

13 July 1897

An hour or two past midnight. In the polar twilight, a hazy and indistinct grey with tinges of pink, I am asleep or am I? it doesn't matter, I am aware perhaps of the creaking of ropes and the gentle breathing of my companions and yet at the same time another part of me moves in other places, unreal and yet far more solid in their myriad form and texture than this insubstantial particle of reality in which I am suspended half-asleep from a globe of hydrogen in a sea of frozen air. In this other consciousness into which I slip deeper now and then as one might descend lazily into a bath of tepid water, a bath that calls and attracts with its warmth and yet to which one cannot surrender totally and immerse one's being for more than a few instants since breathing is not possible in that violet and soporific fluid, in this deeper consciousness the objects are hard, vivid, piercing, all the more hard and vivid for their very unreality. The word *sleep* is greatly too simple to describe this state. At one end, toward the surface, it merges into daydreaming; at the deeper extreme, if one were to sink to the bottom, it is death. But the soul knows how to preserve itself. It drifts at a nice depth, now descending a little and now rising to touch the surface, in the manner of those sea creatures who must breathe air and yet whose nourishment lies deep. I hope I shall not snag myself on a telegraph cable down there. Inside the skin coat, when I awaken and only drowse a little, there is a smell of reindeer hair and tar, a comforting pungence, I am quite warm in

this tent I have made by pulling my arms inside the coat. Doubled until the knees approach my chest, the hood over my face, I am enclosed in animal content. In the moments when I sink lower, toward full sleep, a curious phenomenon takes place. A part of my body, mistaken about the circumstances or perhaps responding to some private reality of its own, awakens and stirs toward a goal. In the vividness of its imagination this part of me thinks of, invents, or conjectures its mirror image in another similar and yet importantly different organism, a concavity to match its convexity. The stupid brutal thing is not a whit discouraged at not finding this concavity; it goes on yearning in its stiff and mindless way, exciting itself with its own thumping heart. In my moments of half wakefulness I am inclined to be ironic about this delusion this fifth limb of mine seems to have fallen into. And yet is it not strange and curious that a part of me, a part of my consciousness even though a lower and coarser part, should mistake a portion of reindeer skin in this way for the embrace of a yearned-for and beloved companion! And stranger still that only a single scrap of membrane, of all the animal substance in the universe, should be the one this fine nerve of mine should desire to touch—that it should be so exigent, so obsessedly selective, and yet so easily deluded. It is only in the wakened state that the body makes fine distinctions. Asleep or half-asleep it is ready to settle for the shabbiest simulacrum. Fold of reindeer hide or whatever, beloved one, this blind snake tightened in an arc is your adorer! What twaddle, a plague take it. It would be better to stay awake and put an end to such foolishness. I am not very sleepy anyhow. I turn over inside the warm skin bag, settle my limbs into place, and doze off or half-doze again, but this time with a difference. Through a trick I learned long ago as a boy, and practice now and then as other men practice with dumbbells or playing cards, I enter fully conscious into the storehouse of my dream matter and select exactly those pictures that I choose rather than those that blind seeking of the blood happens to stumble over, so that sleep becomes something like one of those stereopticon viewers that fasten on your nose and enable you to see with a vivid roundness, more powerful than life, whichever of those cardboard images you choose from the box on the table. In short, it is possible to dream what one will, although it requires some effort, just as it is

possible to remember *what one will*, a street number or the formula for saltpeter.

But it is necessary to be hard, as hard as an angel. Steely, gripping the memory in my will's fingers, I pierce downward through layers that shimmer as they part and close again behind me, their soft torn edges clinging to my limbs. In a stratum not far from the surface I encounter a yellow room in a villa, Stresa. Then a carriage on rue de Rivoli, a balloon flight over Suomi, an angry white face in the twilight in the Bois. Finally, deeper than all these and a good deal more vague and evanescent, there comes into focus the hall of the Musée Carnavalet on the occasion of the Fifth Congress of the Paraphysical Society in 1895, where I was lecturing on electromagnetic phenomena in the atmosphere. I had just embarked on the possibility of extraterrestrial sources of the waves when I caught sight of an extraordinary face in the audience. A rather long, pale, and absolutely motionless visage with eyes fixed intently on me, a lofty brow, a mouth that gave the impression of being held in place only by a conscious effort of the will so that two little creases formed below it on the chin. Immaculately groomed, gown from Worth's, soft hair gathered into a knot at the back. Incredibly enough, at that time she was only nineteen. Following the lecture she presented herself at the podium and engaged me in a discussion of the Female Question.

"Captain" (I was a captain in those days), "these matters, emanations or whatever you call them, do you believe they are susceptible of investigation by women?"

I looked up from my notes and hardly knew what to answer. Was this an attack or some kind of an overture of friendship, of admiration?

"Why? On the other hand, why not?"

"It seems—I mean—I gather from what you say that they are an ethereal kind of thing." Did she always speak this rapidly, and not quite looking at the person she was addressing? "C'est à dire, subtle, and perhaps women, being creatures of intuition and especially good at invisible things, might be particularly fitted to investigate them. Also they can be studied in one's own home with very little apparatus, and they don't get one's hands dirty."

Or she said something like this, I don't remember exactly. I do remember that she spoke with a great assurance and even a challenging

air, a faint touch of contempt, and yet that she blushed as she did so, a kind of pink spider forming on her throat and moving upward into the paleness under her chin. The little speech on feminism evidently came from one part of her being, the vascular reaction from another.

