

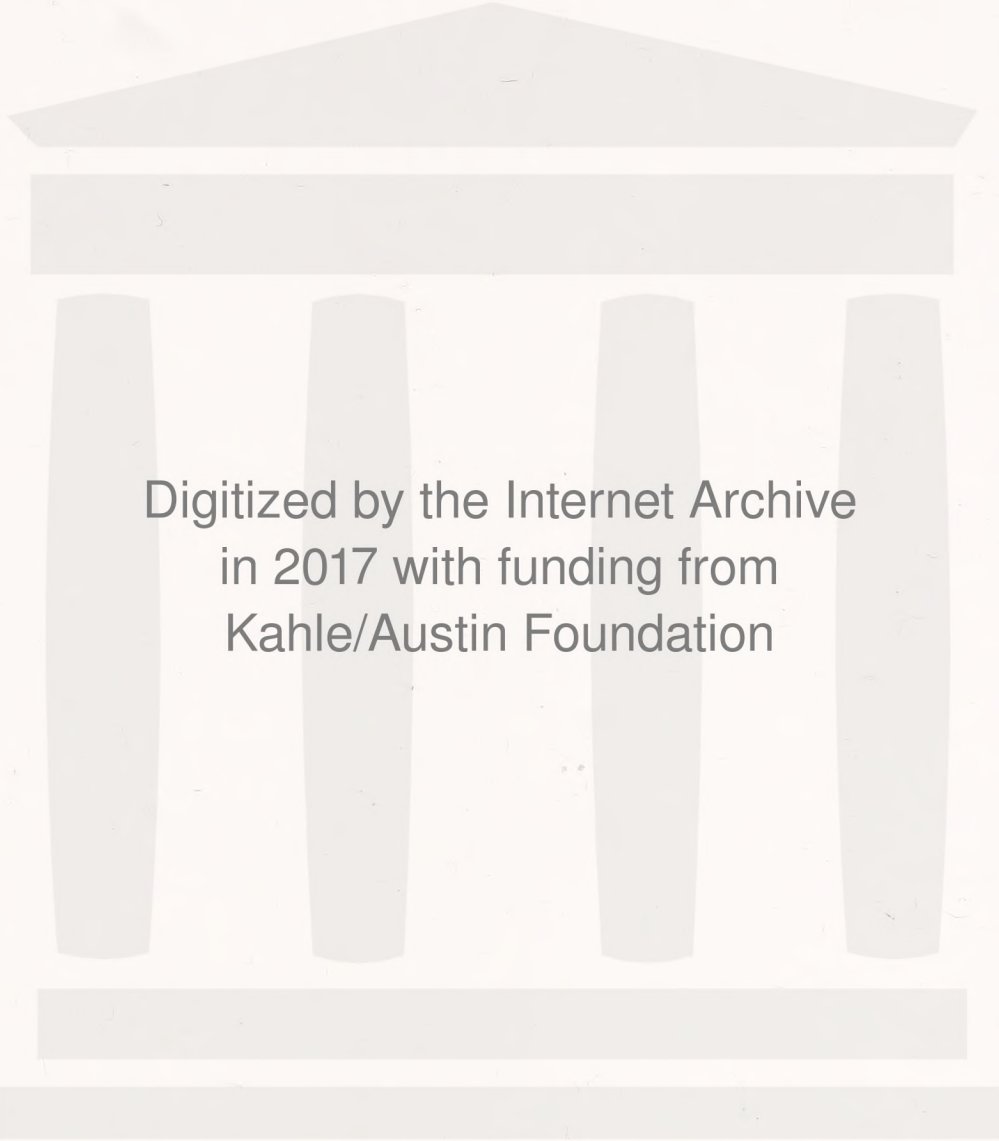
“Pierre Guyotat is violent, transgressive and inspired. He is the last great avant-garde visionary of the 20th Century.”

—Edmund White



TOMB
FOR 500,000
SOLDIERS

PIERRÉ GUYOTAT



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TOMB **FOR 500,000** **SOLDIERS**

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TOMB FOR 500,000 SOLDIERS

Pierre Guyotat

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INTRODUCTION

'I dreamed this book high up on the watchtowers, half-asleep on guard duty, with before me the space of the night illuminated only by the moon and the stars.' At the time when he began to visualise *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers*, among the arid zones and mountains of wartorn Algeria at the beginning of the 1960s, Pierre Guyotat was a young French soldier, in his early twenties, who participated in the Algerian war of colonial liberation after leaving his isolated home region in the mountains of south-central France for Paris. Although Guyotat had actively wanted to fight in the war, he eventually sided to a large degree with the Algerian rebels, incurring the wrath of the French military authorities; the book's incarcerated character Thivai undergoes much of the treatment Guyotat himself was subjected to. The spectacle of the Algerian war - with its immense cruelties, tortures and arbitrary massacres of civilians (on both sides) as well as of soldiers, prefiguring many other conflicts over the subsequent forty years - deeply marked Guyotat's vision and language; the speech of his fellow soldiers, with its sparse set of expelled phrases, counterpointed his own lavishly hallucinatory, epic generation of language. The book - Guyotat's second extended work, after a novel entitled *Ashby*, set on the Northumberland coast of northern England - was written after his return from Algeria to Paris, where he lived in poverty and constant hunger in the mid-1960s.

The publication of *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers* in October 1967 shattered the future course of French writing, and made Guyotat a highly public and controversial figure in France, often subjected to violent controversies over the sexual and insurgent intensity of his work. Over the thirty-five years since its first publication, the book has become widely viewed as the greatest and most ambitious French novel of modern times, and Guyotat himself is universally seen as the sole living writer to rank with such crucial figures as Artaud, Bataille, Genet and de Sade. For all young French writers, artists and film-makers of originality in the subsequent decades, from Hervé Guibert to Leos Carax, exposure to Guyotat's book would prove to be a seminal and determining creative experience, capable of coalescing and pushing further their own obsessions. Even while still in the process of writing the book, Guyotat was aware of the profound experimentation with the matters of language and the body which he was undertaking: an experiment that propelled his work far beyond the range of the literary novel, into an extreme sensory, visual and linguistic zone, capable of vitally inciting and transforming the perception of its

reader. Early in 1965, after writing a hundred pages of the book (which he had started in October 1963), he gave a newspaper interview in which he was already intimating that his work in progress would radically overhaul and negate the preoccupations and strategies habitually associated with the form of the novel. He said: 'Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers is not a novel, it's a kind of epic, a story of adventures of war and emotion, with as its framework an imaginary country in Africa: a country under Occupation, and with a civil war going on. There are a few major heroic characters, then characters drawn from the crowd of inhabitants and soldiers from the two warring factions. There will be a mass of repetitions, words, images... The idea for the book came to me after watching again Buñuel's film *Los Olvidados*.' Guyotat's emphasis on film – rather than literature – as an immediate inspiration for his book demonstrates its acute openness to every visual medium, though simultaneously each source-component of the book (elements of mythology and history, Lautréamont's *Maldoror*, the Bible, and a vast range of works in art and cinema) becomes challenged or obliterated in its incorporation into Guyotat's language.

In its anatomization of the forms of conflict and massacre, *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers* is historically pitched between the 1962 end of the Algerian war, which saw France expelled in angry humiliation from its now-devastated colony, and the legendary Paris street-riots of May 1968, aimed at the overthrow of the repressive French state. Guyotat's book, published only months before those riots, contributed to the unprecedented aura of exhilaration and dissent of that moment, and phrases from *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers* appeared stencilled among the graffiti that saturated the walls of Paris. But other historical moments, of catastrophic and enduring cruelty, are also deeply engrained in the book, as in the scene in which bound children hung from hooks have their limbs gradually sliced off, until their bodies form a heap of severed flesh on the ground. The second edition of the book was dedicated by Guyotat to his uncle, who had been deported to the Nazi concentration camp of Sachsenhausen for his Resistance activities during the Second World War. In July 1991, I travelled with Guyotat to the site of that concentration camp, to the north of Berlin, where his young uncle had been murdered. The medium of death at that particular camp was via a lethal injection or a bullet in the back of the neck; as we watched a film of Sachsenhausen's 1945 liberation in the camp's empty and godforsaken cinema, it seemed as though the spectators of those filmed atrocities still needed urgently to watch out for bullets in the back of the neck. At that time, soon after the forcible dissolution of East Germany, the camp's site was undergoing a reversal of its historical status – the Nazi genocide was being downplayed, and media attention was focused instead on 'the crimes of communism' perpetrated by the Soviet occupying forces, who had taken over the camp in 1945 and used it as a detention centre where many more

inmates died, of starvation and exhaustion. Another part of the camp was then under threat of being demolished and turned into a supermarket (though in the end, this plan was abandoned). History itself was disintegrating in front of our eyes. In the camp's subterranean dissection room, through which his uncle's body had probably passed, Guyotat broke off a floor tile to keep as a fragment of memory. From its act of witness to the projects of Hitler, Lenin and Mao, *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers* presciently embodies many subsequent conflicts – among them, those of Cambodia, Bosnia and Kosovo – as well as more recent, and contemporary, historical figures exacting massacre or revolution.

Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers is utterly semen-drenched by innumerable sex acts – their forms and participants infinitely permutating between slaves, masters, soldiers, generals, dogs and prostitutes. In his book, Guyotat assembled a unique vision of life as a relentless spectacle of slavery, prostitution, elation and degradation, in which only the delirious intervention of sex can explode power. In large part, this overriding presence of sex, layered into the book's relentless enumeration of acts of atrocity, led to the media furore which met the book's publication. Guyotat's own response was definitive: 'I don't need to justify myself. In the end, I have something much worse to do, which is to live through my book.' The ongoing sexual detonation of the book has both generated and defeated numerous failed attempts to film it, though it has formed the raw material for several celebrated theatre performances, notably that directed by Antoine Vitez at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, in 1981, during a period in which Guyotat fell into a near-fatal coma from the corporeal demands of his work. Guyotat's output since *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers* has constituted a supremely resilient and innovative body of work, from *Eden, Eden, Eden* (1970, published in English by Creation in 1995), to *Prostitution* (1975), and through to his contemporary collaborations with artists and choreographers, and his immense multi-volume work, *Progénitures* (the first volume of which appeared, together with a CD of Guyotat reading from the book, in 2000).

English-language readers have been denied the experience of *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers* for nearly four decades, though that delayed impact makes its final availability all the more miraculous. English-language writing possesses no parallels whatsoever to Guyotat's work, which stands ferociously alone even within the context of French writing; the reader of *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers* enters uncharted sensory terrain, the engulfing 'anus of the world'. Soon after the book's original publication, the sole typescript of an English-language version by the translator Helen Lane was destroyed by fire, either by accident or intentionally; even Guyotat himself is unsure of the exact circumstances of this notorious calamity, though Helen Lane (who suffered a profound spiritual crisis during her

work on the book) had certainly viewed its action – which she saw as being situated in a post-apocalyptic timeframe – as disorientatingly unlike any other work she had approached. Less combustible translations, notably that into the Japanese language, have projected the physical and visual matter of the book into other cultures, with consequences similar to those in France. Romain Slocombe’s new translation – retaining all of the dense splendour, linguistic rhythm and sheer virulence of the original book – allows English-language readers their first opportunity to enact their own confrontation with Guyotat’s seminal work.

–Stephen Barber

TOMB FOR 500,000 SOLDIERS

« to Hubert, youngest brother of my dead mother, born 1920 in Czeladz, Upper-Silesia, died 1943 at the extermination camp of Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen, Brandenburg. »

FIRST CHANT

In those times, war covered Ecbatane. Many slaves escaped, clung to the victors, but when these tried to get information about the resistance of the occupied, the slaves refused to tell the names of their former masters, and therefore fell into even greater servitude. Ecbatane then was still the widest capital of the Occident : it had been built along fifteen kilometers of coastline. Every day, the beaches below the sea front boulevard, were covered with bodies of young members of the Resistance, who landed at night, only to be shot by the sea sentries. The victors had overcome easily : they had conquered a city which was ridding itself of its gods. Ecbatane was returning to the North, from where these victors, booted, helmeted, armour-plated, held the snow of their soles and the ice of their eyelashes. For a hundred years, the earth had been growing colder : Ecbatane's scientists worked secretly at a weapon capable of warming it up but the victors stole it from them. An airplane was built into which the weapon was put and also the scientists who were sent North. The victors persecuted those whom the capital threw out of its seas : adventurers, acrobats, soldiers. A few families, within the heart of the capital, refused to submit to the orders of denouncement and cruelty : their children, at night, would flee into the lands, others would embark in subterranean creeks of the south shore, all rallied in the Buxtehude archipelago still inviolate but covered day and night by the shadows of enemy bombers.

A young officer from Ecbatane, long despised by headquarters because he wished to hasten the modernization of the army, had fled, the day of surrender, to the Buxtehude archipelago, by means of a diplomatic mission to this allied country. Ecbatane had at once condemned the rebellion of her ambassadeur extraordinaire, who strove to convince the archipelago's government of the necessity and grandeur of his resistance. Buxtehude gave him a room in a sea resort hotel where he hung portraits of his wife and children still in Ecbatane, then a small studio at the national radio from which he broadcast his calls to Ecbatane, exhorting it to resistance, revival, political clarity ; then, at last, he was given some crates of weapons and ramshackle, closed-down barracks. Soon, all of the North, all of the Occident, parts of the Orient, caught fire. Never had the conqueror

enough of these fires, to lighten the secret darkness of his soul, nor of blood to mix with his tears. Into humiliated Ecbatane, he came at dawn of the day of surrender, sat down in the gallery of a triumphal arch and watched the city asleep ; his boot scraped the cement, a rat ran under the balustrade, he caught its head under his boot and crushed it, the blood dried with the sharp wind, a bodyguard bent down, wiped with his handkerchief the blood on the boot, took the rat and wrapped it in the handkerchief. The conqueror stroked the knee of the guard who was getting up :

— Take this rat to the kitchens, we'll have those dogs eat it after they've signed.

Old men, priests, patriots, gave themselves a chief who pleased the conqueror. This chief had once won a great victory by tasting his soldiers' soup. Ecbatane was still trembling with the pleasure of its feasts. Now its poets, its musicians died under the whip, in the forests of the North. The women's deep eyes hardened.

