

*Wednesday 4 December*

An immaculately clear, cool morning. Everything is hazy on the plain, but one can hear life down there. The mountains, full and distinct in front of me, some elevated fog and, in between, a cool daytime moon, only half visible, opposite the sun. I walk straight between sun and moon. How exhilarating. Vineyards, sparrows, everything's so fresh. The night was pretty bad, no sleep from three o'clock on; in the morning, making up for it, the boots have lost their painful places and

the legs are in order. The cool smoke of a factory rises calmly and vertically. Do I hear ravens? Yes, and dogs as well.

Mittelbergheim, Andlau. All around the ultimate peace, haze, labour; at Andlau there's a small weekly market. A stone fountain, the likes of which I've never seen before, is my resting place. The winegrowers subsidize everything here and are the backbone of these villages. In the church in Andlau, the priest is singing mass, a children's choir clustered around him, with otherwise just a few old women in attendance at the service. On a frieze outside, the most grotesque Romanesque sculptures. Holiday homes at the edge of town, all closed for the winter and shuttered up. But breaking into them would be easy nevertheless. A row of fish ponds there is exhausted, used up, overgrown with grass and brush. It runs along a book.

A perfect morning; in perfect harmony with myself I'm walking briskly uphill. The potent thoughts of ski jumping make me feel light, like floating on air. Everywhere honey, beehives, and securely locked holiday homes throughout the valley. I chose the most beautiful one and contemplated breaking in then and there to stay the entire day, but it was too nice walking, so I walked. For once I didn't notice that I was walking, all the way up to the mountaintop forest I was absorbed in deep thought. Perfect clarity and freshness in the air, up further there's some snow. The tangerines make me completely euphoric.

Crossroads. Badly marked from here on. Naked woodland swathes with blue smoke all about from the woodcutters' campfires. As fresh as before and, like this morning, dew on the grass. Practically no cars up to now, and just half of the houses are inhabited. A jet-black wolfhound glared after me with his yellow eyes unflinchingly. When a rustling came



from some flying leaves behind me I knew it was the dog, even though it was chained. All day long the most perfect solitude. A clear wind makes the trees up there rustle, the gaze travels very far. This is a season which has nothing to do with this world any more. Big flying reptiles soundlessly leave their vapour trails behind above me, heading directly west, flying via Paris as my thoughts fly with them. So many dogs, from the car one doesn't notice them that much, the smell of the fires, too, the Sighing Trees. A shaved tree trunk is sweating water, again my shadow cowers far in front of me. Bruno flees, at night he breaks into an abandoned ski-lift station, it must be in November. He pulls the main lever for the cable car. All night long the ski-lift runs nonsensically, and the entire stretch is illuminated. In the morning the police seize Bruno. This is how the story must end.

Higher and higher, I've almost reached the snowline that begins at about 2,600 feet, and then, further up, the border of the clouds. Foggy wetness begins, it grows dusky and the path ends. I inquire at a farmhouse, the farmer says yes, I'd have to go up through the snow and a beech forest, then I'd certainly come upon the road Le Champ du Feu. The snow is half melted, hardly any footprints, at last they stop altogether. The forest is foggy-wet, I know it will be unpleasant beyond that height. The farm was called Kaelberhuetten, it's deathly still in the cloudy mist. It is impossible to know where you are here, only your direction is known. Although I've apparently attained the summit, when I don't reach the road, it strikes me as odd, and I stop in the dense woodland that finally consists of fir trees; thick fog has settled all around me. I try to work out where I made a mistake. There's no other solution possible than heading further west. As I pocket the map, it