“In fact, a good deal of apparatus is required,” I countered as moderately as I could, “electrostatic generators, coils of wire, Leyden jars, and things of this sort, many of which are expensive. Not only do they get your hands dirty, but frequently there is danger involved; for example, a good many observations can be made only from airships. I hardly think you would like that. As for the tasks men and women are adapted for, you make too much of the difference. The parts of the human body that distinguish the sexes”—(second appearance of the pink spider; I plunged on)—“are the most ephemeral. In skeletons they are hardly discernible except to an expert. Whereas, comparing man with ape, the skeletal difference is apparent even to a layman. I wonder where you get your opinions about intuitions and such things?”

But one of her qualities that I learned immediately was that she never answered questions. To frame a remark to her in the form of a question was to distract her instantly into another subject, as though by an invisible system of switches. “Do you know the dramas of Strindberg?”

“I have never been to a play in my life.”

“So much the worse for you. You talk as though you had read him. He is mad of course. I can assure you I am perfectly able to afford Leyden jars and coils of wire, and I would adore ascending in an airship. I have a book of engravings about the frères Montgolfier. It’s a pity you haven’t read Strindberg. It might have armed you against me. As it is, you are my victim. Captain, please come to tea at my aunt’s. It is perfectly proper, she belongs to the best society of the Île Saint-Louis. You can explain your emanations to her, and perhaps you might give me a list of the apparatus I ought to buy.”

I said that I would or I wouldn’t, I don’t know what I said, but the outcome was that I actually presented myself at the house on Quai d’Orléans on the following day, dressed like an idiot in a white shirt and patent-leather pumps. The aunt maintained a curious establishment. It was hard to say whether it was respectable or not. Luisa in stressing

its propriety had perhaps slightly overemphasized the point, since what was the purpose of mentioning this if there wasn't some slight doubt about it? The whole family had a characteristic quality of raffishness combined with the greatest kind of dignity, a juxtaposition that reappeared in the various members in various disguises but was always recognizable once you were familiar with it. Perhaps it owed this to its ancestry, which tended toward the mongrelish, although in a highly aristocratic way. The American father by this time was of course not on the scene, since he had gone back to his own country through some complicated circumstances that I didn't quite follow and had died in an attack on an Apache camp in New Mexico in 1875. This exotic demise was evidently not considered *comme il faut* in the family, since he was never spoken of. In addition to his debts he left to his family only the quintessentially transatlantic name of Hickman, which everyone concealed as though it were an unfortunate secret. His widow, Luisa's mother, evidently lived as a kind of dependent and companion of the aunt, wore saris and even a caste mark on her brow, although she was three quarters of European blood, and did nothing in particular except drink tea and eat sticky Levantine pastries. She was not held in very high regard among the Silva e Costas, perhaps because of her marriage to the handsome but penniless American frontiersman. The aunt was a spinster. Her long face tended slightly to the equine and her eyebrows sloped a little outward, like the eaves of a house. She shared the ivory family complexion, although in her case it had been marred by a childhood smallpox that had lent it a kind of lunar and irregular texture like weathered alabaster, or satin from an old wardrobe. She also suffered slightly from a chorea-like affliction that caused slight and almost imperceptible movements of her face: the chin, fixed as it were by effort, nevertheless tremored to the left a fraction of a millimeter or less, once or so a second, returning immediately to its former position, in a movement so subtle and so faint that it was to an ordinary twitch as the pulsing of a tiny insect's heart is to the beating of a clock. The beholder, in fact, did not necessarily notice this movement upon first meeting the aunt, it was so slight. Once you had become aware of it, however, it lent a faint negative quality to everything the aunt said and did; whether she praised your poem, invited you again to tea, agreed with your

politics, the imperceptible vibration of her head seemed to reiterate constantly, "Nay, nay. It is all nothing, I deny all." She dressed in long gowns of the Empire period and wore her hair in ringlets, although the effect was somewhat marred by the gold-rimmed spectacles that gave her a kind of Voltairean air. It was said she was very wealthy. I believe she disliked men on principle, and perhaps this is where Luisa got her suffragism, although the connection was a little tenuous. In any case she was very polite to me. She spoke French in an accent of her own that involved distinguishing sharply between the vowels, with a different shape of mouth to go with each. "On voit," she told me calmly and not unkindly, "que vous z-êtes un vr-rai é-rudit." I forgot to record that one of her breasts had been removed in an operation and she wore a padded appliance in its place.

In addition to the aunt there was an uncle in Pondicherry, another aunt in Palma de Mallorca, and a female cousin in Poland with whom Luisa exchanged violet-scented letters. The house on Quai d'Orléans remained something of a mystery to me for a long time. There it was in the middle of the Seine, neither on the Left Bank nor on the Right. It was ambiguous. It may have been true that the family "belonged to the best society of the Île Saint-Louis," although such judgments are of course a matter of taste. Certainly they had nothing to do with those old Bourbons and Bonapartists who hated each other so cordially in their seventeenth century town houses on Quai d'Anjou and rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Île. The aunt's teas were frequented by a coterie that ranged from the fringes of Faubourg Saint-Germain to the more dubious elements of Montmartre. There was a young professor of art history from the Collège de France, a pederastic English poet, a Brazilian naval doctor of impeccable credentials. I was introduced to M. Lugné-Poe, the director of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, which impressed me only negligibly since I had never heard of the place. The inhabitants of the house were all women, the guests all men. Except for a lady physician, a friend of the aunt's, who had a frame like a stevedore and specialised in nervous afflictions. Perhaps it was she who treated the aunt's trembling. There were other ornaments: a fashionable photographer, a teacher of geology from the École Normale, and once the Greek poet Jean Moréas came to sip tea and recite his verses from under his soft mustache. I will say