Ecbatane let its old chief talk of tradition and national pride : not long ago it had reinvented universal conscience. From this time dates the rising of a new virtue named common sense, a lessened form of the savage custom. Some poets celebrated the tools : rakes, forks, cattle, people ; oxes were awarded prizes for service to the fatherland, national ribbons were attached to the heaviest ears of wheat ; children who had saved from water or fire brother or grandma, the old chief wished to meet them and reward them : the child was pushed into the waiting room, holding against his chest a small paper flag of which he would say to the chief that he kept it day and night under his shirt, the old man then appeared, kissed the child's forehead, bending down towards him ; next, at a sign of his hand, the aide-de-camp opened a cardboard box, took out a stick as fat as a lollipop, painted with the national colours :

— Receive this emblem of my authority, may it grow at the same speed as your courage.

A child, the son of a slave, but freed by a priest who was sodomizing him, as a payment for his generosity was pushed by the priest in front of the chief, and said aloud that the old man smelled of urine : the chief was deaf, he fondled the cheek of the child ; who was given a stick, which he placed at once between his legs :

— Mine will grow quickly, mister Your Excellency, while yours diminishes in length and power.

As he saw that the child was taking pleasure in talking to him, the chief had him given two big glass marbles which the child squeezed on each side of the stick he held between his legs. The chief, dazzled by a ray of light, turned back, took the arm of his aide-de-camp and disappeared inside a swarm of widows. At night, lying over the child, the priest was catching him by the throat and hitting his

temples with his fists ; the child bit them, spat into the priest's eyes ; the latter, seated at the edge of the bed, threatened to sell him as a slave again ; the child said he was hungry, the priest took him in his arms, down to the kitchen ; a young man crossed the small garden, knocked at the glass door :

— Open, open, they're after me.

The child touched the key, the priest pulled him away ; gunshot, the young man collapses against the lit up glass ; the patrol invades the kitchen ; the blood, around the young man's head, shines under the moonlight, the priest serves drinks, a soldier noticing the ring at the child's lip :

— This one too belongs to them ? Drink with us, priest. You, pour the wine.

And in the same time he catches the child by the waist, pulls him and pricks the child's bare torso with the point of his dagger and pinches and twists his nipples between the thumb and the index ; the child struggles, rolls against the open door, his hair dipped in the blood ; the priest strokes the soldiers' badges, has the meaning of the symbols explained to him, his hand quivers on the cold metal ; the napes and cheeks of the soldiers smell of wind and ice.

The child, set on his feet again, stands behind the priest, his breast covered with scratches, holding the pitcher of icy cold wine, bloody curls at his temples.

— Priest, sell your brat to me.

— He is free, not for sale no more.

— He serves your nightly sacrifices.

— I haven't pulled his ring off yet. But I will show you the writ of emancipation.

— Give me your brat, priest, or I shout that you're hiding rebels, and you'll die frozen in the far North.

The priest rises, he extends his arms, steps back, the child puts the pitcher down on the tiled floor ; the priest presses him against the wall.

— Hand him over, I want him.

— Before, you'll have to pass over my body.

— And you wouldn't dislike that.

— Kill me.

— Heroism doesn't suit you well, you renegade priests. There, lower your arms, uncover your lover, and find a subtle, doctrinal excuse for your cowardice, the way you all do since your god died.

The priest lowers his arms, bends toward the child :

— Aïssa, you are free, choose.

The child, his hands clinging to the priest's hips, his naked foot touching the icy pitcher, quivers, his eyes roll, shine, the officer seizes him by the shoulder, pulls him close, curls up the child's lips with his thumb, crushes the ring against

the gums then clasps the throat, lifts the child up like a fish by the gills :

— What can you do, brat ?

The child, choking, stifles :

— Aïssa plays the violin, like everyone among his race.

The soldiers lift the child's body, still breathing.

— Go get your violin. I buy you. Priest, I guarantee his safety.

The priest goes up to the room, with the child ; squatting in front of the chest of drawers, they pull out Aïssa's clothes, the priest packs them inside a small suitcase, they go down again ; the officer takes the child's hand :

— Did you take your violin ? if we return to the North, I will need you to rid me of my melancholy.

The priest bends over the child, but a soldier lifts up his weapon.

The rebel rattles ; three tanks are stopped in front of the garden : the helmeted soldiers play the harmonica under the moonlight, the officer climbs into the turret, the child, remaining below, leans against the tank's caterpillars, the officer, from above the turret, holds out his hand, the child catches it, climbs up, the officer squeezes him against his leg, the tanks move off, they drive along the sea front boulevard, the officer looks at the stars reflected in the tumultuous waters :

— Where did you put your violin ?

and he presses the leather of the suitcase, the child opens it, the violin shines for a moment under the moon, the officer touches it, strokes it, pinches the strings ; a bitch, lying on its side, is suckling its puppies, the tank rolls along and squashes it, the blood spatters the tank's headlights ; in the stairs, Aïssa collapses on the steps, a pink foam at the corner of his lips ; a soldier coming up, crushes with his boot the unconscious child's hand opening onto the wood soaked with snow.

At dawn the officer rises, naked, flings back the sheets crossed by a pink gleam ; the child sleeps in front of the door, twisted inside a khaki blanket, head rolling over the suitcase ; the officer walks towards the window, spits his chewing-gum, strokes the lukewarm tiles, lights a cigarette : two women pass, under blue parasols ; the officer whistles, one woman lifts her head, she sees the naked young man sitting on the window sill, the shadow of the smoke on his forehead, the penumbra made by the opposite wall, like a net over the belly and thighs, the officer smiles, pulls out his cigarette, rubs his lip with the thumb ; the two women walk up to a small garden on the terrace, sit down on the chairs wet by dew, one of the women claps her hands : a little girl appears, bare legs under a kind of short tunic spangled with gold, the top of the tunic is damp, the woman touches :

— Who beat you and bloodied you ? Oh well then, shut up, bring the coffee and the toasts.

The girl runs away : fresh blood on her throat. « Some little cook must have beaten her because she refused to have sex with him. I encourage those

servile couplings. »

She lifts again her gaze towards the naked young man, whose buttock almost touches the cool tiles, he smiles, sees the half uncovered breasts of the youngest woman, the glittering drops of dew on the pearly skin, hardened like a beast's skin, the slight down over the upper lip, he searches, with his foot, his sandals made of ass leather, he leans his head a bit, the smoke, blue-tinged by his cigarette's rays, mixes with his lashes, pricks his eyes ; she watches the penis rise over the line of the young man's thighs, she turns her head away, scratches with her nail the trace of a bird's shit on the green table, the umbrella unfurls and rolls along her leg which she uncovers up to the knee with her thumb, she raises her eyes towards the young officer :

— Day broke this morning earlier and more to the left of the occupying forces' quarter. Do you still love as much lieutenant lerissos ? One says that he is suspected of having blown up the train from Ouranopolis.

But the chief defends him ; long ago, before the war, the chief saw him, a fancy-dressed child at a laureate's party, he drew him into the garden, made him sit on a stone bench at the edge of the pond, took his feet, kissed them, his lips move up to the knees of the child who blushes behind his collarette : « You're an orphan ? Your father died in the battle where I was in command, your mother in the arms-factory. You'll be a soldier, I want it. I'll give you a slave to bear your armour. Come to my castle. You'll keep a weapon under your mattress. »

A jeep takes the child with his luggage, it jumps on the inside courtyard's pavement, the chief's former soldiers, squatting under the French windows, draw themselves up, one of the child's legs hangs out of the jeep, the movement uncovers the penis's down, under the half-open shorts, the chief is standing, he sees, he gulps ; next to him, a boy with a ringed lip bends against the paving his javelin of ash :

— Here is your armour-bearer, Aravik, he'll serve you day and night, will sleep against your door, this is the whip to flog him, and the key to the prison.

The boy looks up towards lerissos, his eyelashes get caught in a scar across his forehead and the line of his eyebrows, he opens his arms, holds out the javelin to lerissos, his feet, naked, are covered with manure, with horse's blood.

The chief takes lerissos by the shoulder, the boy throws lerissos's baggage over his own shoulder, he walks on the wet pavement — since the war began it rains all through the year. The chief drags lerissos off to the castle's central gallery ; on the tiled floor, under the windows, some levers and small cannons ready to fire :

— This to protect the Queen of the Night. Her former lovers besiege the castle every night.

A young woman leads lerissos to the prepared room ; she leans over the drawer where lerissos throws his underwear ; lerissos sees the top of the young

woman's breasts, his hands open up, bend round, the young woman looks up, smiles :

— Come and stroke them, if you wish, I am a slave.

lerissos squats down, his shorts of grey flannel tear, the young woman throws a hand towards the slit, between lerissos's thighs, the child stretches his hand out towards the breasts gilded by the rising sun, he touches them, his fingers press the nipples, a drop of milk spurts on his fingers, he drinks it ; the young woman, her head tilted backwards, catches lerissos's arm, pushes him back.

lerissos kisses that hand, kisses the breasts, the rays warm up his lips, lerissos's eyelashes beat upon the top of the breasts, upon the nipples, the young woman leans her head on lerissos's temple, kisses his hair, the ear, lerissos feels the ring running inside the folds of his ear, brusquely he holds his head up again, takes the slave's lips, nibbles the ring, his little tongue burrows into the seething palate, rolls upon the teeth, those that were broken by the whip or the hand ; his fist descends between the breasts, under the dress ; Bactriane's hand catches the linen and slips it inside the drawer, then comes back to lerissos's shoulders, pulls the collar of his shirt, covers the rolling rings of the neck ; a cloud veils the sun, Bactriane and lerissos let themselves go ; the door is wide open on the vestibule, Aravik appears, wearing clogs of wood and ass leather, he is standing, arms stretched, loaded with logs and bark ; lerissos, lying on the bed, knees raised, watches the rosy cloud, Bactriane crouching, is putting the linen away, she gets up, walks to Aravik, takes the wood from the marble top ; on the pieces of bark, the blood from Aravik's fingers, who, still standing, on the threshold, rubs them against his hip ; lerissos utters a little scream, Bactriane rises to her feet, runs toward the bed, covers lerissos's mouth with her hand :

— You have flames in your eyes, clouds pass, mingle with the fumes ; knife-golden discs are turning, inside the iris...

lerissos's knees, his stomach, tense up, Aravik scuttles off ; the chief of the guards catches him in the staircase, forces his head against the bronze ball and the hand on the ramp, the guard's mouth is smeared with blackberry juice, his breath, over Aravik's face has the scent of dew, of suspended mud ; then he releases Aravik's head and hand, points out with his finger the unbuttoned fly, pushes his foot forward, his unlaced shoe, Aravik squats down.

— In the kitchens I saw a woman who looks like you, I took her on the straw mat in the butcher's alcove.

Aravik, his shoe laced again, gets up, his fingers touch the buttons of the fly, his nails cling to the braided hem.

— Truly, she looked like you.

Aravik's fingers quiver within the tepidness of the guard's thighs.

— I wounded her while falling down, with a knife. Button up.

Aravik's fingers catch the buttonholes, where filaments of semen got

stuck.

— Come, follow me.

The guard pushes Aravik towards the kitchens in the basement ; in the middle of the eastern façade, a window veiled with scarlet damask.

— The chief slept in the bedroom of the Queen of the Night.

In the inside courtyard, a truck filled with fuming manure slows down, a guard climbs onto the running board, a girl, her head wreathed with an eyeshade of mica, is driving, the guard seizes her head, kisses her mouth, his fingers sink into the slave's powdery hair, slide down under her dress, along her back, Aravik leans his belly against the truck's wheel ; at the four corners of the dumper, sitting on the rail, four boys, hands crossed on their spades, are watching the sky, the portal covered with moss and blades of grass — a trap where crimson butterflies are struggling, under the gaze of the sleepy guards, squatting under the French windows ; the guard knocks the girl down under him, across the seat ; the engine is going, hastens the orgasm, the guard gets up from the slave, her hand retracts inside the glove, her head rolls on the springs, the guard gets off the truck ; the slave, one instant, stays lying, her dress tucked up to the navel ; the boys bending over the rails, look through the cabin's windows, the girl takes the wheel again, starts, the truck crosses the courtyard, two guards climb onto the running board, guide the slave as far as the orchard ; the truck stops alongside a blazing rubbish dump ; the guards shout to the boys to get off, the boys jump down with their shovels :

— Put the manure here. First, put out the fire. There's no water.

The slave gets down with the boys into the dump, the boys strike the fire with the flat of the shovels, stamp out the embers with their tennis shoes ; the guards, sitting on the truck's running board, drink spirits from the bottle, their cocks swollen under the linen of the battledress, drowsy, eyes riveted to the slave's waist, breasts, belly, the lonely fall of apples breaking, now and then, their seminal reverie ; the boys trample the fire down, their naked legs turn black, the embers fly, burn holes in the light linen of the shorts, tense the fingers around the shaft of the shovels ; a boy, suddenly, squats down, a ring glitters, rolls on the flat of the shovel, he takes it, a guard sees him, he rushes forward, he hits the boy with his weapon's grip, he knocks him down on the sticky embers, lays his foot on the boy's belly, strikes the throat again, bends down, catches the ring, thrusts it into the pocket of his battledress, over his breast, then he raises his weapon, fondles the trigger, turns the weapon towards the boys :

— You've seen nothing, even under torture...

The other guard appears, opens the guard's hand, goes through the pocket :

— It belongs to the Queen of the Night, I saw it at her finger, yesterday evening, while she and the chief were feeling the apples in the orchard, under the

moon.

Both guards come back to sit on the running board. The chief of the guards pushes Aravik into the kitchen ; inside the alcoves, women, boys, are preparing the meats, the fish, the fruits, the pastries ; the guard moves forward, a woman, in the butcher's alcove, surprised, drops her knife ; the guard comes, stops just outside the alcove, Aravik dashes forward, thrusts his head against the belly of the woman, who strokes the head, the hair of the boy. Aravik embraces her, his arms joined behind the back of the woman ; the lamp, spattered with blood and shreds of flesh, swinging, draws up the shade over the legs and the loins of Aravik who bends, his back shaken by the sobs ; the guard steps forward, he snatches the boy away, pushes and sends him rolling to the end of the alcove, he seizes the woman by the neck, presses down ; the woman kneels ; Aravik stirs inside the gutter of blood, his legs slide on the puddle, his bruised loins shoot out of the shorts, he holds his stomach with both hands ; the guard pulls out his cock, runs it over the woman's lips, his testicles appear, pouring out over the buttonholes of the fly ; with his knee the guard knocks the woman down, upon the mat on to which Aravik's fingers are clinging ; then, he squats, pushes up the dress stained with blood, lies over the woman ; after the coupling, he gets up, shakes his cock inside the battledress, the woman goes back to her stall, grasps, squashes the meat with her hands wet with sweat and semen, her fingers where brown locks were coiling ; the guard with one hand sets Aravik on his feet again and pulls him towards the threshold ; the woman, putting down her knife, fondles the boy's bloody hair ; the guard takes a skinning knife from the stall, he catches a girl bending over the furnace, her face and bare breasts bathed with steam and pink blood :

— Get naked.

