bodies around me alighted here on a gentle coast: a small well-nourished belly. The shock of those bronze stomachless mobile statues aroused revulsion; the work that lay in all those muscles tired one out just from looking; these day-long entertainments, as captivating as those I had known since childhood in my culture only on exceptional festive occasions, quite choked me. I yearned for fat, and for cosy good cheer. What a splendid serene example he is, this portly captain of music!

My thoughts jumped eagerly from the fat musician to little Aruki, with her breasts and broad hips; I looked for her, but as my gaze passed over the women it picked out Zana. I saw her, small and undeveloped, with her depraved sideways glance. She was standing beside Slim. Now I felt the insuperable gulf between me and those figures of native heroism. Irritable thoughts passed through my brain. Suddenly an idea came to me. I ran to my hut, draped the Mauser cavalierly across my shoulder, flung baggage about until I located my pince-nez, and stepped outside.

As I approached, several men were occupied in leaping over spears laid horizontally. They all looked as if little springs had been inserted in their bronze forms. The champion runner emerged the victor. He jumped higher than a man, head to the fore, and landed balanced on all fours like an animal. The effort caused the muscle-cleats on his fibrous calves to stand out in clear relief.

And now I shall show you lot what we can do! Slim had to seek the chieftain's consent. Permission was granted, and all attention was focused on me. With great deliberation I polished my pince-nez, and peered out into the savannah for something to aim at. At a laughable distance of fifty paces I found an old acquaintance, a shimmering blue butterfly with hand-sized sails. I placed the pince-nez on my nose, swiftly raised the rifle to my shoulder, and fired. The butterfly fell crumpled to the ground. Some boys ran to fetch it.

Then I turned around; behind, on one of the huts, a painted shield rose above the thatch. It was Kelwa's hut. I fired off four shots in quick succession, the top edge of the shield broke away, and the figure painted on it was now headless. It was no great feat, but it had an effect. When I happened to glance at the women through my pince-nez, they were screaming in horror and trying to hide behind each other. A little embarrassed at the impact I'd made, I went to where Slim was standing with Luluac.

When I glanced at Zana, she hid. Only when I removed the pince-nez did she seem to feel comfortable again.

I'd had my revenge. My self-regard rose significantly.

XV.

My efforts, my victories, my ideas bore no fruit. I was the weaker in this battle with the strange savage minds that whispered to me from land – animal – human. I was wrestling with an Earth, with a climate, with an existence, with a principle that they, representing a higher kind than the one from which I lived, all shared. Now I grappled in my thoughts with the Enemy, now he let me creep away from under him. When I'd finally finished him off by means of a handful of splendid theses, he plunged me through a feeling into a bad state of desolation. Did his mind persecute me because it sensed the Other in me? Who and where was this Enemy? I couldn't get a hold on him. He persecuted me in waters, animals, jungles and leaped around in puzzling female bones that in other circumstances would have more than repelled me.

Evening came. The afternoon, the hot time, slid past in sleep and lounging. I began to dream, out of nervousity, out of sheer boredom, just to give myself something to do. Thinking of my coup I rubbed my hands, ran the whole story several times right from the start until it was smooth and round and practical as a pebble, as polished and certain as the stuff of memory, with a past and a future and causes and possibilities, a coup with something of the classical about it that could make a man feel satisfied.

Like a child with his treasures I began to contemplate the possibilities for putting it to use. Should I, with the aid of my pince-nez and my Mauser, conquer the land of the Dumara, found a city? Lay railroad tracks, set up plantations of coffee and manioc, form an army on Prussian lines with van den Dusen at the head? Or an engineering school for Indian adolescents under my very own direction?

Oh, Brazil is enormous and the Land of the Future, but who knows anything of Brazil, who else knows its soul if not I, the poet? I was created to become its emperor, I shall found not just an empire, I shall found a new race, and invent for it a modern soul of its very own, in the latest style, I'll create a Brazilian and human archetype uniting the talents of every organism. We fire Dreadnought guns and walk on legs, we philosophise and sing simple savage Indian songs that penetrate the blood. We have slender submissive women and for their sake hurl ourselves at death. We are the fastest, we are the wildest, we are the most spiritual and ours are the strongest and deepest appetites ...

Or should I be more modest, and simply pack up the whole village and take it on a circus tour of my familiar European cities? Had Herr Hagenbeck not acquired riches and fame by undertaking commercial expeditions into the wilderness? I could come on as the sharpshooter in an elegant tropical outfit and with my well-known tricks bring down glass eggs suspended five meters up, using buckshot.

But no, that shouldn't happen to me. This day, today, showed that I have talent; and from now on I should attend with the greatest care and literally scientific prudence to the refining of my marksmanship ... and what's more, as Kelwa's impresario I could do modern art a great service. There was a need to bring in a new perspective, to improve the eye, and for this I, as the sharpshooter so to speak among the artists, was the right man for the job. I'd prove to people that if they underestimate primitive and savage art, then they can't see,. Once we reform, change and renaissance everything, there'll still be a need to send to the Devil the last refuge of convention, our eyes, and replace them with a retina once again objective. Kelwa, this great utterly human artist, will have to slice away humanity's glaucoma. He'll have to provide a new anatomical key, discover a formal core much more substantial than the old stale one.

Isn't it possible, I thought, that seeing eyes, provided they aren't blinkered by limiting themselves to a certain learned schema, might be willing to perceive the colours in the faces of these people, the shocking and only seemingly unharmonious grace in the contorted limbs, these animal faces – cats, butterflies – that goggle from physiognomies, these bodies that become real in two dimensions instead of being cubistically triune?

Yes, yes indeed, the artistic and vital truth of Kelwa's figures was pervasive, tantalising and redeeming. No Parisian academician had ever painted humans that were modern down to their fingertips, totally the hunter, totally the observer, that were a complete sensual joie de vivre down to the most infamous stirrings of their soul. What matter if the media in which he worked were so ineffably scanty? His art was so completely Form that he probably gave little thought to the existence of such things as media. And now I would say, take this – how shall I put it – this dolourousness of Kelwa's female figures, this kittenish infatuation with every single little muscle that celebrates the stolidity that you, sir, call contorted because you cannot see, sir, and now you know it – that's what I'd say. I would write pamphlets, set up a new theory, redeem the flesh in people, and let the oft-proclaimed resurrection take place at last!

And I would found a new inviolable humanity, a healthy unsentimental humanity, one that would even make kicking the bucket worth it. Life to the left, life to the right, life on every side, life with and against life! Movement purifies the breath. How delicious it is to sniff this air! In the search for something in itself quite insignificant, I stumbled upon myself. Suddenly I loomed in front of myself like a mountain! What is the life of a human? Year after year he fights a running battle with the useless and irrelevant, faltering and straying, in his narrow field of vision unable to comprehend the tactics that headquarters has prescribed so meticulously and rashly somewhere in his midriff. And one day, in the most beatific moment of his life, the fruit of all this preparation ripens and drops into his lap. The happy notion arrives late, a good way behind the torments. Bless you! they all say to one who year after year has tickled himself in order to sneeze. Now he has something new to say, a technique to offer, a useful object to teach about. To this end, his imagination constantly keeps a handful of initiatives at the ready.

We shall found a new cult of Astarte, rescue society and the up-and-coming younger generation from the physical decline into which they have been plunged by the rotten amatory habits of bourgeois society. A title, a title, quick, words full of vitality that can set the brain swinging. Let's say for example: Tropical Nights. But the 'tropical' may set the wrong mood, a kitschy aura quite false to real life. Seductive namby-pamby Impressionism must be avoided at all costs. There are no Tropics; it's a word-game, but every day we discover reality and the honest style. 'Tropics' is an appeal to the memory of my entrails, from the age when I consisted of nothing other than them; a biographical memory from the Age of Loafing, when my crocodiles still splashed in the warm river-bath on Novaya Zemlya. All that is now internalised, the entire tropical landscape made accessible on two hind feet, and only inwardly is the sun poetic, there are fervid sighs, rampant splendour, man-high thickets, a hunter's life, ambushes, surprises and game-drives.

And there too we have all the poetic ferment; but the external facts stand for themselves. This land here lies below the Equator; is somewhat torrid, tight-lipped and boring, and will not become clever until a railroad track has been laid right through the jungle. Tropics, tropics, a damnable word, salon-cant to make a spot for a couple of orchids that on that spot will wither away. As applied to the truth, it's an excuse in the face of the work that waits in this sundrenched zone.

But I know my fellow Europeans. All they will make of it is no more than a moonlit party on the banks of a jungle river, mosquito-free, or a love story drawing freely on Pierre Loti, in which the Crusader has to join an exotic order. I am fanatically opposed. Are we journalists? On the contrary. Life is not so clean-cut, and it takes a good deal of brain mass to hit on what is simple. No, I regard my poetical contract with the world as dissolved. Poetry is not my profession. I feel that all my tasks as odd job man are done and dusted. I shall launch my establishment in Berlin under a worthy sober title that encompasses in a striking manner my cult of love. For example 'Emancipation of the Flesh' or some such. Anyway, if no suitable title occurs to me I can just let the business drop. I'm my own master, I have no moral obligation to reproach myself. One day I'll give the rabble a serious talking-to. And then I'll speak to people about people, sing a little song in the vernacular, teach a dance of life into which an entire human body with all its wonderful functions is piped and drummed, while no one wet behind the ears has a clue what it's about.

Thus and thus have I come to know him, the human of course, down there where everything is so bright and real, where being human means being a play of limbs, and where life surges restless in the healthy state of unscathed passion! And my establishment should probably be staffed with Dumara women. A pulpit for the ambitions of a new physiological culture.

But the most urgent of all the current favourable circumstances and the high point of my mental boom-time is ... to conquer Zana. This would be the most useful application of my newfound fame, and has already been floating in my mind for a while. Oh boy, you're a clump of climate torn loose, and regardless of rain or shine you

adapt yourself to sun, night, and winds. Yellow tormenting Brazilian afternoon, dreamer of harsh cloudless reality!

XVI.

Zana was going to dance!

And Zana danced, before Moki the idol and the lecherous savages!

Luluac's courtiers sat on mats of rice straw in the big hut in the middle of the village. They clapped hands, sang monotonous songs, and watched from besotted eyes the motions of a slender body whose limbs in the stitching flares of the flickering campfire shortened, contorted and coiled like fantastical cats at play. The body was Zana. She flew like a whirlwind all about the wide space, approached close to the fire, bent her legs, jumped suddenly, you could see: it was a cat playing with fire. She shook herself like an animal, bent her body over - it was long and bendy as a man's arm; - uttered shrill cries and stamped on the hard-tamped dirt floor, causing dull vibrations. Her lively feet summoned a hollow rousing rhythm. They were set loose in the joints, with metal anklets and strong finely articulated toes. The right ankle was rubbed raw on the inside, showing an open wound. Zana worked the dirt floor like a tambourine, the metal bands jingled on the narrowest part of her legs, from this foundation she used the balls of her feet and her heels to draw from the substratum the music's characteristic runs, thudding ragged tones, a scale that kept to a low register. It would take insanely acute hearing to make sense of these eardrum-stimuli.

I yielded intently to these impressions, the darting figure in its wild grace, the unsteady flames, the refrain of primitive-sounding male voices. Then I twigged, I understood the melody that feet, hands, voices and instruments - wooden clappers - composed all together. The mysterious rhythm mimicked the pulsebeat of our blood, and not the complex processes of our ornamental brain. Here, what was called music still corresponded to primitive physiological laws, everything functional, anything happening at regular intervals was experienced as musical. An element of aural gratification was found in a simple repeated sequence of actions and sounds, a rhythmic value in the mere noise produced by an action. Music dwelled in every activity, every passivity, every bodily transformation. In these healthy bodies, music was as direct as the transition from necessity to enjoyment, proceeded no more systematically than the passion in which all the world's business comes to a head, that passion which among the advanced races becomes an event only when clothed as culture. Physical coupling was the given primal musical act, duality unified or unity made dual was revealed as a high-grade musical beat. This was the coming and going, the approach and retreat of Zana's body. And the musicians here were halfbreeds; the collision of two races gives birth to music. One two, one two, hark to the march of Nature! Whatever you do, she sets her own meter. Beat, beat is all in all in the world, the why and wherefore of music, primal music, the primal event!

It plays out in front of my eyes, in my ears. Zana's feet kick up a riot, the drumming of her lovely heels on hard earth parches my mouth and makes my dry head turn feverish. I hear howls of the possessed, and see how their movements follow the movements of the little doll. The beat grabs me, I'm caught up in the beat, I take part quivering in the primal dance. The beat, the beat, it occurs to me we no longer have a beat, Europe has lost its beat, what a big irremediable loss!

Now Zana lets fly at us again, bends and leaps like a panther, takes a twig from the piled logs and swings it madly in her teeth to make a fiery ring around her in which her slender figure stands illuminated down to every little cranny. Her small wild face glows, it's screwed up avid and ecstatic, like heated bronze. The choir of hard men in the shadows, lurking between splayed knees, respond to her shrill gum-cries with a kind of animal harmony, a very physical motif of desire, a bestial melancholy calling forth trembling and hope. Up! my panthers in the forests, cry out to the starry heavens your store of yearning if the soft-furred eager bride should be missing from your side! Ha, how my male cats snarl, hey, how my panthers moan when the lovely feline Zana, flattened body pressing onto bent paws, creeps around the crackling flames!

What are the men singing, Slim you old crazy loudmouth, if you're not completely mad already, what are they singing, tell us!

Zana, they sing:

Zana, little puma woman
Smaller are you
Than Moki's heart!

Smaller are you than Moki's heart! You are small, I think, and who is Moki? Then the fire collapses. Zana ends her dance emerging from a spin. Some men fan the embers, they glow brighter, flames spread rapidly, at once the spacious hut is filled with a steady yellow light. Zana stands by the wall opposite. She's stark naked, she's even taken off the little skirt that the women always wear for hygienic purposes; a single string of red berries hangs at her waist and encircles the belly, which her exertions have thrust to the fore in muscular bands. The belly falls quickly to the sharp bushy angle between her thighs. Around her navel is a yellow crescent tattoo, and coloured curves run across the stomach. I follow entranced the welts that have been made in the smooth skin, and fancy that the crescent represents the opened jaws of a slaving feline. The longer I look, the more certain I become, and now it occurs to me that the muscles of the girlish belly correspond to a cat's body in relief. It could be a rutting panther, driven to tormented cries by hungry desire. Circles and rays surround the flat breasts: green moon and red sun. When Zana turns around, her back shows wonderful lacework down to the hips. Her neck could easily be encircled by a man's hand, her legs are strong, thin, so thin at the joints and bulging at the calves, but with not a trace of fat. Most beguiling are her knees. Oh, Zana is entrancing and true, when with her acrobatic limbs she imitates a bandy-legged panther cat; but when she stands there without exertion, the lines converge on the knees as the narrowest point, almost as

narrow as her neck, and the legs point outwards like components of a very, very blunt cross. And see how it makes her hips wide, and she's just a young girl after all. And the skin at the backs of her knees is pulled taut as if over little drums. In the hollows of Zana's knees, all artlessness, all modesty and sweetness are at home. And yet the brown waxen eyes in her little face look out like dog-eyes, and boar's teeth jut horribly from piercings in her upper lip like the points of a little yellow bony beard. Zana looks like a young warrior and yet is all meekness, all woman.

Did the priestess, the dancer, the courtesan in the primal state wear the artificial teeth-insignia of her pubescence like her successor thousands of years later? It's always the same old art, whether practised by the savage or the daughter of the bourgeoisie. Zana's cheekbones flaunt bright red blotches, and I have to think of makeup. But the head is disconcertingly concave around the eyeline, and seems kindhearted. Don't be fooled, this is no fiery young warrior, but a gentle maiden acting out her sensuous and enthralling part.

Mighty hunters sat in a semicircle, backs to the opening. These were Luluac's best men; if you combined their strength you could demolish a small mountain. Their muscles swelled in ecstasy, came alive in the flickering firelight like a condensed tumult of many kinds of curve. Flesh on the figures leaning forward arched and sank in remarkable knots and volutes like a strangely seething mystical mass. Dreadful forces were stored in bulges and outgrowths big as fists. The assembly was one big savage fleshy organism. Metal piercings graced the brown indentations of the faces, upper lips bristled with sharp animal teeth. Splendid downy feathers erupted from nasal cartilage, and heads sported a lavish crown of plumes. At the level of these adornments a curious birdlike bustle dominated the semicircle, an impression of power and ceremonial pathos magnified every slight movement into the gigantic. But the heads below behaved like boisterous schoolboys, spoiling the effect of the pompous bushy play of plumes. And it was all watched over by the idol Moki, and his stupid curling lips.

For there was someone else in the room, a personage filled with a vulgar intent to make an impact whom I, finding it boring, would gladly have overlooked; a power that left cold my good nerves and unspoiled taste, but slowly and insistently began to weave before my eyes a veil that sapped the will; a puzzling Existence whose challenging presence began ever more strongly to push aside my mental indisposition and drag me down into a whirling defeat filled with blood and shame.

Or how else to interpret this visage, this double-edition of a head, this cram of faces coming chinless together in a vertically yawning maw? Each of the idol's two skulls aligned side by side had a thousand-eye in its forehead, a huge brambleberry, but the divine body below consisted of a thick shaft taller than a man, a plain tree trunk stripped of bark that carried the swaying neckless heads like an endlessly deep collar. Six pairs of clawlike knobs grew out of the trunk, arranged like two rows of teats. They suggested horribly stunted grasping-organs. Even more stunted, truly pitiful – so pitifully botched you could almost feel sorry for the poor fellow, as if for

something that didn't deserve such tackiness – were his two arms. These two carpet-beater shapes, jutting stiffly from the sides like a pair of tennis racquets, could only have been intended as short arms and hypertrophied paws. The tawdriness was enough to drive me into a rage, into blind senseless fury at this imposition on my senses that thirsted for beauty; and for sure I could have allowed myself to be dragged into barbarity and loss of temper of the basest sort, had not the utterly dubious head lulled and captivated me.

Imperceptibly it compelled me to acknowledge its power, stabbed me with crazy details, winked stiffly at me out of hooded eye-caverns, sucked me into the rigid all-knowing earlobes, took shots at me from mystical orifices with fuse-cord sparks and chattering shadows, and from my wildly pounding heart broke visions of a rigid flexibility never before experienced. The mouth gaped so that only a vertical slit remained, and the half-heads were set all around with a profusion of horns, brackets and prickles of every description. A levitatory gaze flashed from the green eyes; he was able to seize the momentum; he, the zombie, was able to arouse light elfin feelings, to conjure a dancing gracefulness in the heart of an assembly, embody an inexpressibly floating beauty, bestow tangible corporeal blessings from repulsive eyes, and veil in pretty lies the law of the Earth's ponderous gravity. Stolidly emplaced, he could free himself at will from his resting point; impassively abrupt, he boosted the feeble art of any human being who surrendered to him sincere and believing.

Indecipherable, to be grasped with humility only in his effects, his pensively bloodsucking expression raised the assembly up, drew the heaviness from their bodies.

And Zana began to dance.

God lifted her. She balanced on one leg. Her torso was bent back and her thick shoulder-length hair brushed the ground. The other leg was raised and bent at the knee. A band of little metal pieces tinkled at each ankle. The soles of her feet were pink and the toes were like little fingers, but were ever so slightly thickened at the tips. The torso formed a slender delicate arc, a titillating curve that drove you mad. You really had to stand up and take this human ornament in your arms. It dug deep, deep into the heart, it aroused the vision's yearning and a stabbing sorrow in the heart. Such discipline of the limbs tightened the breasts of the watching savages, and they uttered rhythmic laments and searing cries. Ah Zana!

Off she went, little stark-naked thing, a sling of nerves, muscles, vertebrae and tame bones, seemingly across the whole space, dashing like a whipcrack from corner to corner, lay like a thread on the ground before Moki, the warty idol, circled with outspread arms, one foot before the other, airily as a gnat around the fire. And God stayed still, and was mighty. His calm engendered rhythm, it was the ground-tone from which movement rose. He loves Zana, and for this he lets her dance. Slight glistening traces of sweat showed on her body, and a herbal aroma streamed from her.

Into the fire's light fell something bushy, dark, one, two, then a whole shower of flowers, twigs, colourful blooms, thrown by the wild men; and the orchids that now lay

on the ground and became caught up in the thatch of the roof and clung to Zana's shoulders seemed as defunct as an opened seashell refracting the stare of a pearly eye.

And what did this magic mean? – Slim explained in a whisper as Zana fluttered past, body slanting forward. Her arms hung the length of her sides with raised elbows stiffly reversed, her hands shook from the wrist with gentle fleeting beats, a rhythm flared in them, spread up arms supple as satin to flood over the undulating shoulders. The body ran like a screw made of the most precious of materials: human flesh. The men all around hummed from clenched teeth like a swarm of gnats, the woody music from the tuned clappers wove a rattling melody. The male figures hummed louder. So Zana was a little tiny gnat dancing before her lord, the god Moki, the bloodsucker, the vampire of human beings, the Dance-in-the-Air Demon who drinks red human blood and likes to dance in the happy evening hour.

Zana, they sang,

Little gnat-woman
No bigger are you
Than Moki's heart.

But now I realised I'd been wrong about Moki's hands. They were in fact not hands, but wings. Zana was dancing them, so now I understood them. I understood everything about Zana's dance, I could clearly read the god's face as she described it, I followed compelled the thrill of her senses and felt the meaning and power of the almighty god unmistakably take shape before me. There, what's that? Proclaiming his satisfaction, his supreme satisfaction, he began to roar from his body like a monstrous trumpet, brought forth from his monumental spiritual calm an amplification, so to speak, of gnat-song. He beat time jokily with his little arms, raised himself two feet high over the shiny tamped earth on which Zana danced, swayed with a stately motion, and with a tremendous jolt disappeared through the roof into the starry night.

As he made his way into the blue light I saw that his wings were prettily varnished, they grew larger, gained proportion, he beat about him with dazzling flames and carried himself with the magnificent glamour of a connoisseur of slaughters. His knobby bits grew to claws, each representing an elementary phenomenon, and the rudiments on his skull grew to the most dangerous ramming horns. His eyes goggled like a giant grape-cluster of green lanterns. Now I recognised him again. His whole history lay clear before me. So that's where you are, old man, you ancient principle of spiritual calm, descendant of antiquarian terrors, garnering from these lively panther-children the usual tribute to your now harmless whims? You old divinity-mechanism, playing as ever with royal maidens, getting a rise out of dance moves and acquiring your effect from the hands of a wily panther-dam? Old stiff dragon-ox, bloodsucker-god grown beggarly, lignified monument to spiritual calm! Just now I brought you down with a pistol-shot, and here you stand again making a fool of me? But you don't fool me. You cannot take away my recognition that God owes his life to blood, that miracles and revelations come speeding out of the rhythm of the stamping feet of real

human beings; that you, Moki, owe your life to Zana's slender bones. It is in their play that your power of levitation resides. She suggests, and you fly. She looks askance from her eyes, and you hurl lightning. Your face is stupid without her; when she dances its power, it is the thrill of her primal dance, of her definitive body, that elevates you to a divine horror. *Oh you god, you creature of this human dancing in her blood, you mockery of a dragon before the antics of the panther-son and his wife!*

When I came to my senses from the miasma of burning flowers, greasy sweating bodies, wild precipitous motions of the girlish body, Moki was standing once again calm, sated and depraved as before, in his usual place in the hexagonal hut, signifying the last stoical offshoot of dragon's blood. Not far from him an old Indian sat in ecstasy blowing into a long, long tube, a stiff tightly rolled mat of rice straw. Up in the roof, a hole that had suddenly appeared was closed by a furtive hand. I had to remind myself of Zana's movements, had to note clearly what it was that her gestures, her horror, her jubilation, the beating of her wings and her lasciviously forward-bending torso demanded of my imagination. Gladly, my dear pretty gnat, shall you have my blood and my belief. Everyone had looked up as if possessed when Zana pointed to the roof, and it would have been indecent of me not to join in this communal action. I was really quite pleased with myself. Fear and scorn could be read in the faces of the Dumara people. And was it not a little malicious of them to let the big malevolent god rise up in the air whenever he liked on his paltry pair of wings; to make their humility and their most authentic awe dependent on their goodwill; to hone their presumption by truncating his top so crudely and praying to it? The human soul, savagely revealed in the soul of these savages!

That's where things stood. Meaning, Moki was back there in his corner, a fragment, and Zana – but Zana was dead. The gnat had been struck down. Its goose was cooked. They had killed it, stoned it to death with orchid-stems. The gnat was dead.

Zana had danced the Puma Dance and the Gnat Dance. She had danced the bloodthirst in her soul. But Zana was also a yearning cricket and laid her arms, no, her long narrow wings, tight against her back. She bent her head back against her neck, her chest projected, strong, stronger, in endless sorrow, and now in the mere play of her breasts and her stomach it was evident that she was sobbing.

The hunters sang:

Zana, little cricket-woman
Is crying for her
Distant lover.

With every piece of metal they'd been able to collect, they set up a raucous clattering and rasping; and thus did our empty sardine tins reveal their ingenious musicality.

The consequence of crickets weeping for their lovers is that you can view the wonderful architecture of their innards. Zana had in her lumbar region a hint of feminine curves; a flat shell formed the lower abdomen. But it was so flat that it

seemed more a dusky glaze on the downy skin than a three-dimensional shape. The tattoo artist had engaged in a superfluous reworking of nature's sculpture. But now his art was totally ruined. For the cricket was suffering unspeakably, and the indrawn belly beneath the small outthrust breasts showed fibrous grooves, as on a boy. The entire monotony of her pain lay in the hopping steps that took her countless times amid the clanging of the instruments in ever the same circle. But then she collapsed, and was dead of sorrow. Once more on this day, Zana died.

And now on this unforgettable evening something decisive happened. Zana danced a fourth time. She was unassailable: elastic and inexhaustible like a true artist; the effort made her joyfully playful, deepened her concentration. Tomorrow, I feared, will be for her a real comedown. From her shape-shifting softly yielding body she evoked a new meaning. When she came up again, Luluac was standing there, her brother. She reached only to his hips. He was tall, and his upper body was planted like a wedge onto hips and buttocks rooted in convex thighs that hoisted the powerful trunk. His chest was higher than it was wide, and projected hard from the muscular spine to which the ribs strained back. The ribcage itself, whose wings stood narrow and formed a deep manly groove between the nipples, was a truncated cone. Below it the belly fell away like a landslide. The head was small and round with a pronounced occiput, clean-shaven, and only above the brows was there a brush of sparse stiff hairs. Like the skull, other parts of his skeleton were formed on the same space-saving principle, a typical product of a long process of blood-selection. These bones were improved primordial instruments, forgoing mass in favour of resistive strength through bends, swellings and clubbed ends. They were set in motion by a visible system of muscles. Their main impetus came from the joints and the adjacent foci of power and nerves; and it was here too that the man had his strength. Everything else seemed denuded of mass, unprepossessing, he was not even excessively muscular. Skin stretched tight over his bones, but at his chest fell in folds like a napkin. The stomach was incorporated as a visible muscle in the grill of the waist. The calves were high, not balled but stretched out long. The face looked ugly, leering, sly, greedy as an animal's. When under physical exertion his lips drew back from the teeth, you could see the white-edged trapeze of the jaws. The teeth were filed to points. This lent the mouth something of a demanding expression, made his face childish. On his little indented skull sat the crown of all Indian feathered crowns. The wildest and most colourful jungle flight-feathers had found their way to the savage gravity of this chieftain. In this way the slightest inclination of the head acquired ghoulish significance, a tiny forest nodded in bright colours, and human motives were introduced into an actually lifeless thing. Yes, yes, said the grove of plumes when it wobbled a little way to the right; and no, no! when it became a steeply inclined garden down the back. And it was woe, woe! when it travelled through the air on the heated head of the young chieftain.

This splendid contrivance of a feather-grove made tall Luluac superhuman when he stepped out to dance with his sister Zana. Everyone watching relished the man's grotesque superiority. Zana herself seemed moved to the last fibre of her womanly

modesty. She bent down compliant beneath him. The family relationship seemed of an unusual kind. Suggestive memories came to mind. As the pair danced, indications of wild sexual arousal became noticeable on their bodies. They watched each other from slit eyes with bestial infatuation. The incest instinct, which emerges among primitive or over-refined races that are still healthy, asserted itself in their sympathies. Was it play, or in earnest? Though Zana was small, her body shared definite similarities with her brother's. They were both slender, their faces had almost the same expression. They were enamoured in their own way, and as they danced they gave expression to all the concupiscence of their absolute and hot-blooded essence.

Did not narcissism, the principle of self-adoration, tend towards the improvement or preservation of beauty? Among sophisticated mammals, similarity has a repellent effect on the imagination. But beyond this, among developed races with equilibrium and mature tastes its effect is to attract, for it is the core of classical development. Within the noble races the longing for variation is satisfied by heightened gender differences, which diverge into harder and more tender types.

Zana was absorbed and abandoned in her dance. It urged her towards the feathered arrow Luluac. Without thinking I glanced across at Slim. His face was twisted. Indian traits were mixed with his northern features, beneath his beard lurked the gloating beast I saw in every face here. He followed the couple with an unwholesome look. But Van den Dusen was bright red in the face and seemed scrunched up; he followed the proceedings gaping, all his gums showing. Luluac, obviously a master of technique, moved in cool masculine curves; he remained hard, rhythmic, formal, but his eyes gleamed fire. You understood that he desired Zana, he turned about her, wooed her, but held himself back from her seductions; there was no knowing how dangerous the little female was, and whether it was permitted to touch her. She might be a princess, a priestess, and the mortal who took her might meet with disaster. Zana's ankles wore fetters, and this enhanced her meek and harmless appearance; the anklets had become entangled. From her heels she made short springy leaps, like a ball. She circled around Luluac, sank to her knees, and crossed her arms behind her neck. Did her humble offering fail to move the chieftain? So much was clear: she was a woman, she was fettered, convention tinkled about her ankles, and she lacked the freedom of her choice and her desire for the man.

Luluac let her approach. Already he seizes her in a pose that blatantly reveals his nakedness, as he again pulls back. He defends himself against the reality of such an alluring other-worldly creature, he calls the whole lovely fact into question. It cannot be that so much allure is real. She is a deception of the senses, presaging calamity. Maybe Zana is a panther-dam? She tears to pieces the human lover who falls for her. Oh how tame she is! He swings his arms and flourishes spear and shield, for it's best to keep a puma at a distance. Suddenly he starts into the familiar war dance, lifts his legs with thighs horizontal and plays running-on-the-spot. Diabolical, phew! Zana wheedles in sublime motions. Her hobbled ankles follow with submissive tiny steps; it's tragic how the cartilage behind her knees moves! It's touching, and will break all

our hearts! Now Luluac can no longer resist. A suggestively danced embrace indicates possession. He never touched her, the gesture remained aesthetic. And everyone understands the innuendo in the entwined arms! Interpreted as: Luluac accepts the panther-dam's wooing! The sexual tension in both bodies has heightened, oh, oh, oh, both are in bliss, both almost at the point of surrender. Zana bucks like a young stud. Monotonous music swells the nerves and muscles and awakens the thrust and artlessness of manly feeling. The circular persecution mania of the music engenders a slight giddiness, there's a hammering at the brows, and eyes and brain meld into a single yearning mass. The flesh on the men's bodies begins to ferment, as it were, a steamy villainous masculine aroma makes itself perceptible in the hut. Luluac utters a raging cry and the men collapse triumphant and sated. The climax has passed. The lovely savage warrior has led Zana to his hut. She squats behind the fire. From now on he is her lord. He plants himself boastfully in the foreground. Who will take her from him? No one; it's the custom. Enough with the dancing and play, bring on the manioc beer, so we who are hoarse and fired up can cool down and refresh ourselves!

Then something unexpected happens, that doesn't belong in the programme: Slim rises to his feet and takes off his sooty white jacket. Then he pulls the thin string vest over his head and stands there naked from the waist up. Slim!

XVII.

The challenge is an outrageous novelty. There's a response. Up to this moment the crowd has remained sober. Manioc beer, slurped from earthenware pots, now plays its part. The music distorts to a mad din, everyone bangs away as he sees fit. "There'll be an Indian wrestling match!" van den Dusen shouts across to me, and I have a foreboding of nothing good. The Indians talk across one another, they're discussing Slim's chances. Slim was a big man with square broad shoulders and the flat chest of a typical Yankee. At the waist he was narrowly built, but his legs came from another, stockier race. That made him shorter than his opponent, but all in all, despite his smaller stature, he looked the stronger.

They started off by exchanging open-handed slaps. Slim's forearms were long, wide, squared off like tool handles. But there was a lot of soft tissue in his big hands. As a boxer he was nimble and clever, Luluac's arms were knocked aside like flower stalks. But the bull-strong blows landed ineffectually, Luluac took them in his stride and stepped back. His watchful gaze never lifted from his opponent's hands, he fought with an old wise smile on the small pinched face. His feather crown bobbed and rustled at every violent move. Slim's approach was crude and straightforward, Luluac's soft and feeble but with a reptilian economy.

At last he caught the fingers on Slim's left hand and forced his way into them like a comb; Slim forgot his right hand, and now it too was caught. The Indian's hand was small and compact. He squeezed Slim's paw at the root; Slim's face twisted in pain, he

lifted his hands as high as he could up over his head. The entangled arms made a roof, they stood man to man leaning into one another with their knuckles as the angle of contact. The Indian deflected the efforts of the white man, who was standing on tiptoe, pulled the arms out to the sides, and Slim lost his balance; but his shoulders and arms would not be bent. His neck was sinewy as a coolie's. As they fought they took dogged steps forward and back. But the Indian too possessed calm practical strengths, he too toiled tenacious as a steel spring. When Slim managed by rapid jerks to get his arms around Luluac's slender waist, the Indian simply took them off like a belt. Then Luluac sprang free from the other man's fingers, and now he caught Slim's arms at the elbow joint, now he had him, entangled fingers wrestling in front of their faces, one man pulling the other's hands down to the hips. The American's wrists became stiff and painful. Luluac let his joints twist back like rubber, betraying no distress. His strength lay in his spine and in the hips, there he was flexible and sure, as unbending as steel. Slim couldn't bear the pain much longer, with a mighty jerk of his heavy body he suddenly brought his hands free and began to box at Luluac's chest, upper arms, chin.

Luluac lost his poise, but at once sprang back and then forward again and grabbed Slim's right fist in both hands. What he did with it was hidden from sight, but it must have demanded Slim's full attention, for he forgot his left hand. And already Luluac had pinched that one between the pulse and the ball of the thumb. He screwed the hand away from the joint. It sat limply on the swelling ring formed by thumb and index finger. It was horrible to watch how the hands at any moment threatened to fall like thick faded leaves. In his torment, Slim landed a knee in the Indian's belly. He was nervous and desperate, out of his mind with pain. Luluac's neck was muscled stiff as a shield. Slowly Slim sank to his knees, his back began to form a hollow, first he stuck out his backside, then quickly pulled it in, and already he was rolling like a wave down into the ground.

Zana looked on dog-eyed, snuffingly attentive to his warrior figure, his splendid bony fury, his dreadful defeat. She sucked it in like a wonderful treat. The Indians all around maintained a refined and triumphant silence. The silence was shameless, it was tactless and I couldn't bear it. The manioc beer tasted sweet and sharp, and ambition burned in my breast. But it wasn't only that. Zana's obnoxious stare irritated me. I hated her most of all. I saw our prestige evaporating, and the thought came to me to do something about it. Having this morning had luck with my Mauser, now I would venture to salvage our honour. Gymnastic memories came to my aid. I stood on my hands and managed a few steps. But blood rushed to my head and my elbows buckled, the legs overhead ran away with me and I had trouble keeping up. I landed back on my feet as best I could, gracefully enough for it to seem a final flourish.

Now I was hot. I even felt a little dazed, but not at all embarrassed. My ambition would not be quelled. Willpower, willpower! Let others make do with just one success, I persevere with an iron will. Philosophy belongs with handstands! As I took two rakish steps back to gain a nice gymnastic impetus, clever rationales swept in their hundreds through my head! Maybe despite these I had somewhat lost a sense of my

situation? To counter this, just at the moment when I patiently planted my hands for the sixth time on the ground and my rear extremities went galloping into the air, I remembered something to which I had given insufficient consideration. Damnation! Of my four shots only three – three! – had hit the shield. Shame ran like frost into my limbs, my elbows wobbled again, and I landed at my own side, shot dead as it were. I had a distinct feeling of lying next to myself, and it took some time before I could in principle ascertain my position.

Phew, manioc beer is crazy stuff. Now they're all serious and none of them wants to see what I'm really up to. I'm grateful to the beer, as long as you don't attach higher interests to it. It's a pernicious substance, makes you complacent. On the Indian side they seemed to be ignoring artistic efforts altogether. But the iron will, my dear fellows, that's what's important! Pooh, this business with Luluac is so funny, how he prances about and makes his method plain, and how he hides his victor's smirk behind dismay and embarrassment! Behind this, too, an iron will is concealed. A man must have willpower, hard as iron. Then he sees people as they fundamentally are, he notices in big letters how gratification lurks behind their politeness. Out with this Luluac, he's a humbug! He's drunk too much beer. Why's he making faces? I can see through him! Why's the Dutchman giggling? He can't handle manioc. He should be placed under a police ban on beer-drinking. He must not drink manioc!

Van den Dusen was the only one who took my handsprings seriously. A circumstance for which I gave him no thanks, merely finding it silly. For, I said to myself, a fellow like that has no right to engage as an expert with my higher acrobatics. But maybe manioc beer arouses malice? Van den Dusen was more evil minded than usual today. Had I, I might ask myself, already revealed my backside to this van den Dusen? Whereupon into the ground-bass of my conviction there fell only a Never! But now I was positioned in such a way that he was constantly menaced by my tottering legs, and if he retreated I at once emerged out of the air just where he was standing. I hated him. I couldn't stand people who got drunk on manioc.

Zana was sitting opposite him, and I hated her too. She was the second element of my public. Van den Dusen's hateful presence was solely to blame for my failed attempt at hand-walking. And I'd planned to show Zana such wonderful moves! I hated her when I had to think how I'd laid myself bare before her. Had the beer made her malicious too? Today they were all evil minded, and yet today of all days I had a good heart and wanted to do something for them with the work of my hands. What, what can I undertake for Zana? How can I give her a little treat, a pretty and sincere bit of fun? If only she'd show me a friendly face, I'd fall about her neck.

Instead I revealed no human emotion, but kept to myself and reconnoitred the terrain. Following this scientific observation I finally braced myself, one more time! Onto my hands – hell's bells, my legs stayed up all right but with a tendency to overbalance. My hopes were more than fulfilled. I foresaw no harm in letting the rest of my bodily components follow as spryly as possible after my legs, which had taken the lead. But suddenly I sensed an obstacle, it retreated swiftly, I heard a yell and saw

everything around me grow dreadfully bright, something hot, devilishly hot was creeping into my clothes, ow! ... Now, unable to maintain the tempo, I let go. Crackling and sputtering the ground rushed up to meet my head. I recall how I found it highly remarkable, the way it suddenly slanted up and whacked me on the back. Its emphasis is all askew, I said, and I was lying in the fireplace. Ruddy sparks showered up around me, I lay there as workmanlike as a joint of beef and heard from a hundred miles away a roaring howl of triumph. Twenty hands dragged me upright faster than my own decision. Jacket and trousers were charred at the back. My first thought was to have my next tropical suit made of asbestos. Then I glanced at the site of the calamity and realised that on such uneven sloping ground, a veritable chasm, the skill of even the best gymnast would fail him.

Where is Zana? She's left, I've scared her away. Oh the heartbreak! But there she is, by the wall, standing naked with red hot bands around her ankles, intent on winding an orchid stem with crushed blooms about her closed knees – and she waddled horribly, brought the whole hut to a disorderly swaying, ah, the devil knows why!

I felt a great heat. The Indians were making a din and had already ungratefully forgotten my masterly performance. Mangy dogs, no, these redskins? Slim arched his eyebrows. He showed no interest in me, in anyone, in anything, not even in Zana. Even when she looked up from her bound knees, looked across at him, he didn't move his head from the gap he was looking out through. Ha, wasn't the heat too much? Did it not stink of Indians here? Did it not stink perhaps of roasted human flesh? Hold on, the stink's coming from me, it's my flesh burning here, they mean to slaughter me and eat me; the stink is a part of me and you're not going to partake of it, you drunkards, you damned manioc worms ...

Through the gap in the slats you can see stars. The Dutchman giggled and gave me a lecture about walking on your hands. With his figure! I thought. Then I thought how the manioc beer was a damned powerful brew, because they were all so drunk. I went to the entrance, which swiftly positioned itself at a corner so I had to crawl past the post. Outside it was dim and balmy. The sky hung heavy and low with stars.

XVIII.

Silently, unremarked, I made my way to my hut. Just opposite, where the lane bent away and vanished, I saw van den Dusen sneaking into his hut. He seemed to be holding back some merriment, I caught a whiff in him of a kind of urge for action. Checho, who'd come with me out of the big hut, abandoned me at some point. It bothered me for a moment; although it was no concern of mine, I was so distraught just then that I assigned undue importance to this insignificant matter. A mild annoyance went fishing in me, without bait, something else was bugging me, but now it bugged me that Checho had run off. Hup, there's the worm, dangling for me!

The firmament was filled with stars. They hung so tight-packed that they formed shapes; fleeting connections flashed between them. They curled like hot metal shavings when a breath passes through.

Checho, in my view, was badly brought up. Where were his manners, running off like that? Strange how everyone forfeits good tone for what they gain by whims. Where can – now, is it Checho I mean, or is it not – where can he have gone off to? I struggled with a thought, a suspicion I must have formed earlier. Aha, what's this, and there's Aruki, she's alone, her husband isn't home yet, maybe he's hanging about with the witch Zana or some other female. Meanwhile Aruki was tending her baby, singing between her teeth and harbouring God knows what sad thoughts. I had nothing left to spare for her, and her feminine rotundities filled me with scorn. Checho too was not helping her through the mournful evening; he too must have realised at last that delicate slenderness represents the true ideal for an Indian hero. Served her right; now that it was over between her and Checho she was no longer unattainable; even I, so to speak, was a kind of hero of my race, and had to cultivate my tastes; one must do one's duty, to some degree. We're forever taking revenge on our dreams, we're forever betraying our one desire for another. So being as it were freed up in this respect was a relief to me. It delivered a thoroughly healthy jolt, and at the same moment I could see with dazzling clarity.

What the hell, you shouldn't swig manioc beer if you can't handle it. So, Slim grappled with the chieftain ... Slim. This came to my mind, and sat like a mountain in my heart. And what did Slim do then? Let's admit it at once: Slim was also the subterranean worm that had snagged my consciousness, rapping like a ghost at my mood and with formless eyes glaring at my complacency whenever it was about to settle in. Oblivious, I'd asked myself where this Checho fellow is off to and what's he about, and was extremely annoyed at his quite incomprehensible behaviour ... but really it was all about Slim.