that the principles of the place were thoroughly democratic. On one occasion I was introduced to a street paver, on another to a retired customs inspector who painted in his spare time, a rather stupid fellow he seemed, named Rousseau although he was no relation to the philosopher. I went there a score of times perhaps, and in addition escorted Luisa occasionally to places like the Café Royal or an exhibition of Etruscan artifacts. It was perfectly proper, since we were accompanied at all times by her dog and sometimes by the footman from Quai d'Orléans, a gloomy and red-faced young Breton with pimples. In fashionable afternoon attire Luisa made a remarkable effect. Her dark hair in medium length with a simple knot at the back was not the fashion just then but it suited her admirably. Her gown of black moire was cut to the level of the breastbone, and the coat she wore over it she had a way of throwing back over one hip with her hand. It was clear to the spectator that she was an extraordinary young woman, that she was thoroughly at home in this city, and also that she was not French. If her complexion were not enough, there was the shape of her face: in her case the genetic *Silva e Costa* elongation, instead of assuming equine form as it did in the aunt, gave a long-nosed, patrician, even-eyed, ruminant, self-contained, faintly supercilious expression; she looked something like a llama. Her dog was a pug, naturally, and she carried too many things in her purse. She was one of those marsupial women whose security lies not in a home but in this little portable womb they carry about with them, filled with pocket combs, handkerchiefs, vials of cologne, foreign coins, hair ribbons, smelling salts, unread novels, stubs of pencils, dinner mints, scent, tweezers, ends of theatre tickets, mascara, tiny powder boxes that play Swiss waltzes when opened, even a china egg. Her favourite of her bags was a kind of reticule made of Bayeux tapestry, exquisitely beautiful, I have to admit. When we went to an exhibition or musical event she would comment on things in her controlled, slightly artificial voice, a little disconnectedly perhaps but frequently with considerable insight. There was no question that she was intelligent and even that in her way she took the things of the mind seriously and was capable of applying herself to them assiduously when she chose. Once, simply to play a joke on her when she asked what I was reading, I lent her an abstruse philosophical treatise in German (it was

on the theory of irreducibility in irrational numbers) and contrary to all expectation she understood something of it. Her scent was one I have never encountered elsewhere: a thin, barely perceptible violet like the fragrance that plays round the poles of electrical apparatus. She preferred Gérard de Nerval to Goethe, Schumann to Bach.

I had come to Paris that spring with the idea of working in the Bibliothèque Nationale, but for one reason or another I rarely got around to it. At Quai d'Orléans at five o'clock I would find myself mesmerized into conversations with Luisa which I had not chosen and which surely had not been organized by her, since she was scarcely capable of organizing the contents of her handbag. Did I care for Rilke? He and I were almost perfect strangers. She informed me that he had invented "la poésie des choses." Bully for him. She wondered if I liked riding. She rode every morning in the Bois, very early when the world was asleep (by "le monde" she meant six hundred people out of a population of two and a half million, and probably she was speaking of nine o'clock in the morning). And: she would drop casually that it was this very evening that a diva only rarely heard was to appear in recital at the Salle Meyer, and she was curious if I planned to attend. I would reply that I never went to such things, and she would say "Ah!" in her most interested and yet distant manner. There would be a silence, which I would have been wise to leave alone, but deuce take it all! In spite of myself I would end by inquiring politely, "Are you?" Oh no, she would explain in a kind of dreamy sarcasm, you see it wasn't considered fashionable for young ladies to make their way about a large city alone, it might subject them to insults or other embarrassments, a stupid prejudice but for the present at least society was organized in this way, que voulez-vous? Naturally I would end by offering to protect her from ruffians, amorous cabmen, etc., and find myself presently sitting in the Salle Meyer listening to a plump Milanese soprano trill her way through the Mad Song from Lucia. It was not long until she was clearly taking me for granted, a thing I abominate. "À demain, n'est-ce pas?" she would remind me mellifluously as we parted. "Chez ma tante."

At the aunt's the next day a hungry Balkan violinist played czardas, the conversation was of Rodin, the gloomy footman served loukoumi and tea. I learned quite by accident that Luisa was engaged.

Her fiancé was a young Spanish officer of artillery who, it seemed, was considered a family joke. His name was Alberto but for some reason he was called the Peninsula. Perhaps it was because he was Spanish, or because he was only semi-attached to the family. I never actually encountered him at Quai d'Orléans, although there was a photograph of him on the piano: a self-satisfied young man with a strong jaw, something like a bulldog, and a meaty nose. His eyebrows met over the nose, so that he really only had one of them. I cannot say why I found this last detail repugnant, or amusing. I don't know what I expected eyebrows to do. The aunt's sloped outward and I found this eccentric too. The aunt never did ask me about my emanations, as Luisa had promised she would, but on my final visit to Quai d'Orléans she did interrogate me about my position in life. I told her that I was attached to the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm and had every expectation of becoming its librarian in due time, and in the meanwhile I was devoting myself to my researches, which had won me a modest recognition along with membership in an international society or two. This crass little speech was pompous but so, I felt, was the question.

"Luisa tells me you are interested in spiritualism."

"Not at all."

"Well then, in electricity or something. It's much the same thing."

"It's the furthest thing possible from the same thing."

"Is it true that, with electricity, one can tell what people are doing in the next room?"

"Only if they are sending out waves with a coulomb apparatus."

"What is it exactly that you are discovering then? I am sorry that I am such a stupid old woman." The head vibrated back and forth, denying all, as she smiled and made this apology.

By this time I was feeling quite arrogant, not to say hilarious. "I believe that intelligences on the stars may be attempting to send us telegraph messages. If so, it is a question of the greatest importance. Are you interested in such matters?"

But, like her niece, she countered all questions by changing the subject. "Do you know, I wonder if you have noticed that Luisa is a remarkable young person. We expect extraordinary things from her. Extraordinary. Do you know that she reads Dante?"