The girl unbuttons the top of her dress down to under her breasts, pulls off, steps over, tramples the dress, soiled and creased during the multifarious embraces of the guards ; the girl is naked, loins leaning against the balustrade of the furnaces, the guard unbuckles his belt, passes it through the loops of the skinning knife then fastens it around the slave's waist ; the knife gleams between her thighs, a tuft of hair sticks out over it, the guard moves the cleaver, he lifts it, he thrusts his fist into the cunt of the slave, he pulls out his dripping fist and rubs it between the breasts and to the face ; Aravik grips the woman's belly, the meat she is squashing, cutting and tearing, puts red glimmers in the boy's eyes ; the guard swings the blade against the slave's thighs :

— I want you to work all day, naked, thighs battered by this cleaver.

The guard seizes Aravik by the shoulder ; in the staircase a guard, a young one, is sitting.

— If the girl removes her cleaver, strike her.

The young guard, straightening up, the penis hardened under the linen, salutes, a pink foam dries at the corner of his lips, his hands are shaking upon the

grip of his tommy gun, sand runs behind his ears, the chief leans over the nape of the guard's neck, breathes the scent of salt, of seaweed :

— Did you see the Queen of the Night bathing ?

— No, she doesn't want to appear undressed before the chief. One says he took little lerissos to love him, as a consolation for this refusal. He is now in his room, the child is struggling on the bed, nailed like a butterfly.

In the evening, lerissos, bruised, his cock scorched, rambles through the orchard ; the trees, veiled by the fumes from the manure and rubbish dump, creak under the weight of the fruits. A footstep, he turns back, a woman, tall, radiant — from a long way off he sees the sadness in her eyes — comes towards lerissos ; he wants to hide inside a clump of shrubs, a perfumed hand touches his shoulder and grabs it at once, he lets himself go against the woman's belly and his lips follow, press the throbbings of that belly ; they walk to the orangery, lie down on a litter of warm straw, embrace, drink each other's tears, mingle their saliva ; night climbs upon the greenhouse's panes, a salted breath, coming from the sea, shrouds the greenhouse and the orchard, two guards awake : one of them stands up again on his wooden leg, his back, his loins rub against the French window, a cold sweat wets his forehead like a spittle ; a scar where blood wells up every night, on waking from the reverie, crosses his fair hair, his lips fat and red come unstuck, blood bathes his gums ; he drags himself along on the tiled floor, crosses the courtyard, pushes the door to the dining hall, sits on the bench stained with blood where tufts of cotton are stuck ; upon the whitewashed wall, a large photograph of the chief ; the young guard listens to the noises from the kitchen, the shouts, the laughs, the tears of the slaves, he bends his head against his wrists, his wooden leg runs into a table, blood trickles among his hair, bites at his forehead ; other guards push the door, sit down, get up, walk into the kitchens, fondle the slaves, tuck up their dresses or unbutton their shorts, rub themselves against the hips, the loins, twist the slaves' arms, burn them with boiling water, strike them, pull them around with the ladles and the rolling pins ; inside the dining hall, the blond guard holds his head in his fists, a slave from the kitchen, through the guards, brings him a plateful of meat and cabbage, her hand lingers on the wood of the table ; the guard takes it, strokes it, his eyes move towards the slave's face :

— My leg hurts tonight. I want to die.

She opens the top of her dress, a bloody gash in her shoulder, the slave holds back the flap of the dress and stares at the soldier.

— Who wounded you ?

He rises.

— I do not know, he took me from the rear, he was tucking up my dress over my loins, his cock was hardening on my hip, I was struggling, he took out his knife, he thrust it into my shoulder. The nurse doesn't want to look after me because I refused myself to her tonight.

The guard takes the slave's shoulder, presses his lips on the wound and sucks the blood, then he drags the slave into the corridor, pulls out his handkerchief, opens the tap, soaks it and ties it around the wound ; the slave hugs the guard, cries over his breast :

— Buy me, buy me or I will die torn to pieces, yesterday they seized me and sewed me inside the horsehair of a mattress, cutting a hole in the cloth at the place of my thighs and everyone could then fuck me choking inside the horsehair, eyes pricked by sweat, and the cloth, around the hole, blackens and sticks to my belly ; I can't see them, I recognize them only by their cocks. Set me free, I'll work for your living.

The guard strokes the hair, the temples, the slave's forehead, strokes, soothes the restless forehead, the quivering neck, his belly touches the belly still wet, the stain on the dress called « slave's stain », his wooden leg crushes the foot of the now silent slave, motionless and quivering against the guard.

Inside the orangerie, beneath the panes of glass which sparkle like ice, the Queen of the Night, kneeling, her hands clinging to Ierissos's knees :

— Kill me, kill the slaves in this castle, release me, release them, little slave without a ring, with naked lips. He took me from the Opera house where I was singing, his soldiers drank and raped on the bloodstained snow, illuminated by the lights of the Opera, they throw shreds of raw meat at the high shutters, he catches my hand ; the soldiers share between them the little dancers and the assistant stagehands ; the whole city is ablaze, the soldiers throw the king's dead body out of the window ; the prince, in pyjamas, they crush him inside his bed, strangle him with the bars of pink wood, quarter him at the four corners of the nursery. Since two years I've been resisting him, I cannot go out during daytime ; at night I wander, barefooted, on the glittering pebbles, he attacks me, he grips me, my eyes flash with anger, then he lets me go, he runs to the dormitories, wakes a sleeping slave with a blow of his heel, drags her, all the way to his room, he lies upon her, he strangles her with his fingers, he opens the window on the icy wind, he throws his hands into the tumultuous darkness : « See these hands, you just died, strangled. »

The wind shrouds the dead body of the slave on the ravaged bed ; I wander through the orchard, my lips sparkling under the moonlight, happy from having set free both a body and a heart. He, he calls his guards, has the corpse dumped into the rubbish and goes to bed ; goddess I am for whom a man sacrifices, wounding, killing the victim like he would kill the god ; to me, like to the god this sacrifice gives pleasure, by setting free one companion to my solitude. Kill me, kill, with your hands, with your foot, or your teeth. In the middle of the night, he rises, he prowls along my door ; women flee ; well then he rushes into the

courtyard ; the buckle of his washed-out belt sparkles on his hip, his open shirt is lifted by the wind, he goes downstairs to the kitchens, gets caught in the alcoves' curtains, makes his way, stooping, in the darkness, gropes, touches the paillasses where sleep, naked or entangled in the aprons, the kitchen boys, the young cooks ; his hand seizes a foot, the leg, moves up the thigh, takes hold of the cock, the boy awakens, sits up, shrinks back towards the top end of the paillasse, but the chief pulls on his cock, holds the boy back sitting in the middle of the paillasse :

— Come, get out, come, so that I can get a look at you.

He lets go of the boy's cock, opens and closes again his sweating hand, thrusts it into his pocket, the boy gets up, treads on the mattress, a moonbeam breaks through the curtain, shedding light on the boy's belly, causing the navel's shadow to revolve ; the boy raises the curtain, moves forward into the kitchen, the chief seizes him by the shoulders, he pushes him towards the air hole, the boy leans his back against the wall, the saltpetre runs down along his vertebrae to the top of the buttocks ; his head tilted, eyes half-closed, towards the shoulder, the chief lifts it up again, he strokes the tense muscles of the throat and neck, his eyes move down upon the belly, the crumpled cock, the thighs, the gleam of the knees ; he takes the boy's hand, drags him out of the basement, into the courtyards, the wind grips the sleepy boy, his head rolls backwards, forwards, his wide open eyes overflow with moonlight ; inside the chief's bedroom, again he is overcome by sleep, softened, his body's copper skin mellowed ; all night, until dawn, the chief, crying, screaming, lifts up, turns over, opens, props up, crushes that sleeping body of which one only sigh, at the moment of orgasm, rises among the semi-darkness and the disarray of the sheets.

lerissos pushes back the Queen of the Night, she grabs his wrists, squeezes them around her throat, he breaks loose from her, with the jerky movement of some big insect, a sand blast scratches the glazing, its shade crosses the uncovered breasts of the Queen of the Night. lerissos looks up, she grabs his wrists, squeezes them around her neck, until she dies, lerissos is struggling ; the body, lifeless under the veils and soaking them in cold sweat, drops before his feet ; lerissos flees to the door, sets it ajar, a big black bird motionless on the threshold, head held up, is watching lerissos ; the child moves forward, the bird attacks the naked leg, lerissos springs forward, the bird is grappling on to his knee, pricks him with his beak, digs into the wound, parts it and tears it with his claws, lerissos runs up the orchard, the blood is streaming down along his leg, soaking his sock. lerissos runs as far as the portal, he wakes up the blond guard asleep against the corner-post, the guard rises on his wooden leg, he loads his submachine-gun, hearing the noise of the breech the bird lifts its head , the guard strikes it with the butt, the bird contracts, its claws pierce the flesh of the knee, under the bone, lerissos groans, the guard strikes, strikes, the bird, its battered head, its eyes blinded by the blood, by the blows, breaks loose from the knee of lerissos who

shakes his leg, the bird falls on the flagstone, the guard tramples on it with his boots, lerissos wipes the wound with the flat of his hand, the guard squats down, pulls off the bird's beak and feet, tears its breast open, with his nails, bursts the gizzard, a ring rolls in his fingers, sparkles in the midst of the blood, the feathers and the fragments of the beak ; the guard takes it, makes it roll between two fingers, in a ray of moonlight :

— The ring of the Queen of the Night.

The guard leads lerissos by the hand, they go to the kitchens, raise the alcove curtain, the guard awakens the slave ; inside the linen room, there sleeps Bactriane, whom lerissos awakens ; the blond guard gets out a jeep, he and lerissos lift the body of the Queen of the Night ; the guard knocks down a little door at the lower end of the orchard, the jeep jumps forward then slows down, at dawn, on the sand ; on the back seat, Bactriane and the slave are wiping the face of the Queen of the Night ; lerissos runs towards the surf, dips his handkerchief in the rosy foam, Bactriane takes it, lays it down on the Queen of the Night's brow ; the blond guard is sleeping, his head leaning on the steering wheel ; a party of children, half-naked, are asleep against the barrier of seaweed ; at the summit of the cape, gunshots : former soldiers of Ecbatane were continuing the fight, two years after the war had ended, but this time, against those who then governed Ecbatane and whom the war had not moved away from power : these soldiers had expected to destroy the interior enemy by destroying the exterior one ; most of them were former slaves or sons of slaves, the present government of Ecbatane had not wished to abolish slavery.

These soldiers lived on the Leuctres promontory ; neither the army, nor the government, nor the civilians, dared to besiege them : often they came down into Ecbatane, marched through the city, armed, decorated, the police would draw aside, the civilians applaud, the women quiver, the children follow shouting or silent. lerissos, the two slaves and the blond guard drive up to Leuctres : the children of soldiers throw flowers on the jeep's bonnet.

Several times, the chief comes to visit lerissos in Leuctres, lerissos wears on his finger the ring of the Queen of the Night. Now a young man, lerissos comes down to Ecbatane, the chief appoints him lieutenant. All the chief's slaves are dead when lerissos enters the castle again ; skeletons crouching, lying, leaning against the corner-posts, a whip wound around the bone of the neck, a dagger stuck into the jaw. lerissos walks through the orchard, pushes the door of the orangerie, squats down, his lips alight on the place of mud floor where the Queen of the Night fell, sand covers the panes of glass ; at each breathing of the sea, the door, pushed by the wind, opens or closes ; the chief is waiting in the inside courtyard, he tramples the skeletons underfoot. lerissos, sitting on the stone bench, his head under the powdery palms, turns the ring around his finger ; an apple, which he tears open, has the taste of blood, he strokes the down on his upper lip ; he hums

a tune to be sung over water, which Bactriane learnt from the Queen of the Night, one evening when Bactriane, hunted by the guards, had taken refuge inside her bedroom. The chief moves forward, he scatters some small branches, his boots squash the rotten apples. Leuctres, abandoned, children there play war ; for a time, Leuctres opened its gates to runaway slaves, to raped orphans, and closed itself upon them, Ecbatane had mellowed. Those from Leuctres used to eat together, in summer on the square at the end of the cape, in winter in an ancient deconsecrated church, under the boat's framework ; all came to the table, even the new-born. Foreign reporters went up to Leuctres to take photographs of the horde ; the blond guard lived with the slave in a wooden house ; all night, he writhed and moaned on the bed, in daytime he would get into the jeep, stop it at the edge of the cape and watch the sea, caressing absentmindedly the children who came up and touched his wooden leg ; the murmur of the city, if the wind brought it to his ears, would make the foam spout up to his lips, he then moved his hand everywhere on his body, as though a hand, a whip, were striking him.

One afternoon, he threw the jeep on the rocks down below, died with his head crushed under a tyre and his arm ripped off, caught in the steering wheel. All the couplings were performed standing, against the doors and the palisades.

The chief sits beside lerissos :

— Only one little girl-slave remained faithful to me. I've been forgotten by Ecbatane. Wait a short time and you will call me back again ; those from the North will bring out the weapons from the ice, children, women are quenching the bullets, wetting the incandescent steel of their cannons. Here, women drag their long dresses on the limousines' running boards, at Ecbatane's racecourse, buy little slaves for their idle sons. Presently, markets are held on the estuary banks, many Asians bought by the Northern merchants and sold at the frontier towns of Ecbatane ; they are chained and lying inside the barracks and aircraft hangars built towards the end of the war ; the merchants sell them at low prices, in families : a complete family for the city latrines ; the wife at the till, the man helped by his boys, cleans the cesspools, and the girls, the tiles ; a complete family for the State sculptor ; another one for the school, the masters inebriate the whole family in front of the children to make them sick for ever of wine and drunkenness ; another school, where the headmaster, under the influence of a Northern doctrine, gives to his pupils lessons of sexual education : one man then pushes one of those families on the platform, one forces the father to mate with his wife, the father with his daughter, the daughter with her brother ; then, to make clear the ugliness of unnatural couplings, the father with his boys, those same boys together then with their mother, at last, the mother with her daughters and those same daughters together ; the master touches the copulating bodies, sweating, taut, with his ruler, explains the movements, makes warnings ; catches on the tip of that ruler a drop of semen or sperm, and has the ruler passed among the rows.