Just consider how it all came about, this whole defeat that unsettled me so! I recalled that van den Dusen must have been drunk. He was bright red, and visibly steaming. Hm, and even Slim had no head for it. I, on the other hand, had a good training behind me. This wasn't the first carousal I'd survived victorious; what other outcome could you wish for? I had nerves, nerves in the true sense. I could eat poison like cheese, my nerves would come through swimmingly. The ideal nerve-person lived inside me, my alertness outlived any poisoning. The blander the taste on the tongue, the more vigilant the brain. The calmer the stomach, the more strenuous the consciousness. I repel illnesses with diagnosis, I repair discrepancies with analysis. Hardly anything could be more progressive. Cheers, Slim! You've been overtaken, your nerves have gone down with you. You don't go into a fight when there's a prospect of drawing the short straw. It's different with handsprings. That's a Platonic pleasure, even when no one's watching. Furthermore, were you ever brave enough to climb into a fire? Did you ever willingly offer your back for a grilling? I rode through it like a Satan, the entire hut was on its feet when I danced my most fiery fire dance. My hair is

singed. Oh how dreadfully bright it was around me! So it goes, Slim. But manioc beer is too sweet and leaves a stale taste, no, don't you think?

I felt intensely awake. Waves of steamy air came across from jungle and savannah, cool damp gusts from the stony brook. A metallic ringing, the swelling din of a cicada chorus, seemed compressed beneath the low-hanging horizon from which a white fire flickered in a myriad combinations like those the noisemakers had made. This was calming, cleansing. But Slim had landed not just himself but all of us in the soup. Whatever was he thinking, to pick a fight with that outrageously tall fellow all on account of the girl – where was Slim's superiority now? It was our prestige, my prestige, he'd gambled away. He should never have dragged us into it. Us. A human community should never be endangered by the actions of one of its members. And I was the conscience of this community.

When I recalled how Slim got to his feet, a big strong man in all his glory planting his imposing figure by the light of the fire, I felt the soul of the world shrink back in shame. This isn't about me, even though I ... but the collective was broken. What must the Indians have thought! The acid sensation of unused muscles rising up in everyone was a beat, nothing but a human beat. Oh I knew it well, how it rose up slow and acid like a bad impulse, but it was a good social impulse. Men envy one another all kinds of action, even a simple clip on the ear. It was not nice of Slim and quite unfair to swagger so, against the programme. You could understand the misgivings that went through the assembly when Slim contributed his own hero-dance. Compared with the refined performances of Zana and her brother, it was a washout. No, Slim – ouch!

My back hurt, a perpetual twinge made it stiff and incapable of resistance. God almighty, had my spine not become a good bit shorter? Had two vertebrae at the end collapsed into one another? So that was the outcome of this bizarre day: Slim was beaten up, and I would henceforth – now or for a good long while – wander through life under the world's most pungent witch's curse, always assuming something was there to wander through!

With my sore back I dragged a mat to the entrance and lay down beneath the palm tree. It was after midnight, and mosquitoes sat in their thousands on leaves and jungle flowers or danced over one of the tepid puddles beside of the brook where a piece of the moon was mirrored. Big fat stars twinkled overhead, and little ones that looked like triangles and seemed actually to explode at the apex. The most prominent were linked by lines forming crude figures, clunky mythological images. Cicada-song rose and ebbed. A single cicada nearby, which by mysterious relocations seemed to sound now from here, now from there, outdid all the rest. But when it fell silent, a metallic roar arose from every corner and end of the world.

Animal cries swarmed out of the jungle. The village itself was livelier than usual this evening. Figures scurried down the lanes. A little creature moved to and fro several times not far from me. It had to be a woman. What did she want? I grew curious. Then I swore, for she seemed fat and old, and vanished as if sensing my

dislike. I had to think of Zana. Aruki, sweet girl, now the mundane beloved of earlier days, was again comforting her child. In a sad voice she crooned to herself and the infant their shared misery of life. Tcha, what was this life good for? Why was I lying here in this Indian backwater idling away, instead of living, toiling, encountering aggravations and falling in love among paved streets? The most everyday aggravation with a bit more comfort would be balm to my soul. But here I am an outsider. My place is not here. Worry closed my eyes, and I desired sleep in order to forget.

What could be gleaned from these cannibals, these *bons vivants* who dined on the torments of other people? The jumbled extravagance of muscle, flesh and sensuality oppressed me. I wanted to flee, I saw brown men on all fours chase after me, saw them make ready to leap like cats. One landed on my neck, and bit. It hurt. I had a clear sense of the gloating ravening face. I gathered all my strength and gave a shake, shook in convulsive horror ... it fell away from me. The pain abated, and at once I could sense relief sending a fierce energy through me, I curled up and shot into the sky, fresh as a daisy. I flew in a broad arc across the universe, bent at the waist, face forward.

Ahead to the left was a big fat star; then others came, approached so densely that collision seemed unavoidable. We collided; but remarkably I felt the pain at my back. This brought me to the notion that I was actually flying backwards. And so it proved. Is it so rare to be oriented wrongly to gravitational forces? Every sun has a story to tell. I had discovered for such non-differences the lovely symbol of the waterwheel. So I flew backside-foremost; but maybe too I was located somewhere in infinity, while the entire universe rotated steadily behind my back. The stars, stupid silver bells and stiff dried-up frog skins, whenever they struck me they entered into my body, caused a brittle crackling and with the same clicking tone pursued a jolting path out through the back of my head. In this way I worked through the whole firmament, more or less, it trickled gently rustling like an ant-trail all through my spinal column.

Beneath me suddenly were tall buildings, a paved road came sidling up to meet me. And though I was sweeping past at an elevation of several miles, it was as if my eyes were a man's height above street level. For a second time I had to drastically revise my perspective. It transpired that I was in fact rushing along a street head down, legs high in the air. My body was so immensely stretched that I'd almost lost contact with my head. I realised I was sailing through the air on a handstand, so to speak, and my head, which no longer belonged to me and was burdened with countless stars unable to find their way out again, no longer served its purpose.

I was seized by a tremendous yearning to come to a stop on this street, which I seemed to recognise. I tried to reach out my right hand. It was hard, like pushing through treacle, suddenly it scrunched up like a dead glove, but in the next instant I had an idea: as if on command, a tiny white star fell just at the right moment onto the glove like a drop of hot sealing-wax, wiggled its way inside by some remarkable means and added a tidy amount of weight to it. Now it was a hand again. It touched the ground, with a numb feeling. It was soft asphalt, which hardened at once when I clumsily laid my back on it. I was still swimming half backwards half head down along

the house fronts of the empty street, not a soul was about who might take any interest in my helpless plight. Stars were still shooting like rockets down the ladder of my vertebrae; the bombardment was strongest on the left, where a really big fat ugly fellow kept sending a whole series of his relations through me. Then I finally made contact with the street, ran on for a while on my right arm and then crashed head over heels. All of a sudden it was dreadfully bright. I lay poleaxed, and all the stars warehoused in my backside exploded in a shower of sparks about me.

Now I felt totally defeated by Life, for it occurred to me that it was eight o'clock in the morning and I had to go to school. Furthermore, I was extending my early morning dreaming out onto the paved street in a most unseemly manner. I felt utterly crestfallen, found no joy in life, lacked the gravity of a character as I lay there on the other side of life, far to the north of the simplest warm impulses, powerless to move even a finger.

But to substantiate the fact of my defeat, a slender maiden now came along. She was brown and pretty, and I called out to her: "Hallo, Zana, how's things?" She wore a thick veil with threads and dots covering her face, so that shadows freckled her face. "Oh, Zana," I said full of yearning, "remove the veil from your tattoos, just this once." Her cheeks flushed bright red, but she acted as if she hadn't heard. She walked on, left me to my misery. I struggled to move my body, demolish the curious burden of my moral and physical torment. I forced myself to think, and with my eyes sought individual limbs that seemed to have come adrift from me. I put all my concentration into that look. Then I became aware that I was in a fugue state with two depths.

My thoughts were precise, but my experience was ambiguous. It was the Trance, the great spiritual event of the Tropics. I was quite clear about my mental presence, but I mixed up the physical foundations, I was capable of conflating two kinds of space. It's a dreadful abyss of depths that looms here. I was capable of thinking that the image of the senses in relation to the spiritual state is totally irrelevant; but for all the enormous effort of brain and willpower I was unable to influence that image, I literally could not move from the spot. My existence in those minutes, despite extraordinary mental exertions, was something that remained only relatively real.

At that moment I found myself on the street of a big city. But I ignored this reality. I was compelled to experience a vision that I denied. In laborious denial, my straining eyes acquired a green point that moved hypnotically. Slowly I recalled that it resembled a palm leaf. A Fräulein Zauner or Zana – the sound touched my ear only fleetingly – was there again. She had set aside her dignity, and now she flirted and swung the palm leaf over me like a back-street hussy. My desire for this girl was boundless. She stood to my left; somewhere on her – on a stalk behind her ear or in her hair – a gorgeous white rose bobbed. The girl said nothing, but chirped in a bewitching tone so irresistibly sweet and dreadful that my entrails cramped for sorrow and tears trickled from the corners of my eyes. Like the voluptuous chirping, the tears were heavy, heavy and round, and I was able to keep count of each one, was literally able to track them with my weeping eyes. So acute and many-sided were my restless

powers of observation, so tense my imagination, which was able to use the consciousness trap to attend to the smallest and most intimate things.

The horror of this situation, a blend of desire and torment, of boundless spiritual freedom and physical paralysis, was rooted in a sense of the most tender integrity. Zana, little cricket-woman! I dreamed sobbing. But meanwhile my mind remained firmly in reality, or in something that it experienced as such. "Please, Fräulein Zana," I said with my mind and very objectively, "you're playing the coquette. Your patterned veil with the way it affects your complexion is an imitation of Indian tattooing. Don't bother with it. I don't love you. Don't deck yourself out with the umbrella, I know it's no poetic palm frond. You're using terribly hackneyed ruses to ensnare me. I despise your little games."

My heart broke as it told these lies. But it lied with my mind's truths. It exploited them in a practical way, made use of them for what was actually a simple manoeuvre as it set about trapping a female. Ha, what is it with these truths of the mind? Are they perhaps first and foremost the weapons of sexual dominance? Do I, captivated here on the street by a female, form this analysis only in order to have a counterweight when the girl with the freckled face is showing off? Love makes one spiritual and sincere. But spirit and sincerity are worth about as much as the rouge on a girl's cheeks.

Haha, the thoughts I can think! But even this thinking that bethinks itself is merely a veil, a charming adornment to something more important. Physically unplugged, I lay there as the ideal human organism. The blessed question of the organism here took the form of a profound awareness. As I gazed after the girl hurrying away, it flashed like lightning through my extraordinarily clear and animated head that observation is a not insignificant component of desire, and could be a direct expression of animal or even vegetable functions.

Fräulein Zana's departure affected me. A simple skirt hung tight about her ankles. She couldn't stride, she hastened along with short hobbling steps. Her ankle boots had buckles and bows. Now I recognised it again, something I'd experienced many years before. Was tenderness a deviation, a diminution, a corruption of cruelty? A sense of the brutal – of constriction, of maiming – crimps the folds on the body of modern woman, struggles insistently in the shapes of garments, explodes empty and meaningless in the yearning illusion of fabrics, weary from fruitless pleas to give visual form to ancient desires. Everything the male once had is displayed today as a fossilised formula in the make-up of our lady friend. Everything the man once handed over to masculinity, today she sews, stitches and darns according to her needs. His body is no longer interesting for its muscles; but she now carries about with her, tame and toothless, the fetish of bewildering engulfment such as the naked male once offered her. And – how could it be otherwise – she loves the fur stole as a biceps, the tight dress ruffling like an exploring hand, the corset resembling the violent embrace once enjoyed by the natural beauty of hips and breasts, and she steps out in her dainty shoes to dance the now banal phallus dance.

Wild, cruel and wantonly flaunted is the splendour of our women, ever since their desires were answered not by the male but only by cloth and leather. In the primal violent deeds of the titillated prehistoric woman's sacrificial gaze, I saw the parentage of our fashions. And so even the maiden went about prettily and full of hidden modesty in her prison, carried it with her down the street and found it marvellous. Her dress made a feature of the double saddle of her body at hips and knees. At the knees the contours of her body teetered superbly. This narrow pass enclosed the sleek hollow of her loins. Gentle submission arose from warm shapes, forced its way through a lukewarm unnerving tenderness that seemed to vanish in them to no purpose. The fabric delineated the secrets of this maiden. My head exploded from ancient feelings; mislaid oddities, boyish hobbies came retrospectively to mind. Beauty, was it this that we worshipped as a fixed mystically regulated divinity, or: pious avoidance of good experiences?

In the long street of a great city it happened that desire for the female came to me. I saw the girl strolling. Suddenly I understood our primordial condition and conceived of our relationship as a primitive question of wished-for violence on this side of custom and manners.

And now something happened, the strangeness of which came clearly to my consciousness. The wretched palm frond the girl with the damaged high heels had waved over me became a complete real palm tree. Something new and coherent was building around me. I greeted it with a pale shimmer of recognition. It relaxed my mood like something long trusted; vague images of primordial feelings slowly ripened: and there, all at once it was there, I had a name and named it: *tropical landscape*. I was lying on my back under a palm tree. My back hurt, so I refrained from movement. My right hand lay heavily under me, it had gone to sleep and hung limp. Above me, to the left, amid a wild jumble of stars a great blazing white planet glowed with intense light. It stabbed my eyes, trussed me in its beams like that elongated muscle, the snake. It exerted a paralysing effect. It bewitched me, and I dreamed deeply, but my reason stayed awake and criticised the dream. I saw myself in a tropical landscape lying outside a triangular hut made of palm straw. My eyes were wide open and refracting, I noticed them with horror as something alien; squatting fat and cold in them was a white star eating its way like a metallic worm, a white-hot inflammation, into the carrion sheen of the eyeball. Was I dead or was I ill, lying here like this with signs of feverish decomposition burrowing their sheen into my eyes? Was it a memory, or a foreshadowing? Or was it a symbol, was it all just a symbol of an inward condition?

My thoughts were normal and swift. This condition, despite a mild torment, despite horror and doubt, was not lacking in bliss. I was frozen with happiness, paralysed in a frigid well-being. I suspected the fact of a trance. In this condition the two depths of the soul, dream and not-dream, were interchangeable, and everything was dream, everything was reality. The world of logic, the *phantoplasm*, the *system of sufficient explanations made visible*, was twofold. It swung between two rhythms, of which each was simply the reflex of the other. What I thought here I could also think

there. The same psychic process could underlie the different phantoplasms, whether dream or waking life. *Phantoplasma*: my name for this discovery, discovered by me in my most incorporeal moment – in a trance.

This brisk brainwork, for which in other circumstances I'd have allocated around an hour's concentration, was accomplished in a few corporeal seconds. For in that space of time the girl had managed to move only a few paces away. Her vanishing woke me up. Again I was in the street flanked by big buildings. But this swiftness was trivial compared to the nullity of time required for the changes to the visual underpinnings of my mental agitation. This agitation was the sole solid and enduring aspect of the entire trance. I've retained a coherent set of thoughts about it, preserved with extraordinary accuracy.

Meanwhile my body seemed doubly present, I sensed two lives with the same shared mental cusp, I was alive in the big street and alive in an Indian village; of course I suspected at bottom that the city was reality while the village was an illusion, albeit intensely experienced. Now and then the impressions melded; one was where I found myself in a city street and a figure, which I felt intensely to be female, was moving away from me. Suddenly the woman stood there naked. No, she was not quite naked, she wore black stockings up over her ominous knees and an overblown hat on the slightly inclined head. While I was occupied with the knees, the black stockings fell down. Now the knees seemed a good bit more innocuous. The hat with the extravagantly bobbing ostrich feather achieved a similar metamorphosis. The principle of the patten, the platform shoe, as applied to the skull hidden under this giant of a hat, magnified the figure's stature; the female helmet gave exaggerated testimony of demonic power. Its successor was a net with an evil mystical look; it covered the womanly head, and in it buffalo horns and bobbing birds played a menacing role. At once this perspective too was superseded. Next was a little face with black locks down to the shoulders. Two delightful little boar's teeth pierced the upper lip; compared to the thin lower lip, the flesh of which pressed wild and dark violet through the slightly scarred and deformed skin, the upper was full and overripe, like berries bursting in the tropical forest. Now I knew that this was the face of the figure with thin knees slipping past along the row of straw huts and emerging across the boundary line of shadows into pale light. She was encased in an armour of softly flowing silver. Her feet seemed a little damaged. Although the distance was too great, I knew that the figure must have a little streak of a scabby wound on its leg, such as arises when the ankles are tender and become scraped during a certain womanly way of walking.

The figure vanished. Unease and doubt broke the flow of my thoughts. I tried to return to the big wide street, but the effort failed. Suddenly it seemed just as unreal as the landscape I was dreaming. And now the ground was swept entirely from under me, and I fell into a pale incorporeal reality. In it, everything that appeared before me appeared not to be present, and as I dreamed my double life I stood on ground I could not perceive, a third unknown world that nonetheless was supported somewhat by my speculations.

And what I dreamed there I did not dream at all. I *heard* it. I heard words and they formed for me meanings that contented them. It was all a tale told by a remarkable stranger with mystical eyes, one I called Slim. He regarded me with a black magnetic gaze and I approached him unsteadily, released from the stronghold. Apart from us there was nothing; world, city, landscape were merely the tale he was telling. His narration was singsong and verbose, he climbed an endless steep ladder of images in order to give full voice to his profane desires in an ecstatic climax; with a sweeping energetic hand he formed a half-dark eternal mass in which sparks from his soul could be doused hissing. His tale was one long wild song. And already I was digging away with questions. Who was I in his tale? Who was he? Was he outside the tale?

And I ascertained that he was merely a part of his tale. He was the shape of the book I was reading. But as I read, I was writing it, and I wrote it down from my mind shivering with astonishment and curiosity. All that I dreamed was only a book I was writing, and it was to convey all the heavy wisdom of my youth, was to be the chilled goblet in which I served my amorphous yet fiery wine.

The book was to bear the title ‘Zana’. This concatenation of sounds – Za-na – rang out like an orchestra of alien music that I heard in my visions. I felt weak in the face of this book, but I recalled that this was happening in a trance, and put a stop to my self-criticism. Never had I read sentences of such ecstatic significance. They appeared before me as rounded and thrilling handholds into my observer-life, the most ordinary words and connections were priceless treasures, excessively full of content, as if it was expressly on their account that I’d undergone the travails I depicted.

We were a company of white men from countries far and wide, who came to a village of savages. We had ambiguous experiences, ridiculous experiences lacking in humour. I fell in love with Zana, the priestess and artist, always with the foolish sense that, legally speaking, something novelistic must inevitably ensue. But the disaster we caused was simply that we used all our strength to blame each other. Zana, ah, I had a profound relationship with her; she embodied all my longing. She was a specimen with well-preserved instincts. I took a great deal of trouble to place myself in her sight. But we managed our affair so badly. These people soon discovered that we lacked character, and hardly met the most imperative requirements of humanity. We didn’t even walk properly, let alone anything else. How I hated and feared them, these faces of the mothers of those naughty children standing with ribald good humour on our feet and investigating our clothing with such intrusive curiosity! It was the pride of mothers who wanted to have given birth to a race whose elementary life-impulse could be greeted with joy.

Already their tramping heels announced the beat to which they would all keep time. They grew into their education, became big and strong, formed a heaving menacing mass of warriors. They danced at a storming pace before their mothers, wives! Pace, pace, this was it, this was what they possessed, and we had lost. Indigenous life, libidinous deformities, joyful bunkum of existence, all that is very charming and worth cultivating. And now I too knew why I was writing this story from

the Indian jungle. I had to accuse myself and justify myself to all Zana-people, all people of a higher species who keep their heads uncovered and have acquired an inward rhythm, a sanguinary certainty, people without measure, simple people, who experience their naïve deformities as lovely spasms!

I eavesdropped on my culture. It was a huge hall, cold as a museum, through which people strode murmuring. There was no beat, all I heard from the galleries and corridors, from the corners of the hall and the doorframes, was the tread of soles, soles, soles. There were not many who tiptoed. Not many were poised tautly for a leap. They flitted with their illusions past the curiosities and dead shapes, without holding on to them. In atavistic costumes lacking power, symbols whose spiritual force was spent, constricting the body and forming a dreary extension of the skull, they ushered one another with great courtesy out of life. This life lacked cruelty and grandeur; a late butterfly from a more heroic bloodline diverted it with feudal malice into indifference. Afflicted by the shimmer of past purposes and the breath of boastful hedonism, vain and incapable of suffering, we find the chalice of life pale and devoid of honey.

But this is not humanity's meaning and fate. The human is of the feline race, small, cunning and tenacious, succeeding, lifting himself up. Observation was his, he was the sharpest-minded and most hunterly of all creatures. By observation and creative contemplation he screwed his physical mass to enormous size, while the size of every other system shrank. His will was his fate. Observation his claws. With his eyelashes he marched into worlds unknown to the Earth. With the rays from his eyes he guided rivers that carried him, he must not know whither, into the Good. He is a swift and proficient feline, keeps a sharp lookout, and understands how to be wild. God gave him eyes, for loving and digesting. But to the dragon he gave a belly.

Observation! Observe your own self, and you grow! Under your gaze the muscle swells. You discover yourself, from you to your technology, from your desires to your nature, from pleasure to lust, from haste to pace. And the pace is good. If we've lost it, we want to fetch it back again. We travel. We subdue the savage when we see him coming. And now we fetch back for ourselves what we once traded for our brains, but we don't cancel the trade. We retain what we own. For our brain is our knife, a keen blade of observation that never leaves our side. It's our dark-adapted eye, our nostrils to the wind, our tendons to the dissected limb. Frigid poets who sought calm instead of passion and were poor observers have damaged our powers of analysis. But a good observer delights in his sight. He sees nothing he is not glad to see. He sees so that there may be things to be seen. For the modern man is one who listens until grass has grown over it. This does him good and now it's reached that point where he lies in the grass and sings at the sky.

On the other hand I see in the background the beat of the rearguard, the salvaged remnant and the ruins of age-old desires, the dancing phalanx of the bourgeoisie, a hobbling-machine joyless and sullen. Dully they extend the hollow space in the skull with rigid habits, and prettify their wives with narrow symbols that have lost all metaphorical power. The happy instincts of ancient savageries and the joyful art of

dislocations drag weary and useless through their civilities. A rhythm grown stale twitches galvanically at their corpses, rouses fading musicians to their duty and has them sing full-throated songs. And so you who are lost and forgotten should not upbraid the bourgeois with the stiff helmet of good powers! But you, wild creatures and jungle-souls, may upbraid him, and laugh heartily when the phalanx dances. *For a new bourgeoisie must arise! A new stern habit and breed; hard laws and joyous god-willed dependencies!* Let the pace rattle along, and enjoy yourselves. The entrails crave it, and already the spirits snarl hungrily about you ...

Silence was all around me, and a white light. Was it the spirit shining? I lay on the knife-edge between intellect and vegetation, I could sense how hard and alive everything here was, sensed these shapes of white light that clumped and dispersed at will. I dreamed (oh how good it was, a reality between two realities) higher and more valid perceptions from the sense of life. And from within this state I came to the conclusion that *for every reality, the stronger it is, the more dreamlike.*

Then – a few seconds had elapsed since I left them – I approached again the colourful reveries of the sensualised dream. Zana had crept past the huts. I was staring into empty starlight. Out there on the savannah over towards the jungle, a bitch in heat raised a resounding howl. Some dogs in the village howled back. For some reason the bitch's howl touched my dream-freighted heart. I saw Zana, feet hobbled, down on her knees, arms crossed behind her neck. Then I sensed my male insufficiency. Scales fell from my eyes: all this grace could apply to me; to me too, if I were someone else with a more proportionate figure and a comportment to match. The clothes that hung so grotesquely about my body were displeasing; I felt Zana's disparaging glance directed at them. One would have to ...

Ha, what a marvellous thought, this thought about clothing. In the dream I noticed that I smiled to myself, a gentle satisfied smile. My body registered a pleasant wellbeing. The smile broadened, it came from the brain, from the guts, it encompassed the whole body, and dissolved at last as ringing laughter from my throat. Hallo? An idea had raced through my head. In the distance I saw a man going past, whom I named van den Dusen. A good old acquaintance, a familiar figure of my imagination, a standard for my critical pursuits, an exemplary Average European. He emerged from a hut that stood farther out where the lane curved. The figure was stocky and lumbering, and moved forward despondently. But there was something else about it that made me laugh, made me curl up laughing a deep thunderous laugh.

My back hurt, it creaked, sprayed trickling pain, I suddenly found my right arm had gone to sleep and enticed it by various diversions to a certain amount of activity. The sky was full of stars. They went in pairs and coupled and formed worm-eaten moons. I lay on my back and revelled in the acuity of my eyes and thoughts. Then laughter overcame me, I laughed like a fanatic ...

... and there was van den Dusen emerging from his hut, wearing a white and blue striped bathing costume. I had been dreaming reality!

XIX.

Next day the sun shone bright as ever. Wild rumours were exploding through the village. Last night the god, from his place in the hut that he hadn't left for ever such a long time, had flown off up into the sky. He had given dreadful voice, had gusted and tootled deep into the heart, and vanished into the star-bright night! This happened in full view of the great hunters. When he came back he fought with the white men, and with Luluac's help inflicted a terrible defeat. With ineffable contempt and superiority he had thrown the *paleface* into the fire. Zana had danced as never before.

These were portents; great happenings must be on the way. This was a good day for the Indian soul. But for the nerves it was a baffling day, for everything felt inexplicable. It was one of those days when women quarrel with their menfolk and the two sexes seem to have switched roles, because they're made moody by the absence of their most natural desires. A parched chalk-white sunlight filled the air, and nothing cast a shadow. The jabbering was over the top, everywhere excited voices resounded from the huts; the men were dreamy and lethargic, and the women did all the talking.

"No," I said to van den Dusen, unable to resist a curious glance his way, "let others see how they'll come out of this dilemma, whether they plump for belief or for doubt, for mysticism or horse sense. I've had my fill of last night." He gave me a quizzical look, and I began to shiver but didn't know why. It was the weakness in my limbs, which were sandpapered by pain. And then I thought detailed and sunny thoughts about lots of things, about so many, so many things.

My nerves remained sober and unblurred. It was a thoroughly sensible day, and a general feeling for Nature activated unfamiliar zones with almost a native's capacity for sense impressions. I've never got to know the demons of the exotic. When I woke up this morning I felt hatred, nothing but savage hatred for the glare showering down from above, for the pure unminted molten gold, for the banality of this constant rigid bleached-out space. It was hot, very hot, but I sought in vain for the lyrical sultriness and fervour of existence, as proclaimed by poets.

Mood, this is no mood in ready-packaged form, a meaning made all complete by a couple of nice picturesque phrases. Mood is rather a myriad trivialities that you're on intimate terms with according to your predisposition. A fatherly hand claps me on the shoulder when I travel, and foreign lands are often all too closely related to me. I discover with dismay that the world out there is how I am but would prefer not to be; a mild affinity comes to meet me ... a surprise, given that my homeland is severe with me and always other than I. Setting out to find heroes, total novelties and otherness in the human realm, I always rediscover one and the same thing, and now I must accept that even here all valiant deeds have had their day. The creature in me, so all-powerful and strong, returns to old hunting grounds. Broadways, boulevards and ring roads are exotic, strange, and mystically animated. But the equator is a dead straight

comfortable passage for experiences. In the ribs of the Cordillera one has roughly the same inhibitions, worries and symptoms as in the glories of those grandiose Dolomite porphyry-corpses. And the true man of the world has little sense of the picturesque when his train is brought to a halt on the Texas prairie by a horde of starving hobos, or when in Whitechapel, conforming to all the laws of art, he is held by professional pickpockets gagged by the chimney in a cellar, or in a Viennese suburb half-grown proles threaten him with a pocket-knife. *What's the difference?* Slim would have said, and that was the cathartic attitude.

Verily, I had broken away to see subjective countries, subjective moods and subjective humans, while of course the point was always the precious subject of my own self. But I found nothing that would have been there expressly for me, because everything was there for me, and instead of a wonderful fragrant land I discovered a regular familiar old planet, the Earth.

As I lay here again in my hut, restlessly defying the tropical morn hoisting itself on the awakened jungle's shrilly buzzing assertion of life, I was able to draw a clear distinction between the actual outcome of my voyage of discovery, and the conventional. I had not discovered Brazil, or the Brazilian Emperor, but the planet's Brazilian soul. With all its adventures so outrageously lacking the desired fine-minded trait of the heroic, of what else had my entire journey consisted so far but brief sketches of generic experience? Whither do we travel, other than backwards into our own memories? As my head cleared, I saw myself diving into the hazards of immature situations, into wild primordial oddities and ructions, into the swamps of my blood and its pursuit of vegetable happiness.

And slowly Genesis ripened again towards me, a doppelganger of evolution emerged from the reflections of my brain in a higher sphere, a medium beyond the senses, a different phantoplasma. My brain reprised the entire world-process, constructed a new edition of it, small as a focal point. But as it reflected this evolution, it brought it to maturity. One must not only take the short path from the place where one actually takes the long path, but must also know about it, and hence stray from it, indeed even lie about it. What I was doing was two things in one; that much was clear. I was making a journey of sense-experiences, half of them banal and half of a significant sort; and was making a journey of abstract perception in which every geographical location vanished and one spot on the planet was as good as any other. And without any skilful and active holding of the threads on my part, simply by surrendering to myself and to life, the leitmotiv finally broke vigorously through in the fusion of realities.

From the single cell to self-reflection: it's such a long road, it's the Amazon River of the human soul, it's a Brazilian jungle and river system of the mind!

Observation, please, this is my big trump card, it's a *postulate*. The creative man sees, hears, tastes, smells and touches his way into the things of the world, and oh look, his senses make them real. You might also turn this formula around, implement a

cyclic transposition, so to speak, and its values will remain unchanged. You might even say that everything perceptible is already present as physical mass, and analysis is only the rusty pickaxe doing the deconstruction. In this formulation, it gives expression to the self-evident point of view. But now another thought comes in. *Of any two readings, the richer and less-defined will be the better.* And the richer was obviously the one to which my impulses leaned. In that higher sphere of reason where the substantial world is a transposable illusion and only its consequences count as thought, both readings were superseded, and the original symbol of the waterwheel found its application. Within the favoured phantoplasm you can hold either to the norm or to the paradox. The paradox is more correct to the extent that it proves more fruitful. Truth is a capacity for further learning; stasis the only lie.

In my case paradox, as had happened so often already, was on my side, it held enough illumination for an entire century, and though it might be no less provisional than all outcomes of thinking, still a powerful joy radiated from it to all those of good faith. It takes strength to think up a contradiction without resolving it or making it coherent. I wasn't in top form at all times in emulating my own highest mental achievements. It took an act of violence, which was often inadvisable when my strength could hardly rise above its normal level. But what did this prove? That for highly-normed thinking, being incorrect was not sufficient by itself; attention also had to be paid to the relationships given by the phantoplasm: these had to be overcome, not circumvented.

Watch out! I said to myself, and my face screwed up with the tormenting pain of cogitation, as if I were a person weeping who has, so to speak, been reduced to his minimum. Watch out! ... observation is a postulate. *To investigate is to construct.* Here's the evidence. Observations assiduously pursued have enabled us to hack away at numerous world-views and world-feelings that once were received wisdom, bombproof. The life they shaped was neither more nor less certain than today's. What they didn't know didn't hurt them. But what did hurt them they knew all the more deeply in themselves. God had the same value as a university professor. Cultures with no psychology of the Ego and its objects anchored the child-human's wellbeing no worse than the most absolute enlightenment. This proves that with our analysis, our scepticism and our enlightenment we don't discover what was earlier overlooked, but rather observation itself has brought forth immensities.

The thought of progress as the exploitation of a gold mine is the creation of a progressive culture, a mind with one extra motion and dimension. But the dimension is there only because of the mind, progress is there only because of the culture. It progresses, but is not itself a progression to other cultures. That Moki flies through the air is no more or less certain than that our aviators suffer broken bones. But we observe the latter situation with the help of newspaper reporters, and so it's real. But now– and this is highly mystical and vertigo-inducing – it's possible to share observations, observationally infect an entire gathering, an entire public, as by the way has been observed. And so you could probably persuade an Amazonian Indian that a

famous aviator has just landed upside down. And he'd find it hard to extricate himself from this religious and cultural event. Everyone observed it, and now he observes it the same way.

You might surmise that observation is an author, writing his book from out of his own head. The keener the observer, the greater his Ego's plagiarism. I see swamps, predatory animals and human hunters only because everything within me urges towards the shaping of these phenomena. I discover this principle in me, and it becomes my key to the world out there. Now I observe the observer, I pounce on him, I stretch and leap high by force of my visual will and step by step bestride dimensions at first shadowy and then hard-tamped ...

The conceptual dependence, however, that arises between me and the observed world feeds back into my wellbeing. Between transcendental and epidermal goings-on there emerges the most important – no, the unique connection. Thus brain and viscera resemble one another in their composition, and what lies between is just instinct, and spatialisation of the more final and unique truths of life. This halfway house with many possible dimensions is what I have dubbed phantoplasma. Paris is different from the jungle river, and not the same today as it was thousands of years ago, while brain and viscera remain unchanged. But the coming phantoplasma, its advantages over others accounted for only by those ultimate human profundities which until quite recently gave preference to life's aesthetic trimmings – this anticipated system of life is *the world of hunter-humans and observer-humans*. I create the type. But before I formed the wish, it was already heralded within me. He will be born with the mirror. And his head, this blank mirror-surface insubstantial in itself, casts its reduced and magnified, its coarsened and condensed image on all that it encounters.

To what end is this race travelling? To attain to humanity within itself. You don't voyage to distant lands with strange climates and puzzling experiences: if you did you'd suffer disappointment from meeting nothing but philistinism and disillusion – and you've never been crazy about those. But in his travels the man of the world, precursor of the new type, is bent on anything but harvesting impressions. Seemingly he travels backwards into his experiences, into world history, into biology, and even holds the primal cell as a mask before his face. But even this is an old outdated standpoint. He sets himself in motion around a problem, and he crosses the ocean for the sake of a figure that for a hundred years to come may not stand large as life on two legs. He fights murderous duels with paradox, and expends enormous energy on overcoming dimensions. For he knows that the direction of his thinking is only half.

Does pure thought not proceed in contradictions, to that higher frontier that runs atop the sufficient reasons of the phantoplasms? Always he thinks in a half-dimension, in dreams or waking life, and never in their higher unity. The world is round, so what in fact is above, below, what is left or right, high or deep? Observation is the route he takes back into marvellous primal causes – but does he sense that actually he's storming on ahead? His brain is an inviolable blank mirror. The past? Pardon me! The

future! The past is a book of seven seals. Memory points to the future. Thus he senses the connections that seem to lie within the phantoplasma, as a distribution of entities of which the phantoplasma itself is the lowest. This is where he makes a past for himself, that it may be a metaphor of his future.

Does he conceal within him, this man, contradictions that a child could resolve? A child perhaps, but probably not anyone who has had experience, or has been an experience. What does it do? The hygienics of thinking lend him strength, passion and justification. Contradiction is a premium brand of thought. Can one conceive a late-stage unfragmented dimension in which the physical finds transcendental expression?

Time has been revealed as the fourth dimension. Is there not a fifth, and can one not activate it? Ha, let me try! I brace myself with both shoulders against Time, I attempt to force it from its path, I challenge myself to an act of violence. A line forced from itself? A surface, good! Now when I think – I can feel it already! – and at the same time think the opposite – hurrah, we have it! Thinking is temporal. When I think and at the same time think the opposite, I push Time into a higher conceptual form that is not Time. Time is made perpendicular to itself. I attain a new dimension. The edifice of Time has stirred, it trembles in silence, we've had a glimmer of a lurch, a huffing breath of success. Watch out, we'll bring Time round yet! Can you see around corners? We now, we think around corners. We think in crannies, edges, crystals. And you can depend on it, we'll bring it to the point where we think, so to speak, in dodecahedrons, where thoughts simultaneously shove themselves together a whole bunch of times! Phew, the demands this makes!

I sat up. Outside the entrance, muddy ground tamped smooth by innumerable feet lay in the bleached glare. As my awareness of it grew, there came an ill-humoured urge to weep. I felt all my limbs were autonomous, they were nervous, and each seemed to have a different plan. This brought an uneasy sense of fragmentation. I pondered: what has happened? And believed I'd be able to calm myself down. I was still in full possession of my mental and physical faculties. Inside the hut everything was in excellent order. It occurred to me I could pack up, for after everything that had happened yesterday, Slim would no doubt at last get serious about his intentions! Hurrah, so there's another change coming! ... But this expression of an upswing in my mood came across as rather feeble. Well, but still. So? Tcha ... no, it didn't work. I couldn't get around it.

And because I couldn't find my way around myself, spiteful tears came to my eyes. Nothing in particular was going on, but my capacity for joy was severely diminished. I felt my back; it still hurt, swathes of pain kept jabbing down my spine. It was a vivid reminder that I'd laid myself bare before Zana. For there could no longer be any doubt: a tormenting memory reminded me of the expressions on the faces of the various witnesses, and with enough precision to call out as false yesterday's audaciousness and nonchalance in relation to my surroundings. Could I admit I was suffering on Zana's account? But it wasn't lovesickness, just sexual affliction. I knew my sexuality was impaired, the self-restraint in my loins was a challenge, and my manhood was being

impugned. Denial as a sexual being was experienced as physical tyranny. I wanted to rage, pull down straw walls, ally myself with Checho. I was hysterical.

What now? What I want to know is why do people go travelling. Does one maybe travel as an escape? That's no use. For even if at last, dear Johnny, in a new land among a different sort of people you find a healthy relationship to your environment, you'll only lose yourself again. If someone flies the coop, heads off to foreign parts, pitches his tent in a godforsaken village in the jungle: he's faced with the same task of creating a status for himself. He sees himself in contrast to the dancing phalanx of the bourgeoisie, the closed circles, the dignitaries and beauties and ornaments, in a word: the *beat*. Wherever he goes he carries within him the inner person for whom geography does not exist. And now a street in the bustling centre of a big city is more exotic than the Brazilian wilderness.

A free and happy person knows how to attain balance within the conventions of any society in the world, avoiding disruption to either himself or it. A mean-spirited fellow with a depraved attitude will everywhere find eyes upon him, he's cold-shouldered, his worthy person has landed up in the wrong sort of place ...

Now, there may be souls who turn up everywhere as guests, never lift a finger but let everyone pay court. They have a powerful personal magic, high-tension expectations, you might say a sweet tooth; no country would dare disappoint them, the most impressive rarities are laid at their feet. This freeloading band of world travellers travels without personality. People who are never at home in themselves find that everywhere is the Other. But whoever's comfortable in his own skin sees with surprise how the jungle extends to him with a generous hand the selfsame eternal necessities, and seems to have nothing more to give. He's a descendant of that northern race against which a horde of lions was unleashed – they beat them back with their cudgels, thinking them tawny dogs. And ever and again, when the ancient hot-blooded bearers of culture grow lazy and shape life into nothing more than a circus performance, when with senility the pleasures of observation regress to childish beginnings and the hunter-instinct atrophies to the comfort of a seat at the Variety, these cudgels of old remain alive in their blood. Life is just such a lion, and sexuality, and foreign lands, and all the other barbed things that have recently been laid out before us. Then the time has come, then one appears among us and proclaims the 'tawny dogs', we step forward blithely to look the objects of our observation in the eye, set up a reality for ourselves, and strike the new nominal-lions dead as dogs.

That's if the subject were ever to come up in European society. What's all this about Amazon jungles, hoho, do tell, do tell! ... Ladies and gentlemen, I regret to say I must disappoint you. There's nothing to say about Amazon jungles. They hardly exist. I advise you to visit some village of cabbage-fields, or even a coffee house. The Tropics have been brought to your notice under a false colouring. Don't imagine you can take part in a panther-hunt; there they throttle the predator in a ring of beaters, and that happens among us too, in the best families. Dangers are smoothed over, and under the Southern Cross you'll lie in more tedium than under the electric bulb of your hotel

room. If I were to tell of life in the jungle, its usages and situations, you'd suspect me of joking, of allowing myself to wax satirical at your expense. Fräulein Zauner – and here I bow to the possessor of that renowned name, and invite you, ladies and gentlemen, to give our revered friend and artist three cheers! – so, Fräulein Zauner would take it as a personal affront were I to tell of my experiences with one of her lady colleagues in the far southwest.

And now in fact I must make a confession. I am not the hero and adventurer you take me for. I am grateful for your obliging opinion, but must admit it puts me in a tight spot. It impels me to a gesture. And if you go on like this, it won't be long before I'll be unable to tell the difference between myself and what I am in your eyes. For the truth is that on my extensive travels, undertaken with perhaps more thoroughness and depth than those of many another traveller, I have learned nothing and, what's more important, have forgotten nothing, like those well-known professional monarchs. All my strengths and sorrows, passions and inhibitions remain intact. What happened to me was not what happened to Peer Gynt, the visionary with no personality. I have always known where my imperium has remained incomplete, and where the task and mission of the Bringer of Passions await me.

For deepest down in the human being lies the hunger for passion. The passion motive is the fulcrum of all vegetable and animal life. This is surely not news to you. But perhaps what is new is this: in the animal an apparatus has established itself – more refined and intricate the higher the type: the imagination. This, although it rests on the principle of reflection, is the vehicle of every shaping and creative power. It observes and reflects, and from the rocky cliff of what exists appears to mine the gold seam of perception; in reality it tempers this rock, this phantoplasm, only by means of experience.

To the eternal laws of eternally-unchanging Nature that are fulfilled in us – rather, whose fulfilment we probably are – each one of us brings a pair of compasses that we've invented, a system of reasons. But these reasons are never compelling, not even for our existence. So we who are gathered here tonight are also born liars and cheats, pathological babblers who falsify the effects we have on one another. Our real intercourse takes place via organic parts of the body unknown to us, that hardly any of us will ever get to know. We influence each other via panics. How dreadfully alone and isolated from one another we would be, if an act of consciousness was the only thing that could unite us! And now you see that what I experienced on my travels was just as dull and ordinary and lacking in savour as anything among human beings could be. But it was granted me to travel a short while in an alien phantoplasm, to plug myself into an alien life-act, and let it play out.

There was an Indian maid called Zana, of a small distinctive stature. I loved her, for me it was a law that I loved her. But what did I know of her, what could I know of her? All of you who are my guests here tonight would have been just as foolish, helpless, impetuous or clueless as I was in this alien world. The little frictions of the many Egos in a given neighbourhood constitute the course of life here as there, and here as there

create the torment of intimacy and then the relief, or cold pain, of parting. And for her sake I shall refrain from a comprehensive report, so that no one need feel targeted. For all my experiences were such that they always merely alluded to the fundamental experiences of my culture and yours.

The essential remains the same everywhere under the stars. All that brings change to the monotony of travel is the altered form of intuition, the vague memory of primordial conditions; the unfamiliar phantopiasm. Not one of you, if I should look down from the podium and name to myself the types of our culture that fill this hall, would be able to form a conception of what I should really be telling you. Your intuition is too one-sided, itself too much a higher jungle and too organic to be able to reflect within it a different, thoroughly primitive and more immediate phantopiasm. How can I bring before your eyes the existences of the jungle ... perhaps, I tell myself, I could make it my life's work as a writer, set in motion a problem of education, a modernising of your concepts. For I suspect in advance that the future and the most ancient past are in contact. But you, ladies and gentlemen, find yourselves at this moment equally far from both. And yet it would be worthwhile to guide the attention of each individual towards the important fact that he comes from the jungle and that modern life strives to release in him again all the ancient virtues of former times.