I agreed that she was educated beyond the common sphere of woman, but my phraseology here was unfortunate and evoked a blank stare.

“These spheres of which you speak, my dear Captain,” she informed me, “are of a bygone era. Persons of advanced thought, these days, no longer believe that half the human race is confined in one sphere and the other half in another, or rather free to wander around and do exactly as it pleases. Apropos, tell me something, dites donc, why is it that you are a military man and yet you don’t wear a uniform?”

“Primo,” I explained, “I am on detached duty; secundo, the container ought to indicate the contents, and taken apart from or inside my clothes, I am not very uniform.”

“Inside your clothes you are not the same?”

“Profoundly different.”

“Ah.” A skeptical look came into her eye, but she said nothing, only wagged her head.

I forget what else happened at this last tea. A good many idiocies. I talked for a little while to the mother, or attempted to, but it was thick going. For one thing she stood slightly too close to me for the conversation to be comfortable. It was about an arm’s length, or three quarters of a metre. As inconspicuously as I could I would back away about a hand’s breadth, she would follow me by the same distance, and so on. This has happened to me before and it is a futile exercise at best. Such a ballet can describe large circles around a fashionable salon. Perhaps, I thought, I ought to get over this nineteenth-century aversion toward the mere propinquity of other flesh. On the other hand, perhaps there was something deep in my blood too Lutheran and Nordic for these tropical birds. At any rate, the mother, Madame Hickman née Silva e Costa, stood too close to me in a sari and caste mark and holding a saucer with a pastry on it, conversing with me in a thin timid voice slightly below the threshold of audibility, glancing about her now and then rather apprehensively as though to see whether anybody was observing. It was only with the greatest attention that I could make out what she was saying. I had the impression that at any moment she might whisper, “I have been abducted by these people. Please rescue me.” She smelled of musk and nervousness, like a small

animal. She spoke a mixture of French and what she imagined to be English, so that understanding her, in addition to a physical feat, was an exercise in comparative philology.

“Do you like Paris?” I at length detected.

“Very much.”

“Have you had many new experiences?” Or perhaps she said, “Have you made very many new experiments,” since the French word is ambiguous, even at normal loudness.

“Experiences? How?”

Glancing around again, she hazarded, “Do you know Mifeuya?” or so it sounded to me. I was not sure how to respond. Who or what? A Japanese painter? A seaport in Turkey?

“How?”

“Millefeuille, a pastry.”

Ah. “Certainly, madame,” I told her with as much respect as I could muster for the subject, “I know it very well.”

While waiting for me to answer she had taken a tiny bite of the confection on her saucer, and now she chewed it with a timid rotary motion of her jaw while she tried to speak at the same time. “C’*est ra-vi-ssant*,” I finally caught. It was not clear whether she meant the millefeuille or what she was now enjoying. For her it was probably the same; her mouth was full, of the word, of the thing, and it was ravissant. Talking to her was very simple now that I had caught the trick of it; you had only to pretend that you were talking to a very small child, perhaps three, who had just discovered bonbons and wanted to know if you had heard about them too. You had only to assure her, with a gravity proper to the subject, “I do indeed, and they are very good.”

The mother melted, evaporated into the collection of guests, or perhaps merged into the Astrakhan carpet. I found myself in a bay window looking out over the river with the fashionable photographer from rue de la Paix, whom I hoped to interrogate about the possibilities of using photography in an airship to record meteorological phenomena. But it was difficult to talk to him when he was continually glancing around and over my head, probably in search of someone who was wealthier than I and more likely to pay a large sum to have his visage recorded on a glass plate. These swervings

of his nose were held in place by a tense jockey, a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. Finally he noticed me. "You are an artist?" he inquired.

"Hardly."

"Not an artist?"

"I am a natural philosopher, more or less."

"Odd, you profoundly resemble an artist. Believe me, in my profession it is necessary to make a study of physiognomy and I know what I am talking about."

"Perhaps a naturalist is not very different from an artist, physiognomistically speaking."

"Profoundly different. Profoundly different." The gold spectacles controlled the nose now and held it exactly in my direction. "Art is permanent; nature is in flux. Nature is dust and vapors, noxious. What we see about us, these fair prospects"—the nose bolted briefly toward the décolletage of a lady a little distance away—are in reality a constantly degenerating panorama of corruption."

"How long will a photograph last?"

"With good care, fifty years or even a century."

I was about to comment that the same was true of a man, but we were interrupted by the aunt, who took him away to waggle her head at him in a corner.

The whole collection, for some reason, affected me that afternoon as a nest of madfolk; I could hope for little better from the pederastic English poet or the professor of art history. I found myself filled with a powerful desire to escape, but in the vestibule I encountered Luisa, who was looking bright, wistful, and a little flushed from the stimulation of society. "Ah . . . then . . ." she articulated tentatively.

"And so it's farewell," I told her with a conventionally regretful smile.

"Surely only *au revoir*. You were going to give me a list of apparatus, and . . ." She didn't finish, she trailed off.

And what? Oh, those three little dots at the end of her sentences.

"To begin with, all that is needed is a head, my dear lady. And a library full of books."

"You are pleased to mock at me. It is only your male conceit. At least you might tell me the books to read."

"I am very pressed. I leave Paris for Stockholm tomorrow."

“And what is it that calls you back?” she inquired sweetly.

“Another affection, perhaps?” (*Another*, I noted, was a very interesting and perhaps even slightly presumptuous locution on her part.)

“Only a balloon ascension, to tell the truth.”

“I would adore a balloon ascension. You must take me with you.”