Back in tumultuous Ecbatane, the city crammed with slaves, where entire families are preparing to flee, the chief is applauded along the large central avenues ; his car advances slowly, he holds lerissos's wrist ; the bonnet shines, fawn-coloured and blue in the twilight ; newspapers thrown, waved by the little slaves are filled with disquieting threats ; the surge of Asian slaves pointed to a star-shaped thrust by the Northern armies. Ecbatane linked by multiple alliances to countries coveted by the master of the North, slackly gets prepared for a war it deems imaginary, being too foreseeable and which it pushes away to some distant future ; the time of peace had taken the reality of a dream, Ecbatane, strong with its thousands of slaves, by them put to sleep, softened by the excessive use it made on them of its desires and its cruelties, reassured and stupefied by their flattery and their dangerous faithfulness, Ecbatane watches those newspapers and passes and withdraws in the autumn mist, knees suddenly pierced by their fear, amongst the crowd of its innocent slaves.

At dawn, while the State surrenders to the chief, lerissos walking under the porch of the government palace, between the sleepy sentinels, looks up towards the second floor window, still lit up ; the chief appears, sees lerissos, smiles, lerissos kisses his fingers. After the deliberations, the chief drags the defunct government towards the canteen of the hospital adjacent to the ministry ; a slave serves them, lerissos appears, the slave gives him a glass of scalding hot coffee, lerissos takes it between his fingers, the steam soaks his face, he shakes his other hand, lifts the glass to his lips ; through the steam, he sees the face of the young slave, the top of her blouse wet with splatters of coffee and jam, the silver ring sealed into the upper lip, Bactriane comes behind him, strokes his shoulders ; in the shade of the door, young soldiers, head bandaged, pyjamas half-open, get out of their bed, drag themselves along to the vestibule, lean against the wall, call Bactriane, their forearms throwing off the bandages and the bloody dressings, uttering little soft moans, foam on their lips and cheeks covered with night scabs : dribble, tears, snot ; Bactriane returns to the corridor, she takes the young soldiers one by one and brings them back to bed ; lerissos, drinking the glass of coffee, looks at the young slave, who is wiping the glasses, she lifts her lowered eyes, black, when the line of the glass hides lerissos's eyes ; lerissos gives back the glass, the young slave shakes the cloth, takes the glass, her fingers touch lightly the marks upon the glass of lerissos's fingers ; above the table, a large photograph of the chief ; lerissos watches the young slave ; she puts the glass, unwiped, inside the front pocket of her apron, lerissos, turned towards the chief, listens to threats, regrets, fears, decisions of truces and defence tactics ; the young slave continues serving, lerissos comes back to the place where he drank, he bends towards the slave, his fingers tremble over the icy tablecloth where weaving points of light sparkle like crystals :

— What's your name ?

— Mantinee.

— Since when are you a slave ?

— Since always, my mother was singing at the Opera, when your soldiers took our city. I am born a slave.

— My parents died in this war led against you, we are brother and sister. He catches the slave's arm, he strokes it, up to the blouse's sleeve.

— Don't touch me ; tomorrow I will be sold to the widow of your former prince ; she has four hundred slaves in her houses and on her lands, eight hundred in her factories and her mines ; ten of them die every day, they are replaced on the spot. They say she is an ogress. She's buying me to devour me.

The diffused light of dawn drowns the neon light suspended to the ceiling. Faces are pale, eyes sealed, blood flows in the hands' veins ; Bactriane, in the corridor, is struggling in a wounded soldier's arms, she pulls him from the wall, he holds her shoulders, pulls her blouse with his bandaged fingers, moves his lips towards Bactriane's ; the other wounded soldiers, lying, sitting in the bloody semi-darkness of the room, groan, make the bones of their wrists crack, tear their bandages, laugh, open their pyjamas, take hold of their cock and laugh, eyes fixed on the wounded soldier who is embracing Bactriane ; lerissos withdraws his hand from Mantinee's arm, rushes into the corridor, releases Bactriane, strikes the soldier in the face ; the lips of the wounded soldier tear, blood spatters lerissos's wrist, the wounded soldier cries :

— Lieutenant, you're hitting the wounded.

— You can't control yourself, all of you are like little dogs. Go back to bed.

The soldier, bending his head, pyjamas down to the middle of the buttocks, returns into the barrackroom, his hand covering his lips ; lerissos wipes the blood with his handkerchief, leans on his elbows for a moment at the window ; the grey dawn climbs up the domes and the towers and the oriflammes of the palaces, priests walk along the terraces, their ass leather sandals are steeping in the icy water of the puddles ; leaves of their books open to the wind, come unstuck ; below, stopping, motionless in the spiral staircases, their little slaves are waiting for the end of the prayers, maniple on the wrist, the linen of the shorts and shirts shivering in the wind ; platoons appear suddenly at street corners, their rising capes flapping in the sharp air like a petrol fire ; groups of slaves, runaways or complainants, crowd at the palace gates, the platoons beat off, machine-gun, trample, knock down, the slaves scatter, run along the walls, the bursts of gunfire flatten them over the footpaths or throw them against the walls ; city trucks spray the streets ; the dead bodies, washed, hair divided by the stream, sparkle ; a bloody water flows between the paving stones, dies in a foam against the sidewalks ; garbage men load the bodies and drive them into the trucks' mouth, amongst the tepid ashes and the excrement.

The priests come down, apply their hands to the shoulders of the little slaves, with the maniples they wipe their foreheads drenched with cold sweat. The agony is ended ; their free hands slide on the stairs' hand rail ; doves soar over the balustrades, over the springboards, over the roofs of cast iron streaming with rain and dew and droppings ; sleepy crows search for their holes, bump into the jaws of the dragons, the breasts of the virgins, the antennas, the oriflammes ; rain sticks the shorts and the shirt of the little slaves to their torso and to their thighs ; lerissos comes back to the canteen room, Mantinee gives a start, lerissos touches her shoulder, Mantinee tilts her head to the side, her cheek, her eyelids brush lerissos's palm, who raises his fingers to Mantinee's lips ; but the chief's glance, a gust of wind under the doors startles them, Mantinee looks down, recovers her linen on the tablecloth, props her belly, caught in the blouse, against the edge of the table, lerissos brings his hand back to his chest, to the veins of his neck ; he catches up with the chief who is walking towards the door, the ministers draw aside, some of them look down on him :

Inside the car, next to the sleeping chief, his black hat tipped back over his forehead, lerissos, collar turned back on the cheeks and on the ear lobes ; a little slave, a shred of canvas wrapped around the thighs, is squatting in the gutter of blood and cinders ; his hands dig into the gully hole ; he takes them out covered with blood up to the joint of the elbow, he raises them above his head and stares at lerissos with his pale eyes studded with blood ; lerissos places his wrist on the armrest, the child runs behind the car, his hands clasped over his close-cropped head ; the chief's hand touches lerissos's thigh :

— And nevertheless, that enemy, I've beaten him.

lerissos turns his head, wipes the vapour on the back window ; the child is running, dancing, the blood streaming on his chest, covering the navel ; the driver sees him in the rearview mirror ; the chief falls asleep again, lerissos looks at the driver's shiny nape, a cross is drawn there, half hidden under the scarf ; the car slows down, the child overtakes it, his bloody hand trails along the window ; the driver opens his door, slams it, the child jumps on the footpath ; the driver speeds up, he sees the cross of blood on lerissos's window, he throws the car straight at the child, who collapses, his leg caught, the right front wheel crushes his head, skids on the macadam ; the chief, woken up, holds with both hands the back of the front seat, a bit of foam is wetting his chin ; lerissos opens the door, he springs forward, he squats down next to the child, pulls the head clear, the shoulderbones recede and come together around the top of the neck ; the car backs, the driver, his head buried in the sleeves of his coat, his untied scarf hanging from the steering wheel, is shaking : lerissos takes the body in his arms and flees.

In the evening :

— Master, lieutenant lerissos has been seen in the ruins of Leuctres.

Must one have him arrested ?

— No ; after every one of his flights, he comes back to me more docile, more craving for tradition, for affection and his cheek and his shoulder taste of wind. Let him run and the sweat cover his brow, and the frost harden his lips, his fingers and his cock, then Spring soften his skin.

The enemy enters Ecbatane. Ierissos, having come down from Leuctres to the district of the slaves, stops one evening in front of a shack and hears the call of that officer who fled to Buxtehude : the voice calls to resistance those same ones whom Leuctres, not long ago, sheltered at last behind its palisades :

— This fight against an enemy able to enslave your masters, win it with me. Thus you shall deliver your children from a deeper servitude, and your masters liberated by you, I shall oblige them to set you all free.

Ierissos comes in, he sees the slaves sitting down around the radio. A stroke of sunlight illuminates the upper part of Leuctres, the points of the palisades, the ash of the burnt down stakes ; enemy riders are galloping along the shore, the horses' hooves stamp, trample the bodies of the young rebels shot during the night ; they ride up the sandhill, gallop through the outlying districts' alleys, trample the children squatting down in the sand playing at knucklebones ; a rider's helmet, bloody, rolls on the sand ; the rider jumps off, the bolting horse continues into the scuffle ; the rider, helmet in hand, runs behind the platoon, which disappears under the gates of Ecbatane, in a veil of red sand and stirred up turds ; the slaves come out of the huts, pull their children, fondle their pounded limbs ; one of them kisses his child's jaw, widened by a hoof, the child groans, his toes turned up ; Ierissos, his uniform in tatters, runs after a child, who, his ear ripped off, and the teeth smashed inside the mouth, flees, runs up the hill of Leuctres ; Ierissos seizes him by the shoulders, brings him back to his hut ; he goes out into the small garden, a hanging sheet slides across his face, the soap pricks his eyes ; two tanks are patrolling along the shore, they drive up the sandhill, the caterpillar tracks tear off the brooms and the tree stumps ; the turret turns, the hail of bullets riddles the surf then the upper part of Leuctres where a parachute is tearing on a palisade : the rebel runs among the ruins, his hand turns on the ashen stakes ; Ierissos returns to the hut ; two of the chief's slaves knock at the door : the mother hides her pounded children inside the alcove, Ierissos opens the door :

— The chief wants to know if you are in good health.

— Tell him that I'm alone, that the weight of power fills me with awe, that the palace is swarming with assassins.

And the slave grabs Ierissos's penis, Ierissos steps back, pulls away the slave's hand clinging to the cloth of his uniform.

Both slaves walk out. They return to Ecbatane, the one who touched Ierissos opens his hand under the chief's lips.

lerissos, that afternoon, and until night, raises a secret army of slaves : one of them swims all the way to Buxtehude, he comes back, passes through the hail of bullets, collapses, dripping wet, on lerissos's straw mattress ; in his closed hand, a crumpled sheet of paper covered with orders and promises of weapons.

Little by little, the slaves get organized into platoons : tanks are set on fire, armouries explode, the free young rebels are reluctant, at the beginning, to fight on the slaves' side, they complain, at night, lying in the temporary quarters, about the smell, the clumsiness, the boisterousness of those slaves of obscure and remote origin.

lerissos appears one evening in the chief's room, a valet is bending over the chief sitting at his illuminated desk, his wrist overlaid with State papers ; lerissos steps forward, the chief half turns back on his seat, chases the valet away with a punch on the thigh, sits up straight again ; lerissos comes closer, the chief takes his thigh :

— I know that you are in command of an army of children and of slaves. Take me with you, some night, into the barracks, so that I can watch them asleep, their weapon between the legs, their throat fluttering and their navel uncovered, their lips and cheeks smeared with fat and wine ; their chest restless and their cocks raised by the shapes and the voices of the reveries of somnolence. You here, the captain in Buxtehude, the two arteries of my crepuscular heart. I cover up for your parallel actions, and as soon as the war has ended, everywhere across the world, and the North defeated, and ravaged, you will sentence me. You leave me every time in order to rescue some slave from slow death. Now I give myself up to you. You live for me, within the light and the tumult in which I cannot plunge my hands. Hardly do you allow me to drink on your cheeks and on your hands the sweat from your deeds. I was born to liberate, not to falsify the lists of hostages, day after day. They impose Northern valets on me ; they turn out my socks, their spies laugh behind the doors when I squat down on my pan. You smell of slave. Do they obey you ? This morning I watched one who was working on the palace roof, he was pulling with his fingers a cast-iron gutter, blood was pouring from his hands on the torn iron ; getting up, he looked at some smoke coming out of the chimney against which he was leaning his back and drowning in the light ; he saw my gaze, he looked down ; the sharp wind was swelling his shirt ; he looks up, his eyes are bathed in blood, in morning dew ; I refrained from pushing him into the void, like a pebble. Are you staying here the whole night ?

He closes his hands on lerissos's ear :

— My legs are getting weak, I don't have the strength anymore to make them hard against the washbasin.

The valet prepares the bedside table : the phials, the sachets, the syringes, the boxes of cotton wool. lerissos sits down on the sofa, the chief holds his thigh :

— Alone, I know how to resist the enemy, but my government at night or during my nap, signs provisional treaties which I am obliged to endorse. In this room, where I replan my battles, neither of those, enemies from the outside, enemies from the inside, can enter. I have a dog, given to me by peasants whose herds and tools I blessed, I stick little messages under his belly ; one day, I shall let him loose, the orders shall be issued, I too shall have blown up trains and bridges. See this dog, the peasants wanted to offer me a bitch, I asked for a male. Chto. At night I wake him up, I catch, still lying, his snout between my fists, his eyes glow, his belly which I press keeps my secret, his tongue softens my wrist, my lips. It is Ecbatane looking at me and quivering under my hand, eager for freedom.