Now I presume you all agree with my audacious yet extremely metaphor-rich assertion, when I identify our culture in its position of eminence as a culture of the fifth dimension. This is a metaphor, for please note that I myself speak here as a creature of the phantopiasm, and the real effects that I appear to exercise upon you with the aid of my dialectic are simply nothing more than a logical amalgamation of events that have been transported away from our oversight ... Hm. Pay attention now! The jungle-human has a phantopiasm. It unfolds in the second dimension. Only the cleverest heads among us grasp the fifth dimension; this peculiar shifting of thought within time: organised thought, which I might say bears the same relation to inorganic thought as the dualistic sex act bears to parthenogenesis. Those who can think in this way are very few. But the jungle-human does not even know the fourth dimension, Time, where Space is washed away. For only the idea of progress could make the concept of time completely congruent with a moment of intuition. The jungle-human sees organisms large and small, creatures young and old, he knows about growth and understands it as corporeal wellbeing. But he knows no stratification and no development. From his first breath to the last he remains stationary. Do not imagine that the jungle-human, were you to appear before him as the representative of a more mature race, would have any insight into your superiority. He has no concept of the time that lies stored within you. He lives within eternity, in a space of beingness that could never be swept from under his feet to a higher form of existence, to technical transformations or mental manoeuvres. Only he who loses eternity discovers Time – we lose and discover.

So, does the jungle-human dwell in the third dimension? No. In the second. His life plays out on a surface. He hasn't even arrived at the idea of space. My evidence, in

short: he has no depth. You may assert that this is just wordplay. And I counter that I have learned to gather my convictions from word games. Language is reliable, oh how reliable! All philosophemes and world-views which were sooner or later labelled as errors were born of words. Sooner or later: that means too late. You know the proverbs: pluck the rose in bloom, strike while the iron is hot. *Come to an act of creation in a timely fashion*, not laggardly, but punctually, being present – this is the truth of everything! For you see, being correct is made up not merely of inerrancy, but of the beat, the pace. *The only valid truths are those with pace*.

And the wordforms possess a beat. For one who is so inclined, there arises from them a marvellous phantoplasm. But the jungle-human has no language in our sense: for him it is not a high-degree intuition, as with us. He's still at home with the primary arts: music, dance, painting, and his being – his root-existence – is reflected in the stimuli these offer. He observes, so to speak, with other organs than we do. His observations are two-dimensional. He observes a surface. We observe in depth, in evolution and inversion. Our observing extends finally to ourselves. We are introspective, he is barbaric. Both of us have curiosity.

One moment please. I must backtrack to bring you with me ... What does the modern traveller experience? Not just the wonderful and extravagant excesses of his sensitive nervous system, but also the relevant words and consciousness. But if you come away from this, if you move a step farther along in your thought, undertake an eversion, an inversion of temporal thinking into the fifth dimension, and think up for yourselves an artistic sense of sight for this colossal consciousness so full of responsibility, then you have a painter, one who has returned to the origins of painting, and one who gives to painting what belongs to it: the surface ... and who – despite his emphasis on physicality, despite his primeval interpretation of the human's observing faculty as barbaric – is of all artists who have even been the most spiritual, the most scientific and most ego-adept depicter. And then again you understand I'm not talking of Kelwa, say, the jungle-artist – I could have thrown you a few crumbs of his – but of our revered painter-inventor and friend: I rise to my feet and offer a toast to our Roroschkin, this Leonardo of our race, the Gothic genius, the artist of this latest and newest dimension into which we have just now stepped. We, the transposers of Time, Logic and Thought into Higher Thought! Long live Roroschkin!

Very well, ladies and gentlemen. Now I would ask for a moment of quiet. You agree with me and rejoice in Roroschkin – this pleases me greatly. It's a good sign. Let the roar from our fifth dimension also deafen the average mood of the current products of our culture. I am glad to see once again a beat that encloses our egos in iron brackets. *Encloses!* The culture of our dimension is so to speak shot high into the sky, much that belongs organically to the jungle-human we are now fetching back again. The main thing is that we are as one in setting aside this dereliction. We must become more physical – and already we are. The beat flies towards us, the pace enters our stride. We still have opportunity, we can still become strong and happy. I once compared the noise of our cultural life to the distant inarticulate shuffling of feet past the display

cabinets, stuffed animals and other fancies in a museum. But I hear the signal. We utter the rallying cry, gather around the new human, slowly but surely, from every part of the world's cloisters, pick up the new pace. In short, we set the pace and secure ourselves in our phantoplasma. New human assets are on the march. The greatest of passions is to set the pace!

And this is no doubt all about passion, and as I started so now I return to it. Passion is the whole point, life in and of itself, the element of all dimensionality. It exists in us as a mirror-apparatus. Its rays refract in fivefold finitude. For every transposition of a dimension to the next higher is reflexive. And are not all intuitions and stages of observation – whether active in the phantoplasma of the paradoxical human or that of the jungle-human, or in the phantoplasma that with its utterly other causality we call the dream – are they not a more or less entangled system of mirrors? Everything that's reflected, that's reflected into infinity, everything for which space and time and higher things have been formed, is passion. I have found it in barbaric cultures, rich systems of physis with a bounded pace, and find it in the Asiatic intellectual culture within which we number ourselves. No decision as to primacy can be made here. Culture is culture and as such incomparable. The idea of evolution is given only within our phantoplasma. No other culture will admit to progress or even grasp what it is; not unless it's decaying and alienated from itself. Only one characteristic is certain: those cultures are physical, this one is intellectual. The mirror-principle, observation, extends across those that know nothing of depths and distances, across the External that has no internal structure. Curiosity delights in barbarism. But we call vivisection scientific. We go into the depths, arrive at the dimension of time, motion and speed, and in the final dimension of paradox turn ourselves, so to speak, once again towards the outside: we've become apparently positive and physical, apparently primitive in intuitions and purely dimensional. The truth is that only now have we come again to the full flower of an ultimate outcome in our intellectual development. The mind is dead; long live the mind! The mind ...

XX.

At this point I was disturbed by Checho. I rose from my mat and the pallet of palm straw, stepped to the doorway and peered into the glare of the morning sun. Zana was standing outside. I looked calmly at her, my eyes cold. Standing still her little figure seemed skinny and unlovely. She could do nothing to me. I had lost my soul, surrendered it so to speak to a jungle soul, and had now won it back. My pace was in me; I knew that out there, roughly from where the sun had been climbing since dawn, a society of frock-coated gentlemen and pretentious ladies awaited me. I could attach myself to their kind. We held séances, put ourselves in a trance and conceived a new humanity. We had pace, the new pace, and every one of us had a salvation. The poison of analysis was applied for purposes of rapture. All future happiness must be based on living at peace with the instincts of one's curiosity ...

The dusky dancer's skinny figure made no move, even when, stepping out of the doorway, I tried to push past her. She regarded me with fuzzy looks. As I attempted with a sudden surge of energy to direct a firm compelling gaze at the little varnish-brown oval orbs that she placed in my way like an animal's elastic strength, and sought in vain to escape from that woolly look, I cautiously nudged her aside with my hip. Then something unexpected happened. With the quite insubstantial weight of her slight body she leaned into me to block my exit, braced against me with her strong small muscles; in her whole little person was the joy and triumph of a predator cub exercising its play-instinct by happily interpreting any incoming movement as a challenge. That same deadening sensation, the same gloom of defeat came over me again as that time when, for the sake of the delighted mothers, we'd had to endure the devotion of their urchins. The un-power of this move, effected with a fraction of the verve which I myself should have been able to apply as a minimal counter-force, sucked away my newfound energy.

We're not up to trivial tasks, because we are habituated to the difficult. If it were Luluac standing there, I'd have leaped at him without a thought, so lightning-fast and sure of aim were these fists filled by fury with my blood. At that moment I'd have relished danger and looked it straight in the eye without blinking. But irritation found me weak and perplexed. I yielded, and went back inside, where Checho was fiddling with our packs.

But what was this? As soon as Zana saw me give up the struggle, she threw back her head like a cocky back-alley kid and glared scornfully at everything around. The insult she felt was not so much from me, but from the things that had witnessed it. She reacted with refined rage to the humiliation that lay in my yielding. Now I'd have to propitiate her, we both knew. And ridiculous as the situation was, atonement too was no longer on the cards.

Vengefully I savoured the bitter humour of the situation. I swiftly grabbed one of the bottles of eau de cologne that Checho had just retrieved from among dirty clothes in one of the Dutchman's bags. The atomiser had survived the trip from Rio. I squeezed the bulb and sprayed directly at the girl's face. And now it seemed Zana would attain the goal of her longing. She wanted to experience something good, and did so. When she felt the coolness of the spray on her skin, she shrank back, uttered a little cry, and began to retreat towards the doorway. But the cool fire became a delightful prickling. A showerbath of coolness was no unwelcome sensation to a hard-boiled woman of the Tropics. The hands she held up to her nose smelled nice; she sniffed the strange flowery scent with a judicious expression. A moment later she was at me again. Several times I had to free myself and envelop her from every side in dewy fragrance while she dodged and grabbed at me, head lowered protectively to her breast. Finally I pulled off the atomiser, bulb and all, and drenched her in quick slanting gouts of the remaining liquid.

Laughing we tugged one another this way and that over the bags and straw pallets. She grabbed me by the shirt, the arms, tried with a man's violence to dislocate my

wrist. She exerted herself, braced obstinately on her toes. Anyway, she was hurting me, so I became angry and grabbed roughly at her wrists. I held her firmly at arm's length. She twisted about, screwed up her face, and her head twisted the sinewy swelling throat about her shoulders, breasts and neck in time to my pulse, her jaw jutted wide as a viper's down over her own body to the points of attack. Every movement of her system, riveted all the while to the two contact points at her ankles, cost her considerable pain. Throat and head hung forward from the shoulders as if over the edge of a basin, seething with rage and hate like the scum on a toxic potion. At that moment she ceased to be human. In her gestures was the formless, presuppositionless demonism of a mass animated by narrow instincts. She was an unsubstantial body with a single dull consciousness: self-preservation.

When the distorted body, disjointed by the imagination into impossible shapes, suddenly acquired an abrupt flickering shimmering life, it was as eerie as if a crumpled rag stormed flaring out over itself in rage. Something of the hatred of the proto-organic and the elementary lay in her instinct, a sullen feline reactivity, as you might say a direct one-dimensional existence, a formless primitive extension of Being. Her head tossed angrily between her shoulders, seeking an escape as all the while I kept the muscles of her body stiff and checkmated by the painful pressure on the nerves of her wrists.

It took a while, in a kind of over-exertion or extreme ecstasy her eyes had retreated to blue shadows, when suddenly she opened them wide and directed at me a nameless soulful look. At the same time I felt her muscles slacken. She heaved a deep sigh. Her wrists lay inert against my constraining hands, the inner surfaces of which were beginning to tingle. Beneath the girl's smooth skin, the stringy sinews and tender bones of her arms snuggled into the sensitive flesh of my thumb-tips. I was seized with delight. But behind her sweetness there still lurked the threat of a bite to my belly, and so I held her away from me the more she tried to close in.

Checho was standing off to the side behind me, bent over the baggage. I had no clear view of him, only a vague and fragmented image was caught by the extreme edge of my visual field. Nevertheless I knew for sure that his head was turned towards us. A smile must have lain in his face, expressing something unwelcome. I felt his grin burning into my neck. My irritability was a torment at this moment, and I felt embarrassed. But then, before I could come to a decision, I had already jumped back. I had kicked out, Zana tumbled against the doorpost, I broke away, Checho's crouching figure came into my field of vision. There was the grin, tormenting and envious. Zana screamed. A tall shadow was standing behind her on the yellow clay floor of the entrance. Slim bent his head, stepped in and pushed Zana roughly ahead of him. She looked sulky, but he laughed. A few words had her cowering against the wall. Slim stood hard and tall in the hut's space and filled it with a great cold presence.

"We're leaving tomorrow," he said coolly, and stood beside Checho over the baggage. "The dame's coming too. She knows already."

This laid itself upon me as a comforting relief. I glanced at Zana. Her brown ovals flickered at me, elastic animal-eyes. Dreadful hope enwrapped me like a shroud.

A quarter of an hour after Slim sent the Indian woman away, we went striding through the village. We felt forced to a stop outside Kelwa's hut. Shouts and sounds of quarrelling came from the enclosed front yard. A vengeful haughty voice dominated. Something was wrong here; this was confirmed by a certain cringing aspect to the men slinking past along the lanes of the sun-scorched village. The women had thrown off their charming docility and were attending to their family's needs with grim disregard.

Life seemed a degree more ordinary and empty; the nimbus of the exotic had faded and I felt a powerful equipotency with these formerly intimidating surroundings. Ha, had I at last struck the right note in myself and attained my own pace? Had the old conqueror-mood at last achieved balance, and would I despite everything attain to my conquests? We're off in the morning! Now, as I stood with one foot in the distance, on the journey with its exertions and its toils, my good sense of self came awake. Woman troubles were over and done with: whatever pleasures might still be expected from that direction – I thought of Zana and my mood lightened – could be taken along as a desirable extra. It's all kicking off again! Up, up and away! Maybe we'll find the treasure – a genuine treasure. And one adventure after another waits faithfully for us ...

So, what is Slim saying there to this Xantippe of an artist's wife? I directed my whirling skull towards the din.

"Jerusalem!" Slim called out. "The whole village is hung over! Here you see the one and only original morning after the night before. Once this pack of felines loses its mind in utter bliss. it gets whacked in the kidneys next day like the most decadent boulevardier. The capacity to absorb pleasure has limits, even here. You'll feel homesick for the temperate zone again, Johnny. The true pleasure the organism needs does not reflect its consciousness, however humble that may be. Nothing is known of it, or its uptake. The morning after is also a kind of joie de vivre. Humility and self-contempt and sickness are essential to gratification, just as much as the positive forces. These vessel-and-tube systems of cell tissue you hear honking and tootling all around, whistling from every pore the tormenting need to go on living, they are today harmless people. I'd reckoned on it. Men and women for a while exchange their charms ... maybe a wise rule of Nature's economy lies hidden behind it. As I say, I knew it was coming and planned accordingly. Today they're fragile. Today we'll pull the expedition together – and Zana's coming along. If we're not out of the village by daybreak tomorrow, it'll go badly for us. For last night ... we really blew it. You didn't have to do handstands. You made us look ridiculous. Say, whatever were you thinking? I guess you can't handle the manioc beer?"

"No, that's where you're totally wrong," I burst out in annoyance. At first his words had aroused my sense of humour. His way of expressing a phenomenon – nothing human is alien to me – seemed appropriate. I didn't believe he'd reckoned on it; that was blatant boasting. But he was clever to lay it out like that. I could see through him.

He was smart, the American. His were the deed, the powerful act, but mine were a nose for clues and an alert consciousness. A whole slew of the ideas he uttered came from me; he was impressionable. God only knows! He knew how to make an attack play into his hands and then concentrate it. A little nightmarish, this was. When Slim enthuses about my ideas, and misgivings whiz through my head, should one conclude with a result from sensibility that would brush against Slim's contempt? No, it was advisable to forego petty satisfactions. Faced with megalomaniacs and plagiarists, one repudiates the instinct for self-preservation.

"Whatever do you mean," I said, "I'm a Senior in a German fraternity. Man, you've no idea how that sort of fellow has to hold his drink. Seriously, I don't appreciate such talk. You can see I'm a trusting sort; so please, leave it alone. Small slights are hard to ignore. So, if we're going to remain friends ..."

"Well," said the American, and added almost casually as he tried to peer over the straw palisade around Kelwa's yard, "self-satire and self-exaggeration are also one way to bridge over a new situation ... What's more, the Dutchman, who's also not from a race of sissies, swears just like you about his head for drink. And look at the guy now. Last night he felt a duty to play the Indian. He set something up in the jungle. Zana seems to have had something to do with it, but ..."

"Van den Dusen?"

"Yes, sir. But I know one thing: no man is going to touch this girl! My gun's already loaded for him."

Slim has big bones and a sturdy frame. What happens if I leap at his throat? I've nothing against threats. But vulgarities and exaggerations rub me up the wrong way. Now with my next move I could have broken the head of an unsuspecting man even if he was stronger than me. Slim, Slim, that was not just outrageous, it was stupid. In principle there was no defence against me as long as I took myself seriously.

"Yes, by golly!" I cried. "What's up with the fellow? Where is he?"

"He's lying in his hut all wearied of life, for the jungle inflicted nocturnal indignities on him. Maybe it was the broad. He's crazy. We'll pay him a visit shortly."

With this Slim had bluntly confirmed that he was in charge, and forbade me the girl before I could draw breath. And now suddenly he was in a contented mood and responded to the calls of Kelwa, who had meanwhile noticed us, with jokes. The two of them conversed dramatically once we were admitted to the yard.

The images standing around diverted me. The dog-genius with its smug long-snouted face – it really was a face – was still sniffing and licking at an act of love and at life. I seemed to recognise the suffering creature beside it. It was clearly a puma, chewing at itself from either hunger or sexual need. Its lower body was swollen to a sack, the head and shoulders were scrawny. Its mouth gaped open to the very salivary glands and stretched up to the sky, slightly curved like a vowel letter. It harboured a marrow-shattering cry of pain. Alongside the animal images the usual array of bodies

made themselves at home, figures of two and three acts cobbled together. I had to glance across at Slim. He was conversing animatedly with Kelwa beside the tableaux, patting him on the shoulder.

An idea came to me. Did he stand there enthusing about the whole, because he understood a part? For who could approach close to this life of the mind, to this so fundamentally different phantoplasm, this mode of perception that had survived difficult upheavals? It was an act of desperation, damnable dialectics, that was it! Maybe the blood, blood that trickles through the mountain ranges of the brain, had detected something. Who was now the real artist? This international adventurer with his sophisticated experiences, who motivated the consciousness of this mode of perception and was already in fact riding the coach home, or Kelwa, the native, who simply painted thanks to the connections between his brain and his hand muscles?

I stared at the juxtaposition of colours. Like a riddle they dissolved again as soon as you thought you'd got it. And suddenly it seemed to shift in my favour. The impression of reality came speeding from the tableaux, and when I reached this point I felt for the second time that sense of transformation. Was I looking with a native's racial consciousness? A world of forms opened to me, which technically must have lain deep. But its interpretation was laid no less bare in the workings of each entity than in the most convoluted three-dimensional groups. Here everything was appropriate and satisfying, more restless than any of Nature's efforts, more heroic, so to speak, than the primordial form. Everything was *form*. Indeed, was there in fact such a thing as technical progress, or was it not rather the case that altered consciousness pulled behind it an altered perceptiveness?

Perceiving – observing – means wanting. We submit to a magnificent suggestion. Knowledge of forms and things comes before awareness. In essence, the shaped non-dimensionality underlies everything. What is the individual human? A symbiosis of animals. This man Kelwa possessed a phantoplasm appropriate to his life as a hunter. His kind of eyes howled and snuffled in my head like dogs, it was for them that the human lay exposed in such complacent ugliness, as for example in these images. Had anyone ever asked the dog what its world looks like? Would he recognise Leonardo's ladies as portraits of humans, would he actually find anything comprehensible in them? Well then, I voted for Kelwa's vision. What we extract by analysis from Being is merely a synthesis of what we need for our passions. Kelwa's life is a complete system, a culture. If I should happen to return to him in this fifth dimension I've discovered, good, then after thirty generations I regain my life as *the hunt*. I see people and animals in their related form – for the form is a cover for my will to live. In this gaze that I bestow on them I assemble all the passions of this state of existence.

My dimension includes one that is called Evolution, a substitute for "Time". Let us seek the art of "Time". For every dimension has its art. Music is the non-dimensional, the point, being-in-itself, and the salient point: passion. We have now, thank God, discovered that passion does not come to an end even in disharmonies, and that by a word it is made omnipresent. In the first dimension we have the art of the line:

architecture. Which was familiar to the earliest people. Gravity is the primal line. Has not every age sensed that architecture is the nearest blood-relative to music? Oh how clear it all becomes!

Kelwa is a great artist, for with his extraordinary dimensional purity he presents a pictorial analogy of the world. I shall pay court to his dusky wife. Whoever scoops love from this well ... It's conceivable that Kelwa has a sharp eye for the human prototype! How she peeps out at us! There's contact even in her eyes. Apart from contrary moods, he must be a happy husband and artist ...

With cool scholarly passion I buried myself in the simple symbolism of the images. The screaming puma in its bodily need could be a tribal totem. I'd noticed it as a blue tattoo on Madam Kelwa's belly. I pushed closer to her, and to start a conversation I pointed with a silent finger and exaggeratedly meaningful looks at what it was on her body that attracted my interest. I asked about the puma. There ensued a most embarrassing scene. The woman, a look of unutterable horror on her face, suddenly threw herself down on her back and with legs splayed distended the tattooed body part to an uncanny size. It was as if the entire lower body came erect, and by a kind of magnetic elevation the belly approached close to my fingertip. But this closing in was, as I realised later once contact had been broken off, merely imagined. My finger was not drawn and held tight; I held it willingly, despite experiencing the opposite, pointing at its target. What was dreadful, indeed almost ridiculous about this scene was that for the whole duration of the fascination that emanated from my finger to the wheezing squinting female and back again, I moved my slanting finger not even an inch away from the belly. The demon of this sensuality impelled me to huge astonishment, my puzzlement knew no bounds and was oppressive as a nightmare.

When I came to myself, I had to heave a deep unending sigh. How strange that I hadn't released my finger from its immobility. But at that moment I had absolutely no memory of myself, albeit I couldn't marvel enough at the fact that it was *I* who stood there so immobile. It was totally clear to me that I didn't have to do it, and that no power somehow contrived on Earth could have forced me to it.

This course of events remains all the more puzzling to me, having experienced it several times under that sun. Is our will so creative that it can drag into our observations the *real* effects of *imagined* powers? Or does our consciousness veil the genuine workings of Nature with the aid of a visual will? Is our will the *instigator*, or a *side effect*? This thought now arose in me for the first time. It vanished again. It would have destroyed all the conceptual results of the last several days. The fact was that my reflection and its conclusion were theoretical; in practical terms, for that moment I had utterly forgotten about myself. I calmly pre-empted the effect of a change of stance in my thinking; but it was a fact I had stood there with my finger pointed slanting at the distended belly and my eyes popping like suction cups. My mind was free; my body lay under a spell. And then I was again in practical possession of my powers. I was still standing motionless; with a slight and not quite undoubting curiosity I resolved to retreat – now!

And before I thought the thought, my hand dropped and the tension in me slackened; but all these sensations lacked something I'd like to call seriousness. Everything was thought out and mentally motivated, there was no illicit working of occult powers. Only the native woman's behaviour belied the normality of the event.

She lay three paces from me. Her belly sat there like a pregnancy, a huge ripe fruit, swollen, and perhaps as it were impaled on my finger. It deflated visibly as I stepped back and let my hand drop. The woman's head, partly plucked in a tonsure but otherwise with shoulder-length hair, was bent back, but her eyes just behind the lids clambered straight as a spear towards me. The mouth between the full cheeks was open, I could see the purple cavity and the craggy trapezoid jaw. Irregular gasps forced their way past the mucous membranes with a thin rattling, accompanied by snarling noises. The body stretched on all fours; the lower body gazing out in sad yearning was the midpoint; it moved in the vague flattened spheres I had already observed in Zana.

As the brain regained its dominion, the human creature gradually worked its way up into the light, and a befuddling amiability and modesty could be seen in the woman's strange expressions. She pulled herself together and listened. Slim and Kelwa could be heard conversing behind the hut. I stood at ease, very respectful, and allowed my booted feet to be kissed. I laid my hand in her greasy hair with no hint of disgust. I said nothing, just nodded my head. She rasped something in her tongue. I nodded again. And now she stood, unfolding herself into a small female of remarkable build. The upper body was thin, the chest flat with long breasts, shoulders carved from wood, clavicles jutting like bony ornaments, arms with the lower arm turned outwards, lying close to the body in the elbow region. But the hips were rounded and not without charm. The backbone, vibrating like an upreared snake, dropped away to an upswing that vanished in the double swell of firm malleable flesh. The little red-blue skirt of berries and pearls that had come awry now fell decently back over the three-pointed shadow-star.

She spoke to me as if I couldn't help but understand the natural expression of her not unfriendly attitude. She looked trustingly up at me. Now I noticed she had big completely brown eyes that warmed. The upper lids were broken like asymmetric gables. Under the nose she displayed the inevitable ornament of a boar's tooth. The consequence was that she kept the shortened upper lip always open, revealing her good yellow teeth. Her complexion was no longer fresh, but soft and satiny. The little brats asserting their presence in every corner of the yard and inside the hut were her children.

She disappeared into the hut. When she came back out, she had a shield in her hands, tall as a man. She broke it apart. Now I understood the secret we shared. This was the shield I had sent bullets through several days before. Three of my shots had hit. It broke in two, the upper half dropped to the ground – now my lovable Indian lady stood there holding the remains out to me with submissive eyes. She was standing very close. Her elbows touched my hips. I could smell the oily bronze skin drenched in an unfamiliar flaxy perfume, a salve made of flowers that deep deep down

sent out a nebulous pleasant allure, while its crude obtrusiveness repelled. It mingled with the earthy smell of her slightly heated armpits. It was the perspiration of a wild animal or a lush moist jungle plant, as powerful and indeterminate as the smell of phantoplasm.

My organs resisted it. I remained courteous and steady on my feet, and felt the slight pressure from her body. As I thought about the health of that transpiring flesh, I gained strength. Despite the unusual scrawniness of the shoulders, the skin lay smooth and firm over the bones. My eyes felt across crevices and little bumps smooth as polished ivory. And at once I remained passive, no longer resisted the perspiration but found it homely. I pressed my right arm to the side. It lightly brushed against her sinewy back. She leaned into it.

“Rulc!” she said in her gulp-language. So her name was Rulc. She quickly traced a few contours on the shield-picture. She recalled her bodily identity with no trouble at all. Slowly I followed her, the finger retraced, followed the course of a line as on a map. I put two and two together: she was called Rulc, and I had shot her likeness in half. Had it hurt much? She stood now almost in my arms, a sketch of an embrace, like a European girl.

“Well well, wonderful,” I said in English, because I didn’t want to stay silent. And suddenly I began to talk to her, though I knew she didn’t understand. Filled all of a sudden with inner impishness, I told her she was delightful; I lifted my fist from my hip, and as if to emphasize a very important piece of information pressed it into the flesh at her waist. Then I felt a dragging sense of unease at the back of my neck. An object of absorbing interest behind me was trying to steer me towards itself; it turned my head, and I followed for a thousand reasons. Finally, in this fraction of a second it really was I and not the other who terminated the movement. It was an age-old movement, whose reasons dated back to the sense of a span of eternities. I recalled it to memory, like a long forgotten duty. And I saw Slim’s face peering out from behind the hut.

He had to poke his neck out, because his body was still hidden; he didn’t pull it back but stepped fully into view. He was smiling; it seemed benign, and might be malicious. Was he jealous? He had a handsome, deepset, slightly hard eye. In this eye was something shameless and unreserved, it was insolent, left nothing untouched, stood its ground, laid claim to the whole ground. I don’t know why this occurred to me at that very moment.

Slim gave a boorish laugh, and I remembered he was a Yankee. He strode across pontificating, and I found him as mystical and incomprehensible as ever. “Ah, so you’re taking drawing lessons from Rulc? Good, you can learn something here. Let her teach you; this is all more elementary than anything your artists have achieved up to now. Kelwa lives in that mental stage where people still see aslant. Nature makes no fine conversations. But where in all your fine works of art can you find such obliquity, lopsidedness, haphazardness? Who actually looks like the way you lot describe, draw,

paint? Your best and most ideal artists were syrupy daubers. In these barbarian images lies the only true humanity. They encompass living forms and the things that truly lie behind them. For note this, Johnny: the things we perceive are excuses for our senses. The deeper causes for the reactions of human to human lie on another planet than this Earth, or lie in eternities of future behind the premature pseudo-causes. And Kelwa is closer than you and your lot to the primal causes – he hasn't yet discovered Time and Evolution."

At this moment I found him quite insufferable. He expressed so brutally the thoughts I carried in me with such doubting tenderness. He went on: "You won't understand yet, from these few fragments of my intuition. But I've mentioned it to you already. Meanwhile an entire system has constructed itself in me. If you like ..."

"No no," I broke in eagerly, "I do understand. This here is ... I would say, painted in the manner of a map. Or do you mean to say I look like this ... horrible, simply horrible." I had to laugh.

"No, sir," said Slim, "that's exactly the point. You don't know how to look over, or maybe under, the horizon of your language. In language I now include all the means of pictorial expression. An Indian's language is his painting; his spoken language is simply painterly, not conceptual. Advanced language and philosophy are one and the same. Has it escaped you that the world looks different in German than it does in French or English? Advanced language reacts to the fifth dimension. We talked about this, no? Anyway, what you said about the map is correct, but the idea came from me."

"No," I said, puzzled, "that won't work. Because I remember quite clearly how the word came up. I could swear it came from me. I captured it in the course of seconds, anyhow captured it through observation."

"So?" said Slim, stretching and regarding me with a smile. He was immensely vain. He seemed to me like a vampire, sucking thoughts and ideas out of others. On the other hand it occurred to me: who here was the real artist? Kelwa, the naïve genius, or Slim, who thanks to the penetrative sphere of his multiracial Ego had the ability to worm his way into another's train of thought?

"What do you mean?" Slim asked, all fired up. His eyes had turned grey in wonder at my opposition. He became thoughtful.

"Oh, nothing," I said quickly. But I noticed I was very much against Kelwa. So I began to tease, for I found his figures gaunt, idolatrously gaunt. "Admittedly, from a physiological viewpoint it's a remarkable breed of people; for me a high-class race; the artist that reproduces them is also a little bit accurate in his way of seeing. But the exaggerations? It's so clumsy, for God's sake, there's no artistry, I ask you, no artistry!"

Slim passed a hand through his well-tended shock of hair. There was no abiding me! Rulc vanished into the hut. And before our eyes now, well-proportioned, small, yellow, there moved the native artist, round as a statuette, filled out like a well-fed youth, with a dainty belly and immaculate feet and hands. This was the man whose

ideals culminated in these rachitic contorted bodies. Slim let his hair fall back. For sure I was even dumber than I looked. He seemed to be waiting for some sort of objection from me. He laid his big hand on the little man's shoulder, and said: "Artists, well now, artists don't need to resemble their ideals. *Artists create racialities, they are so to speak the sensory organs of a race.* You'll understand it better, of course, once I've acquainted you with my whole doctrine. Artists are machines for producing new –"

"Phantoplasms," I said in a serene smug tone.

"Oh no, phantoplasms?" Slim began, but at once collected himself and said, "Phantoplasms, of course, that's good. I understand, phantasy, malleability. That's excellent." He looked attentively at me. "It's better than phantomias. Phantomia, you see, is the word I coined for it. But it's remarkable how people come up with the same ideas, when they stand mutually exposed in their isolation." He said this with a stony face. "There's literally been some interpenetration here." I reddened under his reproach. His thoughtful, almost wise forehead expressed the highest irony. He hated me because I had found the better word.

"Yes," he continued, "that must be it. Artists create happy types and fatal delights. Even your proper artists do nothing else, they create the happy type for your times. The happy type in West Aryan culture is the scientist. The fate that seems so sweet to you is the plague of analysis. We have 'evolution'. It could easily happen that one day we emerge from analysis and attain again to a static type, like the Chinese. But behind this ... phantopiasm of evolution, there is in play an eternally unchanging undeviating physical fate, a primordial fate that we're unacquainted with, we only divine it, as far as it's concerned our existence is a mere symbol – d'you get a whiff of Art? – and Kelwa stands not a jot closer to it than all of you – no, I mean: us. Not a jot. If I ever made such an assertion before, it had a different functional value than now; merely figurative, within a space-metaphor. For Kelwa has his phantopiasm, his racial happiness and his dialectic, all without the motif of evolution. His language is incapable of expressing me and my thoughts. But can you sense already that with him, the mere passion-capacity of the coloured imagery in his pictures illuminates the primal sensibility just as adequately as our most daring theorists? He can never think like me, and maybe ..."

"...maybe," I cried exulting, "this Kelwa is only a readout of the primal sensibility from your own phantopiasm!"

"You think so?" Slim said with a twitch around the eyes that literally retracted all he'd said so far. My too-eager agreement must have bothered him. I understood why he felt a need to narrow things down now. "But what does it prove? That my theory is rounded, treats itself as a theory, and exhausts every contingency that reality presents!"

Here we have Slim in all his glory. A sublime joker. Intelligence is trickery of the highest order. I glanced across at Kelwa, who maintained an expression that annoyed me: the face of a *male Sphinx*, of an artist. The artist: that was he: *a blend of idiocies and racial intimations.*

A heavy indigestible resistance rose in me, and I thought: Who am I? Joker, or idiot?

A female voice nagged from the hut. Kelwa was suddenly in a hurry. Slim shouted something out after him. This I want to see, I said; and went over and stuck my head around the door-screen. At once I was back out with both nostrils in fresh air. "Gipsy housekeeping!" nodded Slim. We went off together into the clearing.

"I'm a good trailblazer!" Slim began. With a thought that had hung heavy over him, it seemed, he'd now concluded his business.

"So?" I said, "a good trailblazer, how so?" Suddenly something occurred to me. Sparking with mischief I presented the idea, keeping the straightest and most humble face in the world: "No doubt you mean a good medium; that's my impression too, Slim." Slim's mouth opened and shut, for he'd been just about to say something else.

"Ah, medium," he said, his voice full of annoyance, "why this unoriginal word always. I say trailblazer, as it's something new and we need a new term for it. And anyway it hits the nail on the head."

"Trailblazer, then. But what do you mean by it?"

"See, this is what I mean. A couple of pointers is all it takes to transpose me right away into what you so splendidly term a phantoplasm. Of course you'll laugh at me, because while I'm no Indian I've already assembled a complete system of Indianness. Is that so remarkable? I'm no intellectual joker. Give me some credit. No, give *language* some credit. I'm creating something new, completely new, using no other means than language. I've absolutely no need of crude material experience. I think. I'm hard-wired for cogitation. And I made a shocking discovery – it was my first real shock: that I experienced things exactly as I thought them. I experienced my whole life between fourteen and twenty, as a sea cadet, confined to a hammock, a fo'c'sle, a ship.

"At that time, like any seaman I knew nothing of the world. But afterwards, when I came into the world, I had no new experiences. Or rather, always the same thing, always again those six years of personal solitude, always again that content of things already thought. I've led a wild life ever since, by Jove. But apart from ideas slowly maturing, I've had no new experience. It was in me already, before I even made its acquaintance. And I know why that's so. It's not a weakness, as I once thought. It's a remarkable power, yes, Johnny, a masterful power that often embarrasses me in front of other people. I see people running about with no face of their own, like crumbs from my Ego. I have the hunter's nose, his observation, his talent for connections. But in my quiver I have words, nothing but words. And I run down my quarry without fail – let's say that the hunting instinct is itself the most important game, and that you live not from the quarry but from the hunt. That's the sole, first and last physiological event, and that's the whole point. The quarry is only technically there.

"Your kind can starve on facts – I live from theory. Your kind are dreamers, you rest your case on appearances. But appearances elude you, they've always eluded you. You believe you can see? You have very poor sight. I stick with abstractions. I stand

external to life – I think life, create it according to my thinking. I say unto thee, thou shalt make no graven image, not of yourselves, not of him, of nothing – this was the apple of knowledge that was denied you, exactly this! But I make this image, and reality flaunts itself. I switch being and thinking, and the result is, I live. There's a residue: a treasure. A treasure, Johnny, that for everyone else is a pretext. I flourish, I stand here in full flower. I experience the miracle, and my slender staff strikes out.

"I have physical signs and higher confirmation of my thinking: I have attained to that maximal human degree of existence that is called Faith; what kind of faith it is you can perhaps guess; I'll reveal it to you some other time.

"Now I challenge you to laugh; I'm going to employ an antithesis: there is praxis in my knowing. In me you see the culmination of many races of hunters and adventurers, of observer-natures. I've benefited from probably millennia of training – please, you can have your say in a moment – like those Buddhist fakirs who've mastered their organism in some incomprehensible way and after twenty-four hours of rigor mortis and burial have themselves exhumed. I too have been buried, and live. I'm a typical amateur when it comes to life; that I nevertheless stand here alive and experiencing is my special pleasure, but it's insignificant. I might just as well be sitting in a hotel in Paris and write books or paint pictures. The amateur, whoever it may be, is the observer, the creator. He can ..."

"Nonsense," I said; he paused, offended. "I must confess I'm helpless in the face of your assertions, because I can't grasp them all. In terms of your conception I'm a true amateur – so what? – but I know for sure it's all dialectics. There are misprints, too many for me to spot them all ..."

"Well," said Slim, "dialectics then, if you please. Good. But then what is not dialectics? Every institution of a bourgeois society rests on the results of dialectics. State, marriage, patriotism. These are things that do not exist. But people deal with them. The visual arts are dialectical, they are blandishments, lies, tricks. But for all that they're not worthless, Johnny. They correspond to a certain dimension, I've already explained it to you. Your experience lives, but in a certain dimension ..."

"And yours?" I interjected quickly.

"Mine more even than yours. I live in the dimension of the paradox, the eternally contrary. Recall what I explained to you last night. Or did you sleep through it?"

"Last night?"

"Of course, last night, after that remarkable séance where Moki performed his old stunts. We argued whether he'd actually flown away – the idea's quite absurd – or if it was a case of suggestible vision, which I explained to you. I know you've forgotten all about your utterly drunken credulous soul of last night!"

"Oh no," I said half-dead, my brain completely devoid of thoughts, "I remember it well. Yes, and, and ... you somehow explained your system, how ... yes, of course I remember. But it's strange."

“What’s strange?” said Slim, grinning. “You were very drunk, Johnny, I know. But you spoke a damned deal of sense, even though you kept addressing me as ‘Checho’ when you were trying to prove that the god had upped and flown away. I had the greatest respect for your subtlety and powers of observation. Today you’re appreciably more stupid. So, what is so strange?”

“Strange, yes, well, well your system of course. There’s something to be said for it. I remember now. Say, did I maybe tell you a story as well?”

“A story?” Slim looked me straight in the eye. “Yes, you told me about your fiancée, that snooty German girl, a soubrette I think you said. Yes indeed, we spoke of it up there in connection with my system of dimensions and various phantoplasms. By the way, I’ve adopted your word phantoplasma, it’s better. Clearly you gave it some thought. I found it charming of you to tell me about your earlier life. Your remarks about it were all quite interesting. And now I feel to some extent that I owe you. Now we’ve become friends out here in the jungle, I wouldn’t want you to be in the dark about anything to do with me; like anyone nowadays you’d be sure to put a bad slant on it.”

“Not at all,” I said, my feelings somewhat tender.

“My physiologism,” Slim continued, “is intellectuality. Let’s look at the physics, Mister Engineer. To produce an aura, whenever the need might arise, it’s all the same whether you move the body into the magnetic field, or the magnetic field takes a stroll past the body. Consider phase inversion! All right, that’s my analogy. For the transposition I motivate not the last of the dimensions perceptible to us, i.e. Time, but carry out an empty objective movement against it. The aura that’s produced in this way is roughly my dimension. The fact that I reach back in it to ancient primordial low-dimensional forms of life is just, let’s say, its reactionary nature. Listen ...”

And he began to expand on what he called his dimensional theory. Deep in lively conversation we strode out into the savannah and back again. When only a half had been dealt with and clarified, we were already back at the first hut. For all these impressions I found a formula that kept me detached: *Slim possesses an enormous synthetic intelligence, but over-extends himself in it.*

“You’re an original,” I said politely, my mood one of disinterest. The conversation ended when we stepped over to van den Dusen’s hut. I caught myself thinking that I must be a good trailblazer. One has to be something, one has to satisfy some or other ambition. My head during these days was nothing but a branch office of the phenomenal cogitative organ lodged in Slim’s skull.

At that moment he sensed my authority, I swear, for suddenly he made himself ready to take revenge – this time I saw through it – but was troubled by my politeness and sought to shrug off all burdensome obligations by armouring himself heart-deep in objective iciness. For what he said, quite listlessly and so to speak setting up the standard for the good uncompromising rhythm of our interaction, was: “Johnny, you’re an interesting fellow. Really. But how come that despite your higher intellect

you always have more errors in your ideas than anybody else of deep-seated intelligence?"

As he spoke he turned to look at the hut where Dusen was sitting in the shade puffing away on a short pipe. "It all comes from your being a German and never settling to any specific reality. *The Germans are always one degree cleverer than other people on God's good earth.* Now, don't give me that baffled look. Nature is deadly serious about this superiority. Nature clearly loves the German, she gives him talents, the chance of unprecedented power, of happiness, but he passes it all by. The German is universal and loves nuances; for him the mere idea of foreign skin complexions is arousing, and makes him ambitious. He loves the Chinese and would like best of all to be one, because he wears fine silks and lives in a system of age-old wisdom. In a *system*: just think what that means for a German. He loves Negroes, because he senses their musicality. He awaits nothing less than the ultimate refinement of the world through the blending of German with African music. And he loves Red Indians, this time with the best of reasons. For the red man among all the foreign races reminds him most clearly of his own kind and his own mythology. But the German doesn't take what's suited to him. He'd feel it was unethical. He has in his blood a cursed low asceticism, a goddamned slice of those slave races that have sprouted in him. No other people lives so little of what it thinks and longs for as the German. The German is the inter-territorial man, just as the dear Lord God created him.

"But of all the great nations he's today the most territorially restricted. No one knows the outland, the foreign, as he does, for his is the fullest imagination; but where has it been shown that he has enough imagination to rule an outland? Here, in my opinion, lies the highest imaginative tension: to rule something foreign organically; that's the outcome of the highest and most noble sense of sovereignty. But the German is ashamed of his loveliest violent instincts: the old slave-soul lurks within him. He has the crazy servile notion that action would diminish or even negate spirit! As if spirit could anyway be tarnished by externalities! The German at once becomes a slave to strange environments: he has so much phantasy, so much more phantasy than other nations; but not enough phantasy to master those environments. Everything in the world has been discovered by Germans; so much so that you could say of all earlier discoveries that their originators were actually just anticipatory Germans: but others have imported his ideas ..."

"The Americans?" I interjected, half eager, half embarrassed.

Slim flung open his jacket. His shirt was embroidered with stars and stripes. He had a broad chest. And it was protected by an incongruously small silver cross around his neck. I gave it no further attention, for in the South American republics men commonly treasure such harmless toiletry trinkets. He stared hard at me:

"I am American, body and soul. I grew up with the Stars and Stripes on my body, in a fervent patriotic school. And though I curse these most wholesome United States all the way from Seattle to Galveston, I still dream the songs and stories the old lady told.

The old lady's my grandmother. She was German. Well, Johnny, I, the American, can tell you: there's nothing doing with that nation. It hardly exists. The hopes that justified a Washington or a Lincoln must be considered already fulfilled and superannuated. Today's American is an expired type. A flower blooms fast and unmotivated, and fades as quickly. The foundations were laid too hastily. And I have to say: there are too many people of my provenance among that nation; and only a little of a certain kind of blood is dangerous, it lacks balance, and results in ruined, lopsided and characterless figures ..."

"The English?" I pressed him.

He laughed. "Don't worry about it, Johnny. Don't conceal your proud heart behind such courtesies. Johnny, the mere thought that instead of the English, the Germans might be sitting in India ... my heart fails me. What would that have meant for the future; for a fact like that I'd willingly spout all sorts of guff about 'humanity' and so on. But the Germans? Johnny, admit it: you're a German – and not once in your life have you ever thought about India! Haha! All credit to Charles Darwin; he's the one we've promoted so thoroughly. But I still expect anything, even the conquest of India, from the nation that gave us Baron Münchhausen. That man would feel at home again only at the foot of the Pamirs, where the mountains are imagined to ascend to the heavens."