It was difficult for me to explain to her why, given the mores of our time, it was impossible for a well-bred young woman to remain for fifteen or twenty hours suspended in a basket with a man without recourse to the amenities of civilisation. “I am sorry. It is not some sort of a picnic, you know. It’s a serious scientific venture, involving hard work, boring details, and so on.”

“I am not afraid of hard work and I am not easily bored. Surely I could be useful. I could take readings of your barometer or something.”

“Goodbye, mademoiselle,” I told her, smiling and offering my hand.

“Au revoir,” she corrected me, smiling just as conventionally.

•

Immediately upon my return to the Royal Institute I began preparations for the flight I had projected from the Stockholm district to southern Finland, the purpose of which was to try out in practice the steering apparatus I had finally devised after a good many years of thought. The route I planned was suited to this end because it lay mainly over the sea, where the guide ropes were less likely to become entangled in the landscape or otherwise damaged. I had written to Waldemer before I left Paris to invite him to accompany me on this flight. Unfortunately, I explained, I would be unable to pay his transatlantic expenses, since the flight was supported only by a very small appropriation from the Institute, but I hoped that his newspaper would finance his voyage to Europe in return for exclusive coverage. When I came back from Paris, however, I found a letter from New York on my desk. Waldemer was unable to extract the travel money from his editor and besides, a thousand regrets, he was occupied with another assignment which would keep him busy for several months, a comprehensive series of articles on the tinned-food industry, which was on the point of bringing the highest refinements of the palate to the masses. It was clear from his letter that he genuinely regretted

not to be with me, although this was not because he preferred my company to that of the soup magnates; it was because he regarded aeronavigation as a more important technical development than the preservation of food. He would have and *did* prefer my company to that of soup magnates, let it be clear; it was just that his personal pleasures were always a secondary consideration with Waldemer. He was a dedicated and consecrated professional, a hero of modern journalism. It was too bad, because to tell the truth I enjoyed *his* company (I was not quite so consecrated), and besides, he was an invaluable assistant and one I had taken a great deal of pains and effort to train.

The aeronautical side of this particular flight, however, would not be excessively demanding, and in a pinch I could always manage the newly invented guide ropes by myself. What then did I need a partner for at all? I answered my own question: the balloon was designed to elevate approximately a hundred and fifty kilograms, and lacking this weight it would be necessary to carry along sandbags or something else to make up for it. Surely some human being could be found who was at least more useful than a sandbag, if only for reading the barometer. How had that example got into my head? Why did I telegraph Luisa? It was a folly. I think more than anything else I did it to challenge, through a definite and quite concrete proposal, her feminine whim of the kind she was always expressing without any notion of the practical entailments, declaring her readiness to be hypnotized, to go down into coal mines, to be present at a dissection, etc., simply to indicate that she was as sturdy and as reckless as any man. After a while you felt a malicious but irresistible impulse to say, Here is the corpse, dear lady, take up the scalpel yourself and find the hypogastric nerve, climb into the coal basket, and don't blame me if you soil your gown. This was a dangerous tactic with Luisa. If I had known her as well as I did later, I would not have tried it.

To cut the matter short, I telegraphed asking her to join me on the flight to Finland and received an answer almost with the speed of the electrical impulse. Her reply was precise, orderly, and substantial, detailing exactly which train she was taking in order to arrive at the Kungsholm Station on the following Monday, and adding that she was bringing along dust-proof travelling clothes and a salt reputed to be specific against altitude. Why dust-proof? Did she imagine the

balloon was dusty? Probably she had noticed the clothes in a ladies' magazine. As for altitude, the steering apparatus I proposed to try out depended on the balloon remaining quite close to the earth and it was doubtful that we would rise even as high as the Vendôme column, but I didn't bother to send a counter-telegram explaining all this to her. Instead, I instructed the workmen to prepare the balloon for an ascension on Tuesday, weather permitting, and then busied myself collecting the instruments and charts I needed.

On Monday at three o'clock in the afternoon I met her at the station. She was impeccably clad in a surcoat with blue fox fur at the hem, the same fur at the tops of her boots, and a muff to match, and she was followed by a porter pushing an enormous wagon full of luggage. The portents were not good. Removing one hand gracefully from the muff, she offered it to me and then restored it to its warm place. It was an ordinary day in May, the temperature was quite mild. "Sweden!" she exulted, tossing the hair from her high forehead. "Comme c'est charmant! I love the air, it smells of something like ship's tar. And those fillettes, the little girls with the riding crops—" (I had no idea what she was talking about)—"elles sont délicieuses. Where do you live?"

Without responding in any precise way to this question, I told her I had arranged lodgings for her for the night in a small hotel near the Institute. "Ah," she replied, delighted with everything. "How very thoughtful of you." Just as graciously she followed me to the end of the platform and smiled winningly at the porter while I tipped him, and allowed herself to be put into a cab. It was mean and curmudgeonly of me to reflect that if I had been meeting Waldemer it would not have been necessary for me to tip the porter for carrying *his* baggage. Contrary to my expectations, it was possible to affix all her bags in or on the cab in some way, top, sides, and rear. We went off. It was five minutes to the hotel.

What in the blazes was I to do with her? I had other things to occupy me during the evening—the final adjustment of instruments, a call at the weather office to look at the maps. She was charming, fragrant, feminine, flattering, accommodating, cheerful, and quite imperious in her need to be entertained or otherwise done something with at every moment. At the hotel, which was a modest affair without a lift,

she signed the register in a fine baroque hand and then followed the ill-humoured hotel servant as he bumped and battered his way along a narrow corridor with a portmanteau in each hand. "Oh dear. I'm not sure this will do at all," she murmured from the depths of the corridor. And I too had begun to fear that the hotel would not do for such an elegant person and wondered what I had had in mind in selecting it. In actual fact, when we arrived at the room it was not excessively squalid. There were hunting prints on the wall and a vase of roses, even a square piano. From the window it was possible to catch a glimpse of the Kungsträgård. She sat at the piano and played a fragment of Schubert, then sprang up and pulled aside the curtains.