He sits down beside lerissos, he draws him towards his knees ; a patrol, in the street, passes with a noise of shingle stirred by the surf. lerissos strokes the old man's cheek, rolling in his fingers the white locks, through which the blood flushes under the lips, his nails stop at the eyelids where there gleams, loosened, the blue gaze with double iris ; the chief's hand plunges between the thighs of lerissos who dozes off, softened by the fire, the fragrance and the glimmer of the flasks, his head rolling over the back of the seat ; the chief's hand, plunged deep to the wrist, kneads the young sleeping flesh, the fingers unbutton, pull the underpants, hold them open, slide upon the locks of hair ; the other hand grasps an envelope, rolls it and lays it against lerissos's penis. On waking, the old man growls in his bed, his hair spread out on the pillow, the valet bending over him, opens both his hands upon his neck ; lerissos springs forward, knocks the valet down on his back, the chief growls and rolls aside. lerissos tramples the throat of the valet lying on the bedside rug, then, he leaves the room, runs down the staircase, under the portal, rain lashes against his forehead and his hands ; he walks through Ecbatane, jostles with enemy placards, with empty dustbins where cats are mating, he walks down towards the estuary ; on the roofs of the river Rescue barges, huge cats leap, their fur wet with semen and rain, they rub their backs against the tarpaulins, against the naked legs of the watermen ; he walks up towards the enemy headquarters, stops against the wall supporting the balcony of the Ecbatane prince's widow, listens to the screams of slaves and the breath of furnaces, under his feet through the kitchen's basement windows ; opposite, in the jumble of terraces, platforms, chimneys, gable ends, there the turrets, windows, half open skylights, clouded, stretched out, cluttered with uniforms, shirts, vests, handkerchieves, socks put out to dry, are hiding the heavy and restless sleep of enemy soldiers and officers.

Two women are slowly walking from the bottom of the street where the gall and blood of fish are trickling between the paving stones ; a blue parasol, darkened and distended by the rain ; they pass in front of lerissos :

— You ? Come to the Palace, we will have lunch together. You ?

— Yes, your Highness.

The two veiled women go before lerissos into the small staircase ; the fingers on the hand rail, intertwine with the roses ; one of the women turns her head, a rose gets caught in her hair on the temple ; the hand of the princess holds the hand of the young woman, squeezes the phalanxes, bends back the nails, stretches the skin, pinches the veins ; lerissos touches the hip of the young woman above him ; on the top of the stairs, two slaves leaning against the dripping stones, are closing their shirts ; rain is running along the muscles of their necks : « To bed, now », pricking their chest with the tip of the folded umbrella ; the slaves move on, both women enter a verandah, fifteen meters high ; the pillars are of bronze, the panes of glass painted at mid-height ; two fir trees planted in two stone jars rise up to the dome topped by chimes ; in the intertwined branches, lerissos sees broken toys, shreds of shorts and shirts, straps, tommy gun magazines, teeth necklaces ; at once, a multitude of slaves, men and women, boys and girls, spring into the verandah, arms filled with flowers, fruits, cold meats :

— Today I am receiving for lunch the field officers and princes of the occupying Army. I want to show them the riches of Ecbatane. The chief did not accept to take part in the banquet, he prefers his stew and his mineral water. Are you staying here for the day, lerissos ? All those slaves annoy me with their smell. Those fir trees, the Prince would bring them back to me from a Northern forest, with their birds and their squirrels caught in the net. You were just born. The war was made by rats. A bubble of mud, a dead man. The Prince threw himself in my arms, upon his eyebrows were running the insects of the Night, on his forehead I fondle the mark of his driving cap's peak. All the slaves have died at war ; then, winter dispatching the wounded and the madmen back to their homes, the gates of the palaces and the villas open up. Every night I dance, and by day, on the phone, joyous under the furs of my bed, I make my lovers suffer. The prince nails his butterflies. We live in peace with the republic. Sit down. I'm coming back.

She walks out, the young woman sits down, all dressed, on a sofa, head resting against a vase filled with putrefying water :

— Mantinee, I know her, are you unhappy ? She had a thousand lovers from all sides of the world, blackened her body for the negro, freed her breasts...

— At night, her jewels knock against my teeth. All the slaves are jealous of me, their eyes glare when I pass, their muscles, their bones recover their place, their blood is boiling. They drive nails between the floor planks. Ignored by the free men, hated by the slaves, in every room a bell can summon me to her bedside ; against every tree, at the wire nettings of the ponds. Then, the slaves push out their heads, spit at my feet ; with the wind, the spittle spurts back on their cheeks ; they scrape the earth, rub their genitals, throw crowns of paper at my feet. Bending over her I try to control my sadness, but she sees my skin quiver under my eyes, she rises on her elbow, she takes my chin in her hand, the needle of her chignon gets caught to the pillow ; her hand comes up to my eyes, I close them, I

want to love her, I fondle her wrist against my cheek, she smiles, her hand comes down upon my throat, I push it back gently.

— Would I love you free ?

— Then you would love me dead. I lie down next to her on the bed, my eyes stare at the canopy's golden stars, her hand unbuttons the top of my blouse, covers my right breast, underneath the stretched cloth, unbuttons as far as the waist, moves up along the neckline, over the buttons ; dust runs in the folds of the curtains ; a slave girl crosses the room, on tiptoe, takes a sheet at the foot of the bed, squatting ; the seam at her shoulder tears, the princess sees the bared skin, she sits up straight :

— Take her, Mantinee, take her.

The slave remains still, the unfolded sheet on her arms, I get up, I catch her by the waist, I drag her towards the top of the bed, I push her, I bend her head upon the face of the princess, the slave's hands open, her nape stiffens under my hand, the sheet flows on the wooden floor, the princess grasps the slave's neck, pulls it :

— Turn her, twist her arm.

I turn the slave's arm, the princess catches the slit with her teeth, nibbles the flesh, the slave, sitting at the edge of the bed, her dress sunken between her thighs, her hands clasped over the navel, her neck squeezed by the princess's wrist, looks at me ; the princess's foam wets the shoulder, the dress's cloth in the back and above the breasts ; then the teeth bite, the slave brings her shoulder back against her cheek, her hair spread over the sheets, blood spurts on the princess's gums; the slave's belly, tense, grows hollow, her hands open, move up along the chest ; the princess throws the upper part of the slave's body against her breasts, still biting the shoulder, her teeth clenched under the muscle and pulling it like the string of a bow, the slave bites her lips, her head falls backward uncovering the breasts bathed in sweat and pink blood ; she screams, her hands rush forward then bend back over her belly, the uncovered knees shine, wet with sweat running down the legs, to the feet ; the dress sticks to the body, swells at the places that remained dry ; I stroke the princess's brow, her eyebrows spattered with blood, her eyelids, the princess unclenches her teeth, she releases the slave's neck, she tilts her head back on the pillow, the pink sweat wets the pillow against the cheeks and the hair ; the slave remains sitting at the edge of the bed, I take her by the head, lift her up, my hands slip on the soaked, gluey dress, the slave covers her wound with her hand, sits up, I push her towards the door ; she leans her back to the wall, her shoulder above a vase full of green water and filaments of rotted flowers ; I go back towards the bed, I pick up the sheet, I fold it, I bring it to the slave, the blood from the wound streams on the vase's rim, flows down, touches the water, veils it with scarlet ; I lay the sheet upon the slave's able arm, I open the door, I drag the slave into the corridor then abandon her ; at the moment when I pass

through the door again, she attacks me, bites my arm, holds it clenched between her broken teeth ; I cover my mouth, the tears spurt down on my wrist, roll along my nostrils ; the slave unclenches her teeth, spits my blood and flees, the unrolled sheet dragging behind upon the carpet.

When again I bend over the princess, she smells, she sees the blood on my arm, she catches my wrist, she pulls it, she puts her lips on the wound, sucks up the blood while drawing the flesh apart with her tongue and her teeth ; I lie down by her side, she continues to suck the wound, the slave's dried-up blood crumbles on her eyelids, her eyes are closed, her head tilted on the pillow ; my blood is running inside her chest, mixing with hers ; I want it back ; she loves that slave blood ; men too, the blood and the semen from the slaves ; slaves, the loss of our blood and of our semen, dispossesses us, tears us away for a while, from our condition of slave ; they fecundate, they revive a free body, for us a thing unknown. You, free men, you love to drink the blood, and receive the semen of the slaves ; then, penetrated to the very bottom of the soul, by an ancient fire : liberty through submission to the forces of heaven, shivering, chilled by your solitude, to those slaves lying against you insensitive to the forces of earth, inside their flank, you inject your poisonous semen ; or else, for fun, and you make us die, we who are already dead.

The princess returns, sits next to lerissos ; the slaves run ; some of them, their hair, shoulders and knees streaming, stand leaning against the wall, uncork bottles stuck between their thighs, shorts spattered with wine and wax ; women are laying the table, their children hanging to their blouses ; a young slave, arms filled with bottles and flasks of hydromel, pushes with his foot the door of the verandah looking onto the wine cellar's yard, his knees over which the breeches are tucked up, are bleeding, the rain veils the blood ; the princess, whose hand is resting on lerissos's thigh and whose hair touches the young man's, sees the bloody knees, she quivers, she stiffens her finger pointing at the ground, the slave comes forward ; the princess catches his leg, he loses balance, the bottles shatter on the tiled floor, the flying glass wounds the naked legs of the small children ; the slave standing, hands open on his hips, bends his head, the princess pulls at the leg from behind the knee, the slave advances further, the princess throws her mouth on the wound, nibbles the bone, licks the blood on the leg, lifts the foot to her lips, licks the blood gathered on the toe ; the slave, standing on one toe, holds to the back of the sofa ; the princess's hands envelop his foot.

lerissos stays silent, bending over Mantinee and stroking her hair. The slaves pick up the shattered bottles, cutting hand and foot ; wine runs as far as the sofa, the princess lifts her feet, a slave girl throws on the tiles a large floorcloth ; seagulls stopped under the domes' carillons, shake their wings over the glass roof ; the princess releases the foot of the slave, who, his leg washed, the wound on his knee softened by the princess's saliva, moves back towards the tables ; the

princess turns towards lerissos her bloody face, half opens her mouth weltering in blood, a pink saliva foams upon her gums :

— As you see, blood, even the vilest, stifles my melancholy. When their blood spurts no more, when they wander, in the Palace, in the gardens, again it grips me, it shatters my bones, I get up, I follow the slaves, I disturb their works so that they hurt themselves ; I give a small knife to a squatting child, a needle or scissors to a little girl sitting at my feet. Animals' blood fills me with horror.

At dawn I rise, I awaken Mantinee ; we walk out into Ecbatane ; in the streets I bend my body creased by the night, over the streams of blood : from slaves or rebels killed during the night I take blood within my open hands and I drink it, Mantinee quivering at the footpath's edge and looking away ; the gush from the trucks soaks my dress, freezes my forehead and underneath, the fever that makes it bulge.

Back inside the Palace, I go to bed and close my mouth over the blood I drank, until evening.

At noon, the princess lying inside her room, and lerissos and Mantinee chasing each other across the Palace's attics, the field officers get out of their private cars, crowd inside the terrace's small staircase, their drivers sprawl on the front seat, light cigarettes, take bottles and fruits out of their pockets, remove their cap, put on the radio, whistle at girls, free or slaves alike, stand up on the seat and unbutton themselves as they pass.

lerissos, forehead veiled with cobwebs, hands thrown forward, falls over Mantinee buried inside a basket filled with old shawls ; he lies upon her, tears the shawls covering her up, takes her mouth, weighs his belly down on her thighs ; their salivas wet the shreds of the shawls, the loops of the shawls get caught in their teeth ; lerissos presses his lips and, underneath, his jaw where two teeth are broken — a fall, long ago on the stones, as a child, in front of the chief who tried to catch him — upon Mantinee's chest ; with the teeth, he unbuttons the top of the dress, nibbles the breasts, to the nipples, on which he spits slightly and shakes his powdery hair ; then, moving back and squatting, he tucks up the dress, both his hands covering the belly and the navel, and lowers his face towards the cunt which he licks, his lips trembling on the top of the fur, Mantinee's knees squeezing lerissos's shoulders, her arms unfolded along her body, in her opened hands sweat sparkles, like stars, among the folds.

In the middle of the banquet, a field officer, by clumsiness, overturns a sauceboat on the head of a small slave squatting by his feet and holding his mother's dress ; the mother, gripping the sauceboat in her fist, squats down, wipes the sauce on the child's head with a tail of her blouse, the child, lying on his back, is panting, his eyelids burnt, eyes covered with sauce, mouth shut, chokes ; his raised knees retract, his hands open against his hips, the slave, silent, but her cheeks bathed in tears, lifts her child in her arms, throws the sauceboat on the

table, and runs to the vestibule ; the princess, weakened, her forehead glowing, watches the fir trees :

— This child is going to die ; his father, born from a whore, the prince pulled him out, when still a child, of the brothel where he lived, naked all day, blood and bones injected with gall, limbs weakened by constant twisting and forced somnolence ; in the palace, in spite of his diseases, he bewitches all the girls and all the women ; his hovel, inside the kennels, resounds till dawn with their screams and their laughter ; he is a good stud.

A slave, arriving from the kitchens, bends and whispers in the princess's ear :

— Well then, bring his things and throw them in the fir tree.

The slave leaves then comes back, he holds in his arms the little slave's playsuit and his toys : a boat made of bark and a top ; the princess fondles them :

— It smells of milk. Horror for me, the blood drinker.

And the slave throws them in the fir tree.

Mantinee, standing behind the princess, watches lerissos whose fingers are trembling over a half eaten quail's head ; lerissos looks up, smiles, his teeth grind the head, the eye sockets, the skull, the cheeks ; the princess sees lerissos smile to Mantinee, she continues to speak to the field officer facing her, but in the evening, when lerissos has gone back to Leuctres, she throws herself on Mantinee, she hits her with her fists and tramples her on the tiled floor ; then, seeing her injured, beaten up, unconscious, she drinks the blood wherever it spurts and covers the body with her hands, her tears, her hair.