"What you said about the Americans," I said, "I understand."

"Oh please, no comments!" he interrupted me. "I won't listen. When someone criticises his own nation, it sounds different hearing the same words from a foreigner's mouth. Indeed, if I'm to be quite frank with you, I must beg your pardon. Exaggerated praise of a nation, too, is easier to say than for a native to hear. For at bottom it still contains an adverse comparison, a criticism. As for the Americans, let me clarify what I said. The American type, as he exists in modern concepts of the standard human being, is dying out in America. And so he seems to be relocating to Europe, or rather to Germany."

He smiled directly at me: "But you, Johnny, you still lack a lot of what's needed. Aren't you a little bit romantic? A little overheated? Don't you have, if I see through you rightly, a pettifogging need to stylise, to turn everything into what you call poetry, the larger-than-life? No? Well, that's how it seems to me. My dear fellow, elementarise yourself, be pure in your experiences! Don't ramp it up, for God's sake don't ramp it up! Damned German obsession. You've surely had moments when you saw me as a great man. You're blushing. Now see, I'm not going to prove to you here and now that I'm no great man, merely a vain and brutal one. Because I can't prove it. I would have to overwhelm myself with confessions and use words pouring out fast as heartbeats and nerve-impulses. All I can do is state simply: I am not great. Don't burden me with such responsibilities. And the main thing: don't hold it against me. I have warm feelings towards you. But you mustn't love me. Leave me alone. Don't wrap yourself around me. The moment I begin to observe, then for me you're just a corpse. I'm always on the hunt. I bear no malice. But I spare nothing. I cannot. I lack the talent. And I can't even

fret about it. Don't let it puzzle you, it's really quite simple. For you're no female, Johnny, what? ... Hallo, van den Dusen, how's it going, what's up?"

The Dutchman, squatting disconsolate on his camp stool, whimpered at us. Slim gave a loud laugh, quite unmetaphysical, almost cheerful. Facing the sick man he seemed insanely healthy. But the other had become sicker. And suddenly Slim's dominance became detestable. Something in me tipped over; I grew proud of my weakness, blazed in bright enthusiasm for the inhibitions that cordoned off my brain like a mountain range. At once I too laughed and was annoyed at how healthy it sounded; someone here was even weaker than me. Van den Dusen made such a pitiable impression you'd have to rise from the dead at the sight of him. He was a prophylactic against weaknesses and wavering moods.

He was unshaven and his pith helmet sat low over the eyes. "Hurrah!" he cried morosely, winking at me, "I'm rid of a catchword. Down with catchwords! Down with the waterwheel! Waterwheel, waterwheel, ha, how it turns inside my head."

"Waterwheel? Hey, what's wrong with you, Dusen?" asked Slim. "So where did you hide away last night? What did you catch out there last night? Hey?"

"You know what a waterwheel is?" van den Dusen shouted. "That's how John and I christened the discovery we made one day, that facts can be turned on their heads without changing their effect. It works away and leaves you the pleasure of letting things snap into place and out of place like a floppified gong. Keep that in mind! And now you think you're a human, a good European in sensible clothes, just like Adam in reverse, he eats from the Tree of Knowledge ... and see, now he realises he's put on too many clothes. And ..."

"And what?" Slim enquired calmly, with a straight face.

"Well now ... oh fiddlesticks, nothing. It's just these damned rotations. There's hardly anything you can do with them. For surely you can't just turn up somewhere, say, and dance naked in front of women just because they think our sort are badly dressed? Na, but you'll admit ... Abstract, nothing but the abstract. Totally abstract!" He uttered this as if he'd meant to compose the crudest insult.

Slim walked away smirking, hands in his trouser pockets. I wanted to go with him, to continue our conversation. But the Dutchman, mysterious and awkward, held me back. Grunting he pulled me into the hut and stripped off his upper garments. Using the penknife I dug from the pale flesh of his back several thorns of mysterious provenance, and put plasters over the long wounds that ran across his neck like whip-cracks. My man meanwhile swore long-winded oaths that paradox was not for him.

XXI.

Thorns in van den Dusen's walrus shoulders led me this blue night to a remarkable adventure, which was to end not without some inexplicable unpleasantness. In the

jungle are many snakes. Never again shall I creep into the jungle by night because I'm bored, or because the gallant exploits of my companion leave me no peace. Moki alone knows which is more dangerous: a poisoned knife in the hands of a jealous skulking woman, or the stabbing bite of one of those long thin snakes whose scales glint slimily in moonlight!

Never again shall tedium lead me astray. I stay like a good boy in my hut or by the campfire, dreamily smoke my pipe and look across with longing at Aruki as she lets the baby knead her long breasts with its little fingers and suck with its little snout. The tedium, the tropical tedium, this gift of the forest demon, this karma of a race that has not yet discovered Time and Evolution, how the eternal, glittering greening luxuriant tedium weighed on me this evening.

Was this the splendour of the southern heavens, or was it a trivial sky of stars with no mood, no poetry? It was a sky with its motions and its jests, a spirited sky where shapes ran together, melded in long chains, asserted themselves in letters and signs like American neon advertisements. It was certainly a sky that had spirit in place of beauty and mood. But I could do without mood, and this sky-spirit failed to satisfy my longing. I sat long lost in thought.

The clamour of the jungle's great evening prayer meeting had already faded away: the crowing, singing and rutting, the slipping and sliding through foliage, horned insects criss-crossing in the treetops; and unending trains of legless creatures crawling to a standstill on mouldering humus.

Now the night held no portents. Noises echoed from the village, dogs were restless; their barking seemed to prolong the day. And yet it was precisely this night that became wild and macabre and unleashed those deeds whose germs slumbered in the profusion of flesh around me. The moon hung full at the zenith. A figure went by, small, on stomping feet. These came from a pair of sturdy calves that swelled like balloons. At the joints they were thin as paper twists. A longing arose in me, and I saw that it was Rulc. I stood up and followed her. She turned and hurried on faster. She went past van den Dusen's hut; they nodded to each other and spoke briefly. In my thoughts I bashed the Dutchman's head in, shot him six times, kicked him in his fat belly and exhibited him thus to all the women of the village. I quickly ran back. I'd had an idea. On such a night a man needs a weapon! I tucked the big Mauser pistol in my belt; it could kill a ... a puma, if you caught it in the forehead or the heart. When I reached van den Dusen's hut I shivered and touched the pistol. But only touched. The reason I found for this was that he wasn't there now, so touching was permissible.

But at once something happened that I experienced as a complication. I was no longer following the ring road, but had turned aside onto one of the radial paths. Rubbish was strewn about, foul smoky air from fireplace vents clung to blackened palm-straw walls. This was the secret alley for nocturnal lovers. Suddenly a figure loomed before me and vanished. It might have been Zana. A violent conflict of desires arose in me, for a moment disinclination sapped all my energy. Fat legs are a sin in a

woman! Rulc? I opted for Zana. But because I was disinclined, I continued mechanically to the outer circle of the little Indian Hell.

As I walked along, all of a sudden something lovely wafted towards me. An agitation took hold, a sweet inward torment. It unfolded slowly into consciousness. And then to the slight tang of ammonia there was added a dampened rhythmic vibration, murky and at first bland and immaterial as a smell. It grew stronger, but still pianissimo, the most refined and unsettling titillation I can recall. Boom-brr, boom-brr ... melodious wood. It was not-yet-music, predator-melody, dull organic sweetness that heated the blood. Ah, now I'd landed among the musicians, among those poor devils the pariahs and mestizos, those of no caste, those with yearning, those at the outermost sentry posts! Only they could pull their lives together in such sounds! These were the half-foreign, the deracinated, seekers, melancholy self-asserters, and they were welcoming me, playing our march of the cripples, they tremoloed our blood-duality, our outsider-lives!

But no! It was only the drum-major at his nightly finger-practice, developing his technique with musicianly diligence. Maybe too it was the music-tutor at a princely court, who makes use of the night hours because he can't express his vulgar pariah-diligence at the official school ... but then again the late secluded hour indicated a private artist. Even this must be wrong. There were depraved secret orgies, a private séance among the local bohemians with nude dancer Zana II, whom I hadn't yet met ... ah, that hurt a little. You shouldn't do that. You should leave lyrical thoughts be. I tried to shake the music off, like a biting snake.

But the venom was already in me, it circled out over me, began to make the sky revolve like a dreadful emerald screen broken through. The world's life-feeling swelled to a pure honey of existence. The sky, the dry besprinkled sky of the tropics, too hot to have a mood, too clear to unfold phantasies, welled up and yet became auspicious. Happenings in my blood tuned it scenically. It came fresh from the junk room of my needs. Heyho, I can use a tropical sky, a gallant somewhat wanton sky, please, a touch of sultriness and fever, infection, taints in the blood, taints!

And already there it was. I was infected with joy and hopeful unease. Vibrations of the erotic High Music behind the straw walls faded as I left the ring road and headed across the moonlit savannah towards the jungle. But I carried the vision of it with me, arousal clung like a leech to my soul, and sucked. I felt myself grow lighter. A great desire for an undertaking came over me. It will happen today or never. I shall have a woman, or I'll pulverise the village. Why else am I a crack marksman? Why have I already shot Rulc, morally speaking, cut her body in two, in a way, and made her mine?

I took the pistol from my belt and chambered the first bullet. Then I stepped calmly on. No one had anything to say to me here. I am going for a stroll, if anyone should show interest, and it is a lovely evening. Why hadn't I treated myself to this on every tedious tropical evening, why wait till tonight, when we're likely to be pulling out in the morning?

But there was a minor crisis to overcome before I could arrive at what it was that burned so mischievously in my blood. At the edge of the ferns that fringed the jungle for more than a hundred paces, a heavy figure was moving. I knew it must be van den Dusen. In the moonlight I must be as visible to him as he to me. If the cicadas hadn't been extra loud this evening, I would have overheard his clumsy progress. Even now I could perceive what I couldn't hear. Some organ in me was sensitised enough to him. When he noticed me he stopped looking for a way through the fringe of ferns and came towards me. We met bareheaded in the middle of the last patch of savannah, directly under the moon. He was armed to the teeth, and it showed in his voice. I noticed he had at least a loaded shotgun, which he held ready under his arm, two repeating pistols, and a slender well-used machete in his fist.

"You can't make it through without this," he said apologetically, holding the wavy flashing blade up to the moonlight. He grumbled that he was tired, wanted to lie down and sleep, and on top of that his back was hurting.

I said, "Twas on an evening la lalla lalera, lalla ..." I sang to improve myself, to wipe away, so to speak, the mystery that sounded in my words. For in the middle of all this something occurred to me. And so I said at random, even though I had no sure knowledge of it: "Yes, as you know we're pulling out tomorrow, very early in the morning. I know it for certain. We're in danger here ... Maybe it'll be best for you to lie down and get some rest."

"I'm going to," he replied, all his weapons and shiny hair twinkling in the moonlight. "Do me a favour and don't go in there, it's crawling with those creatures!"

"What creatures?" I asked coldly.

"Why, those Indian girls," he said. But there was no holding me back, despite his bad experiences. Smiling, I wagged a finger at him. There was something strange and unsettled about him. I think in the end he grew vain, and declared he would come with me.

"No," I said, gazing frankly at him, "you see, I could never get mixed up in that sort of thing. It goes against my nature. With such toads! How could any white man forget himself like that! I'd have the stink in my nostrils till my dying day!"

"I don't understand Slim," he said. "What is it with this Zana? Sure she has a talent for that. For that! All these women have a talent for it. But I know other kinds. Take the Creoles in Rio for example ..."

"What about Zana?" I asked. He showed he was deliberately ignoring me, gave a cryptic look, winked and said: "My dear fellow, let's leave nostrils out of it. But really I can't come with you. So are we really to be chivvied away in the morning, if I may make so bold to ask? I hope so with all my heart! Buenas noches, senhor!" He hurried away towards the village, shotgun under his arm like a foxhunter, and vanished behind a shack.

I stood at the edge of the fern thicket. From the village came the narrow-chested baying of dogs. One thin mangy mutt came hurtling out of the line of huts, came to a stop and bayed diligently into the savannah, pointing its nose in all directions. It was distracted, howled solemnly, and what it was thinking God only knows. Finally it considered its duty adequately done and retreated; silence reigned. A wide unechoing night trickled from a myriad pores down over the Earth. Quickly I turned into the ferns and forced my way through the dense shoulder-high growth.

I came to a stop. My senses sent out long feelers. They scented a human, although almost nothing was perceptible. I quickly jumped to the side and again zigzagged onwards. A cracking sound ahead. Something broke, no, burst, a capsule, something green, juicy, fibrous. And ahead of me I saw a crouching figure, clearly discernible behind the jagged curtain of ferns. I swiftly stood up, in order to peer over the shoulder-high stems. There in front of me was Rulc, in a crouch. Moonlight fell sheer over us, and I could see her head, widest at the pearshaped cheeks. She kept still and stared directly at me, almost unconcerned. In this indifference lay total submission. I could leap on her, strike her, throttle, murder, love her. But her attitude held me spellbound; she flew up and further into the surging ferns. As if the obvious thing to do given her panic, I rushed after her. Was it fear or temptation, this kind of female denial following surrender? I myself was the hunt, and love. Then came the great physiological glow over me, the cruelty of nature, the taste of hunter and his game. When Rulc came to a stop, knelt down and crossed her arms behind her neck, I understood her challenge. She passed water. I chivvied her, took her and threw her down. Our embraces interlocked, her soft body received me, I heard her pharyngeal rasps and felt her eager bites. Her breath rolled thick over me and smelled of plants.

Then we gazed reconciled and calm up at the moon. I stroked the fullness of her cheeks and closed my hand on her ankle. We knew one another, how well we knew one another! Had we ever known each other otherwise than in this state? Had we not already spent eternities together, had we not immersed ourselves for eternities together with animals and plants in passion and reconciliation? Was I, I, and was she, Rulc, an Other? Was I a man from a distant zone with a different brain and could we never, never understand each other? We didn't speak, but hummed deep things to each other. She declared her love for me through her nose, and rounded her totally brown eyes beneath the high gables of their lids. By inarticulate sounds I called her my sweet, my little pet, my panther.

But once as she lay on my breast I saw her mask before me, and faltered. I had looked into a wildly alien unappealing face. Beneath the smooth skin, soft as oil-paste with its delicate network of pores, an alien skull pressed through. The upper lip was pursed, you could see sharp yellow teeth, a boar's tusk protruded from the base of the nose. I grew cold, lost my sensuality, my goodness, my desire to clothe myself in passion and anguish, my interest. Already I wanted in all heartfelt courtesy to distance myself, decently take my leave, when the wildest event of the evening happened.

At that moment we heard a rapid trampling through the ferns. Animal? Human? Rulc released herself from my arms and pushed her way, bent low, towards the savannah. I stayed coolly sitting, never even thought of the pistol. A few seconds went by, I could hear vegetation rustling. It was as if creatures were approaching from every side. And there – a clang, a clang as from a metal fork but less distinct and thinner, and at once a sigh quivered. But the sigh had no voice, it was not a sound, just a strong clear breath. I stood up. The noise I made was swallowed in the sharp breaking and popping of fresh fern stems, drowned out by a longer crackling and crepitating. Ha, there it is! What's going on? What's happening here so wild, so uncanny?

Ten paces from me stood a small slender thing, amazingly stretched. Hair fell in evenly trimmed locks to the shoulders. Moonlight glimmered on it. The body was strangely jointed from within, thumb-thick ropes that glinted metallically green were winding around the upper arms, shoulders and breasts. These ropes were in constant writhing motion, twisting into slings and knots, phosphorescing like metal rollers, and suddenly a muscular segment shot straight up into the light and remained there shimmering and vibrating. They were vipers, twined tamely around Zana's delicate bones. In front of Zana the ferns lay parted. A substantial body must be lying there, a woman's body, the body of a voluptuous woman. And now Zana lifted her hands high like a dancer, and nimbly wrested one of the twitching stiffening creatures from her arm, held the rotating body and the glassy head with the evil unblinking eyes in her strong hands and bent down.

But as she bent down, another figure appeared swiftly behind her, the figure of a man whose wild hair and beard were as white and fearsome in the light as an animal's hide. Zana shot to her feet with a little cry. She felt under her armpit, pulled one of the living ropes off her – her shoulders were now bare and childlike – and hit out with it at Slim as if it were a whip. Slim ducked, grabbed something and leaped back. He kicked out at the woody tubes of old ferns; they sounded metallic. Zana flung at him the snake she was holding, unplaited the others from her body, once, twice, and tried to hurl the rearing things at Slim's feet. But Slim caught them with whatever he was swinging in his right hand. It was a machete, thin as tin, slender as a rapier. His strokes were rapid, eager, he caught the creatures in flight and bisected them lightning-fast one after the other. The fleshy question marks coiled down like watch springs. The sound as he made contact was brittle. When Zana saw he was occupied – their battle had been rhythmic as a dance, a snake-fight, a divine judgement – she fled. But Slim reeled her in and overpowered her.

I was witness to a wonderful occurrence. The bodies of the sexes are matched to one another in an incomprehensible poignant harmony. It's the final development and resolution of the dance. The dancer Zana merged with her body into a single human ornament, showed a functional acquiescence in the meaning and jigsaw-puzzle of a highest animal organism that was complete, redeemed, unriddled, that had attained the vegetative innocence of corporeal unity like a blessedness lost and found again. The savage barbarian magic that fused in the senses of the man and the woman was

beautiful beyond measure. Again I stood in the midst of a fern-forest, millennia at my back. Time, evolution, did not exist. I was here in the freshness and decorum of this event, riper for understanding the passion-nucleus of the phantoplasm than on the heights of my advanced culture. This image before me, of human limbs as ornaments of a great active flower, was one single unified creation ...

These were the thoughts that came to me as I lay half asleep in the hut and concocted for myself all kinds of theories in anticipation of our coming departure. Really, I had travel fever! For it was clear that danger loomed. I thought a lot and dreamed up remarkably sharp images. In the morning my head ached. Two hours after midnight Slim appeared. "We're going," he said. "Are you as confused as the Dutchman, Johnny? He wants to leave, and at double speed, but he's actually shaking, the devil knows if it's the pain of parting." Shortly after this we were on our way, hastening along the river course and with glances behind us wishing ourselves free. For my dreams had not been inconsequential. Some murky deed had occurred.

PART 3. At the Waterfall

XXII.

Again the machetes flashed. Slim in the lead wielded a slender worn-down steel blade that swished continuously in his outstretched arm. He wielded it with a strong hand, he toiled with cautious intent, sweeping aside branches, vines and tussocks, the sounds echoing back to us like whipcracks and flapping pennants. At some point he'd honoured the Dutchman with this fine weapon; now I saw it again in his hands, it grew from his fist, he stormed ahead, and Zana ran stooped like a little jaguar bitch behind him, emitting enthusiastic guttural squeals when his lightning-fast strokes cleared an obstacle. She belonged to him hide and hair. She cried Ahi! Ahi! In her eyes lurked a beatified horror. Slim paid her no heed. All you could see in him was a diffuse unease. We moved as if fleeing, parallel to the river, down the valley.

We were all possessed by travel fever, delighting in movement after so many days of listless idling. But another poison was at work in our heightened nerves, a kind of fear and anxiety. This condition had been in us since morning. An omen unfavourable for our journey had crossed our path, and our five Indians from the coast seemed apprehensive. In the forest of ferns where the jungle and our journey began, Checho, guided by the smell, had suddenly stumbled on a corpse. It was a dead woman. When we approached, a snake was coiled tight as a hosepipe in the depressed lap; it reared up on its little tail-end rigid as a stick and performed a ceremonial one-legged dance of rage and fear. It was a long warty beast with a rough yellow skin that seemed covered in moist webbing. Maybe it looked prettier at night. Such was my thought, thinking it might well be so thanks to an internal light source. It had a small stupid head, a tiny little box with a somewhat gaping lid.

Slim's machete did its work. It swept like a scribbling pencil through the rigid line over the woman's belly, swished twice, three times and the constituent parts of the gore-spewing hosepipe dropped onto the yellowish cushion that was the corpse. The head, by a humorous move of Slim's, landed on van den Dusen's chest. He turned so pale I felt nauseous. The snakehead lodged between the buttons of his tunic. When the Dutchman pulled himself together with a shudder, it dropped out like a ripe plum, and as it lay on the ground its jaws moved with tender suggestiveness. Why Slim did this, and did so with a certain spiteful glee just when we were standing over a corpse, remained a mystery to me. I confess that it threatened once again to cast our friend Slim in no good light, and at such an advanced stage of my narrative this is no longer a matter of indifference to me, or even desirable, as earlier it might have been.

In general none of us seemed to comport ourselves as befitted the deplorable situation; surely we should have performed some act of Christian observance for the

corpse. But the most remarkable aspect was that no one seemed overly surprised, and instead acted as if it were something already known and slept on. Checho had found the corpse, insisted that he'd smelled it. But I noticed no smell, no sign of decomposition apart from the indications of envenomation.

The Indians declared that the woman had been killed by the snake. Two bite marks were in fact visible: a small puncture wound over the heart from which a rusty trickle of blood had dripped down the body – which had the hard yellow appearance of amber – and a larger wound in the lower body right above the thighs. The lower body was swollen round as a blister, the skin was made blotchy by the expansion, showing discoloured shades of lilac, ochre-yellow welts or completely colourless specks. The bloated body, its sex narrowed as if sewn shut, this almost maternal body looked so sad in the mystery of its stillness I could have wept. I declared that I recognised Rulc, wife of Kelwa the painter, but admitted I could be wrong, for in the end these faces couldn't be told apart exactly.

Slim agreed with me. It was Rulc, Rulc for sure, he was quite certain, however bad my own physiognomic memory might be. "Dreadfully bad," I said. At that moment I sensed van den Dusen looking at me. So I insisted that really I can remember faces only with great difficulty. Only after closer acquaintance, after more intimate contact so to speak, am I in a position to remember people. First I must put on my pince-nez ... So, well now, indeed, this could be Rulc, hm ...

I looked up and saw the Dutchman again staring directly at me. This calmed me a little. He, alone of us, was perhaps in mourning. He was a good soul of a man. He seemed to take no joy in life, he was all renunciation, innocuous, and certainly no interpreter of dreams or reader of thoughts.

To my amazement, Slim erected a cross over the victim and made a short funeral speech, which served primarily our own safety. He spoke first to the Indians, and then in English to us. Out with it now! was roughly the sense of his words. He stood close to Zana, within arm's reach, and looked at her. Zana stood the whole time with veiled eyes, very calm. Her hands hung languidly, she had absolutely no interest in the corpse. It was clear she wanted to be off. But life was anyway not amusing.

"Here we see a drama of Indian jealousy," Slim continued, looking thoughtfully all the while at the Dutchman, who happened to be standing across from him never averting his eyes from the corpse. "This is the work of a rival, a woman. Rulc was stabbed. A crime concealed, very remarkable and cunning. The snake was placed on her, shoved so to speak directly into the wound, just after she was stabbed twice. Look here, please, you can see, why does the breast wound not also show signs of venom?" His eyes took on a glint of triumph. He waited for one of us two to contradict him. When this didn't happen, he continued: "Two wounds, both very deep. They were made by a long, very slender blade, with a fair amount of thrust. As for the snake, I may be mistaken. There are lots around here, and it's quite possible one just happened on the wounds. At the moment I'd rather believe this, and go even further. It's

probable the corpse was exposed to several snakes. Here – and here – perhaps here too, though it's not clear, we can see dried mucus. It seems therefore that someone has been here in the meantime and taken the snakes away, someone who doesn't fear their bite. Why? ... That of course I can't say. Possibly out of piety. Or for the fun of the game. It doesn't matter. Much more interesting would be to know whether the snakes were deliberately placed, and by whom: by the murderer, or by some other person coming along later, or by both working together. This doubling is what seems interesting to me. What could, or what must, yes must, these two have to do with one another? For now I'm again convinced that the snakes were placed deliberately. That many snakes don't gather so quickly in one place, and not around a corpse. What say you, van den Dusen?"

The Dutchman merely nodded. The sight of a corpse seemed to weaken him. Slim suddenly gave a strange little laugh and said: "The Indians will believe the snakes did it. But it's all the same to us. We must hurry on. When it's discovered, they'll take it as a sign of fate. There's unrest in the village. Forward, Zana, march!" He closed his big hand from behind around her neck; she went meekly along as if under a yoke.

"I don't get it," I confessed. "How can you bring Zana along just like that?"

"Oh, that's my business," he said, "I have her under my thumb." He looked bright and wholesome as he said this.

The machetes blasted a path through eternal jungle, into this palpable spatiality. The hard toil to some degree over-stimulated us. I was able to observe it, this emergence of an aroused community of nerves among us Whites. The uniformity of our powers of imagination, verging on dread, made us mistrustful. And I was aware I was being observed by the others. Their presence in me, that they were participants in me, so to speak, made me subdued.

From that first day, from the first moment we came across the body of the dead woman, I had gnawed away at myself with painful analyses. An aftershock of panicked terror quaked within me. And I saw the same symptom recur in us all, planful interpretations, arbitrary attempts to complete the picture of harmless and chance occurrences around us. It was insanity, a monstrous synthesising. Ever since the night of Zana's dance, after that conversation I had evicted from my memory, doubts and a worrying kind of dreaming remained with me.

I interchanged the worlds: I laid two different talents of my brain cells crosswise, so to speak, and exchanged the capacity for analysis and cognition with that for phantasy and formative power ... or should I in all seriousness believe my own axiom, that the two capacities are coterminous, and that what *is*, is only what I *think*? That night before our sudden premature departure I had dreamed an exceptionally vivid and deeply lustful dream. It was appallingly clear and definite. The object of such over-powerful sensations is never real; reality is always more blurred than a dream; and whichever way I turned it I couldn't decide to accept this reality, it was physically impossible to believe it anything other than a dream. Waking up on that occasion –

Slim woke me suddenly, I still recall – I awoke with a head totally devoid of presuppositions. Only that the fact we must leave at once like fugitives, with no ceremonial leave-taking, caused me no astonishment. It seemed not even surprising, just what we'd simply agreed. We pull out noiselessly, no goodbyes; suddenly we're in among ferns staring at a dead woman. Checho called out to us. Yes, this is Rulc, I recognise her at the first glance, Rulc, who last night came by my hut, I sent yearning glances after her, Rulc, who once lay down before me with ardent loins, in an unnaturally stiff and swollen posture.

And at the same moment the memory of this levitating apparition is repeated, all at once I have a clear vision. I see what may have happened to Rulc, beside whose body we are standing. A dream from a little farther back occurs to me, the dream from whose reflected outrunners Slim woke me up to start moving ... In this dream I saw something of what had happened. Remarkable, Slim says, someone murdered Rulc ... Do you hear that thin indistinct sound ... Do you hear the machete's humming?

How could Slim know that?

The machetes flash, we resume the day-long battle with the jungle, skirmish after skirmish, we are victorious and we are sick with vigour. Like a living whirlpool in the monstrous jungle lagoon, we leave behind us derisive calls and hate-filled looks. Birds and monkeys send irritable whining screeches after us. Malevolent curses delivered in the sounds of Nature are the rumour that drags along behind us to send bad reports to the forest before us.

Our renown seems unedifying, we catch sight of abandoned monkey settlements and dismantled camps, now and then a prehensile-limbed tribe accosts us in a bellicose manner, sprays us with muck and hurls down second-best furniture. A few pistol shots induce respect, we deploy them at the slightest excuse for the sake of the change the bang provides, the little pampering massage the shock brings to the hand. For our toil is and remains monotonous.

Now and then something happens. Suddenly one of the two hounds that have attached themselves to the expedition along with Zana, which up till now have crept nervously along under our feet, curls up howling on the ground. A thick band encircles its neck and body. Zana leaps in, makes rapid movements. Now a long toad-headed snake rears up along her arm, Zana makes a rhythmic screwing motion, and holds the little snouty face close to her own. And now once again all is clear to me. I see her in my dream again at her work, see Rulc lying spread out in the ferns. The whole factual situation is in my brain, becoming ever more transparent, so that I see roughly how the murder was committed. I have second sight. Second sight!

Through the medium of my automatic nose for truth and my dream-life, I am in a position to reconstruct for myself, in part, the way it went. In any case I should be able to confirm it just by casually asking the Dutchman what he was up to that fine evening before our departure, and does he recall what we talked about among ourselves out there on the savannah; and whether he'd gone to sleep at once... or something of the

sort. I had no doubt he'd have been greatly surprised and he'd have said: "But man, you must be dreaming." Anyway, I really should have sought this assurance. But being guileless and without allowing the suspicion to arise in me that it might not actually have much to do with me, I let every opportunity slide as it arose. I feared clarification. My uncertainty was an existential question. In this respect I felt myself a virgin.

This was not the only battle raging within me. I was carrying in me a powerful curiosity about the others. This was one thing we all shared. But we said not a word about it. Slim sometimes looked at me. We had a thought in common: namely that each of us knows the other's state of mind, each holds the other in an actual trance. I could have sworn this is what his cold awkward looks expressed. Slim's dreams must have been strange. All he needed, for example, was to see the corpse of a woman who lost her life through some natural cause, snakebite maybe, and within a few seconds there formed in him an image of what had happened. Of course the image was false. It was a very plausible and sufficient explanation of the case. But it was simply his memory of an earlier dream, which the elaborations of reality seemed to corroborate.

Oh, I recognised this. I knew how surprising this effect was. But I also knew that Slim knew. For he was to a large extent the source of this abstract system he had worked out as a solution. So: is there not just a second sight, but an unknown number of sights, every single one adequate to provide a motive for whatever elaborations that show up? I couldn't follow down that path, for I saw no reason to. If my suspicions were correct, Slim felt just the same way. But he, the man of the fifth dimension, was capable of believing something, believing it in a display of mental self-will, even when it was simply not to be believed and he knew it. For I had my Slim pinned down, pinned well down, I knew him chapter and verse, I could recite him off by heart!

I knew him so exactly that an analogical relationship formed between us. Slim was a courageous man. When one day a jaguar hissed from the undergrowth in front of us, leaped onto a branch and crouched back on limbs supple as smooth chamois-leather gloved arms ready to pounce at any moment, what happened was entirely to be expected. Slim fired his long-barrelled Colt pistol, and with the fifth shot killed the beast as it toppled over. But later that day I knew Slim had a headache, even though he was in a particularly good mood. And when one day I got in a tussle with an old sun-faced monkey that grabbed the blade of my machete in both hands – it showed absolutely no intention of letting go until sinews and nerves were severed, rendering it completely powerless – I knew Slim was thinking the same of me as I on that occasion had thought of him. And this puzzled me, for on that occasion I might have drawn the equally wrong conclusion. In any case I knew Slim so exactly that I could just as well accept that such events occasioned in him neither a headache nor a good mood, but after the adventure there came a kind of shame, a hangover.

Anyway, I was in the right about him. The next time we rallied ourselves against a horde of monkeys, enlightenment came to me: Slim certainly knew I thought he felt disgust at what we were doing. Possibly it amused him, and left behind a slight pressure in the back of his brain as if from a big shock. He surely posed the same

alternatives in respect of me, but at the same time he also knew that in doing so he produced the same thoughts in me. We each read the other from our own mind.

Slim was puzzling over the Rulc business. He was proud of his weather-nose. If I'd said to him what I didn't believe, but for this purpose would gladly have attempted to believe, that what he took for a hunch represented simply a shock to his memory and that he really had experienced what he seemed to have dreamed, he would surely have gulped and told me straight out that he knew it, and he'd have been equally capable of telling me that I was mouthing banalities and he had no patience for such nonsense. For I had a feeling he was conducting the same experiment on me.

At bottom we were each of us united in crediting the other with our own self-deceptions. This line of thought led me to the conclusion that Slim was after all feeling some discomfort. For it was not to be excluded that Rulc's departure from the village and her murder had happened before his very eyes. Now, for a man like Slim this situation was of no tragic significance. The only uncanny aspect was psychological: the strange lack of clarity in the memory, to a certain extent indicating amnesia, an aberration, a clouding of consciousness within an intact and maybe even heightened capacity for thought.

All these doubts could have been lifted if Slim had, for example, confronted me directly and asked: "But tell me, Johnny, that night, you know, that moon-bright night before our departure, weren't you out on the savannah?"

At which I would have said, in conformity with the truth and with diabolical calculation – he would count the points off on his fingers –: "Now now, my dear Slim, where did that idea come from? I don't wish to be indiscreet, you understand. But that night I saw two men one behind the other coming through the ferns. This was shortly after Rulc gave a sob, shortly after that dull metallic thunk that sounded so horribly in my ears, and after that scene – but it all happened so quickly. One of those men was you. If you remember you looked away, gesturing at the same time as if you didn't want to be recognised. The consequence of this is that I too really had no clear view, maybe it was van den Dusen; but I'd already spoken to him on his way back. But maybe you're right. For then it's all just our imaginations; we suggest it to ourselves in such a way that the devil knows how we got linked up in this thing. But it's not very pleasant for you, I suppose?"

In this way we could both have come clean for once. Not about the event, for that simply couldn't be ascertained, indeed came farther from being ascertained the more our thoughts came into alignment. But such alignment itself remained to be demonstrated. It wasn't absolutely necessary to make it real by a spoken declaration. Belief in it had, by no obvious means, been demonstrated to both of us. But I had a need to receive Slim in audience. For he and I represented a panic. It would have been nice of him to create certainty about it, but I could clearly smell his fear. For my part I feared to despise him for it, I was understandably frightened of all feelings that concerned him; they would only proliferate all those feelings of which I was the object.

Possibly this thought was no longer a cause, but a consequence. Certainly Slim had already thought it all out. His glances became ever more problematic. Amid all the antipathy towards me that was evident in them, I noticed a shimmer of gloom. I've seen such looks before only in lunatics. And now a thought came to me: we were suffering a kind of mutual persecution complex. We were fleeing. We'd left behind our mental points of intersection, were trying mechanically to put time and space between us, were striving to evolve ourselves free of one another. But on that point, that shared dream, Rulc's body, the cores of our being were as coterminous now as before. Our brains lived like Siamese twins, they hated each other but were as alike as two peas in a pod. I saw Slim, enraged by this fate, push on with redoubled vigour. He seemed to be trying to flee, flee from me perhaps.

Now a berserker's strength came over me. I was not just the impotent passenger being carried down this road, I was also a shareholder in a greater enterprise. I saw my mental powers stream out over Slim. Now he too was no longer solitary. Now his mental activities too were visible to another. We snowballed like an avalanche, we proliferated ourselves mutually in an endless sequence. We were fleeing, but fleeing not just within this location, we were fleeing from an over-stimulated and as it were guilty-seeming way of thinking. We had a roaring sense of the passage of time, of thinking. Out from space, from tangible space in the form of a dense thicket-infested jungle, off into an untrodden time! Space was abducted by us. We hauled space away.

It was something Slim had said: We hauled away Space and took Time by storm. We lived one against the other, each living against his own life. Where did it start, where did it end? Where was reality and where delusion? Certainty and doubt were resolved. For us, both modes of seeing stood side by side. Slim slept, but meanwhile as Number Two he was present, and allowed the stabbing of Rulc by Zana. How it must torment him! More or less as it tormented me, this immense emptiness in my brain at an important locus of the situation.

For it tormented me, to cut the matter short, that Rulc had been stabbed in such a curious manner. I felt a secret guilt that I had dreamed a formal indictment of my companions, as if I needed excuses for a crime that, in secret and unconsciously, I myself had committed. It was all so remarkably clear, like something ingeniously teased out, except for this one point: the fatal blow. A happy reference point for my logic was signified by the fact that I'd never had in my possession a particular slim worn-down machete. For sometimes it seemed to want to appear to me as if that dream-figure – the weapons-bristling comical attire led me to name it van den Dusen – was a transformation. What it was I couldn't say; but there was at that time a profound self-tormenting unease in me.

But all this was really perhaps only probing too neatly into an abstract system that the tropical sun fermented in us. Hadn't people already experienced what grotesque regimes and mechanisms the sun can engender in the Oriental brain? What rhythmical and deeply elaborate fictions, what mathematically and equilibristically correct structures of fallacious reasoning swelled so copiously out of their heat, and

out of hardships and deprivations when the nerves of Aryan people were exposed to them? Time and Space were, to use Slim's words, for us merely a skeleton, a technique for arriving at our own life, at absurdity and unreality. When we slashed a sappy breach in the forest's spatial resistance, we were conquering the fifth dimension. Our Indians scuttled over life as if over a sheet. For the red man knows no space, the simultaneity of several surfaces. He moves always in the horizontal. You see him brow to the fore, running on ahead like an animal. He tucks his head into his shoulders. He's the man of energy, the straight-ahead man, dynamic but spiritless. He has no real sense of time, the simultaneity of many spatialities. And he's not ipso facto like this or that other type in the world, without latitude or extension, and he knows no thought, the simultaneity of many temporalities.

But we are in thought! For us reality, the jungle for example, is a bagatelle; we conquer it with the left hand, we serve as altar-boys extraordinaire, we view it from one perspective ... for it reveals itself essentially as a simplification. We are sons of the fifth dimension and two is one and one is here two. Everything collapses to its totality. Forward, swing the machetes, on, on, on ... through here, through this thicket ... ah, on through!

On the seventh day we sense a change. Something in the air has changed. The sense of touch in our hands reacts to it exactly as to a dull humming. There's something more tenuous in the atmosphere. We breathe a clearing.

In the evenings, when the great heaving unrest of the forest suddenly switches off our toil, we drop wearily beside the campfire. Zana, who never speaks, watches passively without lifting a finger as our Indians prepare the meal. We eat in silence, no one enjoys the food. But when she dances, standing all of a sudden and dancing away from the spot as we clap hands in rhythm, she looks not at me or Slim or Checho: for some incomprehensible reason she fixes on the Dutchman, who has lost weight again and shows his pink sunburnt hairy pelt at shirtfront and wrists. He's grumpy and contrary in his opinions as we – Slim and I – confirm and elaborate our dimension-system.

Then we continue in German, paying no attention to him. Slim declares there is much of this sort he can express only in German. Zana dances her primitive dance in the fire's glow: no splendid figures but graceful, practical movements, idealised fragments of her everyday experience with strongly physical powers of imagination. The repertoire of her abandon is not large. But she charms again with a new idea, a new sluttish move that seems to her worshipful, but is received by the Dutchman with a leer. She mimes lovemaking, shakes her childish loins. Slim hits her, they fight, then she crouches abashed by the fire, staring into the embers. We would all like to hit her.

Weariness impels us soon into sleep. Suddenly my ears wake me up. I've heard rutting sounds, and find that my eyes are wet. My heart is burning. I have no shame, in the great devouring forest I'm concealed from shame, but slender brown limbs that belong to another are a thorn in my flesh. I was awakened by jealousy, my brain

noticed sounds that skirt my desires. I look up at the sky-gap and fix on a star. Let it fall and squash the couple! My eyes scrabble about to see if it won't let itself come loose. And see, suddenly there's a warmth in my mouth and at the same time my chewing muscles are set free, so to speak, and a shooting star sails across the firmament. It was I who breathed it out, my breath is fiery with suppressed kisses. My desire spills like a warm orb from my mouth, and I hear myself sigh.

At this moment I become aware that the bond with Slim is broken. I feel alone, a healthy personality with a trenchant life-instinct. And at the same instant I settle the matter once and for all. Here beneath this fine radiant sky, with the heart of a predator in heat, memory returns. I admit now I can still be wrong and can always change my mind again. But either I have not lived at all up until now and it was all a dream, or it must remain a fact that I have already heard this breathing of two people, exactly this same breathing. So I have an experience in common with Slim, and not a dream, and nothing binds me to him. And I heard them, I did ... the night before our departure!

At once I felt myself in a state of limbo. A harsh supernatural light surrounded me. It was as if I had lost the ballast stored in the bilges of my soul, my sensitivity-life was uncannily alert and pure. The slightest sound and the least distinct colour moved me with sweet force. It was unquenched desire, now painfully heightened, that made me tender. I found myself in an exalted rapture, made no move, stared straight ahead with undazzled eyes. I heard a snort, a sharp exhalation through a nose, and recognised Slim's breathing again. I heard a vague sobbing, it was Zana's love-cry. Pain at this joy in others aroused in me a vivid sensual clairvoyance. Apart from which I made the following discoveries.

The fire was eating away at a fresh lump of wood, I listened as its long jagged saw-lips with the tiny teeth chewed every one of the green cells into itself. There was a hissing of thousands of little teeth at work. At the same time I was preternaturally sensitive to something happening to one side of me that I couldn't exactly see because my eyes continued looking through the sky-gap.

This event was happening on a many-branched tree partly overshadowed by other trees, and really it was insignificant. But the tree was such an extraordinary shape and showed such unexpected movement within its system that I was literally fascinated by this tangential stimulus. The rhythmic convulsions continued. A green shimmer intensive as cathode rays filled the upper space, where a knotty segmented species of palm, all elbows and knees, spread out; and among its limbs there hung coiled a giant living intestinal mass. The endless slow convolution that quivered up its length seemed to come from nothing and flow into nothing. The thing was broad as a human skull and swelled like a full bellows of green silk. This self-procreation of a living being embodied the ground-sensation, the entity-perception of the word "shuffle". The creature was all shuffle it seemed to me, its motion, its life was analysed in terms of shuffle, a series of jerks, simultaneously a forward motion and a digestive achievement. After a part of my brain had followed this motion for a while that seemed an eternity, it was as a sudden storm of thoughts that it first clearly entered my consciousness. I

noticed all at once the dun-green light that streamed onto the creature from within – factually explained by starlight reflected beneath the foliage – and just as salient, the spectacular tedium of the motif of shuffling, and the sudden emergence of purpose to the motion in the form of a snake-skull poking out. The skull was flat and closed like a fist around cold green eyes. Now, as if along an invisible thread between the creature's eyes and my own, I could sense glowing green rays that seemed to come down from the stars. The anchor-shaped tongue, sharp as a split-ended hair, was sustained in a furious perpendicular vibration by gassy emanations from its insides. It tasted the charred smell of the fire and swiftly retracted, at once the head placed itself in a true vertical against the trunk, and the march upwards began.

The creature had no knowledge of space. It marched literally with its forehead to the ground, it could have stretched itself like a log across an abyss, but its medium was always a flat surface. This long, tedious sack of muscle was conquering gravity, or what is the same thing, ignoring it. This strange illogical observation provided a lesson. Space is a product of the knowledge of gravity. The more gravity in a life, the more elaborate its spatiality and dimensions. The creature knew not time, maybe it would never die, not in any human sense. For death is gravity within time. Only through death, through resistance and denial, does human time arise. For only that which becomes is perceived. It becomes through becoming perceived. The sense of gravity is a weakening and a diminution of capacity, but constraint creates a higher dimension.

Only through contrary thought does higher thought arise; with the death of thought I feed it to a higher stage, in the gravity of a reality I elevate it to the next stage. My faculties of certainty and my stability are diminished. But my insight is enhanced. Every attack of vertigo gains for me a new dimension. For every direction I renounce in life, I gain a perspective. I cannot walk on my hair or cling vertically to a tree trunk with my belly. I must be able to renounce these simple skills and enjoyments.