"And that park?"

"The Royal Gardens."

"Ah. Everything is fascinating, it is so different from Paris." Everything she had seen so far was exactly like Paris, unless she meant the smell of tar, or the fillettes with the whips. "But you will take something?" she suggested with a small gasp or intake of air as though she had abruptly thought of it. "Some tea, brandy, liqueur? I don't know your customs."

Declining ceremoniously, and thanking her, I took my departure. Outside, the afternoon was growing chill. Perhaps she had been right to bring a muff. The Fiend carry her off! I slapped my hand on my forehead and left it there, the fingers working in the hair. The flight was ruined. I went to the rented room where I lived on the square facing the Institute, found on my bureau a chronograph watch I had meant to have checked at the jeweler's that afternoon, took it in my fingers, and almost threw it at the wall. Then I checked myself; it was an expensive timepiece and it had always run perfectly with a steady rate. Instead, I seized the bell rope and ordered something from the servant; tea, liqueur, brandy, what the blazes was my custom?

I changed into a dress coat, at seven o'clock I called for her and we went to dine at Stallmästaregården. Shellfish on ice, potage au cresson, and roast beef in the English manner. With claret and French coffee the whole came to a hundred and fifty kronor plus gratuities to waiters. Luisa, radiant from the claret, expressed a desire to go to a café concert or some equivalent entertainment. She was infected with the tourist mentality; she was entranced by the difference of

the new country from her own and at the same time she wanted to do in it exactly the same things she would have done in Paris. I consulted my wits. There was a chamber-music concert and the Royal Ballet, but these were too stiff and formal. My own pleasure in the evening when I had nothing better to do was the Chess Club. Usually, however, I studied. This particular evening it was imperative that I call at the weather office, which had promised to remain open for me until nine. At length I bethought myself of a kind of café and music hall in Apelbergsgatan where, if I heard correctly, beverages could be procured and persons sang foreign songs to the accompaniment of a piano. We went there in a cab. The interior of this establishment, I found when it was too late to escape, was so triste as to inspire one immediately with the idea of suicide. In a white-painted room lit with oil lamps we listened to a portly baritone sing lieder, while a female, perhaps his wife, thumped the piano along quite other lines. Luisa inquired as to the “*boisson du pays*” and out of malice I ordered two tumblers of our native akvavit. She drained hers off perhaps under the impression that it was white wine, and even drank another when I replaced it, although at a slightly lower rate. The baritone had embarked on “*Röslein, Röslein auf der Heide,*” insisting on the refrain as though he hoped to subdue the piano through reiteration. Luisa had changed her dress of course and was now totally ravishing in a persimmon-coloured gown that rose from her feet to her bosom, quite simply and without a wrinkle, and then dissolved in a froth of lace. Her shoulders were bare. She did not seem to be cold. Everyone in the café naturally could do nothing but look at her; all conversation had stopped. Luisa was enchanted with everything. The waiter provided her with a bowl of nuts, and she found this charming, cracking filberts with a silver nutcracker and delicately placing the kernels between her lips, offering me a morsel (I declined politely, with upraised palm and a smile), and sipping her akvavit. “*Stockholm, c’est un délire.*” She would be delirious if she drank very much more of that stuff. What on earth had I intended anyhow? With some difficulty I persuaded her it was necessary to go to bed early, and we departed, leaving the other patrons with the impression that Frenchwomen (or was she some kind of Hindoo?) drank akvavit in public and lived on cracked filberts.

At her hotel everything was dark; we had to ring and wake up the boot boy. “À demain, my brave aeronaut.” She lifted her hand and held it at shoulder level with the palm open toward me, smiling, in an oddly touching gesture. “Your crew will dream of you.” I walked home. It was a quarter to eleven, too late to go to the weather office.

•

In the morning, at the station again, she appeared in the thin light of dawn in the prophesied dustproof costume, which consisted of a long linen coat of fashionable cut, black stockings, practical walking shoes, and a hat secured with a veil tied under the chin. She carried her favourite tapestry reticule, which no doubt contained the famous smelling-salt specific against altitude (our altitude of one hundred metres), and for further baggage only a small leather traveling case sufficient to hold a change of dress. It was necessary to take a local train to the small town of Bergshamra, a journey of an hour or so, where the ascent field was located on a promontory overlooking the sea. At Bergshamra all was prepared. The workmen had been at their task since the evening before and the *Prinzess*, the second of her name to be financed by the generous Hamburg brewers, was almost fully inflated. The wind blew steadily from the west with a little more force than I would have wished; the ascent would be precarious, but once in the air we would make good speed. A small crowd had gathered to watch the ascension: a journalist or two, a few curious countryfolk. Our baggage was put into the by no means large basket hanging under the globe of hydrogen, we ourselves mounted, and preparations began to release the mooring ropes. Luisa appeared quite unperturbed, a little paler than usual perhaps but collected and dignified, even when managing the difficult clamber over the rim into the wicker car. She asked a minimum of intelligent questions about what she did not understand and, collecting her duster together in one hand, tried to keep out of my way as I moved about the car adjusting my instruments. So far well enough. Still, the vain creature had prevented me from visiting the weather office, and I could only trust that this west wind would not fail us completely or on the other hand turn into some sort of a gale. My consolation was that the clerks at the weather office seemed to know approximately as little about these matters as I did. The mooring ropes were cut, we lurched

violently sideways, the wicker car banged into a tree stump, and we rose away from the earth, swinging like a pendulum. First crossing of the Gulf of Bothnia! The two journalists had their notebooks out and were already composing leaders.