At dawn, alone she goes to drink the blood, along the footpaths ; she prowls around the slaughterhouses, not to watch the blood of the beasts, but only to see if those who kill them hurt themselves with their knives ; then, she crosses the paved yards, her dress trails in the blood, swells around her loins, in the sharp wind, catches a heap of severed heads : sheep, pigs, calves, horses, the heads collapse, rats come out of them, their fur bloody ; the princess whose knees are weakening, pulls her dress, gets her foot caught in a rail ; young men, leaning against a tip wagon, are cutting, against their chest, sweetcorn pancakes ; the princess watches the knife cut through the bread and stop on the thumb ; she enters the central building, the animals' cries make the windows shake ; the princess makes her way between the tip wagons ; the apprentices walk in the pools of blood, pat their bloody hair ; one of them bears on his cheek the mark of a kid's foot ; on the tiling water gushes out from under the cubicles' dividing walls, carries shreds and shit ; two apprentices are fighting under the meat hooks, shaken, the hooks jingle ; the princess lifts the curtains of the cubicles where apprentices, under the command of the master butcher, stripped to the waist, apron sliding on the thighs, hold back the beasts and slit their throats, their hair shaking under the neon and the beasts' horns hooked to the navel. The princess, her forehead wet

with pink sweat, holds the curtain lifted ; the apprentices' muscles spring up ; boys' legs against horses' legs ; apprentice masters clumsily butcher a horse, the horse's tongue winds around the apprentice's wrist ; the horse presses its front leg's hoof on the apprentice's thigh, the hoof tucks up and stretches the shorts as far as the lower part of the belly, uncovering part of the hair and the apprentice's cock, while he, bending over the horse, turns the knife in the throat, the other hand hooked to the fuming nostrils. Then he pulls the knife out of the horse's throat ; a kick of the horse pushes the knife, gripped in the fist, against the thigh ; the blade slides to the root of the cock uncovered by the horse's hoof, slashes under the hair ; the blood spurts on the black locks ; the apprentice, his hand still holding the knife, strokes with his thumb the bloody hair ; the princess has dashed forward, jostles the apprentices and the master butcher, squats down against the apprentice's leg, takes it, her hands move up to the thigh, her lips settle upon the hem of the shorts, her teeth bump into the horse's hoof, her tongue burrows into the mass of hair and blood, at the root of the cock, her throat throbs against the hoof, her turned-up lips, consumed, sparkle ; the apprentice, motionless, gazing vacantly, the knife held tight above the princess's hair, moves his lips, his nostrils are quivering, sweat veils his eyes, sticks his eyebrows together ; the muscles of his leg and of his thighs are bulging ; the princess draws the blood, the apprentice's locks enter her nostrils, her right eye is closed on the shorts, the other eye watches the veiled eye of the dying horse.

The master butcher, leaning against the cubicle's dividing wall, his apprentices standing in a circle around him, their knives pressed to their hips ; the apprentice held by the princess at the knee and at the buttock, lets his knife rest upon the princess's hair, which he begins to stroke at the temples then at the shoulders, he takes the hair in his hand, makes it roll on his wrist, his nails claw the princess's bared temples, while she, her thighs moving apart under the dress, and her cunt-lips covered with semen, squeezes the apprentice's buttock and knee, and nibbles at the root of the cock, her tongue covering the small cut where blood comes no more ; the apprentice's cock hardens, grows taut, rises against the princess's nostrils, but rounding her tongue inside her mouth filled by blood, she stands up again, her hands sliding along the apprentice's hips ; she wipes her lips with the palm of her hand, glances at the apprentices and escapes from the cubicle ; the apprentice grips the knife in his fists, he bends over the horse whose legs are stirring on the tiles, he strikes its head up with his fist, thrusts the knife inside the throat next to the first wound, the horse shakes its head, its back trembling under the apprentice's bare foot ; blood spurts into the apprentice's eye, streams on his cheeks, on his throat, on his belly, under the shorts, down to the knees. Two squatting apprentices maintain the horse's legs ; the master butcher takes a lead sledgehammer from an angle of the cubicle, lifts it ; the apprentice steps away, the mass of lead falls upon the horse's head ; its legs shaking between the

apprentices' fists, it growls, its eyes close, its nostrils fume above the wounds of the throat ; its mouth half opens, blood mixed with foam gushes out from between the teeth, runs into the nostrils.

The princess, her dress stained, runs along the walls, the wagtails fly out of the downy holes, shake their wings against her hair or her cheeks ; the sentries bending at the edges of the walls, chest leaning against the granite, scratch it with the point of their knives ; the princess looks up. A sentry is asleep, helmet pulling his head on the granite, his mouth swollen by sleep, blowing off the quartz dust ; the princess strides over a pile of seaweed from which a little arm sticks out, eaten by worms ; the dress sweeps the seaweed along, half uncovering a child's body, naked and marked by tanks' caterpillars ; a rat, out from under the body, grapples on to the bottom of the dress, biting the hem ; another one rolls inside a tin, then he jumps onto the child's belly, scampers as far as the throat, leaving on the white chest a trail of rust.

An old woman — the skin of her lips has covered her ring — squatting against the wall, throws wood in a small fire, between her legs :

— Eat, drink, little ones, bury yourselves into his soft flesh, so that his bones and his muscles keep you prisoners.

She's watching for the rats : they run upon the body, tear it, plunge into the wounds, their snout lifting the skin ; inside the mouth, under the armpits, between the buttocks and the belly and around the penis, they stir ; when all have dug in, the old woman rises, bends over the corpse, covers the openings with pieces of tarpaulin ; the rats turn around inside the wound, prop themselves against the muscles, but the old woman grips their heads between her fingers and throws them all alive, and squeaking, into the blaze. Those who are tearing the body from within, and searching for a hole to escape, she throws her hands on their body and they quiver under her fingers ; she pushes them towards the joints, towards the hollows of the belly and of the throat, she squashes them there, her fist digging in the skin — spattered with blood underneath, growing cold.

A rat is burrowing into the jaw and the cheeks, the eyes lift, the ears move ; the old woman squeezes the temples between her opened hands ; the child's gums, torn his tongue and the inside of his mouth and the bottom of the palate, a hole of blood closed by the teeth ; the rat turns over inside this bath of blood and enamel ; the old woman pushes the piece of tarpaulin inside the mouth, the rat, driven into the throat up to the loins, bites and pulls the tarpaulin ; then he turns again, crosses the throat, digs between the lungs ; the old woman, standing again, picks up a stick in the mud, around which barbed wire is wound : with it she strikes the child's chest, the rat disappears under the lungs, she lifts them up ; the torn flesh makes a rasping sound ; the belly swollen by rain, the rat settles there. The old woman strikes the belly, the wire tears the navel, pricks the rat's mouth, the old woman strikes, the rat squeaks, shaking its paws in the blood,

it hides under the bones of the belly's lower part, the wired stick smashes them ; the old woman pulls the rat through the wound and throws it in the fire ; then, squatting, she eats the grilled rats ; falls asleep until noon, her back against the wall ; when she awakens, again the rats are covering the dead body ; the old woman strangles and clubs them, the blood, lit up by the evening sun, falls back in a golden rain over her wrists. When the body is all torn and can't be used as a bait any more, she drags it into the blaze and roasts it over a slow heat ; then, having eaten it, her hands pulling and holding the legs and spreading them, and her teeth covered by tepid ash, she lolls back over the bones and sleeps like this, mouth opened to the night's rain, until dawn, when, rising, she wanders along the walls, and goes down to the rubbish dumps ; and when she has seen, thrown over the rubbish or coiled up underneath, a little corpse with bare lips, her heart throbs within her bosom, her hands tremble in the rain while she draws them near the body, which the rats are holding back by the hair of its head or its penis or its armpits ; she takes the child in her arms or, if he's too heavy, takes him and drags him by the feet, to the foot of the walls ; a little slave comes to the dump carrying a pail of shit ; the handle is cutting his hand, his bare feet are sinking into the soiled snow.

The old woman sees the child, she brings out a penholder made of false ivory from her bosom, she turns it in the sun, the child comes nearer ; his bare legs are wet with urine — his master, an old man free but poor, and of whom he's the only slave, has pissed on his legs when getting out of bed — the old woman grabs him by the shoulder ; the princess is running under the walls ; the old woman, the child touching her wrist, holds out the penholder :

— Look inside, one sees the island of Inamenas, taken from your ancestors by the men of Ecbatane.

The child opens his eyes, the old woman holds the pen close to the eyes of the child, who is gripping her wrist ; the old woman, then, turns the pen onto the child's lips, and plunges it inside his mouth ; the child yells, spits, bites the penholder, scratches the old woman's wrist ; the pen tears the bottom of his mouth, blood mixed with foam runs down the child's chin and chest ; the princess has looked behind, she is walking back ; the old woman pushes the child by the mouth towards a small shack, where the garbage men's tools are kept ; the child, stepping back, puts a foot inside the pail of turds, which cover his leg and spatter his shorts ; the old woman knocks the child down among the tools, shuts the door.

The princess, lips moving, bathed with rosy foam, goes round the shack, leans and rubs her shoulder against the door ; the old woman tears the penholder out of the child's mouth, and puts it back inside her bosom, the pen is bent ; the child growls, from his mouth comes out a noise of shingles, his hand gets caught to the prongs of a pitchfork, the old woman takes the pitchfork and pierces the hand, the child's legs fold up under his belly. The princess, her shoulder torn by

the wood covered with nails, groans, whimpers, nibbles the door latch ; until noon, excited by the smell of blood spilled on the mud floor, behind the door, she writhes in the sun, the apprentice's blood drying on her lips, and on her cheeks. The old woman, squatting on the child, drinks his blood, swallows the softened shreds ; the child lifts his free hand, strokes the old woman's hair ; but she, her mouth covering the child's mouth, licks his lips and his gums and pulls with her teeth the shreds lacerated by the pen ; the child, his head raised, vomits a black blood which the old woman drinks at once.

A trumpet blows at the top of the walls, in the pink and damp wind ; the child lets go of the old woman's wrist, his pierced hand pushes away the old woman's mouth, who bites it and licks it at the place of the wound ; then, pushing the door, the old woman, one foot on the child's belly, throws his head out of the shack : she pulls the body, she drags it on the mud, all around the rubbish ; but the princess rushes forward, crouches down, holds back the head jumping over the tins and the broken tools and her mouth wide open quivers above the red mouth of the child.

The old woman turns back, picks up a piece of iron, throws it in the loins of the princess whose face comes crashing down on the child's face, and her mouth covers his, and eats the clots of blood ; her hands clinging to the throat, to the chin and to the cheeks, claw the pallid skin softened by the rain and the steam of grease ; the old woman pulls the body on an iron bed with bent bars ; she lifts a slat from the bed and tightens it upon the belly of the child, who suffocates. The princess drinks the blood thrown up by this suffocation ; two strong slaves are searching for her, in the slaughterhouses, apprentices throw knives between their legs ; under the walls, sentries spray them with earth and piss on them ; they see her bending over the mouth of the dying child, her loosened hair caught in the bed slats, the old woman thrashing the rubbish, and awakening the rats ; the two slaves come forward, they fondle the child's belly, his penis, the hair where little slugs are coiling, the thigh, the knees covered by the unbuttoned and bloody shorts :

— Your Highness, the blood turns sour, the child is dying.

She looks up, her lips come unstuck from those of the child, her hand which gripped the throat to hold and throw back the blood into the mouth, relaxes, rises, opens ; on the princess's cheeks, on her lips, the mark of the child's lips and teeth ; the princess holds out her arms to the slaves, they support her, her hands cling to their shoulders, and redden them with blood ; the old hag, crouching on her crate, now gets up, walks to the bed, pulls the child from under the slat, and lays him down on the rubbish ; the rats, at once, leap on the body, move its head, its wrists and its penis ; one of them, burrowing its head in the child's mouth, nibbles his teeth ; the child growls, the rat starts and comes out from the mouth again, its claws buried in the nostrils ; once the old woman has killed and eaten all the rats, she drags the body into the fire, head tilted to the side, pulling the

embers ; the child, whose chin and throat are burning, his knees move upwards, then his rattle wheezes through the teeth, a spurt of blood comes out of his mouth, immediately grilled by the flame and the head rolls on the purple ember ; the old woman turns the body over, picks up the embers with a piece of shovel and throws it over the body ; cooked, she pulls the feet, spreads the legs and, her breath stirring up the ash on the thighs, she snatches the penis and gobbles it up, raising her arms.

The princess, lying on her bed, her brow hit by the rays filtering through the closed shutters, she smacks her lips ; Mantinee, squatting at her side, shuts her nostrils to the scent of blood and death spread upon the bed ; she holds the hand of the princess till she awakens.

The officer from the Northern army, naked, strokes the roof tiles with the palm of his hand, draws it back, warmed up, against his thigh, he rises, crosses the room, treads Aïssa's head under his foot, the boy, lying across the door, wakes up, stretches his arms :

— Come and sit on the window sill.

The boy gets up, the blanket slides from his shoulders, the officer pushes him towards the window where he sits down, and pulling at the boy's shorts and shirt, creased between his bare thighs, he fondles his nape and watches the princess sitting in the garden, her mouth bloody and her hand resting on the chair where Mantinee comes to sit.

When the young girl appears, the officer's cock straightens up and beats against the boy's loins ; she sits down, the princess draws back her hand, leans her face over Mantinee's, who pushes back, with the tip of her fingers, that mouth where the blood still fumes.

A warship enters the harbour, its turrets make their way behind the chimneys and the flags of Ecbatane ; the little slaves are bathing naked in the estuary, under the cape of Leuctres, enemy sentries, sun flowing on their shoulders aching under the heavy coat and the rifle sling, place the barrel on the granite or the wood, and fire at those little white bodies marked by nails and teeth ; the bullets ricochet, fume on the sunny water, run through the bodies, the blood spatters, the slaves' hair sinks, unrolls under the water, winds around the legs, around the neck and the arm, mixes with the hair of the cocks, the blood weighs down, covers the dying slaves' face, their cocks where they place their fist ; the sentries laugh, strike the granite and the wood with the gun butts.

Women, hands to their hair, they run along the estuary, scream, bang their foreheads against the torn trees, fall in the sludge, pick themselves up, enter the water to the waist, suffocate ; one of them holds in her hand a spoon smeared with barley gruel. They plunge their heads under water, pull their children to the surface, and hoist them on their shoulders. On the bank, they lay them, among the dead leaves, on the mounds of dry earth. The sentries fire again, the bullets raise

dust, under the leaves, smash the dead children's knees and the hands gripping them.

The bangs make the princess's hand quiver, on a small cut Mantinee made on her cheek while getting up from bed. The princess puts her mouth forward, licks the wound with her tongue ; Mantinee, her hands opened, bent round on her chest, leans her head slightly on her shoulder, the princess's blood runs down her cheek, a blood mixed with saliva, which the princess herself licks up to Mantinee's neck.

The young officer, clasping Aïssa against his belly, gives a start, the boy falls asleep in the sweat of the soldier, whose hand burrowed inside Aïssa's shorts plays with his cock. Mantinee's throat is tense under the cruel sun, blood burns inside the princess's mouth, tears roll down Mantinee's nostrils, the princess plucks them and drinks them. At the windows of the verandah, the crowd of quivering slaves, their eyes crusted over, the corner of their lips too, watch the princess of bloody shadows. Their children lie asleep at their feet, their breath clouds the windows, their half-open lips are stuck to the glass.