An animal head is a signpost pointing straight ahead, it points always in the horizontal. But a human skull is an arrowhead pointing up, out into endless space, suggesting that the dolichocephalic among humans are the most human, the Goths, the builder-races. The Earth is round and a space and a return, and when you've gone far enough you're back again where you started. The Earth as space expresses the contradiction, and for sure it's no serving tray of slops and swampy joys. I've left my earlier sentimentalising behind. Let beasts and savages enjoy their felicities. Truly these lie heaped up in us. The intestine-snake coils itself convulsively around the tree of tripes, and leads a stupid blissful life on a side-branch of evolution. In the end, my friend, you're an abnormality, an outgrowth from a snake that went wrong and took it a long way.

And you carry the savage in you as well, the panicky, the type with the duplicate soul that dreams the same in everyone, and in a ridiculous communal way animates a wooden idol. But I've come away from this, come away at just this moment, God knows what damage I've suffered again in so doing, what new difficulties this grace

imposes on me, and what I shall have to pay for these brief moments of insight. I am again “I” myself, I have found myself, I hang up for good my sentimentality and my infatuation with the Tropics. For I stick with gravity and contradictory thoughts.

Good night, Slim, it will do you good too, now this business between us is settled. I release you. Sleep with Zana ... I lie here in want, my heart burns like a heretic, I suffer when others love brown limbs, but I create my thoughts and mould suffering into passion. Don't lie: the brain is no worse mechanism than Nature herself. Now I'm biased towards the brain, I give to it with all my fervour what it most needs: gravity, death and inversion! Become heavier, murder reality and do eternal penance for your thoughts, turn about and turn against yourself in your thoughts. *Vertite, vertite, anachoreite!*

The green snake uncoiled itself from its tangles, the knot stretched to a long line. I felt alone and clear, in the midst of the tenderest living processes of a keen perceptive faculty. The whispering over by Slim and Zana had died away. I didn't turn my head. I had hardly any sense of the gloating rodent of infatuation squatting in my stomach; I fed it with the very spiritual gluten that aroused my dread of it, and rendered it trustful. A tormented heart sharpens the mind. My thoughts were free of Slim, they no longer dwelled in symbiosis with his. I was able to think clearly and by myself. As the giant snake tentatively pursued the monstrous tedium of its crusade, I went to sleep.

Next morning we awoke refreshed. My eyes met Slim's; he seemed bright and cheerful. He sat up and said: “So, today's a good day. You feeling all nice and fresh? Today we'll reach the big river, indeed we will!”

Hurrah, we've made it! On the eighth day it emerged that the unusual content of the atmosphere consisted of tones. The air in this region must have been saturated with them in an almost chemical way. The vibrations were perhaps enormously tiny constituents. As I plagued my memory it came to me with certainty that I must already have dreamed this phenomenon. Sometime in the past ... Right, this was again that problematic dream from before our departure. Its prophetic nature made me uneasy. So it's possible for experiences that come later to be dreamed in advance, as a classroom example, a principle? How mighty was the spirit! During these hours of hard cogitative toil, as we slashed our way through the jungle, I began to believe in Fate. We have such and such a quota of sorrows and passions to create – how we create them is irrelevant. Here the phantoplasm, the inner sight, came into play.

Up till now, trusting to Zana's sense of direction, we had kept parallel to the river's course. Sometimes we stumbled upon it, when it set out a knee or a snare. Then we turned away as quickly as possible. And now we heard a roaring. Zana informed us it was the waterfalls. Even though we remained somewhat dubious about the practical goal of our journey, a slight unease came over us. What if we did come across an old Spanish or Portuguese camp?

The river widened to a basin. For two days, as we slowly descended from the high plateau, we'd been coming to mountainous terrain. Hills rose, valleys deepened, the

plateau became a fringe of ridges, its outliers and feet jutting like a clump of roots. The course of the little river had grown steeper, now its waters gathered, turned green and sluggish. Around noon, with the sun at the zenith, we reached our goal.

The firmament lay in a smooth mirror like an oval rayless pane of glass. The reflectivity of the water broke up the image. Two hundred paces below the inflow of our little river into the larger water, a natural weir of rocks and boulders lay piled up. Great gouts of water now sped over these in three ribbons of different widths to drop some forty meters into a seething rock-infested pool. The middle ribbon was the biggest; like a monstrous shimmering roller it turned and turned from the vertex to unload white masses of foam into the basin. The waterfall didn't seem high, but the water had plenty of brio. We looked down into the basin. Anyone falling in would be done for. He would end up a shattered mangled corpse.

Not stopping for rest we set to work at once under Zana's direction. The ribbon of water was divided in two places by a wide natural obelisk of rock, each biting like a giant tooth into the flooding mass. On the downstream side, figures had been incised by crude tools into the smooth polished surface. They more or less tallied with those on Slim's tile, which he still had with him. They depicted the topographical markers. For a while we observed the illusory revolutions of the giant roller, the eternal smooth slide of the watery film; then we jumped from rock to rock, and at the spot where the stone obelisk held the water back over our heads, we stepped in behind the filtered milky glare.

We were now in a cave formed by a slanting rock wall. Above and before us the membranous curtain rolled past. A thundering that swallowed all other sounds splintered in this space ... which was empty. We had to clamber over broken rocks that lay scattered around. Moisture dripped down grooves in the craggy walls. Now we gazed at one another in silence, anger in our disappointed faces. We felt shame. Slim stood splay-legged on two rocks opening and closing his mouth. He looked strange. Suddenly it came to me: he's laughing and talking. But no clear sound at all could be made out.

We all stood in the gloom in an overstrung posture orating to one another, and we so worked ourselves up to laughter that we broke into dreadful noiseless spluttering and bellowing. Our rocky nook was misted with a fine rain of spray. Elements of a rainbow hung for a while in the air, for moments almost material, and suddenly disappeared when the watery veil, in a rhythmically recurring cycle, became more dense or less, and the shimmering light that penetrated dimmed by degrees. The air in the space was apple-green. The situation this created was most extraordinary. It became eerie, and I read in the puzzled faces of the others that they too found it weird.

We at once noticed a subtraction from our being. Something in us had been given away, we felt ourselves lifted, a little disembodied. The effect was the same as if some source were emitting a stream of laughing gas. We felt extraordinarily well, but my brain tried vainly to struggle against the intrusiveness of this condition. The laughter

in my throat was one element; the others were laughing too, Zana and even our trusty Indians were shaking, we were all tottering about in unstable poses. But at the same time there was something unsettling in this apparition, this apple-green light. I squeezed my brain, squeezed with closed eyeballs deep towards the back: slowly a long green towering serpent reconstituted itself. It was enveloped in a brighter light.

At this moment we all found ourselves utterly weightless in this medium; one consequence of our loss of hearing was a loss of weight. The green went through us like cathode rays or exposure to starlight. It was no light but a palpable dense flood. Rainbow elements swam in this flood, they sank, floated and flew up, they were palpable, you could let them slide like strands of hair through your fingers. Zana placed her hand in its delicate weave; bending and in obedience to every imprinted contour it flowed past and away. But the main green strands passed right through us. They didn't stick to the skin but broke organically from the flesh, they underwent a transformation, materialised the body anew in a second medium. The space that our bodies filled came into being from new foundational conditions.

I recalled fleetingly that in a vision I had seen this light break through as if from my own eyes. I shrank from the premonition, for it was as if it had some significance for this cave, the fitting location for an occurrence or spectacle the image of which was not yet available in my head. I had an embarrassing and foolish feeling that these continuing allusions from my idle dreams finally did contain some meaning, and this was perhaps the reason why I perceived everything through sharpened and hallucinatory senses. A creeping alteration was proceeding within us. We were exchanging substances, transforming structures and stepping into the shoes of hazier beings. But this exchange cost our consciousness a numb painful feeling, we were more or less unable to conceal our horror, and so we laughed, for in our rational mode we found the happenings absurd.

Suddenly Zana bent forward and stared into van den Dusen's face. He was apple-green, a great apple-green aureole, ridiculous and lyrical and in his lyricism even more ridiculous, to the point of pain. This panic was himself in a higher degree, it was horror. It overwhelmed us in mad irresistible crazy laughter.

Strangely, none of us thought to flee from this space. When Slim made a discovery in a cleft in the rocks, we were so dazed that we paid no attention. What he pulled out might have been a long piece of iron. It occurred to me that after all we had come here for treasure, and now Slim held something in his hands. My heart missed a beat. At this moment a thousand hopes stormed into me. And though I was rock-hard and unromantically expected nothing, in this span of time I allowed myself, like a felon facing certain death, all kinds of audaciousness. Slim really did hold up an object for a moment, then it began to make him itchy and he threw it down. Our little company began to move. And now we became aware of nothing more nor less than a whole campful of old iron. There were arquebuses of primeval construction, helmets, armour, halberds, things of leather. But the leather had rotted in the damp and crumbled to ashes. The weapons and other metal objects from an earlier century were partly

splintered and overlain with verdigris; but the apple-green light also laid over them a shimmering fungoid crust, a sturdy fabric of verdigris.

There was no treasure. The owners of these objects had been poor devils like ourselves; soldiers, globetrotters, discoverers of continents and treasure seekers, like ourselves. The weapons were of cracked and pitted iron, the hilts of swords and épées protruded skeletally like a solitary long fang. We turned our backs on the dismal sight, after vainly scuffing at the pile and stirring up the decay in this still life, bringing to light rich layers of mould and rot.

The physical exertions of the laughter epidemic and the capture of consciousness within this green-lit existence enervated us. We existed in this space as apparitions of light, we were simply a special case and a condensation of the green light that was master here. The sense of hearing had been disconnected. The roaring was so loud we couldn't even hear our own fish-lipped laughter. And there was one more surprise to record. Our senses of touch and sight merged. Light and substance became one. The consequence was that we stood there two-dimensionally, as if painted on the green walls, squashed flat by the spatial hegemony of the green light. I saw the others move their jaws, and gaze out from holes in the green mask. The human was here an altered being. Zana's hair floated on her shoulders in green ringlets like nymph-hair. Were we symbols of a water-world? Were we a kind of water-spirit? Our organic merriment caused our human consciousness a deal of trouble. It was a dissonance in our physical presence, and we suffered under it.

The Indians were less affected. The illusion succeeded with them. Since they were pure physicality, they had no need to do battle with the autocratic powers of the brain. The problem of mythology was solved, the undine-species was saved. Zana leaned a little against van den Dusen. Then Slim suddenly moved out, he leapt over the slimy rocks and vanished through the gap in the opalescent curtain of water that slid endlessly from above down below, groaning and quivering like a steel plate.

We rushed after him. Here's the gap. When we stood outside a change came over us. The objective light of day around us we found welcome, or not we – rather a certain proportion of our mind. This was its home. We recognised one another again in the sunshine, the persistent quicksilver flabs of water at our backs.

"What was that?" the Dutchman asked.

"The second body!" said Slim. "If you should ever lose the first, you can always take up lodgings in the spare!"

"Why yes," I said, "that's just what I was thinking."

XXIII.

The spitzhound that had been waiting out on the cliff, being afraid of water and the foaming cascade, greeted us with signs of unease. He let out yelps of joy as if they had

lain ready on his tongue, kept sniffing at us in all sorts of ways to quieten his distrust, and cast spooky sidelong glances. Maybe we smelled too much of damp, of mould and rot, of apple-green light, of poison. We seemed not to arouse his confidence, and his love and zest for life wilted visibly. The two of us made an especially strong impression on each other. He kept away after snuffling at me, as if I had a sickness. But I suddenly conceived a sharp hatred for him, which I introduced with a malicious kick. He'd been too cowardly to enter the cave. Now surely he alone of the entire expedition remained unscathed. He gave a howl and barked at me from a distance, but without looking in my direction, as if holding God knows what piece of Nature responsible for this horseplay. And from now on this remnant of a hound, a beggarly mangy beast, was interesting to me, I never let him out of my sight. Our lives were linked. For he would be saved.

I wasn't alone. The Dutchman and Slim also bothered the creature. I'd swear they treated it worse than before. Because we were all passing our days in tight-lipped brooding, the hound became an object of observation. And then it became evident to me that for a considerable time we had been languishing in a state of decline. Disappointment over the failed treasure hunt had demoralised us. We lay together in one of the caves along the riverbank, and loafed whole days away. The Indians now and then performed some activity. They prepared meals from the supplies we'd brought along, and picked fruit from the jungle edge. But we Whites and Zana let time slip by, and did nothing. Rocks, huge sharp-edged boulders the river had gnawed from the plateau, gave shade. Agaves grew aslant over our heads. Not a smidgen of sunshine ever entered this little cave; it stayed relatively cool all the time. But outside the air danced feverishly over the riverbed. We avoided excursions outside. A heavily-armoured sluggishness had come over us.

At night, however, when it grew cooler, the region seemed too full of dangers. The Indians lit perimeter fires, and beyond them at dusk and at dawn we heard animals heading to the river to drink. Down there life went its pitiless way. As swift dusk fell on these tracks and caravan trails of the animal world, bloody battles took place. The cries of the dying could be heard, shouted commands and warnings to flee. We lay behind the fires and for that quarter-hour strained our ears to the sounds. A panther that happened on us as it padded along suddenly noticed the fires. At the very last moment it rescinded the leap it had blindly initiated, the back paws slipped on the rock, we heard it scrabbling and panting and saw a tail. One of the Indians jumped up to hit it with a burning brand. This lent it enormous energy; with minimal grip and footholds it scrambled back up in a rage of fear.

And day after day the same scene was pasted before our eyes. The sun, a glowing lump of bronze, shot heat like lances in garish bundles, in snow-white jags. Why didn't we get up and leave this place, what was there to seek here, what was happening to us? This thought rose momentarily in us and was teased out. What are we supposed to be undertaking? We can break out at any time, there's nothing to stop us! But our willpower had gone to pot, we no longer took ourselves seriously, our lack of energy

seemed quite natural. Were we ill? Hot and cold shudders ran from my head down to my toes. For all its sedateness, my pulse held pursuit and unrest. I studied my companions. Their eyes lay stupid under half-closed lids. And Slim stood up, investigated the medicine chest, and took out a damp-proof tin. That was the day we started to chew quinine.

But the fever that seemed to have taken hold of us was not the only reason we stayed put. Zana refused to guide us to anywhere Slim wanted to go. Scenes took place. He started beating her. She submitted meekly and with an unmistakably hate-filled expression let it all happen. She wanted to go back. Slim did not. He declared that it would cost us our heads. That we had sicced the snakes on Rulc. That Moki himself couldn't protect us from the laws of the demons. And so we stayed, and waited to see if Zana would change her mind.

She would not. She lay with her tidy body bedded between round boulders as if they were cushions, her hands scooped cinders and rubbish from round about her and threw it out onto the riverbed. She urged the dog to chase it. But the dog acted dumb. He wasn't trained to games of fetch. With eyes ruined by the sun, he ran right past the object, and Zana grinned. Untroubled by the sun beating down whenever he took off in the thrill of the chase, he dashed this way and that. When he thought to have found something to which, without impairing one's respect for his judgement, one could imagine he ascribed the allegorical quality of booty, he settled his quite hairless violet belly onto hot rock and placed the object complacently between his forepaws.

When once I saw him in this position, the desire came over me to plant a bullet in his stupid happy belly. The revolver was close by. My fingers itched for its hand-friendly shape, I was overwhelmed by delicious anticipation. Yes indeed, I wanted to hear gunfire again, I wanted to be spectator at a little fight to the death, I wanted at long last to have one more experience worthy of a human being. I grabbed feverishly for the weapon and weighed it like a connoisseur. What would happen now appeared to me as a hugely particular savour, it flattered me that I had such desires, the situation held a certain original romanticism.

By chance I glanced across at Zana. Her eyes were grinning in expectation. This circumstance chilled me, I grew dispirited. I had no appetite for sharing the thrill. And so I wouldn't shoot the dog. But for a treat I launched a little coup. I brandished the pistol at a random target. Shots rang out nine times in succession. The shells bounced briskly past us. A thin blue smoke veiled the sun, the detonations echoed deafeningly from the rocks, and I thought: now the blood is singing in our ears. But I also felt something else, a new fresh quickening. Swiftly I stood up and moved about.

I was filled with devilry and a desire for action. Admittedly, an ocean of headache was raging at my temples, and my limbs were not quite steady. But I could feel the rapture of the deed. Today I'll go for a walk. Forward march! Up now! Travel travel travel ...! Away with this idle carrion-bait life! Staggering, but not bothered by my condition, I trotted off down along the riverbed. I loaded the pistol and emptied it at

futile targets. There to the sides, a little above the cracked mud of the riverbed, was the bristling jungle. It was alien and dangerous. Could one penetrate into it? Could one possibly enter without suffering a dreadful death sentence? A fearful vision seized me as I imagined a life among its animals and plants, and I couldn't possibly remember how I ever managed to endure it without expiring in terror. I avoided approaching it. I was an outsider, the sad observer of a sovereign and forbidden secret.

Had I really ever seen the jungle from within, or was it all a gentle harmless dream? Everything was confused. Everything grew to a gigantic size. I felt endangered by my feebleness against the forest, timidly I acknowledged its moral superiority, its grandeur, its demonism and elemental nature. No, the jungle was not for me, I was a poor creature compared to the jungle, too bad and too wretched to ever set foot in it. It was befitting only for giants and unshockable types like Slim, or an Indian, brown strong and savage and with a heart of iron. Did it attract me?

Back into your corner, slimy white man, farcical old fever-steed! I was seized with disgust for my white skin, revulsion for my suety unresisting flesh. Should I, must I, might I enter the jungle? I surrender. I admit defeat. I'm the ultimate lump of clay in God's nature. I'm a pariah in the face of the jungle. Retreat, old fever-steed!

I climbed to my feet about ten minutes ago, and haven't come quite as far as I'd thought. And now my mood became clouded, misery seized me in its unholy form. Physically this in no way made things worse for me, in fact the rush of action drove away my headache. But my condition was remarkable enough, my world simply became flavourless; during these moments I fell victim to an inconsolable tedium. I threw myself down and wept. And in a pure evil mood, in anger and excess of tedium I lifted a boulder heavy as a man and sent it shattering against the cliff. Following this success I affected joy. My physical powers are in no way weakened! But now I had no wish to go on. I'd had enough of walking. The sight of the riverbed and the impenetrable bristling jungle with its oppressive devilry wearied me. I was seized by a strong disinclination to move my legs, in which at the same time I could feel the power of mechanical pistons.

I had just enough willpower to carry me back. Slim and van den Dusen greeted me with smiles. The Indians were asleep. The dog cringed squinting to the side, the fever-breath emanating from me irritated him. Or could he smell my human malice?

XXIV.

The sun stabbed down with a stiff penetrating light; the landscape lay spread before our eyes, framed with bitter realism in the gilded slanting walls. A curse on every artist and forger! Life is a sketch, and bitterness climbs from those tough dry stalks, packed so tight and disorganised, that depict the jungle. Every entity was shockingly realistic in this light, caught in the sober solemnity of its existence. Blooms of outrageous colour, uneventful, opened in bushy rows; they had no proper glow and tone, it was

swallowed up by the all-devouring all-melting light. Colourful parrots stuck heads with wild erect feather-horns through the foliage and stared balefully at us; glowering with malice they settled dead level on branches and with their angular beaks waged a desperate fantasy battle, a passionate pretend fight against our detested presence. A pair of storks strutted in pools cut off from the river channel; in early morning and afternoon they harpooned frogs, frogs as appetiser and dessert and frogs for the digestion. Such moderation vis à vis the jungle's presumed delicatessen was heroic. But it lay in Nature; she determined the style, the elaboration. The most outrageous means were here deemed worthy only of an allusive, you might say patchy application.

The forest was marked by a magical erasure of all those latterly so brutal drives, a garrulous sneakiness served, on the surface, all the mystical and deep forces of its gearbox. Here Nature was excessive, almost ingenious; and so there was no need for humans, and no need for the sloth that crept so deliberately up there with human mannerisms among scrawny trunks three times the height of a man, too sluggish to form its eternally snouty face into a grimace. Nature as a totality was ingenious. Therefore there was no need for its creatures to exist. They could be taken out of service and left in the shade to lie and yawn and have not the faintest idea how to deal with it and never again produce a coherent thought.

My God, those storks dined on frogs with body and soul, and meanwhile the jungle, an enormous steak, was laid out ready for them. And this was Nature, frugal despite great opulence; she was not even what one might think of as a Look, but entirely Being, entirely Thing. This was a thoroughly practical unaesthetic Nature, who showed not a shimmer of concern for the effects of her beauty but was attuned only to the bliss, yes, bliss of summery bodies. But I protested vigorously against her evident bias. I was sickened by her and felt heavy inhibitions rising from her residues of phantasy and romanticism. For in me spring and autumn reigned, in me was no Summer-being, rather Spring-becoming, I was maturing to the blond, to the principal of blondness, only no summer bliss was in me. Hence I was ravaged by vexation, a fever of vexation for which we had quinine pills that I swallowed doggedly. But always the same picture; again solidly-built birds pushed upholstered breasts through the foliage, unfolded huge garnishes of feathers in every colour, stuck out their tail-ends and formed wheels. But this beauty was an exposed overly transparent secret – a department-store beauty, almost mercantile, but displayed a little less than solidly, and I could never love its businesslike features. The shiver of awe was missing. That was it.

It was all a riddle solved. Everything was explicit. I understood it all. I understood when one day two little cockatoo males suddenly set about one another with their sabre-beaks until the brain of one was laid bare. It bored me. What bored me too – I had a vague memory it hadn't always been so – was that the scalped bird in its final death agony uttered a sweet little peep, when in healthier days a more purring tone would have made itself heard.

The clarity with which each successive stage of befuddlement proceeded was paralysing. Caught up in it I began to grow uneasy, fear washed muggily over me and I

jumped up. I mean no, I didn't actually jump up, I just intended to jump up, and before my eyes was a very clear vision of what would happen next. I would flee, would abandon my friends and take myself off somewhere to be alone, simply be alone. For at this time my connection with Slim was again making itself noticeable. I knew he was constantly thinking with me, so to speak, as if thinking his own thoughts and emotions using the powers of my brain. Maybe this was the explanation: that nothing of all that was going through my head actually happened. I was using up the entire action in contemplating it, and Slim fed on this. My vegetative state was a tawdry vestige of reality. Everything else took place only in my brain. I thought up a fine thing of pleasure, a thing refined enough to tear this sweetly excited brain apart. And remained lying exactly where I was, even though emotion surged through me and frosts of tedium came to flush me out.

My condition was well known. The expression 'tropical frenzy' occurred to me like a gift of grace. With this I could work, could explain. And so now I knew where I stood. I would find a remedy as quickly as possible, get to my feet, set to work, lead a decent life you might say, and adapt myself to circumstances as practically as possible. Life must be sorted out! Did not opportunities for an unending natural praxis lie before me, the blank sheet of an unwritten Crusoe-tale? I could build a canoe and take myself off downriver. Or break out with Zana, marry her and lead the life of a jungle-human. My enormous capacity for assimilation, my genius for involution stood me in good stead here. Was I not filled with good confident intentions?

After an hour of the boldest undertakings and whip-cracking, the concept of frenzy was to me as stale as any other word. I slid with hysterical passion into the depths of my condition. I was vain about myself, vain about my monkey-face, my lack of willpower and personality, meaning my ingenious capacity for assimilation: for I could indeed see as I looked around at the others that already we all had monkey faces. We screwed our faces up because the sun dazzled us. The animality in Zana's sleek features incited me to bold impersonation. I courted the expression of her desires, had to sneak those desires from her, she was approachable only by a kind of mimicry. Well then, let's prepare ourselves to be Indians! If Zana is my woman, I'll grab her by the hair and go for a walk on her face. For her I have dastardly plans. No more considering her feelings. I stick by an older humanity; as far as racial desires are concerned, ancient times rule.

The good intentions were the deed. Here, both externally and in my brain, Nature was producing a massive effusion. But she squandered millions out of frugality, to save exertion and spare the old forms that would otherwise die out too soon. This Nature was not meant for Europeans, nor for anything advanced, humane, intelligible. Oh, she hated the machine, that paradoxical bird of the north, and its different economy. She was in a hurry, like a Croesus heading as swiftly as possible to beggary in order not to fall apart in luxury but to be content with frugality. This Nature was, as said, ingenious, ingenious in herself, although her creations were deficient in exactly this respect. Hence in her profusion she was also a great writer, the kind of practitioner

who'd rather get life over with rapidly in theory, just to spare himself and not fall to pieces. The writer, as we all know, is the shrewdest of dealers, he buys everything up and pays with phantasy. I am myself such a writer – such a chunk of tropical Nature, if you'll allow me – such a fabricator of *tropes*. I've been happily married to Zana for the longest time, but all the same I'm still lying here. Now she glances across as soulfully as she can, her look implies that I'd slit her belly with a knife right here and now. But here I lie, lazy as an alligator, and the flesh falls slowly from my bones.

Time depleted us, we were dying of a galloping tedium. Overhead a pair of storks wheeled their circular path. That was the banner of our camp. And it was a real camp we'd now positioned in the world, and the circling overhead was the singsong of our blood. The two storks descended, ah, such long red bills they had, and the bills were so red that when you looked at them all you could think of was their redness. They were two beautiful red *styles* rapidly clacking, two cinnabar *pistils* of an elegant uniform dyestuff, two garish *capillaries* on a magic-lantern slide floating before our eyes. They busied the imagination, on the other hand were so good to look at they were entirely themselves, entirely a thing, entirely bills, red stork-bills, a practical matter, for clacking perhaps! I don't know why we pondered so much nonsense, why in particular we made such a big deal of those red bills that were of no relevance to us. The red was so much itself, and stimulated us in a seemingly powerful way. A thin stiff flap of flesh extruded from the middle of the bird's face and made us boil. Maybe because we had the tropical frenzy. I thought of the shattered head of the little male cockatoo with its peep, its bloody crest. How strange that there are animals running about with the distinguishing features of their bloodthirst undisguised.

But it's not at all strange. Among mammals it's the lips, the blood-fetishes and the sexual organs; in these the fundamental blood-sympathy of the bodies stands starkly revealed. Ha, how we chew when we kiss! How slyly we let this sweet vestige of a bite remain unsated, in our outrageous cunning economy of desire! The bird's kiss approaches closer to the older ideal. When the cockatoo male with a great deal of fluttering covers the female cockatoo, he makes flagellating jabs at the red parts of her face, targeted jabs, passionately he caresses the delicate red patches over her nostrils.

I glanced to the side. There was Zana, flaunting her artificially upturned lips that contained a wide streak of red like a blood-orange; two boar's teeth pierced the bones of her nose and the scars drew the lips up. Now I had to find out who among the men had the trickiest lips. Slim had thin bitter examplars, sharp as two knives. So he was out of the running. The Dutchman had a raspberry coloured pair under his moustaches. Noticing this gave me a deadly shock. Just at that moment we had both looked at the other's mouth. Here was the explanation for Zana's obvious interest. She squinted sidelong at him like a monkey-woman. Slim's face, which was all yellow under the reddish beard, at this moment expressed catastrophe.

The sun moved like a white glowing projectile across the twelve-hour sky, day after day along a path that we could follow. To the left of our desert island was the distant hissing of the falls. In front of us lay white river sand amid trickles in a half empty bed;

on the bank opposite was the seething jungle, and the air between was stirred by the heat into a constant tremor with ragged spectra. Our experiences were unvarying, monotonous, oh. I said “our” just then, hm. The tedium pursued its rotating course, and then the stork couple shot up circling, spiralling and corkscrewing overhead. And then suddenly Slim stood up, acquired some life, he gave orders to the Indians, a tree was cut down and work started to hollow it out. But I didn’t get up to help. I hated the deed, every deed. Slim’s energy enervated me, but he seemed intoxicated by the originality of the undertaking. He was making a canoe. He walked away with my life force, snuffed out my capability and left me lying passively behind. And now maybe for the first time I hated him with all my heart, with no dialectical digressions, with all the heartfelt hatred of a robbery victim. But he thrived on it.

He began to initiate discussions around the campfire, and plied us with his pet ideas, his brand new sparkling Dimensions Theory. Wait a second while I deliver the fatal blow. “You’re a dialectician,” I said menacingly. I was the great unmasker. I was shaking with fever, and my pulses were evaporating, literally steaming with effort.

Then the unexpected happened: the Dutchman began to speak. He took my side. He was an honest fellow, and I had to find it within me to feel a gushing fondness for such a character. Inwardly I showered him with gratitude and swore loyalty and solidarity. The situation was not unpleasant; now there were two of us, marching victorious to our goal. Yet a slight embarrassment crept in. It occurred to Slim, in the course of the discussion, to pick up his Colt pistol. He weighed it in his hand as if feeling solidarity with himself, and savoured the assurance that he too had an ally. His yellow bearded face acquired a lewd, actually lascivious cast, he looked not at us but at Zana, and so we were unsure which of his two opponents his words were aimed at. He spoke affably, but I would have wagered that in his voice there was a note of grim vexation clumsily concealed, a kind of false tune. The most remarkable thing was that he used the English “thou” as if quoting a Bible text, something particularly heart-gripping, maybe contemptuous. He said:

“I decline to debate with thee, my boy. Thou art tedious. I’m way too much of a problem for you. You concern yourself overmuch with my person, anyway more than is decent and healthy. This won’t do; we’re simply impossible for one another. But this I can say: thou art totally crazy, thou art insane, thou hast the tropical frenzy. For what you have in your imagination does not exist. There is no parallelism between two humans. It’s your brain’s mirror-mania. You make me so sick!” He stood and went out and returned only next morning. Around midnight there was a shot, and protesting monkey-cries rang out for a long time.

On the third day, work on the canoe was suspended. The old dreamy monotony reigned once more in our little camp in the rubble-filled shelter below the riverside cliffs. Slim realised we needed food. Without a word he unpacked his American rifle and called to the dog. It responded wagging its tail, trotted thirty paces behind, but suddenly turned about and came back to the shelter with a subdued expression, settling in its usual spot between two big boulders. Slim shouted and commanded,

Zana threw pebbles and clods and behaved as if never in her life had she needed to rectify a more serious breach of decorum. The creature stood up on languid limbs and turned its eyes to the corner as a deathly mournful appeal to our mercy, while snuffling fearfully outside with its nose in the air. Slim strode straight along the opposite bank where the jungle seemed less dense, and disappeared with the dog into the undergrowth.

Those of us left behind became strangely animated. “Phew,” the Dutchman said uncertainly, “now there’s one less soul in this space or this time, or whatever dimension!” He said no more about it, but seemed mischievously content to have pointed out the drama of our communal existence.

Sometime later, while I was busy with my weary head setting out in sequence the events going on around me, van den Dusen and Zana were caught up in a delightful game. They threw at each other whatever loose object came to hand, by chance drew closer together, and I heard Zana give a peculiar laugh as if being tickled. I avoided glancing back over my shoulder. Radiant dreams of Brazilian jungle tendresse proliferated in a brain that was like a summer jungle landscape of bright dappled fragments. In a paroxysm of wishes, inhibitions and sorrows at my actionless existence, I cramped myself into a bundle and with all my lunatic strength pressed backwards into the ground; I was following an instinctive drive to bury myself, squeeze myself away from the light, ha, the white light before which my impotence lay so crassly exposed, down into eternal shadows. Never and nevermore will anything come of my intentions. Never and nevermore shall I be allowed to embrace Zana’s thin limbs, never and nevermore shall I become an Indian prince like Luluac. I could not solve the riddle. There must be secret natural charms that are revealed unconsciously to the female, or that a European would never dare think of – for certain juicy details from the Indian paintings came to mind, natural sexual reflexes that must have been dammed mightily up in my brain.

“Even later on I never solved the riddle.” This sentence occurred to me then; I would think it in the future. “I have seen and enjoyed women of every land, but ever and again I had always to recall this strange ugly creature of complex charms. The natural egoism of a graceful strong human has an absorptive force; it digests the suffering weaker soul,” I wrote down in my thoughts. Ugly – did I ever really find Zana pretty, however often I tagged her with that word? Zana, no, she possessed no beauty of the kind influenced by palefaced ideals and artists. She was abnormally thin, thin as a flute, bones jutted like cables from beneath her brown skin but the skin was smooth and taut and followed sleekly the ornament of the structure. “Ever and again I have found this riddle too, that the male sexual organ shows a more original discrimination than the cultural brain more used to principles and singularities.” For I was remembering into the future, my words anticipated everything to come; it was all at once certain to me that I’d be able at some point to use these sentences in good conscience.

Suddenly shots cracked out from the jungle, the sound dampened by foliage. We listened. Van den Dusen said: "So he'll be back soon." He more or less sniffed the air for him, and became morose.

And Slim came, without a catch and without the dog. No one said a word. And I too shall waste no word on it, for I can only allude to these deep and wicked things, being loath to disempower them. Everyone breathed out. The dog was no longer a survivor, giving the lie to premonitions. "Snake," Slim explained laconically into the silence, and everyone smiled a little private smile. At once we all had a different feeling. We sensed the ridiculous in these useless actions, these caricatured expressions of a sudden zest for life. A Slim with his symmetrical life-forces was, however tedious, a thing that instilled respect. But a capricious Slim exposed himself to our contempt.

He approached across the stony ground with hard steps and wide lifted shoulders. Van den Dusen was pale. What could Slim know? Everything. We could read each other's thoughts from the head downwards, we knew someone could have hidden in the jungle spying across on us. We were so far gone that we were all glued with our imaginings on the lime-twigg of a general mood-sickness. Enter catastrophe. Slim headed with his loaded rifle in the Dutchman's direction. I heard the bang; he had watched the shell as it flew. In the steaming cauldron of this atmosphere I was wracked by frost, for two, three seconds I had a clear perception of the fever that otherwise flooded rhythmically through me. Ha, now the tale was reaching a climax, now all the stored-up hate was being released, now there was blood and liberation from this dangerous togetherness. And now ...

... and now Slim's footfall on the gravel began to sound weak and normal. These were run-of-the-mill steps approaching, not Slim's power-steps. Oh the beggarliness of those steps! I thought of the triumphs Slim had celebrated with his gait, of my boyish funk faced with that seemingly powerful regular tread. I have to admit I'd grown small in its oppressive vicinity, and craved a small trifle of superiority. Well, Slim looked worn out. He forfeited his bearing as soon as he came within view, his anger became a stew of emotion fizzling like damp powder. His feet sank clumsily in the riverbed gravel, and he hardly glanced at us. Normally Slim in his brutality or bonhomie liked to look good; but his symmetry was askew, his characteristic bearing cheapened as he waded through the gravel; conflicting emotions made him seem ludicrous now. A thought rose in me, I looked hard at his legs: Slim's knees were shaking!

And so it came that apart from one word from Slim, nothing was said. Now that Slim was humbled we could have spoken frankly, averted the evil and freed ourselves from many a burden. But no such words passed the lips of any one of us three. Slim's face was screwed up almost as if in pain, he was laughing for shame and God knows what other feelings as he struggled through the sandy drifts in the riverbed. And mulish and miserable as we were, faced with this laugh that denied everything, in each of us brave bold words lay thick on the tongue. Our faces twisted like Slim's, became as asymmetrical as our insides. Ha, we loved and hated one another, depended on one

another and yet were insufferably *for* one another. We couldn't communicate, but our thoughts lay exposed like slit intestines. We were bursting with inward forebodings, our minds were sore and swollen, and just being near to others caused us pain. At the high point of this agitation I wanted to scream, just scream a dreadful stupid scream, but I held myself back by the slenderest thread, for it would have meant my death. I would have screamed myself to death.

This crisis, during which we observed each other attentively and with slight traces of tension, lasted only moments. These were an enormously slow wasteland of time-masses. As the epileptic fit abated, Slim, showing clear signs of exhaustion, took one of the ration packs that lay around and stomped off mumbling to the right.

So I did the same, and marched off to the left. He followed me with his eyes as he waded through loose white gravel. Now I knew myself ploughing through it, felt the pain and the heat at my ankles and saw the glaring surface under me. I glanced around once, I'd detected a painful sensation in my back. It was nothing. No one was carrying a shooting iron. My legs were too fragile in relation to the heavy gravel, too light and lacking in mass. The going became harder and harder, and when I stood beside the big thistle with its lovely flower that must have been visible from our desert island, I was overcome with longing. My heart was sore, I loved my dear old cave with the marvellous shadows, I yearned avidly for van den Dusen, my white friend, for Zana and the natives. And then there I was lying among them and was extremely bothered by the presence of another white man. For I hadn't left the cave at all, and the gun I'd been toying with in a ruminative way I now put back in its place. Slim was roughly as far along as I had come in my thoughts. He'd looked about him, turned from the cave and disappeared from view.

What was the ground-mood of this stratagem? Well, I had other plans. I would set up a desert island on my own account. There I'd live and sleep and work. I'd hunt and earn my daily bread. How delightful it was to wake alone in the morning, to be for the whole day long only once in the world, so to speak, instead of in triplicate, unobserved and with no responsibility for what others were thinking, and with the prospect of being allowed to head off to wherever you want! Ah God, solitude is the boon of fate. Better to utter a load of useless speeches and sing into the air than be forced to keep silent on the profoundest things a man might have to say. To enjoy to the dregs all by oneself the elegy of this solitude, to be able to pass the time in the lovely singsong of one's own boundless Ego! Farther off art thou, oh seldom kept promise of solitude. Thee I had thought to conquer, over the paltry distance of five hundred paces!

So we each kept to our own spot, while our thoughts revolved around Slim. His absence left a gaping hole in our little household. If the Dutchman hadn't all at once grown so strange, I'd gladly have entered into a little conversation on this theme. It wasn't pretty of him to send Slim off in disgust like that. Taken all in all Slim was a capital fellow, a rare and successful example of a man. Couldn't we treat him nicely? How had the lazy ungrateful Dutchman come to the point of spoiling for Slim this little bit of *joie de vivre* we had here? My lips stood ready to apostrophise him, and I

thought of developing a longer speech, a deadly piece of rhetoric for which the words and an arsenal of reasons had already settled in my restless head. I began diplomatically by posing a question. "What's Slim up to, I wonder?" Then van den Dusen sat up and burst out in a whining tone: "He's gone off, he's off to another cave. Now look here, you shouldn't have driven him away like that. Your assertions are all wrong, of course. You're no metaphysical brainbox, so leave all that to Slim! He's not the man to tolerate such nonsense. You're enough to make anyone fly off the handle."

I groaned. "I'm really sick!" I said, in lieu of a response.

"So?" he said. "Well then, there we have it. You're not up to these hardships. You just can't handle a tropical climate. Now you've thrown the whole expedition into doubt!" I fell back, deadly tired.

That same day it came over van den Dusen too. He couldn't stand it any longer. He stood up and began to run off to the left. His sad and by now badly tattered figure advanced along the white gravelly riverbed like a broken heart. Oh yes, the good fellow was draped in a broken heart, his clothes slumped on his emaciated body, and he lurched on unsteady knees. He was all cheerlessness. Once he half looked round with a brief timid jerk of the head, and rolled on. Now I engaged in a wild desperate struggle with the innocent thought that slid mischievously into me, a monster of a thought I had no wish to think, but it asserted itself smoothly and swiftly against my attempts to hush it up. How many paces? Three hundred, within range. Van den Dusen continued on, unchallenged. I stared fixedly after him. He was about to go out of sight. And now he'd reached that lovely blooming clump of thistles.

I began to sing. For sorrow or for joy? An hysterical struggle in me slackened. I was alone. Alone among Indians, lone white man, here I was, lying on the bank of a Brazilian river, cooked inside and out by sun and fever ... Now van den Dusen slowly turned around. Slowly he came back again, then faster, before I'd have been able to shoot, hah, so fast, but at last he slowed the tempo, deliberately exposed himself to danger! How his suspicions wounded me! His face was turned to the ground. Yes, his smooth beefy actor's face was partitioned by a dozen little bumps and dips, it was shattered by physical aches and reflected his soul's misery. But my soul received him in bridal finery. Together we'll celebrate this reunion and conclude a pact of eternal friendship. We allow the fire of our humanity to smoulder, in our minds we embrace soberly and without pathos, as befits two comrades. But Slim will be our burnt offering. For Slim bears the guilt for all of it. Slim's uncomfortable mode of interaction has irritated our nerves and brought them to an artificially over-sensitive state. Slim is a heretic against Nature, a phantast, a totally contrary oddball. He has cast a spell on our brains to set an example, used us as guinea pigs for the laws of telepathic effects. Ah, that Slim! Someone should bash in his skull, just bash it in so his over-developed brain can make contact with the crudest kind of reality.

Charlie, who'd managed to march all the way to the horizon of this little world, who'd completed the actual five hundred paces there and back – quite possibly he

could stand up to Slim. We two see Slim the same way, don't we, Charlie? Mister Slim's methods are an open secret to us. Whatever, revenge must come one day! ... My feverish head was in celebratory mood. Now the great fraternal pledge-feast was approaching, now at last the great historical intrigue had fallen due! Market-crier thoughts rumbled in my skull.

Van den Dusen had come to a halt in the sun. He seemed to be struggling. Suddenly he closed his eyes, and a fit of dizziness made him stumble. Now he imagined someone had shot him. He stood like a sleepwalker and was about to collapse. Or he had inhibitions, poor man, he hated himself for acting so disdainful and wanting to get away from me. He struggled visibly with his aversion; the thought that he'd almost been meant to find lodgings somewhere out there, away from this central point of existence, had shaken him up. For wasn't our desert island the dearest and best place left on Earth for us globetrotting castaways? And wasn't it a gift to lie in the shade bestowed by God or Moki or some other spirit worthy of adoration?

Van den Dusen stepped closer to me. I tried to read his face. It was a clenched hand, the inner side of a fist, a hollowed fist! It was reddened by sun, bulging and twisted. "For God's sake, man, do you have sunstroke?" He snuffled venomously around and now he opens his mouth, now comes the declaration of love. He said:

"We can't stay in this place. It's unfit for any human. And you're sick. Your breath is foul, I can smell it from here. You really need to head off somewhere. It's intolerable staying close to you!" With these words he lay down three paces from me in the deepest shadow next to Zana, and buried his mulish tearful face in his arms.

I'm dead, I've died, addio. The Dutchman murdered me. He jabbed his poison into my heart and I pegged out. I'll never come up again, I'm just a nameless Something with no strength left. Then it occurs to me how mightily regrettable it is, for now I'll never write the book I meant to write about my experiences of how one person interacts with and affects another. I'd have called it "The Tropics"; not just because of the milieu and as it were the hypertrophied and obvious unfolding of all human relationships, which here run in a pure and uninhibited, you might say *tropical* way so out of control. Not merely because the entire human life of emotions is led back to the vegetative, but out of guile, out of subtlety, because anything given is always just a poetical method, a *trope*, and because I'm tantalised by this strange elephantiasis-like growth shooting up house-high, this undergrowth of pure matter all around my feet elevating my point of view, its juices ever and always my own rolling blood and nothing alien. Ha, how I'd have written that book, brisk and princely and well-considered, with none of the sentimentality of the humiliations it fed into me!

Now it's too late, my brain is still as delicate as an Indian summer, but without strength. I'm dead and shall never write it; dead at least to book-writing, for my aches and pains have made me wise, and I can keep quiet. I no longer have the necessary attention span to follow the trail of hidden connections; and human depths and ingenious fabulations are now self-evident to me. I want a simple life free of fancies

and observations, free of discoveries in space and time, free of European Indianness and eroticism. I don't give a hoot for any woman under the sun if I can't have her; every muddlehead and brute who comes running can win her hand. I've looked the genuine tropical sun in the face, and noticed it's still the same as the one that shone back home in my boyhood. And so I renounce whirring turbine-halls with their high-tension glow and frenzied iron girders. But I renounce too my own experience and its books, renounce every actuation of life that is a surrogate of the tropical life in our blood, and opt for a modest and seemly existence.