Immediately I turned my attention to the matter of weights and ballast. In the eddies over the promontory it was impossible to tell whether the Prinzess intended to go up or down, but as soon as we were over the sea it became apparent that she was excessively light. She would sweep along horizontally for a minute or two, then, as though she had suddenly remembered something, she would ascend approximately the height of a flight of stairs, continue awhile again her level flight, and then go up another flight of stairs. The guide ropes hung down quite uselessly with their ends above the sea. I estimated our excess buoyancy at ten kilos or so, and set about releasing a corresponding amount of gas by means of the manoeuvring valve. But perdition take it! I had done this fifty times and this was the first time I miscalculated. An excessive amount of hydrogen whistled out, as my senses instantly detected; we began to descend and we were probably now eight or ten kilograms heavy. Well, blast it. Luisa could hardly do worse than I. I showed her how to release the ballast, since she was so anxious to perform some useful function. It consisted of sandbags of twenty kilos each, hanging on the outside of the car, and each bag had at the bottom a releasing flap worked by a drawstring. The whole thing was perfectly simple, she easily grasped how to work the drawstring, but for some reason failed to shut off the flow, so that the whole contents of the bag fell into the sea.

This accident was so exactly the correlative and opposite of the blunder I had just committed—its other sex, so to speak—that it exasperated me precisely for that reason. “Blazes!” I burst out. “Didn’t you understand what I said?”

“I understood perfectly what you said.”

“I said to release half the bag.”

“Ah! that detail you neglected to mention. You explained how to pull the cord, and I did exactly as you told me.”

“I said half the bag.”

“You said nothing of the sort. I took particular care to pay attention to exactly what you were saying, so I would not make a mistake.”

“Nevertheless you made one.”

I was angry, she was angry, she faced me across the wicker car proudly and whitely, totally without expression, the pink blush appearing at the base of her throat and spreading slowly up the neck. It was our first quarrel. “If you are saying I am lying you are a contemptible cad. If I were a man you would not dare charge me with that, or else you would have to answer for it. If it pleases you to insult your crew, you ought to confine yourself to your own sex.”

“Very well. An interesting point. Let us discuss this. In the first place, if you were a man, you might not have botched the first very simple task you set your hand to. In the second place, if you were a man, it would not be quite so easy for you to refer to me as a contemptible cad, or else *you* would have to answer for *that*.”

“In short,” she concluded, “simply because we are of the opposite sex, we are behaving toward each other like two strange animals instead of cultivated and well-bred human beings.”

“Precisely.”

“Then I suggest that you treat me with at least the decency you would observe if I were not a woman, and I will do the same. In the meanwhile, what practical damage, *if any*”—(she almost burst out, she was still angry)—“has been done by my alleged clumsiness?”

“We are ascending much too fast, and in a minute you will need your smelling salts.”

“What will you do about it?”

I could feel the bristles of my mustache settling slowly again; they always prickled when I was angry. After a pause of five seconds or so I told her quite calmly, “Work the maneouvring valve again.” Doing so, with great care this time (in order, perhaps, to convey to Mademoiselle by pantomime that we were getting low on ballast), I released enough gas to bring us into level flight and even to incline the course of the Prinzess slightly downward toward the sea. We still had a hundred kilos, more or less, of sand left against further blunders.

And now I had no more time for the mysterious complexities of the feminine soul, because the moment had come to test the construct of my imagination on which everything depended, the sole reason for the flight and all its elaborate preparations. The west wind was carrying us steadily in a direction which would miss the

end of Finland by a few miles and bring us after two or three days to St. Petersburg, if Luisa had not lost all the ballast by that time. St. Petersburg was perhaps an interesting place, but it was not in my plans and our visas were not stamped for Russia. It was necessary, therefore, to deflect our course leftward, or slightly to the north, in order to cross up to the Finnish coast and arrive at our destination. In short, to sail *across* the wind, something that no one else had ever done before. First I worked the maneouvring valve with delicate tugs (if that contraption should stick the gas would all fly out and we were doomed) in order to release just enough gas to bring us downward toward the sea. Then the drag ropes, or guide ropes as I preferred to call them, came into play. These were three in number, long and quite thick, made of coco fiber impregnated with oil so they would float on the surface of the water. When the Prinzess rose high they hung below it in a kind of graceful Doric column. But as we descended and they began to trail in the water, a complex set of interworking reactions followed. The balloon slowed, first of all, and tilted a little in the direction of its movement like the head of a charging bull. Simultaneously a slight wind was felt, not so strong as the real and natural wind we had felt at Bergshamra, but a wind all the same. This wind was the secret of everything! All those who had sought the dirigibility of balloons, Professor Eggert included, had despaired of sails or wind vanes, since the balloon by its nature is deprived of wind. It rides on the wind and is part of the wind, and therefore no wind impinges upon it to be put to any useful task. Anyone who has ascended in a balloon has remarked this wonderful windlessness, the absolute silence and stillness of the craft. But at last I had found a way to interfere with this sterility. An important principle lay at the bottom of it: progress when unimpeded is uncontrolled. Only by slowing down the creatures of our wit can we steer them in the direction desired. If your object is to get somewhere, anywhere, as quickly as possible, then you can simply harness nature and let her drag you along willy-nilly without worrying very much about the direction. But if you have a destination in mind, then mere progress is not enough. It is necessary to have direction, even if this results in slowing down.