Mantinee searches for the princess, with two strong slaves ; at the edge of the estuary, guarded by a section, sitting on a halftrack's running board, the young enemy officer listens to Aïssa playing his violin ; the boy is standing, leaning on the mudguard ; small rats run inside the tracks, their tail dragging in the mud.

The soldiers see the slaves and behind them, Mantinee ; they spring forward, they seize them by the wrists, they push them in front of the officer :

— Who are you looking for ?

— The princess.

Dawn makes the blood freeze in the veins and at the wounds' edge.

— Come, you.

He touches Mantinee's hip, the soldiers hold the slaves leaning against the halftrack's bonnet. Mantinee sits on the officer's knees. Aïssa lays his violin on the mudguard :

— Keep on playing.

The officer looks Mantinee straight in the eyes, her cheeks are covered with silver :

— Warm me up. Women, I hate you. I'm as cold as ice. My blood turns black inside my veins, love me, pierce me through, open me, make my blood spurt with my semen. At night I cry and in the morning, but my tears are not mingled with blood.

He plunges his head in Mantinee's breasts, he nibbles the top of her dress, wind raises the dust and the sand under the halftrack and throws them against Aïssa's bare legs. The officer looks up :

— Carry her inside the cabin.

The soldiers take Mantinee by the head and by the feet ; they lift her up,

they throw her on the seat, her head bangs into the steering wheel ; the officer climbs on the running board, a soldier lets his cold hand touch Mantinee's uncovered belly ; the tucked-up skirt is hooked to the gear stick ; the officer strikes the soldier's forehead, he lies over Mantinee, he parts her thighs tightened by the frost, he takes the slave's mouth, his saliva sparkles in her ears and on the hair stuck to the temples. When he rises again, the sunlit semen streaming on Mantinee's belly, a black powder falls and veils his eyes and his forehead. He clenches his fist, he tilts his head back, his tears get in his eyes, run on his forehead towards his hair, the soldiers draw their daggers and plunge them in the slaves' legs, the blood spurts, streams upon the dew ; their legs sliced, the slaves fall on their knees.

Aïssa holds his violin, the bow trembles on the string ; his knees bend ; the slaves groan, their foreheads becomes pale, then the blood reddens the scalp under the hair. The officers draws his gun, he strikes the slaves' temples with the butt. Mantinee, inside the cabin, picks herself up, brings her dress back over her legs. Gunshots in the upper part of Ecbatane : a hundred prisoners, jaws and knees smashed, heart burst, fall in the mud of the central prison.

— Kill them all, kill them all, that their blood unfurls towards the highest seas.

He hasn't buttoned himself up again, his cock hangs on the cloth of the battledress, the cry shakes him, releases the last drops of sperm ; they spatter Aïssa's leg. The officer catches Mantinee's hand, he takes her along towards the surf, he makes her sit among the foam, he squats down there, takes water in his hand, pours it over Mantinee's forehead and mouth, then shows his bare cock ; the young girl joins her opened hands, fills them with water, the officer bathes his gluey penis.

Opposite them, on the shore of Leuctres, a house is burning, soldiers run around it, the trees catch fire, it creeps under the grass, explodes, tears the snow on the sides of the promontory ; the birds, caught unaware by the fire, shoot out and fall in the virgin snow, choking, their belly stiff and feet in the air ; the officer leans his thigh against Mantinee's cheek ; the violin sings in the icy air ; the slaves' blood streams in the cracks of the frozen earth.

Ierissos, in the evening, on the road to Ouranopolis, catches the enemy officer's platoons unaware ; the ambush resounds in the night, the wounded crawl to the fir trees and hide behind the trunks ; the officer, Ierissos hunts him in the tall, frosty grass ; he falls on a small frozen pond, Ierissos plunges his dagger in his chest, the blade pierces through the ice, the officer groans, blood spurts from his mouth ; on his wounded body, Ierissos recognizes Mantinee's perfume ; the ice gives way, a star-shaped crack spreads under the officer's head ; Ierissos stands up, he aims at the throat, he fires, the body starts on the broken ice and sinks into the dark water, blood spattering the transparent ice ; inside the halftrack, slaves

and soldiers, knives brandished, fight hand to hand. The cushions' horsehair flies around their legs ; the wounded bite the bloody bark of the fir trees ; a soldier and a slave, waist clasped inside the turret, grasp each other's throat ; the slave hits the soldier's belly with his knee, the soldier spits in his face, saliva runs on the ring, the slave drinks ; the soldier breaks loose using his dagger which he plunges in the slave's belly, then he clubs the slave with his rifle butt, he passes a hand on his injured throat, he turns the dagger over inside the slave's belly, draws it out, wipes the bloody blade on the hair of the collapsed slave ; he jumps from the halftrack ; lerissos sees him, he shoots him, but his foot slides on the snow, lerissos falls on the small of his back ; two enemy soldiers, hiding behind the mudguard spring forward ; lerissos, on one hand draws himself up, he machine-guns the soldiers who collapse, their heads in the marks left by the halftrack, their breath of agony melting the snow under their mouth.

Aïssa runs towards the pond, his violin falls on the ice, slides in a moonbeam ; around the strings dragonflies, shot out of the semi-darkness of the reeds, flicker ; Aïssa walks on the pond, his nostrils opened to the fragrance of ice and blood ; he picks up the violin softly pushed by the wind on the ice ; through the creaking shell he sees the officer's corpse held back under the ice, mouth stuck to the floe and sparklings instead of eyes.

The prisoners taken by lerissos escape before dawn, carrying Aïssa away ; as the battle has filled them with lust, they go to the brothel pushing Aïssa in front of them, and having no more money, they sell the boy, in exchange for a whore for each of them, every night until their next transfer to the Northern front.

The boy-seller pushes Aïssa into a small cubicle closed by a curtain made of corrugated iron :

— You shall fuck the men and the women who lift the curtain and come to sit on the bed by your side ; you shall play the violin while they undress you.

On the Northern front, the enemy held tight in iron and in cloth, his veins and his lips burst with the frost ; sperm and urine freeze as soon as they gush out ; torn metal sheets cut hip and hand ; the rifle barrel, frozen, magnetizes the skin and flays it alive ; the hanged men's feet beat the soldiers' brow ; nations rot on horsehair, biting the iron and the wood of frames spattered by their shit. The defeated enemy, freezing, dies on the warm entrails of his victims ; the frost and the ropes snap the boughs ; the hand of the master of war quivers and so does his lip ; in the Spring, along a fallen wall of his capital ablaze, he fondles the cheeks and the eyes of tired children he sends back to the front ; he fondles the hair coming out of the helmet or of the cap with blue mica eyeshade.

In Ecbatane liberated, the captain, flown out of Buxtéhude, restores the Republic ; but, beyond the sea, the people submitting to Ecbatane, having liberated

it, hope that the mother country will set them free ; lerissos, inside the capital, snatches the slaves of his army from the traders' hands ; the old chief, tried, sentenced to death, then reprieved, lerissos meets him again, secretly, on the island where he is imprisoned ; Ecbatane laughs, copulates with barbarians ; inside cellars, boys dance, naked, wet with sweat and spirits, their belly wrapped in enemy flags marked with the blood of slaughtered patriots, girls pass between the tables, breasts and cunts covered with swastikas — symbols of the former waster of war — and photos of starving children ; a young boy from the North, saved from famine, through the smoke and the steam, mimes on stage the bombing of his neighbourhood ; the officer who owns him, trades him for a bowl of caviar.

The captain and lerissos build fortified villages for the slaves whom Ecbatane disarmed and refused to set free : armed sentries watch the gates : the adolescents, sons of the former masters of those slaves, come to shout and laugh in front of the gates, they throw with slings little pebbles at the sentries' heads ; the captain buys back more than two hundred slaves and places them in those villages.

Ecbatane, soiled, torn by the purification, weakened, reduced to the rank of secondary nation watches its patriots return from the Northern camps, the face of death and its precise and revolutionary implements ; an art is born with no place for man, for safety. The soap girls use to wash themselves, the sunny air penetrating the bathroom windows, have the smell and flabbiness of a dead body.

God, who has been at the point of death for three centuries, dies. His priests, in vain, strip the ritual service of his worship, whiten the walls of his temples. God had hidden the secret heart of man, man now sees his bestial heart, his eyes are unsealed, the smell of the beast chokes him, God dies at the moment of man's greatest solitude.

lerissos, one night, walks by the captain's side in Ecbatane asleep under the rain ; the sandy foam of the estuary hits the broadside of illuminated ships where unbuttoned seamen, play cards, laugh and fondle the breasts of girls with lips soiled with sperm and wine.

Along the wharf, lit-up shops are filled with fruits, metal, grain ; a small recessed shop, reached by a staircase swarming with rats, lerissos and the captain climb upstairs ; behind the glass panes clouded and soiled with spatters of shit and spittle, a narrow corridor, cut halfway by a turning counter lined with skid-mounted cages ; inside the cages and on a tiling covered with sawdust and shreds of blankets, little girls in rags and tatters, three in each cage, their hair dishevelled under the raw light of neon, squatting, delouse themselves, lick their lips and hands ; on the bars, placards : price, origin. Through the window, lerissos hears the murmur from their lips, their saliva and their muscles.

Ecbatane subdues, crushes the rebellions of its colonies. The captain is dismissed from the State. Formerly tactical, the army becomes a police force. The

State is in the hands of rebels who, in Ecbatane's liberation saw only the ejection and murder of the occupying enemy ; those who hoped for a liberation from the interior enemy ; disappointed, disarmed, suspects in their own family, retire to educational and athletic action. Gradually, the less pure among them agree to return to the State ; there they are, at once, implicated in colonial repressions or in emergency alliances.

But, their presence, even uneasy, in the State, produces an ever-increasing social consciousness ; the slaves are set free or reserved only for pleasure and for war. New laws protect their labour, the leisure and education of their children ; cities are built for them exclusively ; they cannot rebel any more ; many, among their former masters, envy them, ruined by the fall of the patriarchal regime of collaboration with the enemy and the importing into Ecbatane of too costly industrial equipment, and of risky investment methods.

Ierissos walks in now-deserted Leuctres, Mantinee sits on a wooden bench ; his fist strokes the palisades and the fallen thatches ; at the bottom of knocked-down huts, his foot hits, crushes broken celluloid toys ; on the plaster-work is written : « Rabia is my lover » ; Ierissos feels a lump in his throat : Mantinee, her scarf floating over her shoulders, is watching the sea and the evening star reflected there. Ierissos comes close, he strokes Mantinee's hair ; under his nails, dried blood from the ambush at Ouranopoliis :

— I go in for disbelief, with a quivering of joy. My forehead, I want it crushed and squeezed by the bow of a litter, and my shoulders soiled by vomit. O doubt, only eternity.

Then, having slept till dawn within the arms and the wet breasts of Mantinee, he rises, he walks down, he sits in the forge, his arms and his legs bare against the fire and has a ring cut into his lower lip ; then, the blacksmith pushes him into the small courtyard over the estuary :

— Remain standing against the wind, let the silver cool down.

His lips swell ; on a rabbit cage, the blacksmith lays a toolbox filled with tarnished rings :

— Those I tore off from the lips of the freed slaves, men, women, children ; after, blood would run on their throat, their hand would quiver. Look at this small ring, I took it from a boy, he was biting my hand, he was falling in a faint, I made him drink a glass of alcohol, I held him up, holding my arm he walked around the small courtyard, his blood splattered his shirt and his shorts down to the thigh's hem ; one of my rabbits escaped from its cage, all white, and rolled in the blood. Often, I would tear off more than twenty rings in one day ; my wrist, my chest, when I went to bed, were covered with foam, blood and tears.

By evening, in Ecbatane, the newspapers are torn from hand to hand : Inamenas, during the night, has risen in rebellion, on ten strategic points of its territory : some settlers are slaughtered, their children killed with axes or thrown

into wells. The Government decrees the dispatch of troop reinforcements to the island.

A ship leaves Ecbatane, soldiers shout on the deck, vomit over the rigging. Ierissos, Mantinee taken back by the princess, at night, in the middle of the sea, brings buckets of soup to the soldiers ; the soldiers, drunk, chest and neck smeared with vomit, knock him down and plunge his head inside a bucket of scalding hot soup, until death.

SECOND CHANT

A city was rising out of the marshes, bordered at the east by the sea, at the west by the estuary of the river, Sebaou. The ancient working class district plunged into the marsh, towards the river where shacks made of bamboo and sheet metal vibrate day and night, built on piles. The new, residential district, is built on an artificial hill and protected from the slums by a screen of lime trees, almond trees and gum trees where the kites of officers' and higher civil servants' children get caught. The soldiers of the army occupying the island and maintaining order, those stationed at Inamenas, and those from the deep ends of the island who come to relax here from month to month, live under the trees, below the villas and the palaces, in barracks of concrete and green aluminium. At night, they bend over the roofs of the ancient district, they shout, they sing, they vomit in the moonlight and the quivering of leaves, and the smell of decay comes upon the silent slums. There, live families decimated by conscription and betrayal, pressed by hunger, desire and fear. At night, groups of children ragged and tattered, hair stuck to the skull by an unknown blood, run along the muddy alleys, fall in the rubbish, ride on each other in the soiled grass, knees plunged into the layer of human and animal shit. The women, hair glued to the mouth by the lipstick, in the light of half-opened doors, call while pulling up their stockings under the dress. Screams then shoot out of the piles of wood, the street angles, the bushes, the deserted latrines. Men smoke in front of the houses, sitting in circles over the mud. A gunshot tears the night, a sob springs up from a shack. The children, jostling the women busy fastening their garters, throw themselves on the soup, the cats claw the roof's metal sheets.

In the distance, out of the ruts of night, leap starving beasts, they slash the injured storks and the stray children. Human and animal cries then rise from the earth and men watch with indifference the mutilated night. The beasts, heavy, run away, their claws drawn in, towards the top of the hills, jump over ravines, carrying, between their fangs, throbbing prey. Springs gush out, newly born, in the darkness.