Maybe up to this moment I've never thought of writing this so-called "book". But my acquaintance with people, things and thoughts gallops on, it rages like a pine chip in acid and after the first moment has been there forever. I feel no awe when faced with the new, and become intimate all too soon. A book that occurred to me in a blessed moment I have retrospectively been writing for ever. Such moments as they pass are age-old and venerable and we are no strangers to one another. I have no memory for what has not happened; for nothing comes from a human being that would not somehow have already been inside him, and nothing is there *for* him that would not have been *in* him.

Why do I speak here so much about the Tropics? The savage doesn't know them, only the northlander, to him they're a trope for his ardour and the consuming fever in his nerves. He discovers the Tropics in order to set a comparator for himself. But they're not there, they're nothing but a boring monotonous growth-relationship. Really there's nothing there apart from this growth-relationship. Whatever we do not grasp with passion does not exist. I don't believe in a book that I would not have seen as a necessity, as an irreplaceable fact, and I don't believe in readers with whom I'm not passionately in love. Everything is firstly in the passion, and that's dictated by the guts. My thyroid gland doesn't agree with you, Miss Reader-lady. It doesn't know you, doesn't love you; it rejects any closer relationship with you. So I can do nothing and must abandon this book. I've outgrown it.

It's always a dirty business when someone writes books, especially when they're about the Tropics. For the Tropics are humanity's baby-shoes. Whoever has outgrown them would be mature and wouldn't write them. *The Tropics are the puberty of a young European*. But this is now the curse we've brought with us from our ancestry: we mature a time and then it's gone, the maturing keeps pace with the decline.

Well, I'm mature: I renounce woman, career and book. What a wonderful life I could lead with this mental abundance of renunciations, how I could stuff myself with primitivities and sweeten my life with all this temperance. But now I've decided to be dead, I'll set about it. How late is it? Is it morning or evening? Are the storks taking their morning stroll, or fetching their supper? The sun now has the highest tops of the jungle in its mouth and is chewing into them with ruddy jaws. It's evening, and it's time. I, having attained the summit of my insight, shall perform a little hara-kiri. Storks with red bills are a sign; red bills are blood-witness to humanity's ancestry, its

longings and decline. Should it be a Browning pistol or a Mauser repeating carbine? I choose the carbine – and fire.

The stork was standing some fifty paces from me in the river sand, grubbing in weed-choked waterholes by the opposite bank. It fell at the shot, lay a few seconds as if dead, and began to twitch as I suddenly ran towards it in savage torment with vigorous regret deep in my heart, and it stood up on both legs, head bowed.

You wretched man! So now it has happened, now the wilfulness of my imagination has proved itself. By God, I did not want this, by God and all family sorrows I swear I never wanted this! I never intended to succour a stork-widow, forasmuch as I had murdered her provider, never had I seriously contemplated the joy of showing off my marksmanship on a stork's bill. But that's it exactly, my dear fellow. You take aim at a thing outside of yourself, at a pretty red fetish, at an ideal of redness, and in the end it's yourself you were targeting. But if one day you make a formal decision to do yourself harm, distraction enters in, your aim goes a little off, and you hit your neighbour. You perform your self-executions on a doll ... Boy, do I have my suspicions about you, methinks you're an incurable poet.

Conspicuous deaths with visible injury and other questionable epiphenomena have the advantage that they toughen up the energy and boost the joie de vivre a little. You can lie for years in the swing-seat of your fluctuating emotions, drifting off in the ebb and flow of mental tides; but when you've decided how it would behove you and be best for you to drown with a millstone around your neck where it's deepest, only then do you speed into the heights and set a course. So you see: was the millstone, the stiff collar, not for you a lifejacket? Have you never given yourself deceptive hopes as to the gravity of your misdeeds, and have you never under-estimated the buoyancy of your plight in order not to have to swim? Yet how weak you are in your strengths. It takes only a push, and on you roll endlessly like a satellite. Your law is inertia. You're too stupid to be a fixed star, too cowardly to let yourself fall through what in your symbolism you call Outer Space.

Hohoho, how you jump to bewail the sacrifice of your symbolism! Nothing has more savour than regrets over sorrow inflicted. Nothing is more refined than humanity. Nothing is more practical for enhancing life. Shoot a stork, and you come back again to the world. Sacrifice in accordance with good old custom, and Satan departs your body to become the old sow you must now poetise. Make a piggery of Hell, that's a poet's work, you favourite of phantasy. Hell is pain. But if you protect it, it becomes an old age pension. And you and we ... ah, we all of us want to live nonetheless, even though we have too much imagination. From our fancies we forget sorrow, from our fancies we feel it, from our fancies we deny it. But it's there regardless! What awaits you, boy, here at this moment? What eternity? Sorrow ... a bird that's been shot!

There it stood, its two leg-straws awry – halfway down there were protuberances, welded lumps – and conducted itself strangely enough. The feathers on its torpedo-

shaped body, visible at a certain angle, were ruffled in great disarray. Ha! I thought, are you not yourself a fish, you fish-guzzler? You want to be better than me? Have I got to the bottom of your emotions and your asceticism? And yet in you I shot myself. You spurn the groaning dinner-board of a Brazilian jungle, take to yourself the lancets, little torpedos, the delightful ellipsoids of zoology, you have a personal taste and remain yourself, even there where you devour yourself in reflections particular to your own person. To me you're a machine nourishing itself on its own components, in you I've discovered the symbol of all evolution and every technology of life. Practically speaking, your bill is the casing for a rather long fish. Your throat has its individualised precursor in a worm, but for your body a snooty-nosed whale served as the model. Your skinny legs are correlates of the water-spider you love so much; half a dozen before dinner, as an appetiser. You accede to your atavisms. You bestow not even a glance at the Brazilian menu-card presented to you, but strive to keep your figure, and if your digestive horizon is by no means extensive, one must admit it has breeding. Your gastric arrangements are infiltrated by the erotic principal of similarity that we know about already. You cling somewhat to hereditary beauty, it alone suits both your soul and your stomach. Anyway, in you I've found a *type*: it has the habit, from a lack of enterprising spirit and a too-racy appetite, of shoving aside the proffered menu-card of life and sticking to pure formalities. It accepts only those things and creatures that resemble it, or those that have been machined into it.

Although this type in itself represents a technical fusion of lower organisms, it is no longer capable of further development. For – pay attention, all of you, you storks so proud on one leg – it's all over with aristocrats now. They're played out, they're a redundant type. Now it's the turn of the racy brutes, the conquerors, the colonists and developers with bad taste and the initiative of hunger. From the chaos, from the jungle, new satieties will be carved out. Poisons turn out to be harmless and nourishing. Swamps prove to be fertile land. Subterranean springs erupt from boreholes, and thirsts are quenched more by the scorched aftertaste of the volcanic, the fires and depths of the innermost Earth, than by cool water.

The forms these will take are irrelevant for now; they'll come soon enough. For all this is the work of the mixed-race mongrels and the vulgar, those in need of evolution, the formless, the brash adventurers and opened bills that snap to and so have life. They take nourishment not just from what's offered but also from the one who's offering, and grow fat on menu-cards; programmes are their salt; for there are poets among them too, a kind of poet at least with a very healthy or rather supremely healthy digestion. When the belly cramps, or they have to vomit, that's when they first experience the peak of contentment. For others this condition is called poesie, and they all thrive on it. They form and unite themselves into enormous organisations, huge machines for wars and beheadings in which the individual is swallowed up exactly as ever before.

But it doesn't matter; happiness has evolved alongside. The curtain will be brought down on the antiquated prudishly retentive forms of which human beings are made.

There are much more developed degrees of suffering; no strong soul at the high point of its time should embroil itself in horror at the spectre of a suffering stork, whatever the fascination. Down, you soul of a human. What a spectacle, a hunter temperament infested with sympathy! Have some respect for the laws of the higher power!

The creature curled its neck and tucked it into its crop, through the skin of which you could see the pulse beating. The pale eyelids were lowered, behind them bluish shadows flickered; these were the eyes. At the corners a fat dirty teardrop oozed. Oh dear, the stork's crying! He kept his bill open, and clacked it at the sky where the hen stork was circling as if suspended on a string, stretching her head down in horror. The bird below presented a sight of total desolation. A glancing hit had damaged the upper mandible, and the end had split. He lifted this chip to the sky with a stony gesture. When I came quite close and gave him a nudge with the rifle butt, he began to clack the instrument like mad, but made no sound. This activity had a damaging effect. He made looping motions and vomited. A small fish became visible in the bill, it was stuck there and from time to time jerked reflexively; it lay there and moved like a little live mine. In other circumstances such explosive delights would have provided a tremendous kick, a kind of motorised pepper. But now they were superfluous, as demonstrated by the behaviour of the wounded bird.

I quickly formed a diagnosis. Violent headache, shock to the brain, possible madness and loss of sensory perception. I prodded the bird, but at once he sang silently to the heavens again with his spatula. He still had the use of both legs, at this solemn moment the skinny thing had abandoned aristocratic braggadocio. As long as my jabs to the ribs remained gentle, he would not budge. Only after a heftier shove did he react mechanically according to the laws of gravity, and relocate his stance to the rear. Behind the ruffled feathers, I could see from one angle through to warty skin. I sent a bullet right through the bird. The limbs went slack, it collapsed after attempting, shortly after the first shock, to spread its wings. In its confusion it had tried to take off as usual, forgot about death for a fraction of a second, yielded out of thoughtlessness to an old beloved habit. But in that little bit of a second a rapid development must have come to completion. The stages of its inner life rushed past each other. And under the high tension of this impetuosity it turned around once, made a brief circuit of its entire stork existence and tumbled to the ground. The splintered bill still gaped with unclacked complaints.

Suddenly I heard a sound, a secret of a scream, a reduction of a human voice as I interpreted it. In stretching up I crossed the flight path of a thing coming at me from above. It was the hen stork, clawed legs tucked into its chest, pointing its red bill at me. A pretty story! I took aim. She ended up lying a few paces from her mate. Now the bloodworm came creeping from under the corpse, but it made me feel no better. I quickly looked away. My sensibilities had become sickly. But hardly had I looked away when an itch urged me to look back again.

For the rest, my fever seemed to have burned itself out. Following this coup, life returned in me. Hungrily I stormed off into the jungle, my entire nervous system was a

magnification line that captured the most delicate processes and effects of pent-up life. Leaves big as paws closed ranks behind me, I stepped into unobvious holes and balanced my way over slippery trunks. Ha, was this the jungle that had stared at me so horribly green, like the body of a snake as long as a country? I seemed to recognise the jumbled mess. Ha, I had been ill, an invalid in body and soul with the philosophy of a weakling. But there was nothing like a hearty positivism forever whetting the appetite! Old plans bobbed up in me, and a yearning for the primordial. I would devote the rest of my life to the most glorious existence beneath broad-leafed plants, casting off civilisation's inhibitions I'd sacrifice to my pure human and animal drives; yes, I'd take me a wife, and as a coequal son of the Tropics savour all the treats on offer. Ideas will be put to bed, I'll relocate entirely to the neighbourhood called Reality, I'll retreat into the deepest possible dimension.

I shall never write my book. Because there's no one there for whom I feel like writing it, because I know the world won't be changed by it, and moreover because things are lovely even if I don't write about them, I shall never write this book. By Jove, that was my craziest notion, that stuff about writing a book. How could an old mechanical like me have hit on such an idea? The answer is hidden in my birth; I was born into the most literary people on Earth. It all comes of the Gothic languages being a veritable devil's brew of forms and ideas, an unbuilt basilica of components, an egregious seduction leading poor humankind to poetise and think.

But that business is sidelined now, and I'm the first in whom a cathedral has fallen away from the heart. Hurrah, I'm on eternal vacation, I can play hooky from thinking, and live on idleness. Is that not my true disposition? Brother Lustig has always lain hidden in my blood; as far back as I can remember I've never been anything but a better sort of vagabond.

I'll take me a wife. Today even; I'll press on with Zana, we'll live as Adam and Eve and engender an entirely new race of humans. The last one was somewhat botched. Since we know no inhibitions, for us there can be no Fall. And with that the hygienic perversities disappear: syphilis, consumption and the whole consortium die out, for from now on we live in harmony with Nature. Zana's a healthy lass. When she sees what kind of fellow I am now, she'll stab ten others dead for my sake. I'm the finest shot in the Brazilian jungle. Listen, listen, I've hit ... oho, what's this?

A breaking and snapping of twigs was approaching from the side, a movement slipping through the undergrowth. Swaying treetops enabled me to track its progress. It was an animal, I began to make out colours, mainly white, flickering through the filigree of leaves. Could it be a panther? I climbed up to the nearest high branch and settled into position. It was a small creature, panther-sized, but it was pushing through the jungle with considerable noise and lack of skill. It was on course to go past me at an angle down to the river, where it would have to emerge roughly opposite our camp. Now it was a few score paces away, but I still couldn't make out what it was. It turned a human-looking head this way and that, it was white, but nevertheless too lively for a sloth. Good God, the head was damned human-looking, was it an albino

monkey? ... Hahaha, was that it? So that was it, no, hoho, but it's ... Right to the last moment it looked like a fairly small animal, the jungle was so big, the trees so big and strong ... It was actually the laugh, the white featureless laugh. It was laughter in the jungle, a whole symphony of merriment, it was a Homeric roar of Nature showing her superiority over weedy humanity. Nature laughing, the jungle laughing, but my soul laughed along with it. Because this white thing, the little white creature down there ...

Really an inexhaustible comedy lay in Slim's bearing. He seemed so small in his surroundings, so inferior. He flailed away furiously at the vegetation, I saw his face for a moment, it wore a tense expression. The man was following a desire. At last he sat at the jungle fringe in a loutish posture behind bushes, staring balefully across at our campfire. He lifted binoculars to his eyes and looked and looked his fill. He did this for a quarter of an hour. Then, slower than before, he retraced his steps. I kept still. He passed by very close, threw his misery in my face but failed to spot my presence.

I listened gratefully to the sounds of violence that accompany every progress here. Why had I not called out to him?

XXV.

The Indians spent the livelong day uselessly messing about by the river or lying in a tropical half-sleep. Zana did more or less the same, when she wasn't housekeeping. So, and on the third day Slim came by. He was full of beans, seemed enormously pleased with himself and exuded an energetic air. The Indians were sent down to the boat they'd abandoned half-finished. "This won't do at all, you've all become out and out deadbeats!" said Slim. "Now, I have a plan. If we go downriver from here, we'll be sure to come to the Amazon, it's obvious. All we have to do is reach the Amazon, and things will be back to a more comfortable aspect."

That evening we sat inside the ring of fires, nibbling at the bones of a fish that had fallen victim to Checho's guile. Slim's face as he chewed was beatific. He blinked; the corners of his eyes were wreathed in happy wrinkles. Something was bubbling away in his features that expressed a peculiar condition, something new and inexplicable. I thought of that comical situation in the jungle and smiled inwardly. How strange life was! There we sat, the three of us with our long beards, faces close together in the firelight, wagging our heads, and ... hahaha, it was enough to make you burst out laughing. I meant to let drop a word about it. Then suddenly I went rigid down to my very marrow. A thought had bobbed to the surface. I studied Slim. Was it possible, had he gone mad now, or not?

My horrified glance had a confusing consequence. Slim interrupted his chewing, looked at me with naked puzzlement, and gave a satisfied nod. His eyes had such a clear naïve glint that I couldn't stand it. I looked away, across to van den Dusen. His movements as he ate were lethargic, his eyes squinted crosswise down his nose at the skeleton he held in his hand as his fingers extracted the meat. Slim's eyes wandered

from me to him. When the Dutchman noticed us observing him he lifted his eyes to us, but slowly, in stages, as if they were ascending a spiral staircase. As he did so he continued with the same lethargic composure to chew and lift fragments of fish to his mouth. He had an animal look, from his head the skull of a cat or a snake gazed out. In his eyes there shone so to speak a different time of day, not the mild human night and the comforting glow of the fires.

At the very moment when I grasped this, I felt a hot forceful sensation in my face. It was as if a strange mask was being pressed onto it, my face took on contorted shapes, my throat thickened and my eyes stood out as if on stalks. They were being dragged from me by a magnetic force, and I couldn't follow them. As I flew across to van den Dusen and our eyes screwed into each other, I waited fearfully for our foreheads to collide. But we came no nearer to one another. The Dutchman slowly turned his gaze to Slim. Finally he turned his back on us and heaved great breaths that lifted his chest. In his hand was a lump of fishmeat, horribly mangled and squashed. His face took on a look of endless torment.

We're all crazy, I reflected. A sense of wellbeing came over me. I found myself at the peak of my game. I grinned, bared my teeth, uttered chirruping noises. We were all crazy! We were free, disencumbered of all responsibilities! If anyone could see us now, if only one other person had been there to marvel at us! The Indians didn't understand. We were heroes of our profession, our travels in the Tropics had rendered us insane, by its shocks to our mental constitution the jungle had thrown us off balance! Poor souls like us, how high we stand above the healthy average! We are amenable to the most contrary emotions ...

Ah, we lunatics are a sly lot. We're twice as sly as the cleverest of the population. We know very well deep down in the mind that we're not actually mad, but only put on the whole act for the joy of it. Who is so stupid as not to know what fun it is being mad! We're always one step ahead of the common or garden understanding. We fools consider everyone a fool. We are creatures of language, greyhounds of the concept; we see the world through words and penetrate to truth via a system of sounds. We're capable of restoring ourselves, but never bring ourselves back. Nothing you can offer us can replace the ecstasy of our exquisite logic and the malicious pleasure of our atrocious conclusions. The comedy with which we eke out our delights never penetrates to your brain.

That's why we fools, we perfect and more human humans, are in the end simply the cleverer. We think whatever thoughts we like. We sink ourselves deep into our bliss. A truly authentic melancholy like van den Dusen's is a kind of complacent spiritual exercise amid our tripled solitude. All right, let's all be crazy, let's drive out this tedium, this terror in the face of existence, with our fantastic grimaces! Let's do all kinds of perverse somersaults, let's hang life and its sanity up by the heels!

Ah, how I saw through them all, they and myself, how I marched alongside them in the same squad and kept pace with their sensations! Just for a change they wanted to

be mad for a while, and so they were, and I too wanted to be mad, and God dammit the tale unfolded by itself! Wasn't simulating madness in and of itself a crazy notion? It's working, it's working! At last we're free of sanity! Free to be immersed in the wildest thoughts. Words dance like gods, in every sound a mile-wide odour of Heaven or Hell, the spirit of the Word has entered into us, in the torrent of words we spray the world back out again. And yet we are not mad. You want proof? We're capable of being sensible. It just doesn't seem like something we'd want. There's more bliss in our madness.

Adieu, Reason; open up, thou flickering night of the intellect! Everything on Earth happens only from a fear of boredom! The Earth, no, it's some god's feverishness! He's thirsty, needs a drink; he wants to live and it's all a desert; so he cuts his own throat to make a second mouth, a bigger mouth, and he hears his blood spilling and thinks to fill an oasis with it; in the great silence all around he hears a metallic clink, his rhythms collide and he dances, dances words that fly from him like red bullets, and with his thirsty lips he catches what's spewing from his own throat-mouth. He feeds, swallows, digests himself, the God of the Earth, which is to say the god of madness and of words! His fever is the Earth, and I shall write a book about it and call it "Fever", a book for all who aren't here while I go crazy and rage in sounds!

There is depth to my Pythian madness. The night is quiet, the campfires form a circle. In Slim's bearded face lies a smile, sweet and fresh as a nature-child's. And he turned to me: "This melancholy Dutchman can't stand me. I make him sick, he can't abide my face. One day while I'm asleep he'll cut my head off. I know him, he's harmless, and that's always dangerous. He can fly into a rage, the gloomy fellow, and you see, Johnny, our kind cannot. We have imagination. We'd never harm a bird, not without a clear practical reason. But then, as practical people, it's we who are dangerous. Our imaginations invented gunpowder. People never give us any credit. But it's we who provide the impetus. We were the first to tease out that there's no such thing as reality, and it's we who keep discovering new things!"

"Oh Slim, you're no phantast, actually. I think you're quite the opposite. I probably chided you at some point under that rubric. But I was in a bad mood at the time. You must make allowances, Slim, sometimes these days I'm all nerves. I don't know what it is. I guess I lack stimulation. Or is it the heat? I don't know; I had an attack of it just now. The two of you were so strange, I thought you both mad, frankly speaking. But it was probably just me. Anyway, I notice that we're all suffering from this over-excitation. You too, Slim, what d'you say?"

Slim smiled and stared dreamily into the fire. When van den Dusen noticed the harmony creeping in between us two, he withdrew in annoyance farther into the shelter, making a show of his sacrifice. Poor van den Dusen! There they sit, the pair of them, ganging up on him!

The Dutchman's boorishness spontaneously brought us two closer. Slim's voice took on a simple honest tone that nuzzled up to me. "You have a pedantic mind," he

said amiably. “You try to bring into a petty order things that belong in one that is higher and more meaningful. You think too much and too randomly. Do you have vivid dreams? ... Yes yes, I know, you despise dreams. You mistrust the residue they leave behind in your experience. So does everyone. But you shouldn’t. Then a lot of things will become more obvious, and you’ll find obscurities become more tractable from the inside.”

“That’s what I don’t believe about you, Slim. You’re really not so ... womanlike I almost said, the way you often express yourself. But womanlike isn’t the right ...”

“Original?” Slim helped me out. “You mean I probably don’t possess any of that charming mushiness of the mind such as, let’s say, distinguishes the savage? Hm, it’s quite possible. Pardon me if I don’t follow you down that path. But it would almost be a token of such charm, that I haven’t the slightest wish to form a clear view of it or of my relationship to it and its authenticity; at any rate, as soon as someone concerns himself with it in such a presumptuous and mistrustful manner, it’s a sign that the relationship is absent. There’s something servile and dreadful in it.

“A masterful intellect doesn’t criticise itself; if lies or gaps were to crop up it would, I suspect, consider them irrelevant; it has confidence merely from its existence. I’m prepared to admit that originality and intellectual commitment are for me a programme; but because this insight wouldn’t shock me, it cancels itself out. For such a mentally ineffectual insight is no insight at all. You don’t understand the essence of belief. For you the true believer is a nitwit. But he isn’t, not at all. He has mastered Biology and Higher Mathematics. It’s all this stability, so non-extrinsic and dispensing with logical buttressing – but I see it’s beyond me to convey even a distant glimmer of this to you. You just don’t have it. And whoever has it, has it. And the matter is settled. A slave can become a freedman – but never a master. Have you noticed that every masterful nature was a believer, and that scepticism comes from the slave-mentality – from the sneering valet-soul at the keyhole, eh? Those present excepted, I hasten to add, hehe ...”

“Thanks a lot. But what exactly do you mean: believe – in what? In dreams ...?”

“No. I don’t believe in dreams. Yeah yeah, that’s quite a topic. Oh, I don’t know how to explain. It’s not something you can just rattle on about. No, I’ll explain it to you anyway. A dream is not illogical. On the contrary, it has a stricter logic. A walking stick stuck in the ground can be terrifying, can be horror itself. For its presence is unmotivated. It’s a little off the vertical; and this shallow angle has an infamous significance, it’s maybe an allegory of catastrophe. It gives expression to an utterly tawdry, transient, vicious act. There’s a steely logic there. But the dream is rational. It knows nothing fortuitous or ineffectual.”

“But it’s just a secondary thing,” I said, “it’s an adjunct to life, an outbuilding.”

“No,” Slim said quickly, “you’re wrong. What you experience in a dream you experience in another world, but it belongs to the totality of your experiences. Now

you're alive, you know nothing of the dream. You dream: you know nothing of life, you remember it as if it were a dream. Both experiences are real, but the emphasis is changed. As long as you're awake, waking logic seems to you the more compact; but in the dream, you don't doubt for a moment the logic of the dream. For in the end what is every logical interpretation: something illogical, just an interpretation, a literary formulation. Take the simple case for example where you're tossing and turning and hurt your back on the edge of the bed; at that very same moment you dream someone's about to stab you in the back, in that very spot. It's possible both are excuses, but each occurs in its own logical world, in which you're a participant ..."

"Yes, but how do you explain it? There must be an explanation, surely?"

"No, I can't explain it in the least. I confess to you here, and with some pride, that I have absolutely no need for such explanations. The bizarre is for me just as comforting as the explicable. *Explanation is a bourgeois convention; one overcomes it in the same way one has overcome bourgeois morality.* One who is totally without presuppositions is a believer, superstitious if you will, but for sure in a strongly human and mature sense. Explain? What cries out for explanation is whatever cannot be pigeonholed. But I pigeonhole the strange, I comprehend it as thoroughly and intimately as I comprehend something proven. I have in me absolutely no explanatory instinct; but that doesn't make me ambivalent. Whatever is strange is complete. It's as hale and hearty as a fact."

"Fact?"

"A fact! Why do you misunderstand me? I don't deny facts, least of all their value. On the contrary, I'm such an aficionado of facts that I find they come up short. There are many more facts than are perceived. There are waking facts and dream facts. And what I now assert is this: that both are constitutive of the individual. A person consists not only of what he experiences in his waking hours, but also of what he experiences in his dreams. We concede that he develops physically in sleep. But his dream experiences too, only rarely familiar to his waking consciousness, share in his intellectual growth. Have you never noticed this? I'd have thought you already knew something of the sort. I've been watching you for a while. You're sensitive, analytical and clairvoyant. I can read this from your behaviour. I know you wanted to shoot the dog. Because I share the same qualities I can retrace certain events with an exact method, near enough. You have vivid dreams. I can produce evidence. I'd be amazed if you find my train of thought too much for you – but perhaps after all you're a more conventional soul than I assumed."

I was conventional, but I said: "I understand what you're saying!"

"Yes," he continued, "well, is it not also your opinion that the dream is rational? It's really peculiar. What the dream doesn't understand it abandons in horror. For example, there's a dream I often have now. There's a blade sticking in the ground, just like the walking stick I mentioned earlier. It's a slender much-sharpened machete. It sticks up out of a ferny thicket. Who put it there? It's curious how it stands there, and

it intrigues me. Close by there's a body lying, the body of a woman. But the secret hidden in this leaning blade arouses horror in me. Something terrible must be nearby, something innocuous, stupid, average, from a mindless passion. The corpse should calm me, for the threat that emanates from the blade has already done its work. But the perpetrator is unknowable. This agitates me, in my dream. You see how well-founded and logical, I could almost say how moral, is the progress of the dream!"

I was shivering. An obscure fear ran through me. "How did you happen to dream this, exactly?" I said.

I thought I saw Slim smile. "You know about it?" he asked. A pause ensued. Suddenly, his voice emphatically casual, he said: "Johnny, tell me, were you up to something with Rulc that evening?"

I froze. My brain came to a stop. A memory wanted to take shape, but gave up.

"Think back," Slim urged. "It was the night before we broke out." A shock went through my brain, I found myself in a blue light, borne on a lovely soft breath. There was a melodic woody sound. "I don't know!" I cried.

"You don't know?"

"No, I swear to God I don't know. I'd had a disturbed night. I slept badly. I don't understand your question. Yes, it's possible I was with Rulc. But I suspect I just made it all up during my fever. My imagination was firing away. I've never really been able to cope with the humidity of the jungle. You know how it is in a fever: something trivial, a word, a glance is enough to spin a web of self-deceptions!"

Slim nodded imperceptibly. "Think back," he repeated, his gaze not stern but calm, pressing gently like a hypnotist. He smiled; the smile was ghastly. "Think back. You stuck the machete in the ground. You did it for two reasons: it disgusted you, for you're squeamish, and you stuck the blade into unsullied earth. You have good taste: out of good taste you would desist from a particularly passionate deed – or forget about it. Your memory doesn't want to retain something you can gloat about to yourself. You fear your heroism, for you wouldn't believe in it even if it were proved to you. Secondly: you stuck the blade in the ground so it wouldn't be found so easily. That turned out to be a mistake. For anyone stumbling on the body, having heard a toneless sigh that pricked his interest, would be sure to stumble on the blade; it made a quivering metallic sound; he bent down and took the thing in his hand ..."

He was whispering, and squinting sidelong at my forehead. Now the thread that had wrapped itself from his eyes around my forehead fell away. Liberated, I had to laugh inwardly. "I don't understand you," I was able to say quite coolly. "I never had anything to do with the knife. It's your knife actually. I've seen you with it ..."

"Yes, once it was mine," he replied musing, and stretched up from his hunched posture. "I'd carried it around with me a long while ... and now once again it's in my hands. Yeah, that's what I thought too. But I was never quite certain ... Now tell me," he cried merrily, "here you have exactly one of those strange connections between the

waking and the dreamed experience. This machete I used day by day slicing away at the forest recurs in my dreams. So why shouldn't I too make an appearance?"

"That's a false conclusion!" we both laughed, bound together by a conciliatory mood, and we discussed this strange vivid dream-phenomenon.

"Tcha, it's quite remarkable," Slim transitioned from this outbreak of jollity back to the serious discussion. "The inexplicable is probably just as vital as the explicable. There's no use trying to force it. I'll probably never solve the riddle of my dream-machete. For me it hardly bears considering as a fact, for everything that's happened around this machete cannot be a problem. The problem lies entirely in the ethical, I should say in the inexplicable, the peculiar, in the circumstance that *such an energetic act was carried out so unpredictably and perhaps by the least appropriate person*. This puzzling over itself by a natural occurrence finds expression in my dreams, in the unusual way the machete was stuck in the ground: the dream is puzzled by the illogic of the waking condition, which it considers poorly motivated and governed by nonsensical contingencies. Commonalities with these form a connection; for example it's possible that two individuals meet both in the dream and in the waking condition; that would perhaps be proof of a kind of intellectual identity. But I won't go so far; it strains our credulity and causes too much damage to our conventional experiences."

XXVI.

He threw me a long eloquent look and then said; "You know, Johnny, you're already a healthy kid, I can say that much. When I ran away from you all today, I came across something quite extraordinary. It was a thought. It was called 'the gravitation of intellects'. Therein lies the mechanical explanation for so much ..." He stopped, closed his eyes and seemed to want to relive a whole sequence of memories.

"Oh, gravitation of intellects," I said, and a shiver of enthusiasm cooled my back. "It's a pleasure to hear of such a thing. It's so interesting. And what do you mean by it, now? Gravitation of intellects – that's a strikingly new formulation. Well ...?"

"Yes, great, you really think so too? Well, it's the theory of the attraction of minds. A brand new theory. Actually it's just the capstone of my Dimensions Theory, you see. But it's not properly woven into it yet. I'm not yet totally au fait with the material, and so it's got a little intractably ahead of itself. When I get back to the States – what a heap of assumptions there – if I get back in one piece, I shall found a university devoted solely to this discipline. Would you like to come along? I'll make you a professor. Will you?"

My mood had grown very cool. I was stuck with this man in the middle of the continent, how would I get back to Rio without him? I had my own life goals ahead of me. I wanted to write a book, it would have to be called "Insanity". Slim was the main character, i.e. the representative type. For this purpose it already seemed that he was mad. But the question remained: how to reach the coast, with or without him?

“Of course!” I cried heartily, “I accept forthwith. I look forward to it. Might we break out as early as tomorrow? That would be best. We’re losing so much time, and Slim, you’ll forget half of your ideas-elixir if you have to wear yourself out with the other stuff here. That would be a terrible shame. So when do we break out?”

“Ideas-elixir, ideas-elixir ... I like the sound of it. Now you’ve found a formulation. I always knew you’re a fine fellow, Johnny. Would you allow me to make use of these words in my next book? You must know I’m mulling over a new book in my head. It’s a damnably metaphysical story; in it I’ll break the neck of common-or-garden business oriented Positivism, what people call Americanism, and establish a new more spiritual standpoint. It’s all about a new kind of health. Life to be conquered, kneaded, bent and broken, that’s roughly my type, idealised of course ... for you already understand, my boy, that I really am quite different. As you see me here, I’m the product of training. For I belong to no race; that is, I have in me every race, I’m actually what the French call *déraciné*. That’s what makes me a mystery, and unsettling for people like you. Training is an algorithmic abbreviation for race. The bitch Zana and all the creatures here in the jungle have race. But I have training ... Ah, but what I meant to say is that my book should be published in Berlin. Only in Berlin; they’re too stupid for it in Paris or New York. And in this connection London simply doesn’t exist. You can help me, Johnny; my German is not exactly faultless; and anyway I’d like to know how you write. You must have a powerful and healthy language, I think. So, that means Berlin is the most feasible place in the world just now. It’s the heir of Rome and Paris. Half of everything that fills out life as Americanism is made in Berlin. Do you have mastery of English, in its written form?”

“Of course,” I said, humouring his delusions. “But what kind of book will it be?”

“Tcha, I told you already, it’s all about raciality. Let’s assume I’m the modern parvenu. As I sit here I have no cultural past. There’s nothing closed about me. Of course I’ve collected a heap of instincts, in my blood are all possible ancient practices; I go very far back, maybe to the Aztecs, maybe even to the Egyptians; that’s how it goes with us Americans. You know the Atlantis theory? We have a great deal from the primal Indian mothers. Maybe we have Negro blood in us too. The way we swing our arms suggests as much. But on top of this I have a stock of German Europe in me, too. All this affects the imagination. But there’s absolutely nothing there about what people call race, all things considered. For this crucial absence I substitute training. I cause every string within me to sound, even the most heterogeneous. I’m a man of the primordial world in a first-class London hotel, with a metaphysical book ...

“As I said, it’s all madly tangled up in me. My many talents are spoiled because they cut across each other. I’m the American, the parvenu, who at the same time has mastery of himself. Have you never noticed ... you must have, just look at the literature produced by the latest generation. The parvenu is the representative type. None of these men, writers and thinkers, come from good family. They are peasants, workers and Jews. Suddenly they’re the vanguard, marching along with their phenomenal heads. Then a salon door opens to them, at once their feet become tangled in the first

carpet, at the first whiff of perfume they faint away. And now a laugh rings out, a laugh that unmans them. The first best figure represented by this laugh, this perfume, this carpet is stronger than them. They fall prey to one or other female type from these circles. They write amazingly beautiful stuff, they write under the pressure of their yearning. In all their observations they haul along a huge treasure-chest of love ... and never has life been so enriched by so many observations as in our time. These people are hypersensitive, like a savage in a strange jungle: they stand – this at least is in their favour – with both feet in alien territory. Culture to them is something contagious, a bacillus, nothing readily assimilated. Their enormous appetite can't be damaged by it; but it has brought forth disturbances. And so the world, the world's happiness, the panicky happiness for which they strove, has never budged.

“Those eternal convalescents made refined observations, beyond retrieval; all we have now is the method. In their yearning for elegance and good taste they became impractical, never let go of anything, were never happy, never went beyond the glimpse of flimsy petticoats, never had a real flesh-and-blood female in their grasp. As they yearned they rediscovered that old scapyard: *distant parts*. Distant lands, exotic regions, bizarre experiences. And that's where we've overtaken them today, we've conquered yearning, and with it probably all those observations that people comprehended under the label 'analysis'. We've arrived at a *synthetic* form of life. Combinations have free play, the combination is the emblem of this age. It's at bottom an artistic age, in terms not of taste but of essence, for in respect of taste we are natural. In this juxtaposition you have once again the combinatorial trait. The great synthesis is breaking through. We heap Asia and Europe and America atop one another. And what results is a humankind.

“Not only America is young; Europe's much younger, much younger and more bizarre! They should organise scientific expeditions to Europe, to the real Europe! For we, you see, we who have conquered yearning, we don't acknowledge distances. For us that's a problem left to the courier. Not till you see the jungle as a rather antiquated boulevard can you feel at home in it. We no longer stumble on the carpet, we're no longer impressed by a perfume, and won't let any female exploit us. We're a new species. We have conquered yearning. We no longer understand our predecessors, whom we ourselves once were. We read those books. No, we don't understand them. They annoy us. It's a suburban nobility, they never possessed the good taste they desired so deeply, for they never possessed a taste of their own. They had too little hardness and training. We've overtaken these people, instinctively and consciously. We're setting up a new type, we're ensuring a new taste. We cry havoc and murder at the old elegance, we cry ourselves hoarse, let ourselves be jeered in the street as madmen, but because we're without yearning and act according to practical motives we don't weep into our pillows at night or make poems, rather we sleep soundly and get up in the morning with a good reserve of blood in our fists. We are artisans, craftsmen and carpenters, we have ideas for shaping a whole generation anew. Our elegance is somewhat brawny and solid.

“Can you picture our women? They are wild, lavishly and brutally dressed, they wear smocks, and strong shoes on big feet with slender ankles. Such a species knows no yearning, but lives well. I shall sing the hymns of this species. Yearning is no longer productive for us. We don’t want to be better than we are, but only as good as we may demand of ourselves. We’re content to believe well-polished interpretations of this visible world, metaphysics are again our passion. But yearning ... no, we do nothing because of yearning. My stance as a writer is thoroughly practical: first aid where there’s been an accident! As narrator I provide the accidents. They are so to speak the example. That’s the kind of book I mean, Johnny. The title will be ‘Tropics!’”

“So, ‘Tropics’,” I said. “Sounds good. No, it’s fabulous, a true find. It says so much. A man could write a whole book just around this title.”

“You think so?” Slim responded with evident smugness. “I think so too. But my intentions are devious. The word has another connotation. And the prettiest aspect is that I’ll have the whole story narrated by one who was never in the Tropics. That’s the whole point. It emerges that he, the northlander, has the Tropics within him. He has no need to travel to the Equator, he has it in him. His brain, filled with a rampant vegetation of tropes and similes, is explained by the residues of his ancestry. In the cold zone he’s a climatic residuum. The person I depict in the book, for all the culture he possesses, is so to speak a ‘new savage’. The relationships he encounters are transplants from his immediate environment, the Tropics with all their details are thus, so to speak, a key concept. I’d even go so far as to weave in an instruction manual ...”

“But no, that’s really ... well then, isn’t it a bit too audacious? I think a jungle like that would be inaccessible to the reader. Will you be following such sneaky paths through the whole narrative?”

“Yes, you see,” Slim said eagerly, suddenly giving in entirely to his inclination for this obviously engrossing conversation, “that’s it exactly. My man is a type. And I have to help this type establish itself. Even a dodgy character like him can live, and I’ll show you all one day. Analysis has not paralysed him. You lot always take the view that analysis is something morbid. All your lyricism consists of the sighs that cost you your ballast of strength. But he, the new man, has grown steel-hard on it. He’s overcome analysis-as-emotion. He’s totally unsentimental. He has no yearning. Not even for the yearning you lot still had not so long ago. He cries no lyrical tears for you. He’s entirely clear, entirely unromantic, and analysis doesn’t ruin him with ingrained ecstasies. His ecstasies are of quite another kind ...”

“Let me guess, they’re no doubt very ancient and primitive ...”

“Well, that’s how they seem to you. He knows that for him they’re very new. That’s why he also knows they can become old and unappealing again. That’s what he knows best. He presupposes it. He’s at every moment ready to overrule himself. And what’s new is just this refined ability to live in movement without becoming unhappy. He wants nothing he creates to be eternal. He gives the future a helpful push, that’s all.”

“I know. His sentimentality is forward-facing!”

“What? ... Well then, OK, you could say that. That would fit. You can deploy all kinds of twists and turns on him. The most important is always: *eppur si muove*! However you proceed, movement counts. Gravitation is based on reciprocity. For example, I’ve made clear to you that he’s no longer analytical, his movements reveal synthesis. I should add that he’s so strong that in him the critical and the combinatory are identical. And so he, the practical physiologist, becomes a metaphysician. He has a sense-organ for fluctuating reality. He practises the law of the penetrability of reality!”

“How?”

“Where there’s one reality, there can be another. Reality is a plus, a deposit. Hence analysis is the same as synthesis. To record an observation of Nature is to create something in her. Seeing and producing are the same thing. That’s how a book is made: someone writes it down. Where from, the devil knows. It seems to have been there already, you’re simply reproducing an observation. The scribe is a researcher. No one is more inquisitive than the productive man. Does that make sense?”

“Tcha. About reality ...”

“Reality?”

“... Hmm, it ... it seems so familiar. How did you come by it?”

“How? You mean ... ah, of course, maybe I picked it up from you. Not impossible. Are you tired? You seem so distracted. You know, I’m not a jealous man. If someone else has my thoughts ... never mind! It just goes to show how compelling they are. When people interact closely over a long period, they always become a little aligned in their views, they come up with the same ideas. They become each other’s pet. That’s exactly my ‘gravitation of intellects’.”

“You’re so productive! So what is it, actually?”

“It’s the system of brains. They’re in a mutually spellbound state.” Slim leaned forward, it seemed he was touching on a sensitive point. “Of course you know there are certain currents from one person to another?” he asked after some hesitation.

“Cur- currents ... tcha, those in front of us now, for example. I wish I was already among people who could feel them. We’ll be leaving in the morning?”

Slim laughed suddenly, gazed thoughtfully, sympathetically almost, into the fire, and gave a few brief nods. Well now, look here, he’s not being taken seriously?

“Johnny,” he said, “all honour to your translator-temperament. Tomorrow you shall fell trees. All rights reserved until further notice. But this time you’re right!”

He rubbed his hands over his bearded face. Oh, it was not done to treat him dismissively.

“Now, Slim, something else I wanted to ask: does your new human have something to do with this gravitation?” I quickly asked.

“Oh yes,” he said, “nothing other than that he himself is actually one of his crazy ideas!” We both laughed. He was quite healthy at that moment, just a little over-excited. “Good night, my boy!” he said and gave my hand a strong squeeze. We were both standing by the fire.

“But he will have been in the Tropics?” I said, to bring it to a conclusion. It gives a good impression when you let your interest trail along past the end of a conversation.

“Who?” he asked. “The new man?”

“Yes!”

“Well,” the answer came, “then it would be nothing special. He’s supposed to be a whizz of analysis ... sorry, I mean synthesis. Otherwise all proof of his phenomenal sleuth’s nose disappears!”

“All right, Slim. Thanks for a nice evening.” It’s always a happy occasion when you’ve made your peace with someone you’ve long consigned to the irrational.

XXVII.

Many peculiar and surprising events occurred during my travels. But for every event a rational and logical explanation could be found.

It’s risky walking in the jungle with the barrel of your rifle pointing always at the back of the man in front. A few times shots rang out. Slim and the Dutchman will bring back a good haul today! Look lively now, boys! When will the boat be ready? Hallo, Zana, how are you today, little redskin maid? No, no, keep cooking. A lovely day, everything’s in order, everything’s fresh, all going like clockwork, and the old Jeremiah in us is a thing of the past. Here we’re as safe as on a boulevard; here we begin a new life and will soon take a jaunt down a great river back into civilisation. We’ll arrive as greenhorns. Hearken, all ye nations, we bring you austere unspoiled good fortune. It’s a naked sunburnt wisdom we bring you. Tropics, what’s that? Once one is one, and the Earth cannot be two. It’s one Earth that carries us, one Earth that sloughed us off, and Berlin-times-Amazon we stand on both boot heels and today our heads are free!

I was assigned to supervise the hollowing out of a second boat. The first was held firm in the shallow river by means of a big stone, absorbing water. It turned out to be too small, could carry only three people; it was a clumsy thing showing no technique, and would roll over at the slightest jolt to its balance. If the five brown boatbuilders weren’t kept on a tight leash, they at once downed tools and scattered to busy themselves with all kinds of easier life-tasks.