The guide ropes were now trailing in the water for perhaps a third

of their length, leaving three snaky wakes behind them. We slowed perceptibly. There was a stir and touch of coolness on our cheeks from this breeze I had contrived, and it was time to set the sails. These were hauled out on the bamboo poles by lines running through light blocks at the ends and controlled at the lower corners by other lines. Here Luisa could be of some help. It really required three hands, or better four or five, to handle all these sheets and outhauls.

“Now then, dear lady, that cord in your left hand—if you please—and in your other—” It was really quite complicated.

“I don’t see the reason for this. What is it exactly that we are trying to do? Unless you explain the principle, it is utterly impossible for me to pull all these strings and cords in the way you want.”

She was perfectly right. It was my own fault for choosing a bluestocking and person of culture as my crew. If I had taken along a simple blockhead who was accustomed to obeying orders, I could simply have said “Pull this!” and “Slack that!” and he would have done as I said. But once having made the decision to allow in the balloon a woman who had read Dedekind’s *Stetigkeit und irrationale Zahlen*, I was obliged to go into principle, in lack of which the cultivated mind is paralyzed and invariably pulls the wrong string. I would have felt the same myself if someone had asked me to manipulate something complex without explaining the reason behind it. In short, I first had to explain to Luisa how sails worked in order to enable a vehicle such as a ship to proceed diagonally into the wind. Then I proceeded backward into the principle of guide ropes, the impeding of velocity, and dirigibility in general. She listened to everything with that same seraphic attention I had observed when I first caught sight of her face during my lecture at the Musée Carnavalet: motionless eyes fixed on me, mouth held firmly with the two little creases at the sides. Then, she following my directions, the two of us set the sails and trimmed them at an oblique angle to the wind; or, more precisely, we worked an iron handle attached to a pinion gear until the wicker car with its sails was turned at the requisite angle to the guide ropes. The wind now came diagonally. The three snaky trails in the water behind us began a long and mathematically precise curve to the left.

The exertion left me a little short of breath. I sat on a packing case and contemplated what we had done, not without a certain

satisfaction. A glance at the compass showed me we were heading east by north, exactly toward the Finland peninsula. It was a good moment. But instead of enjoying this sense of accomplishment at my leisure, unfortunately, I was obliged to turn my attention to a peculiarity of my personal physiology that had put me to some pains before on occasion, although not in such delicate circumstances. Under conditions of particular tension or suspense, such as our precarious ascent from Bergshamra that morning, my organism accelerated the pace of its fluid-rejecting processes and, after only an hour or two, required a subtraction of moisture in unmistakable terms. The sensation had been present for some time while I ignored it, but now it had become imperative. There I was, suspended over the Baltic Sea with this femme savante, and the thing that had to be done, that nature cried out for in inexorable accents—the thing that if not done would result in physical torment and eventually in my death—was forbidden by every convention and decency of the society that produced us both. Patently it would be done; I was not going to be tortured and slain for a convention.

“Mademoiselle,” I requested (I was still calling her mademoiselle at this point, even when I spoke English, out of a no doubt slightly ironic politeness), “mademoiselle, might I ask you to turn your head for a moment and observe, precisely out there on the horizon where I am afraid there is really nothing to see, to tell the truth, but you have an imagination,” etc., etc., and without very much formality the thing was soon done. Whew! When out of gratitude and sheer physical relief I offered to do the same for her, she simply stared at me without a word. Very well, plague take it, perhaps my suggestion was in poor taste. To cover the confusion of the moment, and also because in my new lightness I felt full of vigor, I busied myself with my instruments to verify whether the system of guide ropes and sails was still working. Mounting the theodolite on the edge of the basket and sighting backward along the wakes left by the ropes, I satisfied myself that we were still moving in a northeasterly direction. “Next stop, Finland,” I reported with some satisfaction.

“Then with this contrivance an airship might go anywhere?”

“The wind permitting.”

“How, the wind permitting?”

“It is possible to cross the wind diagonally, but not to butt directly against it.”

“Could one go, for instance, to the Italian lakes?”

I burst out laughing. “You are a hopeless sentimentalist.”

“And you are an arithmetic barbarian.”

“Why is it we always quarrel?” I asked her quite cheerfully.

“It is something in your character. What good is a balloon or anything else if one can’t go to pleasant places in it?”

“What’s wrong with Finland?”

“It’s cold there, for one thing, and all the inhabitants speak Finnish.”

“It was you who wanted to come,” I reminded her, “on the pretence of devoting yourself to scientific inquiry.”

“I am quite ready to inquire scientifically into something. What is there to inquire into?” I showed her how to take readings of the simpler instruments, and soon she was doing it by herself. There was no doubt she had character. Her own character, of course, but character.

•

The sea was a greyish blue, streaked here and there with foam that left long scratches on its surface. The wind had mounted now; the sails, tugging obliquely, pulled us at an exhilarating speed toward the invisible Finnish coast, the guide ropes leaving three foamy trails in the water. The Aland Islands appeared ahead and, anxious to avoid tangling the guide ropes in habitations or trees, I altered our course slightly to clear them by twisting the pinion ring. (Ordinarily I would have risen over the islands by releasing a little ballast, but now, since Mademoiselle had left us short of sand, I preferred to conserve ballast by steering around the obstacle. Or, to be perfectly honest, I might have released ballast of which we had a quite adequate reserve, but I preferred quite childishly to put her in the wrong by pretending that we were short of it.) The islands were a cluster of low-lying shapes like weasels, with here and there a house or a patch of green woods. The surf broke on the outlying rocks. We passed only a half dozen miles or so from the harbour at Mariehamn; I could see the ships lying at anchor in the roadstead and a large bark under full sail working sideways across the wind toward the town. Almost directly below us a fishing smack, with a lugsail sticking up out of it, pitched