occurs to me that there's garbage strewn about in the woods, an empty can of motor oil and other things that could only have been thrown from cars. Then it turns out that the road lies only thirty metres away from me, but I can only see as far as twenty metres, and clearly, just a few steps. Following the road northward in the thickest fog I hit a strange circular outpost, with an observation tower in the centre resembling a lighthouse. Stormy winds, intense wet fog, I take out my storm cap and talk out loud, since all of this is barely believable after such a morning. Now and then I can see three white lines on the road in front of me, never any further, sometimes just the closest one. The big decision: follow the road north or south? It later turns out that both ways would have been correct, because I had been walking westward between the two little roads. One leads over Bellefosse to Fouday, the other down to Belmont. Steep slopes and slashing wind, empty ski-lifts. I can hardly see my hand before my face; this is no proverb, I can scarcely see it. Hath this brood of adders venom? Aye, and if downtrodden so have I. I yearned to kindle a fire; I would love nothing more than to see it already ablaze. T'would fill mine heart with dread lest thou break salt unto me. Meanwhile it's got stormy, the tattered fog even thicker, chasing across my path. Three people are sitting in a glassy tourist café between clouds and clouds, protected by glass from all sides. Since I don't see any waiters, it crosses my mind that corpses have been sitting there for weeks, statuesque. All this time the café has been unattended, for sure. Just how long have they been sitting here, petrified like this? Belmont, a Nothing of a province. The road was thirty-five hundred feet high, leading down now snake-like by a brook. Lumberjacks again, smoking fires again, then at



2,300 feet the clouds suddenly blow away, yet below them a cheerless drizzle starts to fall. All is grey, devoid of people; downhill beside a damp forest. At Waldersbach no chance of breaking into anything, so I accelerate, to find somewhere in Fouday before nightfall. As there are hardly any possibilities even there, I decided to force open a tavern, that's locked on all sides, a big one in the centre of town between two inhabited houses. Then a woman came, didn't say a word and stared at me, so I didn't do it.

Outside town I go to eat at a transport café, and a young couple with something strange and oppressive lurking about them, as in a Western, enter the restaurant. At the next table a man has fallen asleep over his red wine, or is he faking sleep and lurking as well? The little duffel bag I've carried most of the time over my left shoulder, and which rests on my hip, has worn a fist-sized hole into the sweater under my jacket. I've barely eaten anything all day, just tangerines, some chocolate, water from streams drunk in animal posture. The meal must be ready by now; there will be rabbit and soup. At an airport, a mayor has been beheaded by a helicopter as he was stepping off. A truck driver with lurking eyes, wearing worn-out slippers, pulls out an extremely misshapen Gauloise and smokes it now without straightening it out. Because I'm so lonely, the stout waitress lends me an inquisitive word over the lurking silence of the men. The exposed root of the philodendron in the corner has sought tentative support in the radio loudspeaker there. A small porcelain Indian figurine is also standing there, his right hand lifted towards the sun, his left hand supporting the arm that's pointing up; it's a stately little statue. In Strasbourg, films by Helvio Soto and Sanjines are showing two or three years late, but showing nevertheless.

Someone at a table near the counter is called Kaspar. A word at last, a name!

Searching below Fouday for a place to spend the night, it was already densely dark and damp and cold. My feet aren't working any more, either. I break into an empty house, more by force than cunning, although another house that's inhabited is right nearby. In this one workers seem to be repairing something. Outside a storm is raging as I sit in the kitchen like an outlaw, burnt out, tired and drained of all sense, because only here is there a wooden shutter that allows me to switch on a little light without the glow escaping outside. I'll sleep in the nursery since it's the best place to flee from, in case somebody living here does in fact come home. Most surely there will be workmen coming early in the morning, with the floors and walls in some rooms being redone, and the workmen having left behind their tools, shoes and jackets overnight. I get drunk on some wine that I bought at the transport café. Out of sheer loneliness my voice wouldn't work so I merely squeaked; I couldn't find the correct pitch for speaking and felt embarrassed. I quickly split. Oh, what howling and whistling around the house, how the trees are jeering. Tomorrow I have to get up very early, before the men arrive. In order to wake up by the morning light, I'll have to leave the outside shutter open, which is risky because the broken window will be visible. I've shaken the glass splinters from the blanket; adjacent is a crib, plus toys and a chamber pot. All of this is senseless beyond description. Let them find me here, sleeping in this bed, those feeble-minded masons. How the wind outside is worrying the forest.

Around three o'clock I got up in the night and went out to the little porch. Outside there was a storm and heavy clouds,



a mysterious and artificial sort of scenery. Behind a stretch of countryside, the faint glow of Fouday was glimmering strangely. A sense of utter absurdity. Is our Eisner still alive?