Then van den Dusen came back. There seemed to be something missing. “But Charlie, whatever’s up?” He made no reply, was visibly sick and pale and slunk into camp like a thief. Zana presented a novel mimicry of contempt, blowing air through her lips and acting as if no one was on the brink of expiring. So now it was my turn,

and I put my overflowing health to visible use. I meant to show van den Dusen every indulgence. A sturdy lad like me could allow himself that now, and I hastened to find quinine for him in our luggage, but sick people are moody and ungrateful, and my great martyr's pride reaped nothing in return but a highly unmusical growl. He was delirious, rattling away in Dutch at a furious rate. I took the gunbelt off him.

"Good grief! Where did you leave your rifle?" The rifle was gone. He hadn't brought it back.

Slim returned with a black look and flung down a brace of birds. He gave a curt account of van den Dusen. He'd retreated from some denizen of the jungle, and in his haste had suddenly dropped the rifle, it vanished through gaps in a natural bamboo palisade and was nowhere to be found. 'Strewth, what kind of creature can it have been? Ha, probably a run-in with an old monkey on account of some breach of etiquette occasioned by flirting with an extravagant lady from the royal harem. But Slim seemed in no mood for jests.

For sure his head was full of new thoughts about a reformed jungle, or something that to him would have resembled it. Thank God both made it back halfway safe and sound. Shame about the rifle. We had no spares. How could anyone lose a rifle! It made your head spin. Slim seemed totally uninterested in this severe loss; it was natural to spare the feelings of the sick reckless man, but he never remarked on it again, even later. Was he beginning to brood within himself again? Phew, what if Slim fell ill? But he'd be the last to succumb, he had an Indian nature.

We pondered much and heavily on certain matters. Big theories occupied our minds. In the evening the campfire brought us together for long discussions we'd been looking forward to the whole day, as if for a world-shaking event.

"Have you been thinking about it?" Slim asked. At that moment van den Dusen shifted his position. Up till then there'd been no sound except the crackling of the fires. The Indians lay fast asleep, apart from the old man who was squinting into the fire. When van den Dusen stirred, I had to glance over to him. He was watching us from big eyes, as if we were disturbing the jungle silence. He fixed his gaze on Slim; there was something like astonishment in his manner; he hadn't expected to see the man here. He settled back; we continued in low voices.

And in the great silence that now set in, in the air's hollow fuzzy stillness, our voices jabbed like barbs on silk. They scratched on a delicate instrument they seemed not to know how to handle; the sweet yet savage mellowness that lay upon the world was marred by them. We ourselves felt troubled. We spoke with wide mouths and hissing voices, the sounds scraped against the jaws. Life in the forest gave us the throats of Indians.

"Well?" said Slim.

"What?" I retorted.

"Now, what do you think about it? About ... well, about our book?"

“Excuse me,” I said, “you said ‘our’ book. That’s not on, it’s insulting. I acknowledge your courtesy, haha ... but it’s always wounding when one attributes to someone else something he doesn’t deserve. Don’t you think?”

“Sure,” Slim drawled. “That’s the nub of it, Johnny. It’s so peculiar. Has it never occurred to you ...?”

“What?”

“Well, these thorny questions ... of interactions between people. There are very delicate connections between them. Things that can be weighed only in the assay-balance. Superb trivialities ... but they constitute the entire mechanism. Don’t you know that?”

Of course I did, I had to concede.

“Well then, you see, that’s one of my difficulties just now. The technique must be found. How does it emerge? How should I present it? It must be shaped, it can’t be sent willy-nilly down the slipway like an established science. It must have a structure. It must be crystallised ... do you follow me?”

“Yes!” I said.

“I’m speaking of my book, of course!” he said.

“Yes, yes!” I repeated, maybe with a touch of doubt. He looked sidelong at me. Either he was thinking it over smartly, and the eye movement was a useful adjunct ... or it signalled mistrust. Maybe I wasn’t interested in all this? Was I a sluggard who’d rather be in bed ... “That must be really hard,” I said, “really hard, what I understand of it. Can’t you just write down the outcomes? Just spit it out, make a report sheet?”

“No, that won’t work. You have to account for it inventively. Motivate it in a cunning way. Cause the flow of mental processes to congeal and yet never bring the frozen content to the perception. You must ignore the logical connections in the same way they ignore reality, and only retroactively render the chain of events seamless. But it really mustn’t be a work of art, for while mere works of art are of course very enjoyable, they’re quite inessential for humankind. But a story should be effective and convincing, and the only thing that has these characteristics is the Good. So you have to shape it. And I must let the New Man emerge as specifically as possible, it must come out incidentally enough that he’s the fellow I mean. He shouldn’t just be critiqued, he should sing and act. I must draw the lines that connect him to others, even the most delicate. The most intimate human interactions must reveal themselves to every eye, but at the same time he must remain what he is, an apparatus of intuitions. Don’t you think so too?”

“Of course, Slim. I totally understand your ambition. One must say what one is not permitted to say, without ruining it. People are so peculiar.”

“Yes, yes, that’s the point, as I said: my New Man is in a quite unique situation. He’s a wholesome kid, but he has idiosyncratic dispositions. He’s the one ... what do

you say to this idea, for example: one day he goes hunting with a friend, a man who means nothing to him even if he does harbour some unspoken antipathies. And then it happens that as this man by chance appears just in front of his rifle barrel, purely because of this indifference and antipathy, to which normally he gives no weight ...”

“Oh Slim, that’s horrible! Your New Man is surely a master of self-discipline and a decent chap, as I read him, surely, I hope, he’s no ...”

“No assassin? No, of course not. So he does nothing and he’d emerge unscathed from this little bit of phantasy. But he has another characteristic, he thinks aloud.”

“Thinks aloud?”

“Yes, he thinks aloud. He thinks suggestively ... Have you ever done that?”

“No!” I said firmly in my totally normal voice, looking Slim straight in the eye. Which is to say, I raised my eyes to his face. But he wasn’t looking at me, he was gazing into the fire, as if hm, he wasn’t gazing into the fire. He was mirroring the proceedings in the intense sensitive vagueness of his gaze. He was looking without looking. “Well then,” he continued, twisting his mouth a little pretentiously. “Now consider this little experiment – my New Man is always making experiments, without the least concern for how far he exports himself into them – imagine that the other, the one in front of the rifle barrel, shows himself receptive to this train of thought-speech. He hears the threat so clearly that he runs off in panicked terror – all he can think of is the end has come and he leaps and throws everything away to lighten his path ... but nothing was ever going to happen. So you don’t know this?”

And now at last I spoke up, feeling jaunty: “Oh yes, for sure, I know it. Isn’t it the same case when instead of looking into someone’s eyes you gaze into a – a mirror, and the look that goes through the mirror has an enormously powerful effect, whereas the normal look of flesh and blood would have had far less effect, if any? Is that it?”

Silence reigned for a moment. Then Slim said in a high voice: “Ah? ... And what do you say to that?”

“Oh, I refrain from any moral judgement, if that’s what you mean. I just find it very ingenious. It’s a masterful diversion – the only analogy is perhaps with sex, and in the world of art. Here obviously every diversion saves time. A guaranteed proceeding. No?”

Slim nodded with a smile and gazed into the fire. He said: “So, you know it. I always say, Johnny, you have prospects. We understand one another. But we don’t want to be proud, do we, but work together. You have your share of the idea, more or less, whichever party might have originated it.” He fell silent, then continued. “But it brings responsibilities. You are condemned to listen. If by chance I don’t make it back to the coast, you know what to do. You see, it’s exactly this, this remarkable contact between human and human, that must be in the book. These individual traits are the molecules that must be gathered together. Please keep in clear view the difficulties of narrating a person not as skin, but as a system. Of building him up from these particles alone. For just between us, what else is a person but an intersection line in

this or that moment of unconstrained and still unknown individual events? There *are* no characters any more. Meaning that this formula has been laid by the heels, and taken apart. There are no characters, no major and no minor.

“Take our New Man: he’s a monster of strength, everything about him is Training, he’s been snipping away at his pigtail for so long he stands there with the back of his head shaved. But no, the pigtail now hangs at the front, he’s opted single-mindedly for the future, he’s a forward-facing wreck, fragile as everything human. He’s not at all positive, he’s only a radical extension of the current principle, he’s the negative of a negative, and his life-strength resides in paradoxes. But he’s a character! they’ll say. Well, he ploughs his way on through life.

“But character, character ... there’s really no such thing. There are only situations, only these connections between people, effusions of a magnetic kind that up till now the European knows even less of than a half-schooled Indian, for example. It’s a template, an arrangement of powers granted; in every corner where humans lurk it’s the same. The positions remain constant, but it’s not always the same person absorbing them. On the contrary, he soon sees himself where he once was, and if his memory isn’t bad he can observe himself like that from every angle. It all begins to circle around him like a carousel, he follows it around the track, keeps it in his head, curses and rides around on himself, is meek and exalted, modulates himself into every key and lands up at the prescribed bafflement ...

“Wait, now is exactly the time for the New Species. For when he’s gone around the whole track, and his pride and self-image have been distorted, stretched and chewed up from every compass point, when the staggers stare out from his eyes, then he’s ripe for novelty and eternal youth. He’s in no way despairing, he’ll be neither pessimist nor poet, no, he’s bent on planting himself and his like, his nearest and farthest, firmly on the Earth. He’s totally without conscience, he knows the tight-closed spigots within himself that never actually open up but by a cunning detour despatch the same assassins – and he doesn’t bid them Sleep! Rather, Wake up, youngster, and stir the embers!

“He knows he’s no character but simply a decent fellow. For the rest he’s a number in a situation, and not always the highest. He exists really only through the dispositions of others, the other numbers, and he has a certain reverence – maybe it’s his only reverence – for these numbers. Don’t forget these features of his. Why I’m speaking about this is to impress it upon you.

“Now let a book be created in which he has fleeting possession of all the numbers, even those that are concealed by insight into his numerical existence. In this book, in which everything about him will be revealed, he will in the end be revealed to himself; he is to be not merely Figure but also Plot. He must breathe as freely in the critique as he does in the plot. This must happen with brutal finesse. The book must have ideas that go walkabout. So people recognise Aha, so that’s how a person functions! Probably there’ll be some characters in the book, too, but only as vehicles for ideas.

My book is to be an epic of ideas, a comedy of thoughts, when all's said and done it's about the evolution of ideas, a dramatic development with expositions and peripeteia. It will be an Indian book. That's as modern as can be. What say you, Johnny?"

"Tcha – I've realised that already. I suppose your New Man is one of your ideas?"

Slim looked at me a little annoyed. "Well," he said. "Now that's not what I actually meant. I was thinking of the other thing."

"Other thing?"

"Yes. I mean the gravitation of intellects."

"Hmm."

"Which will be depicted so to speak in the object-lesson."

"You make it all so difficult. Gravitation ..."

"Well, just this mutual dependence of minds, these sublime contacts that determine the interactions of one human with another. You know what I mean?"

"Yes!"

"All right! This is the axis, and the Earth of experience and its continents of characters revolve around it."

A pause ensued. Then Slim said: "Can you hear just how thin our voices sound! Indians speak soft or harsh as the jungle demands. In our conversation is the lingering tone of the solitary hunter. Are we not also hunters in the realm of the mind? Is not everything always a symbol for one and the same object: the human being?"

"Is the New Man an occultist?"

"No, but he has the methods and the genius of his primal ancestors. He's an observer. His brain is a drumskin and a lens and receives impressions without any detour through the senses. The stimulus threshold of his organs lies so deep that it remains buried to his consciousness. He's suggestible, his charisma ..."

"Slim? ..."

Suddenly Slim started to laugh, but grudgingly. He slapped his thigh and rubbed his hands contentedly over the fire. He at once adopted a jolly tone and said: "You see, Johnny, I already told you, his pigtail hangs down at the front, the front. That's how he pulls himself free of the business." He was trying to win me over to his cheerfulness and wholesome irony.

Van den Dusen was staring wide-eyed across at us. We dropped quietly off to sleep. No mundane adventures filled our heads, only theories. The tropical climate favoured the production of abstract unworldly systems. Our minds recapitulated the historical type of the oriental saint and ecstatic. But Slim never provided more details of his 'gravitation'.

XXVIII.

We're going fishing!

The boat rolled as we climbed aboard.

"Oho," said Slim, raising his eyebrows. "This could get interesting. Let's hope it doesn't turn turtle. What a shoddy piece of work." And to van den Dusen: "For heaven's sake watch out, watch out ..."

Van den Dusen turned a coppery face to him, red blotches smouldering in cheeks and forehead. He wanted to argue, but suddenly lost the energy. Slim continued: "The little mat goes over the stern. Once it's fixed in place, the draught will provide the necessary stability. Johnny, you'd do best in the bows. And I ..."

He claimed the middle of the canoe and we paddled out into the river. We were on the broad lake-like stretch just above the waterfall, to which we'd had the canoe carried. The mirror lay smooth before us. It was puckered with little systems of circles where a fish had snapped at prey. Every moment some big fellow flicked up out of the placid membranous surface. The paddles, in the form of heartshaped leaves on long stems, produced no eddies. Here the river had penetrated into the land in great lake-sized bays. Where the tributary stream funnelled into the lake, tall green jungle walls formed a spacious enclosure around the smooth watery arena. Here, Nature had created a stage for a human drama, set a trap made of forest and flowing waters. On the fourth, southeastern side heading downstream, the trap was bounded by the natural sill of rock over which the relentless white-shimmering bands of water slid away with unimpeded swiftness.

We paddled out, and already the current was gently, quite gently but insistently, dragging at the boat like a mystical force. We had to paddle with sure and solid strokes if we wanted to reach the deeps above the slope of rock, where the loveliest prey, strong elastic fish-virgins with promising bodies, flashed high and siren-like over the mirror. But we were excited and made mistakes. This was the Dutchman's day: he fumbled the steering oar a couple of times, the canoe rolled too heavily and we took on water. Slim tut-tutted impatiently. I could see him in the watery mirror. His face, distorted by the water, was pale with a trace of surprise or fear. We carefully dropped overboard the fish-traps we'd brought, Zana's reluctant homework exercise made of bendy vines.

But what was happening? Gazing into the sun's glare behind the water-mirror caused all thoughts and memories to be stolen away. You had to gather all your powers to remain conscious. The boat rocked gently; a dull lassitude fettered thought.

Thought hitched itself to the fish-traps and glided with them to the bottom. The traps! They'd cost Zana a beating. Let's have the image! Zana and ... a beating? Good. What next? Oh, Zana didn't want to come along, the princess was lazy and high-toned and wouldn't make fish-traps for the white brutes. She lay on the ground and refused. She'd rather die of hunger and thirst before she'd help catch a fish. So, whistling

through his teeth, Slim looked over the stripped vines that had been gathered, picked out a short slender switch and whipped Zana's legs. When it hurt too much she crawled off meekly, a beaten cur, and set to work. In the space of a morning, with the help of the men she finished several traps, but the mesh lay slack and we had little hope of any great catch. The mood was downcast. Slowly we anchored the traps, to which you might say Zana's sweat and blood were affixed. Maybe hunter's luck with its peculiar vagaries would favour them for that reason. Hope for the best! The current grew stronger. There was the white foaming cranium of the falls. Watch out ahead!

The smooth satiny surface acquired blemishes, rips spread, long swift stripes with goggling foam-eyes sped past. When the canoe came among them they tugged at it like rubber bands.

"Hey, Johnny, what are you up to? Where are you aiming at? Stronger, lad ... Back! Back! Turn us about or we'll capsize!"

Glare and reflections induced a certain torpor, they took away thought and life's earnestness, moral exertion was required to avoid seeing the situation as trivial, and tumbling forthwith into the foaming reality just ahead. The sky in the pinkish water was an enormous white-hot screen, an irritation. I saw myself outlined with unnatural sharpness in the reflection, recognised myself in a very much overdone reality, stabbed with my counterpart in the same rhythmic simultaneous paddle stroke – both of us grew distorted as we separated – and stared fascinated at the doppelganger-image that held me transfixed down there with its damnable clarity.

And suddenly something unexpected happened below, with a dreamy certainty and vividness that makes me dizzy whenever I think back on it as on something real.

"Ah Charlie you fool!" I heard Slim shout suddenly. "Are you crazy?" I saw his head vanish and reappear behind mine in the water, everything else collapsed in a foreshortening. Then farther back a man-high shadow rose, looming up into the imaginary sky. I heard Slim call out and felt the boat begin to turn. I stared at the water. Something rose lightning-fast like a projectile out of the background, so swift as to be hardly perceptible, and was possibly just an illusion, a darker patch in the water itself – it came straight down onto Slim's skull. A sound sang in my ears. At the same moment the boat rolled left, then right, and took into its belly a thick rippling surge of water. My eyes remained spellbound by the world below; with a glimmering instinctive sense of danger I stared at the green banks beneath the water-mirror that formed its distant frame. Splash – it seemed to me that someone had fallen into the water. As I sat I leaned into a balmy palpable environment, the world rose to meet my ears, I stretched out an arm, and swam. At the same moment I became aware of a man flying head over heels out of the receding boat and into the water, I saw him swim with powerful strokes and recognised the Dutchman.

Ha, I felt myself lifted, caught under the arms, it was the current steering me and taking me along. I strained mightily to head for the bank across the current that was pulling me to larboard. It dragged me down and thrust me against the rock that rose

bare and hard before me. The rock split the river into rake-tines. Once I'd clambered clear, there, on the opposite rock across the rushing stream, the Dutchman appeared.

Where was Slim? I sounded the channel between the two strategic points of which we had possession. I'd over-exerted myself, red clouds swirled before my eyes and made it hard to see into the water. I'd gazed too long into the watery mirror's sliding pane. But Slim ... my God, what was this? Slim was dangling like a slaughtered beast on the rock slope. The rushing watery mass washed over him, his wet butt stuck up in the air, head and legs were a reef of foaming water. A few seconds went by, then the current shifted the legs like a tiller and heaved the body over the rake-tine. Slim shot down with the spate in a steep arc to the depths below.

We had our pistols with us and fired a long series of shots, until the Indians came in the half-finished second boat to fetch us off using crudely twisted lengths of vine. When van den Dusen and I stood on dry land we looked at one another without a word and quickly looked away. The Dutchman laughed. The water had refreshed him.

We said not a word about the incident. No word of regret passed our lips when we thought of Slim. We thought of him not at all. We stared listlessly into the hot day. We were sated with the profusion of events these past few hours, our imaginations had no more room to play. Our minds treated the event as a simple settling of accounts.

XXIX.

Van den Dusen had quite recently taken to wearing a pair of dark sun-goggles, a clunky thing on rubber straps. Everything shimmered before his eyes. He saw big red clouds climb and solemnly slide away. He had definitely looked too long into the water's gliding illusions, that time when we set off with Slim above the waterfall to set fish-traps.

I too had a screw loose ever since that day. It was very hot, and our organs suffered disturbances. I felt a strange ringing lodged in my ear, an indescribable tone that tormented me. When, withdrawn into myself, I engaged in some mechanical task, I suddenly caught myself trying to give a shape to the tone. The attempt failed. I was dreaming it. It seemed to come from everywhere. I was terrified, everything seemed to be copying it. The narrowness, isolation and heat of this existence incubated the tiniest irrational sensation into a monstrous apparition.

It was, I have to say, a low-grade tone. It had something of the twang of a string grown slack. Anyway, by various roundabout routes of feeling I managed more or less consciously to bring it into a connection with van den Dusen. Our mutual relationship had once again grown prickly. Both of us had heightened nerves, we'd lost our heads, for Slim was absent from every nook and cranny, and the construction of a new boat proceeded only slowly. It irritated me to see van den Dusen wearing his pitch-black goggles. He had bad eyes! Good, that was one thing. But there was a second. The

second thing was that he only put the goggles on to keep watch on me from behind them. He'd grown childish, the old man, in his lack of variety. I knew his eyes were ashamed; they sought me out from their black shade as if through arrow-slits, even when he was looking through those ovals in a different direction. He played hide and seek like a little boy, he fancied himself the bearer of a special secret given mysterious expression by the half-concealing, half-betraying black lenses. He made it palpable that he possessed eyes that were not to be seen. I was right to resent him for it. But he'd already grown so feral that this coquetry gave him extraordinary pleasure. He wore the thing like a native who would have himself buried with it. So we were on an unfriendly footing and our conversations were moody.

What he understood least was how weak I'd been the day when Slim fell into the water and drowned. But I'd never paddled so much as a stroke! I sensed him looking sidelong again at me, while the dark lenses seemed to gaze past me. Blood rushed to my head. We'd gone too far downstream, the current caught us and we'd done too little to save ourselves – van den Dusen said only that I hadn't paddled enough. Otherwise he said nothing at all. And I was entrusted with the thought that maybe he was right. The connection became threatening and plainly obvious. I stood up to forestall self-recrimination.

How in fact did it all happen? Do you know? No. Or you? Me neither. He didn't understand how Slim could have drowned. That the boat capsized, OK, that could be attributed to our negligence. But Slim, wasn't Slim an outstanding swimmer? He understood none of it, really none of it, shrugged his shoulders and confessed that his usual perspicacity failed him here. Now it was my turn. I attacked him at random, tormented him until his face twisted and the poor man stood up and left me to myself. He'd been sitting in the stern – yes, but he'd had enough to do to save himself when he jumped headfirst into the river and escaped the current with a few powerful strokes. He could never have suspected that Slim would need help. Slim the champ, and Slim hadn't said a word, not a single little last word, no one saw any more of him until there he was dangling at the lip of the fall. If only we'd at least had a chance to check over the body! The boat had landed shattered at the bottom, and was washed up on the bank a little way downstream. But the body stayed trapped in the whirlpool. It was likely that the falls kept it there under a strong pressure, swept it back whenever it was about to surface and would play catch with it, with the shapeless bag of bones or whatever you might call it, for all eternity.

Van den Dusen emphasised a naturalistic account of its condition. It was evident he must have a good healthy conscience. He went away from me courteously and full of tender concern. But I saw clearly how he watched me. He was betrayed by a hundred trivialities; on the other hand his behaviour left no doubt that he saw right through me. Then these surprises came, when we both arrived at the same thought.

"I'm going hunting today," I said. "Will you come?"

"All right, why not," he replied, but it came awkwardly from him.

I kitted myself out with shotgun and gun belt.

“Actually, John, you know, I’m really not in the mood today. Will you be gone long? Till evening, yes? Well then, I’d rather stay here!”

I shouldered the gun and pushed through at some spot into the jungle. But I didn’t go hunting. I crouched in the undergrowth and peered cautiously back towards the camp. After a while van den Dusen made an appearance. It was possible to observe him bend over the baggage, feel around with his hands. My lookout post seemed familiar. Where and when had I sat just here in the trees and spied on the riverbank? My eyes blinked, and the blinking made me attentive. Right, on that occasion I must have been looking through something. My pince-nez? Maybe. Or a telescope? Or ...? Wait, it was binoculars! Memory focused on the eyes, the surrounding nerves attuned themselves to an old delight, I sensed two roundnesses before the pupils, suddenly these grew into the image of binoculars. Ah, on that occasion it was Slim! How everything in life repeats itself, how you always land up in the same situation! There I sat, and waged the same moral battle with myself as that time with Slim.

For as I sit here, already for some time unease has crept over me, and now there’s something to defend myself from. At this moment van den Dusen on the opposite bank stands up. Slim’s rifle is nowhere to be found. A mystery, where can it have vanished to? Haha, how strange! Conclusion: one of the Indians took it, ha! So shouldn’t those lads be kept under closer observation in case one of them produces the weapon from his kitbag? Eh? Van den Dusen was obviously aiming his two black ovals like cannon barrels at the Indians, who were enjoying their midday snooze. And yet I would have wagered that at that moment he flashed a glance across at me, a brief solid glance I was meant to notice in order to be more emphatically aware of him. It was totally calculated. In order to deceive me he left it to me to divine the action.

When he couldn’t find the rifle he turned right and headed upriver, towards the falls. He shoved the revolver down by his belly, and tugged the belt almost straight. Be warned, anyone rascally enough, for example, to spy on him from the jungle!

And now we shall size up the situation. Pay attention, all you who sit in the jungle spying on your fellow humans. Now you’ll see how van den Dusen goes off hunting with his revolver by the falls. But the main joke comes first. You behind the trees, you dirty bush people, your disgraceful behaviour leaves you with no choice but to vamoose from your scandalous lookout post as swiftly as possible! Wait! A thousand to one you’ll gallop head over heels to the waterfall. But you won’t find van den Dusen there. Van den Dusen knows how you think, he can smell your Indian guile, and when he comes back past the camp you’ll be long gone traipsing uselessly around in the river’s upper course.

Hm. So then there would be both the camp and our man. He seems stressed, he has thoughts. Damn, he thinks, is someone sat there in the trees, or not? Maybe you bush people don’t have enough conscience to stir from your scandalous position once you’ve been spotted. So now a lurker sits in the trees and shoots a hole in Charlie’s

clothes, because he's been a little too clever in his calculations. But maybe on the contrary you have enough conscience that you don't even want to confirm the other's bad thoughts, and you won't go tramping about the upper part of the jungle but slip off downstream, for your own sake so to speak, and to avoid temptation.

Well now, of conscience you have none, you can depend on that, but in its place you no doubt have cunning, a cunning that tells you that the other, despite your cunning, suspects as if from an excess of subtlety that you do have a conscience. In which case you would already be miles away up hill and down dale, and the air hereabouts would be clear. Assuming, that is, that your conscience is not so refined that you'd want to avoid a possibly mistaken conflict that could arise from one step more or less in the adversary's thought processes. But it must be avoided. You can't use a pistol against a rifle. The whole thing is a calculation of probabilities, no? That the calculations of two men concerning their mutual enterprise coincide with each other is one probability. That one of them is a step ahead or behind is two probabilities. So this is what chance favours. Someone knows he has talent as a bushwhacker, and out of his refined conscience removes himself as far as possible from the locus of temptation. He cancels the last possibility, because he doesn't expect the other to do so. By this logic the winner is the one who leaves the initiative to the other, for he has his number. Assuming you're sitting here behind the trees, then for sure you're not sitting here, for you can count off on your fingers that the other man expects you to be here. But because you most certainly are not sitting here, the other man must betake himself, in order to avoid encountering you, to the place you must in all probability have run off to.

So let's go, break out downriver so as not to lead into temptation the poor sinner who in defiance of the laws of his instincts, and perhaps of his fate, sits here behind the trees. One must take account of such an assessment and be a little bit accommodating. Forward march!

Then it all went wrong. Van den Dusen went a little way downriver, suddenly turned around and veered towards the jungle. What has happened? Did he miss a trick in his calculations, or pile too many on? Like a thief who's been spotted he dived into the vegetation, flailed away with hands and feet and cast suspicious looks behind him. The next moment he was standing in front of me. Damn. What to do about it?

"Ah, good morning," I said. It was three in the afternoon. His face was ashen. He was trembling, fending off a weakness in the knees.

"Yes," I said. "It really is me. You catch me here eavesdropping on our red rascals. I'd like to know what that gang gets up to when it's on its own. Our baggage is becoming seriously depleted. Apart from which, have you noticed, Zana and Checho are always together."

Van den Dusen observed me with a knowing look, shoved his ovals forward as if on eyestalks. "Oh really?" he said. "Which reminds me, Slim's rifle is missing. Clearly that bunch nicked it."

“Slim’s rifle, how ... ah yes, right, that had occurred to me too. But it’s really ... it’s a crying shame, such a fine piece!”

“Yes, a magnificent specimen. But it went missing so easily ... There’s something not quite right there ... He did, I think, take a risk flashing it about ... Slim himself of course was always careful. But if anyone’s in the vicinity now ... Just imagine if I’d let the business get out of hand while we were hunting together ... then in the end it would all have been down to me!”

We were so keyed up we both laughed out loud at this absurd notion, and shook hands. It was decided we would go up towards the falls. A little stroll along the riverbank, a taste of Nature’s beauties, what d’you say, haha. And so we matched pace upstream along the riverbed.

Van den Dusen kept looking around. Towards the end of the path his steps grew ever slower. Actually it’s a bit dull hereabouts! Ever since Slim’s death he’s been reluctant to come up this far! Look – isn’t there something peculiar about that bush? He was alert to everything, kept looking for conversational openings, and overshot. Grieving had made him excessively intense; his imagination was beset by pangs of conscience and concocted intellectual events and inauthentic facts that aroused in him a sense of guilt. Was the jungle really so red? He complained of an endless procession of red spheres and rings before his eyes. The stomach caused it.

“Remarkable, what happened to Slim,” he said in the midst of all this. “You know, despite everything I’m almost convinced the body has washed up somewhere on dry land. It can’t have stayed forever in the whirlpool. Surely it must have taken advantage of a moment of inattention to move on out. Maybe the whole thing is smashed to pieces, the head is probably dreadfully broken and scraped. I can see it in front of me – can’t you? Isn’t it the same with you? It comes to my mind so often. Do you know what I’ve been mulling over recently? I’ve become aware of clairvoyant or telepathic powers in me. I’ve heard of such things. Lots of people can see someone who’s far away right in front of them; they sense them from a certain spatial position....”

“It’s an effect of the sun. Probably it can be traced back to the more acute inwardness of experience, that’s all. The Indians claim to possess such a propensity. But it could never be proved.”

“I thought so too, once. But it’s bothered me now on numerous occasions. Another instance, for example, is the corpse. I can’t get it out of my head. Do you think the corpse is undamaged ... that’s to say swollen and bloated but I mean, you see, that the body might still be intact? The paddle I found seemed in good condition ...”

“Ah, you found a paddle?”

“Paddle? ... Well, sure. I saw it lying in the sand down there one day. All in one piece, might have still been usable; but to tell the truth it sent a little chill through me. Maybe it’s childish, but I couldn’t help it, and so I threw it back in the river. Maybe it’s come ashore again farther down in the shallows. So we might be able to find it!”

When we'd gone a little farther, van den Dusen began once more to speak of Slim. "It's so strange to think of Slim dead; that it's all over with him; the man was so full of life ... you can hardly take it in. I have to say I actually liked him a lot. He was an amiable sort, a good comrade and utterly lacking in deviousness. And he had such brilliant ideas. He had a true hunter's nature in everything he did. Don't you think?"

"Oh, I share your opinion. Something could have been made of him. It's absurd that he met such an end. He was better than anyone, he was always so immoderate, but still he possessed a peculiar harmony. He'd overcome so much. And the best of it was that you could plant him down anywhere and he'd fit right in. I especially ..."

"Yes, there could well have been harmony there, at least he was always speaking of it. But he was so torn, too, as people say, so complicated, he had a liking for paradox ... Another thing I meant to say, he had for example this notion of the Tropics. He was surely on the right track there. You know the idea, he said the modern nervous person is really just a kind of savage, one with a more acute hunting instinct. I think he was right. Shouldn't you be familiar with these notions?"

"Well now. I don't really know. Or maybe I do know, but don't give them any weight. You probably over-estimate me, haha, I'm just a simple normal cadaver with average nerves. I'm an engineer, as you know, hence a realist. Our sort don't have all these complications in our practical life. You see in me an honest upright fellow with human instincts, who'd never harm so much as a beetle, one who lives and lets live. What Slim thought of such matters is certainly intriguing and amusing, but I for my part have no pretensions to being a man of nerves. So you're not feeling well. It comes from the stomach, Charlie, just as you said a while ago, most correctly. You can't cope with this boring diet over such a long period."

Van den Dusen said: "But Johnny, you're an unlucky chap, however healthy you may be. Anyway, that begs the question. Just now I wanted to give you a medal. I take Slim at his word – that neuroticism is a measure of natural intelligence. The modern human trots through life like an Indian. He's always about to jump. He's always in touch with things. He's like a sniper – for him the most distant stimulus is like a bullet in flight; he's hit the mark even before he fires. You know what I mean. For a good marksman the rifle and the bullet's track are as it were an extension of his own arm, he masters the entire distance like an organism; and when he takes aim the distant target is the end of the whip he's cracking –and that's how it goes with the man of nerves. All his shots are on the wing, he's enormously full of possibilities, of direct hits; he has distance within his grasp. And only a fellow like that could develop what we call intelligence, only he could invent the machine for overcoming distance. Won't you concede this? Since it's so cut and dried?"

"Oh God, yes," I said. "That's the stuff I'm made of, I'd have to know it, naturally. I'm a bit sceptical about this kind of thing. And how come you know all that, if I might ask? What's the point of romanticising a simple fact with great big explanations? I'm against it in principle. Where do you get it all from?"

“Where from? If you mean I got it from Slim ... well then, that’s another example. Have you never noticed how in the course of their lives people change their standpoint within a situation as easily as changing gloves? It’s bizarre, but it’s the truth. Back then, when Slim was still alive, I gave his ideas the cold shoulder. But all of a sudden I’m thinking about them quite differently, and I’m surprised to find you offering such principled resistance. Because I really thought you too knew it all. Ever since I’ve known it, and that’s quite a while now, I’ve been mulling it over. The mouse, for example, lives in a constant neurosis of fear. With horses, everyone agrees there’s a direct relationship between its skittishness and its quality. But now take a look at the jungle: how much morbid attentiveness and alertness prevails here. How everything here goes on tiptoe, a wandering arsenal of observations. That kind of animal-heart hasn’t a moment’s peace, it never stops hammering. It smells enemies everywhere. There’s a really subtle, almost extrasensory, even telepathic apparatus in its blessed nerves. And the human today lives exactly like this beast of the tropics, a stressful, endangered savage life. I’d be surprised if you don’t understand this!”

“Don’t understand? ... not at all, I understand only too well. But I can’t approve of it. I find it’s a load of ... cock and bull, a hunter’s tall tales.”

“Cock and bull, yes, no doubt. You’ve made a find, there. These days there’s more cock and bull than ever. I shall write a book and call it ‘Cock and Bull’. That would fit; you’ll cede me the title? That’s it exactly, just because the hunter’s blood shows through there are more tall tales, that’s all part of it. With those words, perhaps, you capture Slim in the round. His harmony consisted in accentuating all these negative things, all the morbidity, the neurasthenia, the sensual and the barbaric in us. He was simply the Gothic prototype.”

“Charlie, to calm your nerves, go off right now and write a book called ‘Goths’.”

“Goths are actually blond Indians. Is the similarity of these bony, tall, sharp-nosed profiles merely chance? Is the acuity of their eyes that the Romans noted merely chance? Is it mere chance that gave to both the same long springy bone structure? I dare to assert that a similarly sensuous people as the Goths once existed only as Indians. Look at the old Germanic Yankees, before the current Celtic strain took hold. There’s no difference at all apart from skin colour. And when you undertake travels in the Tropics, among an Indian people, what do you experience other than a kind of Goth? Eh? I pose the question, are these not striking phenomena? The Goths are a nervy people from their earliest beginnings. When they arrived in Europe, Johnny – think back to your schooldays now – what did they find? Yes, they found the bourgeois, the Original European, the flat-skulled Neanderthal, you know? As long as they retained their racial strength they had a marvellous savage culture, a beautiful noble thing of a life. But then the long-skulled race with its monstrously enlarged brain became submerged into the flat-skulled. Their hysterical culture declined to an apathetic mediocrity. But now that time has passed. The Gothic hunter-race intermingles itself triumphantly in the mixed blood of the continents. Slim, forsooth, was such a Goth, despite his traces of Africa and Peru!”

“No doubt, no doubt, that’s all not unappealing. I’m quite willing to accept you’re such a man of nerves, such a Gothic man of nerves. Of course I can’t know if you suffer from anxiety states or not. And Slim was clearly a serious hysteric. He even told me once he had a fabulous talent for calculating the mental processes of those around him. But what I don’t understand is what it has to do with these Indians. They’re all swine. They idle away their days ... Where’s the development, the technology, the mental life?”

“Here,” said van den Dusen, “is where my lack of schooling shows up. I don’t yet know the answer. But do you know something of these people’s customs, of their eroticism, their art ... It might all have developed in a different direction, through some chance, or even not at all. And then on this occasion you’re a poor psychologist. The Indian would be too proud to take from the Goth anything that didn’t come from himself. Don’t underestimate such pride. Just consider this one case: two people walking side by side, one has an idea, the other doesn’t have it and so considers it of no relevance to himself ... Or the other has the same idea, but now unfortunately the other expresses it first ...”

“You’re a pupil of Slim’s!”

“Hm! Could be. Maybe I’ve inherited something from Slim. There are such peculiar connections. Adieu, Johnny! I’m turning back now, I think the fever’s coming on again. You’d best go along this way, into the jungle. Nearer the waterfall it’s all rocks ... Improve yourself, Johnny!”

We looked at one another. I entered his ovals as a worm-shaped ink-coloured creature with a round ball for a head. His mouth seemed painfully twisted. He followed the path back at his own gait, feet placed parallel, bowlegged, so that the trousers ballooned. There was something novel in his gait, something insidious, reminiscent of Slim. And now though I was behind him, I could as it were peer into his face, it was bearded, but under the beard long straggling wrinkles had formed. It was the face of a swift-living, tense, hysterical race. Truly, now he did share a certain similarity with Slim.

XXX.

When I had jumped across several channels, lurching from one foothold to the next, I found myself to the left of the rushing water-curtain by the great split cliff I’d been aiming for. I had to step behind it, because at the front the water rebounded at the base in a mass of foam. But it was calm and shallow behind, and slow eddies carried around a few white blobs. With an athletic move I gained a little height and felt with my right hand in the gap ... nothing there. I stretched my head to peer into the gap ... it was gone. The rifle was gone.

Slim’s rifle was gone. Oh, ohoh! The current swirled in an ellipse. Two low rocks reared up in the middle; an upended log was jammed between them. I couldn’t recall if I’d discovered the rocks directly on my first visit; but as I instinctively inspected the

location for clues to the theft of the rifle, it was precisely this change that drew my attention. The rocks were irregular pyramids rising ten to twenty centimetres above the water's surface. The taller was marked by two clear floodlines. So in the last three days the water level must have dropped, somewhere in the upper course a natural dam must have formed and lowered the level down here. As I looked over the surroundings once more in the light of this observation, they seemed somehow altogether different. There were gaps in the wide slimy water curtain, it was thinner now, in places was reduced to drips and long jagged points. No doubt about it, less water was coming over. And now it was clear why a hunk of dug-out timber, part of our former boat, was stuck there between the rocks. The whirlpool no longer received enough nourishment, its strength had faded, and it had to yield to the buoyancy of any foreign bodies that came along. The timbers floated on the surface and drifted to the sides.

The timbers! Access to the cave behind the waterfall was easier than ever. After a few tactical flanking moves I had the worst of the spray-rain behind me. Delicate columns of rainbow light flowed through the fine mist, veiling whatever object they touched in a shimmering layer, like mould. I bent to look closer at an object right by the entrance that attracted my interest. It was a well-preserved paddle, such as the Indians carve. To dispel all doubt I looked along the shaft; close under the cruciform pommel the structure comprised the characteristic three parallel snake-lines. This pattern of wood-grain was an old friend. I had a familiar object in my hands. Having arrived at this conclusion I at once felt ready for other possibly spooky discoveries. Here a bundle of paddles had been so to speak cast away, there they lay, three of them, as I now observed having registered the uppermost one, with their mid-points piled one over the other to make a star shape. It was a remarkable play of the water to have floated them in this configuration to dry land, and from this I drew the conclusion that timber, maybe only wet timber, has a kind of attractive force. Here were the entire fittings of a little boat, two paddles and a steering-oar, they were heavy, thoroughly waterlogged. In addition the place where they had apparently been revolving in the eddy for a while was seemingly very deep and free of rocks, for the paddles were intact except for the somewhat longer steering-oar, one edge of which showed a jagged gash. So, given that these objects had not been smashed in the fall, having encountered no hard resistance, one might hope that even a human body must have come through unscathed. It was puzzling that apart from these, not a sliver from the boat, which due to its size must have split apart, had landed up here. The paddles lay quite alone in their placid formation at the base of a depression in the fissured rock.

But lying there, as I was able to discern in the greenish light that veiled the cave despite gaps in the water-curtain, was a Something; its shape seemed at first glance indefinable. It was a grey sack, lying in a spot we must have stepped on when we first visited the cave. Whereas the paddles were lying where water once stood, it seemed that water had never penetrated this far. The sack lay near the back of the sheer-walled cave. But one circumstance suggested that between that first visit and my presence today water had indeed penetrated and then retreated again. For a

pestilential miasma rose from the rocky floor strewn with all kinds of stagnating debris. Yes, the stink was stronger now than I would have been able to notice on the first visit. So there was every sign that the waterfall and the quantity of water rose and ebbed, whether from internal laws of gravitation or for purely external reasons, cloudbursts, dams breaking at some larger basin or the like. This assuredly bolstered the hope for a stronger flow of water in future, the first glimmer of which I had not noticed given my feverish condition at the time. In future this speciality of the river could serve to speed us southwards by boat.

Now, that sack over there, what story can it tell?

It was a grey sack, inflated like a balloon. At one end the opening had a head with long hair, yes a head, at the other a tumid pair of high rubber boots. The head, despite its abnormal ball-shape, was human. The shaping of the face had disappeared under the expansion of the skin. Hair and beard hung across in long lank strands. There was nothing horrifying in the sight, rather it looked a bit ridiculous – nothing human could any longer be discerned in this corpse. I struck a match, two, three, they went out at once but in the momentary flare a fat reddish patch could be seen over the left temple, a strong swelling of this part of the head. It lent the head a stupid asymmetrical appearance. Holding a handkerchief to mouth and nose I gazed curiously at the face, searching for anything familiar. But there was no feature that could have reminded me of anything. It was the face of a stupid great cat, with greenish pale skin and a tufted pelt. The eyes protruded false and cold from beneath unequally closed lids. The lids were damaged, they were torn and crusted with blood. For the rest, water from outside and rot from inside had banished all character and soul from the muscles beneath the skin. Nothing was left but a big dull animal face that aroused no sympathy.

I fetched the long steering-oar and tried to lever the upper body into a sitting position. But the head fell into the balloon, sank into it as into an air-cushion, while bones poked through from the now widened sack of skin like splinters of wood. Spine and ribcage must have crumbled into a thousand tiny fragments, the body's long axis offered no resistance. Yes, this was the whole man, this sack of skin. I jabbed with the oar at the slimy clothing, it didn't tear but scraped loose like a layer of grey gelatine. Beneath it bare skin emerged into view. There must have been a hole on the left side beneath the armpit, for the fabric had peeled away there. A curiously blackened lesion the colour of burnt flesh, a wound with a raised rim, showed that the body had received a hefty blow there.

I looked behind me and went swiftly from the cave. It stank of decay. There was a weaving and wafting in the steamy atmosphere, the rainbow spectrum twinkled in the mist when the waterfall thinned, striking the walls with hard brittle sounds. The white singing air outside sent a whirl of blood to my head, red mountains towered up before my closed lids. After a few leaps I stood again by the rock where Slim's rifle must be cached. Had I been dreaming just now, or was it true, was it all true ... Now then, what

gives with the rifle? I stuck my hand in the gap, felt around, peered in: the gap was empty!

Here the water circled around, but it was moving faster than before, so it seemed to me. Could it change so quickly? I looked across to the waterfall: the entrance through which I had penetrated is narrower now. The individual stringy jags of water run together along the rocky ledge, merge into one another and fall in long gouts, suddenly it's falling like a shiny cloth, the opening closes, the waterfall is growing! It's growing towards the sides, its roar becomes louder, foam where it occurs balls itself into white fists that bob into the air. In the middle of a calm patch a log floats, the water lifts it from the two supporting rocks, it revolves three, four times in the eddy, round and round, suddenly it darts in pursuit of new strength as if a whistle has blown. I watch as it floats away, it could be a piece of what was once our boat, in which Slim went to his death, hoho! The river's rising! How long now before it fills the shallow bleached bed where we've been camping so long, and we'll speed with its help downstream to south and east, to the coast, to the coast and the looming prow of a mighty ocean liner!

How the thoughts rise, how all these thoughts rise! Am I dreaming, or am I hyper-alert? Do I sense life's ecstasy, or am I feverishly heaping hallucinations over me, and purple mountains? Up! Jump in the river, cling to logs and float with the current, it's heading east to the ocean and is the great vein of movement. Watch out, you're crashing, everything's smooth and red ... Ah if you could only know what dreaming is, what fever is, and what is robust life! If you could know if life is clear running motion, or a greenish mist and a bewitched rainbow grotto!

XXXI.

On the way back I felt a malaise. The time in the noxious cave had done no good. My head was hot with deep thoughts. As I descended in this state towards our camp, I observed my gait. True, if you ignored the swaying that summoned an incipient fever in me, you would notice that I was proceeding exactly like the Dutchman earlier. How alike we had grown in this shared existence!

When I came to the camp, van den Dusen was lying on his back groaning. His face was puffy, his eyelids lowered but not equally so, and from the slits came a cold piercing glare. Little violet capillaries gave an appearance of injury to the lids, they were reddened and seemed to cling like pus to the eyeballs. This condition deformed the face. I knew it, it wasn't long ago I'd seen it ... it was a cold, nasty cat's face.

At some distance from the Dutchman lay his goggles. I picked them up and for a joke put them on, and in so doing looked van den Dusen straight in the eye. At once the bright world became a violet grotto. My childish jape made the sick man nervous, in despair he craned his neck back, turned his face away – it was the face of a corpse. A deep sigh escaped the lacework of his gums. The sigh brought me to a thought.

“Why are you acting so funny, Charlie, hey?” I enquired sympathetically. “Now I know where that sound comes from. I haven’t been able to get it out of my head for ages ... Do you often sigh like that at night? What’s wrong with you anyway, old boy, tell me!”

But he said nothing and we kept silent. I inspected the baggage. “The quinine’s gone!” I cried suddenly. This was a serious blow, but I got not a word out of him. Clearly he was having a bad day.

Now my thoughts turned to myself. The quinine gone! If now one of us falls into a serious fever ... Ah, if only Slim were still here! The idiot; what a guy, and he has to perish in such a stupid manner. That he couldn’t swim – it was incomprehensible. So strange!

“Charlie, tell me,” I resumed, “Maybe you’ve heard something of the sort, that wet timber, do you think, or timber in water let’s say, that it exerts an attraction ... no? Does it seem plausible to you?” He kept silent. “There are laws of gravitation we as yet know nothing about,” I added by way of explanation. “I mean it’s just my opinion, possibly I’m on the wrong track ... Shall I fetch you some water, Charlie?”

“Not from the river,” he said.

“But why not? Charlie, there’s no other water anywhere round here!”

“I don’t know, leave me alone. I don’t know.” His tone was sharp, his face twisted. The eyelids gaped, revealing a grey veiled gaze.

“But I don’t understand you, man, we have the filter, so why don’t you want water from the river?”

“There’s corpse-poison in it, you blockhead, don’t you understand?” he shouted. He sat up and glared at me in triumph.

“Ah so,” I said. “Well now, I don’t think it matters. We’ve been drinking that very same water all along!”

He laughed. Apparently I was a complete idiot. In a whisper he said: “The body must be pulled from the water. There’s less water now, the whirlpool is yielding up everything it’s devoured. The body must be brought to the cave, yes ... Slim was a big fellow, haha, there he had a ... a sort of mausoleum ... You’re a blockhead, man. Why are you looking at me like that? You understand nothing. You understand nothing at all. Do you understand for example that Slim is a caveman, a primitive, and now he belongs in the cave? The New Man and the primitive ... You, you – it’s symbolism. Do you have any idea, man? You think I’m mad, and I am mad. But it sharpens my thoughts. I can think about ten times sharper, ten times more microscopically, at ten times magnification, say! ... Have you never noticed that madmen are language-fatalists? Pay attention, man. The accidents of language are the fates of thought ... and so the New Man’s body belongs in the cave! The body must be brought to the cave! It’s poisoning the river!”

“Ah, that’s what you think.” I said gently. “Could well be. But maybe it’s already in the cave. Maybe it’s not actually in the river now!”

“The body must be brought to the cave, really. But you must take care,” he continued, “not to smash it up entirely. There’s not a bone unbroken. You must lift it out with the paddles ...”

“Yes, the paddles.”

He glanced at me and held back as if considering something. “With the paddles,” he said slowly. “How do you know about that? Did you dream something? I dreamed it today. You can use the paddles for a stretcher ... the whirlpool is yielding up its catch. There’s not much water now, the poison’s spreading too fast in so little water. You understand?”

He lay back and in pantomime tugged away from his throat something that choked him. His face looked straight up. “The rifle must be part of it,” he said suddenly. “There must be a ritual burial, he was a great hunter, we must give him a bullet, he died of a bullet. Nonsense, a man like Slim can’t drown. He died a warrior’s death, the bullet went straight through the heart. Pff, there he lies. Then you’ve shot him ... Do you admit it, you shot him? You don’t need to have shot him really. But you once had secret thoughts about it, all casual, just for sport, haha. The thought kills, all by itself. The bullet comes later. So will you admit it, was it maybe you who killed him? Of course you think I’m a fool, or I’m playing games with you. But you’re no Modern Man, your senses aren’t sharp, Take a sniff at this, for example – here, can’t you smell how the water tastes of corpse? It’s unmistakable. What am I saying?”

His features held a trace of malicious cunning, expressed a fearsome, convoluted intelligence. He smiled, the eyelids closed and little red and violet nodes formed, beneath which his glassy gaze crept forth. His thoughts were clearly occupied with a specific image. He smiled continually and never stopped looking at me. His face changed colour, the smile became tight, fear and irony somewhat brightened his features and caused them for a moment to seem quite sensible, the weirdness faded. With our stares we fought for dominance! Then his eyes turned away. The next moment he started howling. Spittle dribbled from his lips. “Why are you looking at me like that? Go away. Away, away from here. I can’t stand you. You slink into my thoughts, you’re stealing my soul, you ... away, go away from here!”

“But whatever’s the matter?” I said. “Take it easy now. I’m not doing anything to you. I want to help you. I’ll just have another quick search, maybe there’s still a bit of quinine left.” I had bent down to him and laid a hand on his shoulder. He curled up and shrugged away the hand.

“For God’s sake don’t do that,” he wept. “Don’t touch me. I feel like vomiting when you touch me. I hate you. No, I don’t hate you. I have nothing against you. Maybe I can tolerate you well enough. But I can’t stand you, I’ll die if you don’t go away. Your presence demoralises me, it drains whatever marrow I have left in me. How like Slim

you are! If you only knew how alike you are to him! We've all become the same since we've had to live together like this ... I can't stand it any more, I shall kill you, go away, let me give up the ghost, for God's sake let me give up the ghost!" He lay crooked on one hip like a wounded man, fat tears trickling into his beard. I stepped back a little, and stood not knowing what to do. Where was I supposed to go?

"Get lost, dog!" he screamed at me.

I felt a stabbing pain in the heart, I was profoundly sad. I felt a paradoxical urge to turn around and sob along with him. I decided to kneel down and plead for his love, but instead I went quickly away, out into the heated air, and at once sensed a great monotonous clarity regarding my latest outbreak of sentiment. He was disturbed in his mind. But at that time I had no yardstick for the human, I had no examples for comparison, and so I took him at his word.

XXXII.

Fever broke out in our camp, and hunger came to its aid. Both of us Europeans lay helpless, buried in ourselves. Our authority extended no farther than our fingertips, and rebellion took hold among our people. An ugly disorder broke out among them. One of the men lay alongside us covered in stab wounds. Zana's feminine nature came through, she took charge of him and healed him with her priestess arts. She spoke a lot and in an agitated tone: she had a role among the men. Suddenly, as in a state of semi-consciousness I became aware of all these goings-on, the thought dashed through my head: what if she were now to suggest being rid of the two totally superfluous Europeans?

From time to time she could be heard singing. She sang low monotonous songs in which lay a songbird's melancholy. Maybe she sang of her home village, maybe the semitones were her yearning for her tribe and the dances of wonderful almighty Moki? Ah, I'd never had this sweet emancipated creature! She had trudged on nimble ankles with us all through the jungle, had revealed herself to everyone in her savage passion, bestowed her love on all sides, and no one had properly appreciated her. While I, who alone understood the nature of her ardour, I had never taken her. On her account I had suffered and starved. For now the time had come, now it was exposed: my manhood remained barren and unfertilised. This was the sole cause of all my frailties. Gentlemen, you know it brings a man down ... and yet I'd never attained Zana! Failure undermines the best of characters, but in matters of love it's an impossible situation. Slim had asserted that our species no longer knows yearning. That remains to be seen. What is certain is that there are a thousand reasons for a man to lose himself, and these thousand reasons are often simply a woman. I have never attained Zana. This suffices to explain all these convolutions, and to write a story.

What one is denied in reality is enough to take one off into dreams. The biscuit tubs had all been breached, the jam tins emptied and stamped flat. No one brought

game back to the camp. But as pangs of hunger announced themselves ever more strongly and I grew thinner around the hips, the more irresistible did Zana's equally skinny beauty become, this beauty of hunger, this sickly ascetic tenderness that was rooted in her body's shape. I could taste my love for Zana, a glimpse of her melted on my gums. In my hunger-delirium I busied myself with the delights of her bones, the skin lay so taut over them. In my own abdominal cavity the noble organs became muscular, I could put them to work like trained animals, and I used them to imagine, on the basis of their original powers, the most outrageous tendernesses for Zana. Connection was established between the primitive exigencies of humanity.

Yes indeed, at that time I tasted the delights of Zana's love. I embraced her with my entrails, moved my heart out of the ribcage and laid it gently against her cheek, for joy I let it stop beating for a while, then let it dance again in praise of Zana, meekly I squeezed my body to a single scrawny splinter and with a single fierce act of will sent it exploding into the air. All this I did, and many other muscle-tricks, for Zana's sake and because hunger restored the manhood that unfulfilled love had taken from me.

Dreams came, and days. They were all the same and contained each other. But then came a day, and on that day I did indeed possess Zana. I had nothing in my stomach, I had fasted down to the bone, but was filled with ardour, and caught the subtlest perceptions as they flew by. It was the empty heat that caused concern to my rectum. But this vaporous envelope did good from the inside out, it activated a rather lively digestion, so that I began to swallow and guzzle my own toxins. On the second day, as I had eaten nothing, I was so far along that I began to spread and stretch in the midst of the fierce heat that surrounded me, set heart, liver, guts, spleen in motion, as said, and became aware of a clear upswing in my energy. This was the high point, I had to tell myself. It was a genial heat, it crackled and bubbled, all skin and bone.

During these days I had no emotions. It was as if I were shackled to an expansion contraption, so immense and eternal was the pendulum swing that called forth every delight each after its kind. During these days the sun fell from the sky to earth. There it lay on its hunchback like an enormously swollen bedbug wiggling a thousand legs, jabbing with a thousand probosces unable to get up again. I could feel exactly how it was lying on its back unable to rise. I felt it in my own body, its desolation and its arrogance, the empathy was monstrously real despite its strangeness, which I never really noticed. Sometimes I felt that I myself was the sun. But when the vicious giant bug did finally pull itself together and crawl slowly into the shadows behind the green wall of foliage, the moon quickly sprang forth and grew ever more clear and heavy. Finally it speared itself on a projecting branch and fluttered itself to death like a little bird. A few twitches and it was over. The fluffy silk balloon broke in two and out of it slipped a thin pale woman, who soon metamorphosed into Zana's soulful figure.

She changed colour and became red. Clouds of steaming sunset poured from her and enveloped her. I recall this vision quite exactly. Suddenly the clouds moved up and down. They were carrying something away, they were water, and what they were carrying was the body of a bearded man. I strained to follow the image. And since it

was evening and my head felt sharp and clear, I succeeded in shaping an unbroken sequence of events that were experienced by the unbefuddled brain only as fragments and riddles. Breathlessly I followed the movements of the body, even as I lost myself excitedly as if in memories. The body bobbed up and down a few times and then came again above water. You could see it was alive. Retreating into myself I imagined what had to happen now. The man in the water stretched out one hand and curled it to grip. On his left temple a large wound gaped, blood flowed from it. The wound fed a murky redness into the surrounding water.

Then came a little disturbance, a confusion of motions I was unable to disentangle because they followed too close on one another. At this point my imagination was less exact. But I had time enough to notice that from somewhere in the air the shaft of a paddle emerged and descended with vehement force on the left side of the man's skull. The victim had let out a sigh, an insignificant melodic cry comprising all the notes a breast could make. I knew this tone, heehee. It's the lovesong that the female cockatoo trills when her passionate lord and master takes possession of her, when his sharp beak tickles the beloved on the throat, the eyes, the great arteries. This deep rutting cry was what the man emitted, then I saw him sitting calmly in the boat.

I was sitting there myself. The boat glided away across two worlds. In one I could see ahead but not behind me. But the lower world opened up enormous possibilities for participation. I was in the presence of various things, for example myself, I could exercise a quite unique and comprehensive control over life. There I sat delivering a famous great monologue about mirrors and phantoplasma. Meanwhile stars came down to me, they wafted warm and were red and green and bluish, they induced a gentle harmony as they flew by. But some had a noxious breath, they bumped against me, bit into my blood. I smacked them dead with the flat of my hand. Then came a loud crash, they got up regardless and abandoned me to my ingratitude. When I grew livelier and for a few moments cooler, I wiped bloody corpses of squashed mosquitoes from chin and hands. I had unluckily killed them too as I chased away evil stars.

That was the magician Hunger. He turned me into a magnifying glass for life events of an insignificant and brutish kind. He cast me into the profoundest misery and the foulest disgrace. At the same time he dangled deceptions before me, and when I was sunk deepest in myself and my defeat he drew me up into ecstasy and gave me desperate strengths. A big black velvet bumblebee buzzed, and now it was again as years ago when I was a boy lying in tall grass in the meadow back home. The bee in the lovely black pelt with golden stripes brought its strong little body to a stop by a flower and hummed a honey-tune. The boy listened, it was the voice of an old woman behind the forest. Now he knew he was alone and a tender feeling rose up from his stomach. All the secrecies of his body came over him now, his intelligence became acute and clever, and he knew who he was. He knew himself as a living body.

If you could tell all the many strange things you experience with your body, what fables, what wonderful incredible stories they would make, what an important work for humanity! Are there adventures? All adventures are only adventures of the nerves.

Here I lay beneath the burning sky that I had, as it were, called up in my dreamy state. Now in reality this was the blooming and flourishing that the forest of my homeland had only promised so portentously. A buzzing insect – a mystical mechanism like a little hairy hand able to fly through the air and grab hold of flowers – restored the bumblebee-mood. Here was the original boyish ecstasy of presentiment.

And now all the heavenly feelings came again and rumbled about in my guts. Oh, my empty guts were heavy with love! I was gaunt as an ascetic, but my nerves were so delicately tuned that I could learn via my thin tendons, which still harboured a good deal of strength, how the linen of my clothing chafed against them. I was flexible as a fakir, and ecstatic as only a starving man can be. In this condition I had an adventure with myself and my nerves that today still seems explained too inadequately to attach to it any conclusions about reality.

It seems to me that I really did attain Zana. I feel free, and have no regrets. I have no sense that these travels have in any way become evidence of my inferiority. Had I remained unsatisfied, I would no doubt be entitled to conclude that I never attained Zana. But I feel good, everything's going well. All the same, I wouldn't want to set down in writing as a fact that I attained Zana. For I know as little about these latest events as about the most important external events during our travels in general. For me they remain hidden behind an impenetrable veil, which even today I strive often enough to lift. But I have retained nothing apart from the memory of thoughts and obscure happenings that affected my mind. It should be taken into account that from the very beginning I was probably suffering from fever, without having noticed it in any definite way. I tell of what I experienced and thought. To bring individual events into coherence through objective and sleuth-like conclusions is not in my interest. I neither can nor may draw the final consequences from the events, insofar as they have imprinted themselves on me. Otherwise I would arrive at results that would prevent me from writing this book.

On the other hand, I have imposed on myself a duty of unsparing honesty in my reporting. I consider it therefore an essential aspect of this story to have captured my states and emotions of the time in all their fuzziness.

Van den Dusen flung himself from side to side, sat up staring at me from reddened eyes, as if he suspected what was happening inside me. Around this time he kept uttering long soliloquies in which mysterious phrases appeared. He was mad, and I won't repeat them here. I jumped up and ran out to the sandbanks in the riverbed. Standing there was Zana's skinny figure. She stood with both feet in water. The river was rising, flooding over shrinking dunes. A bright tinkling note lay in the air, in many places little rapids trickled over coarse gravel, haha, hoho! and Zana was standing with her feet in water. At her back larger boulders lay strewn around. I ducked behind them and crept towards her. By the last boulder I had an encounter. There, face turned to Zana, sat our old redskin. The old fellow sat there rather limp and careworn, singing softly, watching Zana paddling in the water. Was maybe lovelorn, the old gentleman, and singing of her legs. Oh God, now they were as thin as his own ancient arm.

I leapt out catching them unawares, which caused Zana to take a little bath. But she showed not the slightest surprise, as if she'd known I was there. "What's up with him then?" I asked, pointing to the old Indian, whose presence was a slight disappointment to me. I asked in English and really only to find a point of connection, although any communication using such bourgeois means was hopeless here. But Zana understood me anyway, answered hissing and spitting and placed a hand on her stomach, which she drew in.

An old man, starving! The youngsters have abandoned him, his old bones are no longer sprightly enough for hunting, now he lies here sick, imparting the last of his life's wisdom. Who knows, maybe it was making him productive, and he was devising new themes about life as an Indian, or new therapies, which is the same thing. Sitting there he seemed part of the boulder, a slab of primordial mountain, the embodiment of weathering, an image of everything that gnaws away at a human in the wilderness. And because the image was already resigned to its fate and because I was also blessed with hunger, I left him sitting there and took Zana by the hand. I staged a veritable abduction, recapitulated as it were the ideal of all love-marriages. Zana was light as a feather when I took her in my arms. I ran upstream a little way until an opportunity appeared, and then we sped into the undergrowth. She ripped the clothes from my body, she herself was naked, she bit my lips till they bled and dribbled onto my face for love. She groaned and performed dances as she dangled in my embrace. I saw the whites of her eyes through a slit, in a frenzy of rapture held her thin bones in my hand ... then a shot rang out.

Followed shortly by a second and a third. The bullets hummed for a moment over our heads and buried themselves with a smack into fleshy stalks. The gunfire sounded jerky and thin, and came from a small weapon. I knew the sound. Zana freed herself from my arms, I followed her and felt for my gun, to see if that too was mine. For in those days when such peculiar things were happening ...

Ah, Zana was sweet in her loving, and it is doubtful whether I ever attained her otherwise than in sultry fever-dreams. And yet it is curious that all the visions from that time remain clear within me, and still I cannot place the tiniest facts in their proper sequence. I sob for joy, I still have the inward feeling from that time in my guts when I summon Zana's sweetness to my memory out of those intermediate states that meld reality and figment together into an inseparable experience. How charming she was then, when with ostentatious tenderness for his thoughtful way of firing at us we gladdened our friend van den Dusen with noisy assurances of our favour! I shot a bullet through and through him, it hit him plumb on a ticklish spot in his guts, where love dwells.

But you should have seen Zana then! I blazed up, I found her more enchanting than ever as she snipped off his nose and all that remained was a curious interesting framework that looked like a pitted plum. I was besotted to the point of madness when she stamped on his belly, and I did my best to hold her steady. But oh my God,

my talent for that proved too small. I was European, a namby-pamby, and anyway it was just a dream in which all kinds of inhibitions tend to encumber the action ...

Well, someone had indeed fired at us, I remember it distinctly. And just as we storm out of the jungle, delighted by this bonus to our love-idyll, chance decrees that we fall into the arms of the Dutchman. We fall on him like a tempest, like a numerous army drunk with victory. We shot, stabbed and throttled him, we beat him by chance on the head, and at once a huge mystical swelling appeared over the left temple, pulling the face askew. Ha, how exquisite Zana was as her fingers dug the eyeballs from the sockets, those little globes with the curious grey-streaked polar zones amid quartz-white oceans and maps of red vein-rivers! The pole radiates cool and dim and in a spectral dissipation like the Northern Lights. Already the eye is an invention of Northernness: beings who do well, who are still on good terms with primordial conditions, have no eyes and are happy to make do with the simplest organs ...

I no longer know if such were exactly my thoughts under the prevailing circumstances, but I felt them, with this theory I gave a more intimate shape to these somewhat alienating, not to say gruesome events. Zana hadn't yet finished. She was inventive enough, she tore clothing in strips from the body and inflicted a nasty wound on his manhood. At once I felt a burning grief. Such caresses were out of bounds, and I grew jealous. The whole merry scene unfolded in the same matter-of-fact way that dreams do. All moral inhibitions fall away, but are replaced by those of a mechanical nature. These were now, in the case at hand, represented by a heavy burden and a nasty pressure on the throat, which was at first slowly and then suddenly released. I shut my eyes and can even now instantly recall that pressure. It contained something horrific, the unexpected consummation of something expected. As if you have thought at length and frequently that a murderer's hand has closed around your throat ... and suddenly it's there and you sense the Unbelievable approaching. This sheer horrible pressure is rooted so deep in my consciousness that time has not managed to erase it.

Now I close my eyes and struggle to recall, I try to conjure the dream image that accompanied this pressure, which was no doubt caused by a blood stasis and the swelling of a thirsty throat. Slowly a vision glimmers in me. It's dreadful enough, even more dreadful because I don't know if it belongs to the dream or actually to reality. Yes, it must have happened that way. At first it lay across me, it was a heavy man, he had thrown his whole body weight on top of me as we fought, and was squeezing my throat in his hands. Zana rescued me with a nasty blow to his head. Yes, that was it, now I remember other trivial facts too. It was her, she hit him on the head, to the left on the top, causing a big swelling that made his face appear ridiculously square. He emitted a long peeping sound as if a bird was announcing its presence in his chest. Then he rolled off me, and the pressure relaxed. We comforted him in his death agony.

Only now did we institute a formal mourning for Slim's death, as is good custom. The ceremony proceeded according to well-established decorum in a bliss of beauty. During the event Zana looked ravishing, as said. I was puzzled by nothing I saw, and

was astonished for the first time only in Rio, when I awoke from my weeks-long fever and sank gratefully back into the twilight of my phantasy.

I have to recall how she stood there before me, real, a creature of flesh and blood, oh such blood, and yet in a frame of delusion and hallucination! She stood like a perpetrator after the deed. And although she was small and reached only to my shoulder – and I'm no giant – she seemed to me big and magnificent. Big and drunk with victory is how I saw her, and every one of her bones seemed valuable to me, more valuable than any other morsel of humanity. I noticed now that her feet and hands could not in any way be called small, as with my bad conventional poetising I had made them. On the contrary, they were big and long, thin like all her limbs, and in them was a noble strength. I, who lay ill and weak on my back all through our days-long boat trip down the valley, I worshipped those long chains of linked bones, I sensed my inferiority before such practical unfevered beauty, I was head over heels in love with the skeleton of her torso. You could see the wisdom and economy of her build, all configured for function like the body of a beast of prey. During those days my way of seeing changed.

I acquired a new way of seeing. Worn out as I was, I emerged to the other side of life fresh to the world. My nerves were shattered, I was starving, I had trouble digesting the meals of plants and leaves that Zana administered to me, I couldn't sleep and was always sleepy. Maybe the food contained opiate-like chemicals. In short, my sense organs erupted in open rebellion. Only now, in this state of utmost neuroticism, did I attain to the heightened sense-life of primitive people. In this state of hyper-aesthesia I approached closer to the starting point of functional living, I could feel what every primitive painter tried to convey, a probable-seeming beauty appropriate to the time and taste that was no mere offshoot of a major or minor drawing technique, but with which one could live, and enjoy. Had I not always loved *Zana, the human wildcat*?

Suddenly it was clear to me that I had stood for ever under the spell of this quite different and original bone-system, without knowing it in other than a literary sense. Now green shoots of passion broke from me and all my vegetating was a song of praise to this creature whom I made happy with plant-cool embraces. Zana, we leapt into the boat and travelled downstream when the river swelled one day; we passed through your people busy with their spearing and roasting. I suffered hunger, but we made love like deities and I stayed alive thanks to your wonderful gifts. I had one more change to undergo: I, the sick man, in my fever acquired wholesome tastes, and only now lost the clammy poetical prejudices of my cultural heritage.

My soul at peace, I gazed into Zana's death's head face. I kissed her hands when they were not clean and yielded to the plant-smells on her breath. She was a wild ardent southlander, pure-blooded with a well-preserved hunting instinct. She was a thousand times better and more gifted than the beautiful elegant Creole women I later came to know in Rio and on board the twin-screw steamer *Albatross*. I loved Zana not for the sake of ethereal qualities, she was a true soul and an animal, she saved me and

brought me all alone in a tiny barque to the coast and she tormented me with a thousand female chicaneries. But I loved a certain roundness in these bones and the dapples at the joints and could have sung hymns to the white melting glances from the slow slit-eyes.

I had come a long way back, I had sought the primordial female, who would stand at the side of me, the New Man, when I turned up again out of the tropics, out of humanity's primordial existence into which I had vanished for the purposes of research to synthesize a new future. For it would not be good for the New Man to be alone ... and I would never have made it to Rio without help, not to mention that my people would in the end have dined on me!

The longer I reflect, the more my scattered memories fall into a kind of order. I gain a fair wind and it all makes sense, I see facts and symbols in motion, they form a coherent whole and boil down to the same thing. My companions are dead and I buried them. Slim, who for so long I placed over me, has left me his inheritance. I am determined to be the New Man, and I sought out the woman suited to me, the woman with the well-preserved primordial instincts of her sensuality. We are a new founding couple, we are Adam and Eve and punt alone down a forsaken river. At night green stars fly their banners as we lie in each other's arms and found a new humanity, all day long the sun hisses down on our skin and jabs tricks into our systems so that we grow hard, as befits us. For henceforth humanity should be as slender as an Indian.

So Slim is dead. He died a sudden, rather illogical death that no one could have foreseen. Van den Dusen is dead – he disappeared while I was lying in camp that time thinking of a way out of the labyrinth. But I, whose doppelganger he had become, became Slim's heir. Slim's great and fearsome inheritance fell to me: I now had a kind of second sight.

And even if in my hallucinations I sometimes distorted events and even if – as a result of the curious paranoia that afflicted us all, Slim not excepted, when our tropical frenzy reached a certain stage – even if I put myself too much at centre stage, tracing back to myself many causalities when the actions were those of others, yet it remains certain that the product of my visions is consistent with the facts. I had fantasized the Dutchman's death, and now van den Dusen really was out of the picture, lost without trace. This drove my agitation to outbreaks of frenzy, I tried to rise and go in search of him, but left off for some reason or other. It came to an end only when I decided to head out with Zana, an occasion in which we effortlessly attained one another.

How it all happened is nevertheless not quite clear. The few traces I have retained of those events are preserved in my visions. I know I went off to search with Zana. What was it? ... ah, of course, it was the paddles she was pulling from the water just at that enigmatic moment when I came across her standing in the river. The sight of those innocuous objects had for no reason at all thrown me into such a state of horror that I succumbed to one of my worst attacks. In this condition I had a presentiment of the Dutchman's dreadful end. Yes, I recall quite clearly this connection that from time

to time seems to have been obliterated. Zana had at that moment discovered the drifting paddles and was pulling them onto dry land. Two lay between the boulders where the old man had been sitting. These two would have sufficed for us, for we had no wish to take anyone else along. But it would be better to commandeer all of them, we might perhaps make use of the third as a spare.

We hurried some way upstream keeping an eye out for it, and stopped at the edge of the jungle. Our senses had become so acute that we more or less guessed the spot where we'd find it. I pushed a little way into the greenery – surely a spot would appear to which a vague association in my mind would draw attention ... ah, there it is! And there he lay, a dead man with a fat crooked head, and his nose had been cut off and was now the abode of a dozen dubious creepy-crawlies. The corpse stank horribly, on the underside a legion of insects was busily chewing the back to mush. They had penetrated the body in their myriads, their lively mining operation aroused spooky life in the outstretched system, the chest moved slowly up and down as if breathing, the stomach heaved spasmodically and muscles twitched gently as if in dreams. I ran, methinks, all around the spot, where clearly a battle had been fought.

How interesting it would be to know how a life was lost here! I say, isn't that a rifle? Hey, it's a rifle! It was Slim's rifle. Curious. Suddenly it turns up again here. As I was looking at it someone approached through the undergrowth. I lowered the barrel and squeezed, in my recklessness I squeezed ... for such sick uninhibited recklessness was characteristic of our states at the time. Now Zana stepped up holding the steering oar in her hands.

And now something happened in me that will be of interest to every psychologist. Hardly had she come into view when I suddenly supplied a motivation for my reckless act: I needed to have fired in order to keep an accessory at bay. This was of course a nonsensical feeling, for there was no reason for me to have a bad conscience. This proves that we often retrospectively provide concocted reasons for senseless acts.

But I was not in the least embarrassed. My actions at that time were often unmotivated, and afterwards I felt no regrets. We carried the three paddles upstream to the waterfall. We meant to ship out from there. But first we would have to send the boat down over the cataract and get it floating again.

When we came near to the place where the new more spacious and stable boat was to have been built, however, we came to a sudden halt on the cliffs that heralded the waterfall. For there was the boat! It was somewhat unfinished, crude even by Indian standards. Its presence here was completely unexpected. There was a fireplace not far off, from which thin acrid smoke was still rising. Curious reddish clots and lumps lay strewn about. Several had the appearance of human feet and hands. There was a stink of blood as on a butcher's block, a fusty odour lingered among the stones. One of these stones had a shape that drew the attention. I nudged it with a paddle, it tumbled over, and it was a human skull with open eyes and lips. Didn't the face resemble Checho's? Ah, little Checho had fallen victim to famine!

Zana never so much as glanced at any of this. She pushed the boat into the water, and off we went. The prow lifted high in the air; ah Zana, be so good as to betake your sweet self pronto forward from the stern, I want to say to her with gestures. The canoe is really not quite stable, we'll have to ballast it at the front. I lifted a heavy stone and placed it in the bow. Well now, and here's an obstacle we've come up against before. Yes, here it is again. I plied the steering oar, the grey mass below turned, sank and moved away again. We floated over it. It was the horribly swollen unrecognisable water-corpse of a white man in rubber boots. The boat turned a few times out of its course, heading back towards the basin. Then away we went past the cliffs, in a shallow current. Ahoy-y-y: now we leave the fever camp behind and head for the coast. On to the Amazon!

We passed by the camp; it was empty. The stuff lying about we piled into the canoe. It was good to reach deep water. On we went. There on a rock in full sunlight sat the old Indian, not twitching an eyelash as we swept past. He wasn't singing today, he had a full stomach and looked out contented over the world he had outlived. To be sure he hadn't overcome all longing, but had stilled it with fodder of mysterious provenance. He sat and digested, and Zana's pretty legs no longer put him in lyrical mood. He kept to himself and suppressed every sentimental adieu. Maybe he was dreaming anew of boys at just the age when the tenderness of the flesh begins to meld with strength.

Of the other Indians we saw and heard nothing more. Maybe they were dead, maybe they'd dined on one another. Maybe they were just now lying low somewhere, concerned only with saving their skins. I have to say, the primordial manhunting instinct that erupted finally under the pressure of hunger is the only thing of which I retain no good memory. I am for the more refined and spiritual manner that can be observed in the intercourse between me and my travelling companion. Methods of slicing each other up have become more sophisticated, and that's good. In coffee houses we perform analyses on our neighbour as we do on ourselves. This produces all culture, and our tools in this respect are highly developed. I hope I have demonstrated this. The human of the future disposes of unique powers with which to dig into the lives of his fellow humans. That is one of the lessons I have learned on these travels.

I don't know what to say about Slim's death. He drowned, that's all there is to it. Still, it remains strange and tragic enough, for I know he was one of the few to have gone over Niagara Falls. It's the tragi-comedy of every great personage. Yet Slim did not live in vain, for I have inherited all his ideas and shall apply my feeble powers to help them bloom, and shall take care that on my death this trend is not extinguished. That's why I have written this book, not out of vanity, not to punish myself for them, not to depict my adventures in a glorious light, but to measure the smallness and pettiness of a person by his possibilities, and yet find happiness in these.

About van den Dusen's death, too, I have no reliable information. But even so I have my suspicions. I myself, during the bouts of tropical frenzy that assailed me ever more violently during the final period of my stay in the definitely not very salubrious camp, came to know a stage in which the primal urges of a human being – hunger and

love – to some degree presented themselves as identical. My heightened neuroticism mobilised everything within me that related to primordial dispositions. It overturned inhibitions that had been erected by millennia of culture and anchored in a thirty-link generational chain.

My condition – in which the removal of boundaries between dreamlike reality and real-seeming visions was no doubt known to my reason but recalcitrant to my will – had brought me with these latest experiences concerning the human mind to a point where I believed it possible to draw an inference about the Dutchman's demise. The contact between us that prevailed towards the end had a consequence: in a symbolic vision I experienced his death agony along with him. Of course it's easily possible that I'm mistaken about the coherence of my impressions and that I arrived at certain assumptions about this event only once my imagination had an opportunity to form an image of the struggle based on my personal eye-witness view of the mutilations inflicted on the corpse.

I could swear, though unable to offer any proof, that the man was not altogether dead when his nose was cut off, and that an act of boundless brutality and frivolity must have occurred to rob him of his life. He fell on his side and gave another groan, it was a touching sound, a peep that lifted his chest for the last time. It was a birdlike sound, the love-call of organisms, the call emitted by the hen-bird in orgasm when she's covered by the little male. But it was also the death rattle. So the connection to the act of love recurs not only with hunger but also with other phenomena, and who knows, maybe this act of love is so much the central point of all that happens on earth that all variations and possibilities of life are in the end merely its symbolic representations? And so the Dutchman, I firmly believe, laid himself on his side and died.

But who was the murderer? I ask. I review my entire tropical experience and arrive at Hunger. Who laid hands on sweet handsome Checho? Who other than that very one who first tried his luck on a white man; but then, out of some unconquerable antipathy towards white people, abandoned his original intention? I picture, for example, an old hardboiled red-skinned sinner about to kick the bucket, who gives in to his instinct for self-preservation. I picture his smug smile as he sits there so sated and wise on his boulder in the full glare of the sun. And I recall the danger into which I quite possibly placed myself that time when I lay with Zana in the undergrowth and kissed her little round breasts ...

Is it then ruled out that this vision I have in my memory should correspond to a real actual fact? Whatever hypotheses one might construct, the affair remains vague and founded on whimsy. But it's not necessary to wrack one's brains over it, for dead is dead and there's no justice in the wilderness, only a morality of instincts and powers, our travels are at an end and now I sit around in Rio de Janeiro, in Paris and Berlin and have a bagful of ideas with which I shall contribute to the enlightenment of humanity.

I have learned to sacrifice all sentimentality, and intend to root out all false spiritual values. Yearning is in decline at an increasing rate, I'll help it along and speed its consumptive decay to a gallop. Is there a yearning for distant lands, for other lands, for marvellous Dorados and adventurers' lairs? There is not! Whatever a person finds he finds in himself, and if he wanders south he notices, disconcerted and chilled, that he, the Northlander, is much more southern in his instincts than the most southerly race, and he gains the insight that a human is anyway already a northern transform and actually carries the Tropics within him. He's the vehicle of Nature, in whom she preserves the slowly expiring Tropics. The Tropics are the foundation of his organism and his powers, he's constructed on tropical principles, in him everything is recapitulated in miniature ... you could say he, the human, is a Trope of the Tropics.

But if the aim is to develop the human in the light of his destiny – something we all want these days, of course – it's anyway good to cast a retrospective eye over all these things that have to do with his provenance. But please, no sentimentality; or else when the day of reckoning comes it will perhaps read like a slick parody of yearning, and that is not the intention, and so it's wrong. But if maybe it was nevertheless the traveller's intention and he keeps his opinion in its shell, only then has it become actually false. For a parody of yearning is the most yearningful and sentimental thing in the world. But now we intend to institute measures against yearning, that primal northern evil.

The future human wants to be something cultivated to the highest level, but every barbarian is a sentimentalist. Slim wasn't really sentimental, but dialectical, even if he seemed otherwise. But even if the fellow was a kind of sport of Nature, there can be no doubt that he was no pure embodiment of the New Man. He was too conscious of his evolution for that. *One must not know whence one comes, one must have already known it.* Slim was still too fresh, so his honesty was not always total; and may have been impossible for him. Honesty requires a healthy memory, one that can also forget.

For sure the future human will be as full of hardness as his distant ancestors in the Tropics. The colder it becomes on the earth's globe, the more heated he will become inwardly. The big city dweller is already a savage in his disposition, as we call it a few degrees farther south. I'll give an example.

There'll be lots of brouhaha about those few dead bodies in my book, people will make wild guesses as to who the murderer might be, and especially clever psychologists will in the end try to steer their suspicions onto me. And all despite the fact that only through an irruption of sheer human instincts can my dead bodies have ended up as that which gives rise to all the shouting. But if an electric spark, this primal impulse of the earth, strikes a man dead, the city that murdered him will see him buried totally at ease with itself, and no editor will consider his fate particularly inhuman. Conversely, the savage who puts a hole through his neighbour has no more of a hand in it than the chauffeur who runs over a child. So when they lay railway lines through the Tropics and so bring the big cats to extinction, it doesn't mean that imagination and youth have been swept away; on the contrary, the murderous danger

is only now implanted. The law of the fist, where everyone knew himself the enemy of everyone, was a cosy institution compared to the persecutions that a society these days can unleash on an individual.

No one can complain that we are backward in terms of cruelties and mutilations. Soon I shall stand once more beside my machines, they are cannibals, honestly! And so, because I am still young and would be simply inconsolable in a well-behaved world, I'm an enthusiast for this tropical Europe where you will never be bored. When I go to the dogs I shall cry ow! just like anyone else.

Nevertheless ... death and life are no contradiction, any more than love and life. It's possible that I, like Slim, shall meet with the most ridiculous death. Then the poet can leap in, then it's time for the poet, the tragicomedy is laid out cut and dried all ready for him. But if you were to ask the future human if he was ever in the Tropics, - Ah, what Tropics! he says, the Tropics, that's me!

THE END

NOTES

p. 3: **Cagliostro** (1743-95): Italian occultist, magician and adventurer.

p. 4: **Altenberg**, Peter (1859-1919): Viennese conversationalist, cabarettist, writer of prose sketches.

p. 4: **telegram**: The Kaiser's 'Kruger Telegram' of 3 January 1896 congratulated the Boer president on having repelled the Jameson Raid.

p. 4: **Turkish service**: i.e. 1830s.

p. 13 **Tat tvam asi**: Sanskrit phrase from the Upanishads meaning that the Self - in its original, pure, primordial state - is wholly or partly identifiable with the Ultimate Reality that is the ground and origin of all phenomena.

p. 50: **Kelwa's picture**: the description fits the drawing below by Oskar Kokoschka to accompany his 1910 play *Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer, the hope of women; in 1921 a Hindemith opera):



Zeichnung von Oskar Kokoschka zu dem Drama *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen*

Abb. 4 Oskar Kokoschka. Illustration zu *Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen*. Der Sturm, 14. Juli 1910

p. 53: **Exposition**: The Buffalo Bill Wild West show performed at the 1889 Paris Exposition.

p.57: **Ashanti**: In 1896 a group of around 70 Ashanti formed a living 'folklore exhibit' at a private zoo in Vienna. Peter Altenberg attended regularly as a participant observer *avant la lettre*, and in 1897 published his prose sketches in *Ashantee*. He was critical of the objectification of human beings.

p. 57: **fake healthy person**: Altenberg, *Pròdromos* (1906): „Denn die Gesundheit in uns wäre, die Kraft zu haben, die Unzulänglichkeiten *ertragen* zu können! "For health would be to have the strength to bear the indispositions" – a Nietzschean notion.

p. 78: **Carl Hagenbeck** (1844-1913): influential developer of animal shows and zoos.

p.80: **Pierre Loti** (1850-1923): French writer of exotic stories, described by the contemporary critic Edmund Gosse as "At his best ... unquestionably the finest descriptive writer of the day. In the delicate exactitude with which he reproduced the impression given to his own alert nerves by unfamiliar forms, colours, sounds and perfumes, he was without a rival." Cf. Müller's style?

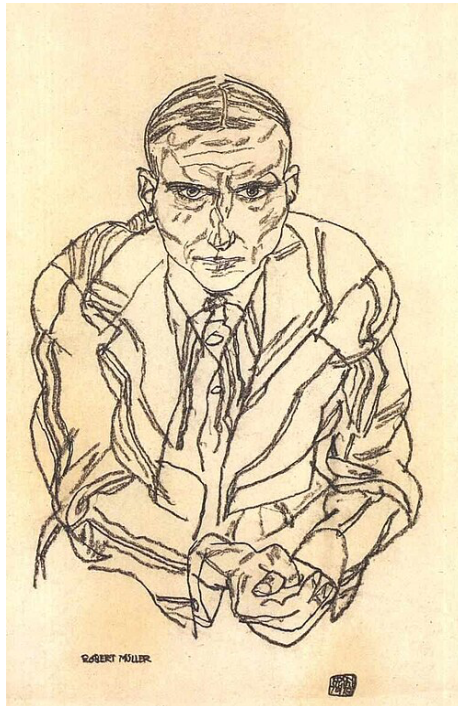
p. 118: **Roroschkin**: i.e. Kokoschka.

p. 157: **Vertite** (Lat.): Turn around! **Anachoreite** (Gk): Go away!

p. 182: **Brother Lustig**: from Grimm's Tales #81.

p. 195: **eppur si muove**: 'yet it does move': Galileo's muttered objection to the Inquisition.

p. 223: **bedbug**: The *Metamorphosis*-like image suggests Müller may have seen Kafka's manuscript before it was published (in *Die Weissen Blätter*, October 1915, as a book a month later, roughly the same time as *Tropen*). Kafka submitted his MS first to *Die Neue Rundschau* in 1914, where it was read by Robert Musil, a close contact of Müller. See Kafka's *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, (New York: Schocken 2016) pp.446-7.



Robert Müller, by Egon Schiele, 1918

Between its first appearance during the First World War and its republication in 1990, Robert Müller's extraordinary novel *TROPICS* – and its author – dropped clean out of sight. Yet the novel offers a great deal of delight, and much food for thought.

"Müller's novel gives voice, in a manner that invites scandal, to the obsessions of a nervous age. ...The high voltage narrative technique alone justifies the inclusion of this novel in the canon of the literary Modern." – Thomas Schwartz (2006, 2012)

"Robert Müller is a dazzling wordsmith." – Alfred Döblin (1920)

"The world depends on the Ego, not the other way around. ... My intention in the novel TROPICS – to understand the external as an active metaphor for the Ego, and analysis as a synthetic act – proclaims this instinct, which has led to all kinds of artistic development, Expressionism, and activism."

Robert Müller: 'Das moderne Ich' (The modern Ego), 1920.

From the single cell to self-reflection: it's such a long road, it's the Amazon River of the human soul, it's a Brazilian jungle and river system of the mind! Observation, please, this is my big trump card, it's a postulate. The creative man sees, hears, tastes, smells and touches his way into the things of the world, and lo! his senses make them real!

– *TROPICS* chapter XIX