In the morning, the young beggars lying on the ground like animal hides,

sleep, their hardened cocks crushed between the belly and the wet stone. Children, out of bed early, trample them uttering hoarse cries. The grass is freezing, they roll in it half-naked, under the gaze of sentries doing the third spell of night duty. These, shivering in their drenched cloaks, rejoin the centre of the camp. The women, pinned down on their straw mattresses, are hoping for returns, for liberations. The beggars on awakening shake their tatters and drag themselves along to the balmy glades where the sun is fuming. An adulteress is weeping deep inside the village for her lost lover and children. The lover runs among the heathers, losing his blood. Soldiers, young, the nape of their neck shaven, standing around a truck, are beating their breast with their fists. Inside the cabin, one of them wakes up, his half-shut eyes see the man bending towards the ground, like a shrub ; the soldier shouts. They all bring their rifles to the shoulder and fire. The man leaps, stretching his arms sideways and falls, on the elbows, on the knees, gets up again, and tries to escape. The soldiers spring forward, they overtake him, they knock him down head against the earth. One of them presses both his hands on the man's nape, two others kneel on his back and on his legs. The man has become silent, his skin, his muscles softened. A fourth soldier draws a dagger out of his battledress and, swift, slashes the man's throat ; the blood spurts, spatters the mud and the soldiers' knees. The one who pressed the nape withdraws his hand :

— You cut me. Bloody army. Bloody army.

And he jumps on the slaughterer and grips his throat with bloody fingers ; the soldiers, up on their feet again, trample the bloody and mobile head with their shoes hardened by frost. The grass is full of windings and flights under the blinding brightness of the sky.

Thus awakens the lower city. On the other side of the tree curtain, on the artificial hill, chocolate and tea are shaking inside the fine cups ; provisional getting dressed, furtive departure of sleepy lovers, anguish, servants waiting, relief of sentries, taking over of command, children washing.

Below, soldiers stripped to the waist, a piece of linen around their neck, plunge their head into the pond. Warrant officers, epaulette askew, prick their shoulders and elbows with rush shoots. The prisoners come out of the cellars, sentries carrying loaded rifles push them towards the latrines. At the pond, cheeks barred with bloody lather, the soldiers look at each other through glass triangles.

The lower district is crowded with incomplete families, squalling, dirty, children are swarming there : many cannot recognize their natural parents any more and live in several different homes ; the authorities neglect the children's civil status. There are no more men, only the elderly and the crippled, and lunatics back from questioning. The boys have disappeared, girls disappear, their torn dresses caught in thistle and ivy. Often, while playing, children discover disfigured corpses at the bottom of deserted ponds, heads putrid under the helmets.

Countryside and sky are bright. In the evening, stray horses gallop freely along the sunken roads, rub their hindquarters against the hedges. Young people, laughing, come out of the villas on the seaside, children wearing short clothes of light flannel step over bramble bushes, dam the rivers with shingles, cry in the girl servants' holland dresses. No playing near the lower city where children dirty and full of outrageous depravities hold out with their tattooed arms half-strangled birds. If two children, in thaw or middle summer days, dare fall in love and hide to play and fondle each other, once discovered they are beaten, often to death. By soldiers, if a child is of the lower city ; by the ringleader, if a child is of the seafront and the upper city.

One ringleader is named Kment. His natural mother is in jail. His brothers, his sisters are her three lovers' offspring. Their adoptive father is dying by inches, inside the shack. The only child he got from his wife, is killed by her. Pregnant, she crushes her belly against the walls, she reddens it by the flames from the gas ring ; but the child, his throat scarred by the abortionist's fork, screams, and the father takes him and keeps him gluey and chilled under his blanket. The mother grinds her knives in front of the child's eyes, she laughs, she covers his head with saucepans, she lets him sleep in his shit and in daytime, dogs follow him and burrow their snout under his rompers. When a young boy, at night, she soils his clothes, and beats him at dawn ; or else, slips a few coins inside his pockets, and puts him to shame. She ties him up naked, belly against the back of the chair, throws a ball of wool to her other children and these bind his knees, chest, penis and neck and pull at his teeth. Kment puts an end to those games, knocks down his mother squatting over the gas ring, twists her arm, boils water, plunges his mother's head where the sperm of the father and the one of the lovers is drying ; then he sits in front of the mirror hanging from the dividing wall, and his hands search, among the soiled linen : stockings, bras, towel and facecloth, the scent bottle ; he opens it and turns it over and pours it on the hair ; he bites the scented hair and his tears roll down, without wetting it ; his hands cover the bared breasts and the mother, turning her face, kisses his chest and the edge of the armpits, under the tatters. One evening, Kment roaming the countryside with his gang, the boy returns from play, his blouse soiled by mud. The mother grabs him by the hair, gets him naked, plunges him in a basin of icy water, keeps his head beneath the surface. Her anger appeased, she pulls him out of the water. The child moves no more, his head falls back, his lips are white. The mother, with throbbings inside her throat, lays him on the bed, covers his lifeless body with sea salt and rubs it with a piece of holland cloth, so strongly that on the neck and around the navel, the skin rolls up. Lips foaming, the other children watch, squatting in the dark, at the foot of the parents' bed, stained sheets falling on both sides upon the mud floor. The child, revived, smiles to his mother, holds out to her his closed hands, but she, jealous to see him thus move and love again, biting the child's

clasped hands and clenching them between her teeth, hits him at the temples with her fists ; the child grapples on to her arms, yells. At last, she lets him go, panting, bruised ; she goes out in the balmy night, her hand wiping the sweat from her brow ; the child writhes on the bed ; the elder daughter — her nascent breasts tearing through the top of her dress — comes towards the bed : — Take me in your arms, it hurts too much, it hurts too much. Carry me to the moon.

She takes him in his arms and rocks him, her hands stroking the child's battered and blackened temples, sits outside, before the moon, of which the rays refresh the chafed stomach. The mother, risen from the heap of straw and the lying lover pulling at her leg, she uncreases her dress ; steps over the straw heap, runs through the clouded place, leans her forehead against the door : the child is dead, vomiting the wool which was choking him. In the night, a storm comes from the sea, the mud weighs against the door. The mother, until dawn clinging to the cradle, protects the child's corpse, rats are grappling on to the blankets. In the morning, Kment, intoxicated, his mouth bloody, bashes the door in with his knees, throws himself on a straw mattress, folds his muddy legs under his buttocks and falls asleep ; under him a shape moans : the youngest of his brothers still alive. The mother gets up, lights a candle ; Kment, face against the ground, unfolds his legs ; his big body saws the child's chest : this one tries to get free, moves his legs and arms ; gradually, the skin of his face turning blue, his lips separate, like the mouth of a small fish pulled out of water ; the tongue vibrates at the bottom of the mouth. The mother lifts Kment's body, makes him roll on the ground, against the door ; the child suffocates, the rats pull his hair ; squatting down, the mother moves no more. At the bottom, the rats make the cradle blanket's folds tremble. When Kment wakes up at noon, they are running on the child's body in the cradle, nibbling the eyelashes and the lips.

After the mother has gone to jail, the children get reared on their own, stealing, selling themselves by the day in the mixed brothels of the lower city. Their shack smells like a fox's den. They come to sleep there now and then ; rats have made their nest in the cradle of the dead child, under the lacerated blankets. At night, the cradle rocks in the dark and the rats utter little baby cries.

Kment holds his meetings at the foot of a house in ruins where an old man lying on his own shit, is dying. He scratches his leprosy on his chest. At night, he screams and his urine fumes and sizzles in the moonlight ; children throw stones at him and burning papers. When a house is deserted, or when a man dies there of illness or of the results of torture, Kment and his gang besiege it ; they throw the half-dead man out by the window, they ransack the house and, if they find any wine, they get drunk until exhaustion of the stock. They pull the dresses out of the wardrobes, slip them on and run after each other like this through the night, with women's shrieks, bumping into the walls, the shelves, the straw cobs and pulling at their cocks under the dresses. The dead body is trampled until dawn.

The looters pierce the wheat sacks shared out every week by the army to the most poor, they roll among the grains and gorge themselves. They bite each other, their teeth knock against each other under the grains ; they plunge their head in the heap and devour the grains, grunting. The wiser pull the oil jars and smash them on the back of those sleeping half-buried under the grains. The rats run along the dividing walls, then, when all have fallen asleep, move forward, struggle in the oil, touse their fur on the islets of grain ears, climb over the bodies, drag their belly soiled with oil and grains on the looters' skin, their neck, their hands, their temples, eat the grains as far as on their half-opened lips quivering under their breath, and even inside the mouth. Now and then, the dreaming sleeper, makes a small gesture with his hand or moves his lips ; the startled rat, bites the lip or the hand, the sleeper cries, moans, does not wake up. The rats run, bustle around over the bodies, in the hollows of the cheeks, under the chin, in the hollows of the arms, in the hollows of the thighs. Outside, the jackals drag the body to the bushes. The first winds announcing dawn, through the boughs wet with dew and droppings, make the sleeping birds fall, swell the hanging linen and the tarpaulins on the armoured cars, chill the sweat on the bodies of the whores, awaken the children and the dozing sentries, lull the executioners to sleep.

The rebels hold the mountains, the forests where they feed on wild fruit and eat the monkeys who survived the napalm bombings. At the outbreak of war, soldiers of the occupation army hunt the monkeys deep in the heart of the forests ; there rebels on the watch, overpower those soldiers shaken by laughter and kill them ; their mutilated and rotting bodies are found in the woods. Headquarters then forbid the soldiers to hunt monkeys.

The headquarters have been set up on the seaside in a group of villas surrounded by barbed wire. Armed sentries in full military rig-out under the sun, protect the field officers' bathing. Those officers pinch their mens' ear, taste their soup, get for themselves some old films from the Continent. They displace populations and :

— When does our furniture arrive ?

Every day, every night, young people from Ecbatane, hardly grown out of childhood, die, mutilated, castrated, slaughtered, crucified, chopped to pieces, in order to retain for their civilian and military chiefs, justifying them by the violence of their sacrifice, wealth and political dignity, honour. Foreign reporters film those remains swarming with flies. Commandos set fire to the village closest to the place of the ambush.

Kment meets the rebels, but also some chiefs : officers and warrant officers of the occupation army. In a secret room, at the borderline between both cities, by them undressed, his belly bare in front of the gas flames, he watches water boiling for tea and the sperm is boiling inside the erect cocks of the soldiers pressed around him and breathing over his shoulders. He steals plans

from them. Fondling him makes them talkative ; in the morning, fear seizes them, they threaten Kment, but, in the evening, they search for him among the barbed wires, they implore him. As soon as they touch him, they forget their threats and their suspicions. Their men know all those things ; they give their chiefs suitable nicknames ; some, even, send to the deserted wives anonymous letters relating in detail their husbands' crepuscular work. Several wives, out of spite, give themselves to the acknowledged authors of the letters. On days of military operations, those men : quartermasters, secretaries, armourers, crowd at the gates of the villas : the children go out, to throw stones at the young natives.

Those soldiers are always wearing new clothes, eating others' rations, stealing bullets and explosives, to sell them in the city to reactionary young men, pomading the pustules of their penises and of their cheeks, fondling each other under the mosquito nets, and never fighting. They feel repugnance to combat, but live on war. Often, the commandos, back from operations, catch them and plunge them all dressed in the pond. They fine the soldiers from platoons having lost bullets or mislaid a belt loop ; after, they put the money in a box and undress in their barrackrooms the prettiest and youngest prostitutes from the lower city. Secretaries, aide-de-camps have influence on their chiefs ; indeed, they know their private life. They press hard upon those tired men, they humour their liking for sacrifice to a State that is forsaking them. Chiefs appreciate these skillful people, these pimps.

Headquarters have their own landing strips. Soldiers dug them out, at the beginning of the war. The chiefs' women and mistresses pass in front of the road works, playing cards and wineglasses in their hands, the children sprinkle each other, under the shelter of the tamarisks, with orangeade diluted with water. Soldiers can buy drinks, a glass of orangeade for two weeks' pay. Often, the servant in attendance on one of these women, catches a soldier by the epaulette and pushes him into the villa : furniture to move, curtains to hang up, vomit, turds of luxury cats and dogs... At the end of the dark room, under the closed shutters, knees striped by the rays of light, a boy or a girl in light shorts, spreads thighs, smiling to the shoulder bending over the tiled floor or perched on a stool. The young maidservant brushes past the soldier, her breasts are jutting out of the bodice, the soldier unlaces the apron's string, over the loins, his hand covers the moist belly of the servant, at the place where the pubic hair, bristled up, makes the wool swell. Then, he gets released, he returns dazzled to his work, under the sun, in the insecurity of slavery. Kment watches the streaming backs of these soldiers and their shaven napes, when he goes to visit his natural mother in the prison and his brothers and his sisters are following him, washed and combed, having left the languid or brutal company of the soldiers, in the secret rooms.

In the evening, soldiers working at these sites, return to camp, crammed in the trucks, with burning hot tilts, dazed by weariness and sun, grubby, munching

rust. Along the streets of the lower city, the trucks drive at full speed, running over dogs, brushing past old men, women, covering them with dust and grease. The soldiers, tossed about, thrown against each other, excited by those violent contacts and by the sight of women, yell, spit, stand up against the rails, raise their fists, unbutton themselves, tear off, hanging between the barracks, the dried festoons of some ancient feast and tie them around their thighs. When the dust has fallen down again over the spittle, over the pools of blood and the quivering bodies of the dogs, men come out of the houses, drag those fuming remains towards the small gardens and the pits. Later, the forgotten bodies putrefy on the spot and mix with the sand. Cats, dogs, starving children smell out these carrion slabs, exhume them and devour them aside.

Children hide to torture beasts. They catch birds, tie them up alive on a cat's back or burn them slowly on a candle flame or else bite them when still alive, at the throat. The cats, who die slowly, avoid the children, don't allow themselves to be stroked by them. A captive cat entertains the children for three days, at the end of which it dies, its limbs scattered on the ash. The animal is skinned alive or impaled, or chopped to little pieces, which the children rub against their genitals, then eat raw or cooked. Often, in the fever of these mutilations, a child cuts himself ; many, the wounds having got infected, die.

Thus live beasts and people. In terror, in cowardice. Rebels do not take part in those disturbances. They find their dignity in resistance ; they go to meet their punishment, to meet the scorn of the army : thus can they live and die holding their head high. Very soon, they come to despise those whose rights they are fighting for. The knife strikes the undecided ones, mutilates the children, as a warning. The rebels live on the servitude in which they maintain their brothers. They enjoy that luck of being in battle and of riding horses.

The governor has his palace on the top of the hill. The metropolitan government appointed him to Inamenas, in order to appease the officers' reactionary restlessness and the rebels' intransigence. The people love him : in the morning his waiting room is filled with women and children ; the soldiers watching them, wash their hands noisily, after duty. At the beginning of the war, the rebels do not intend to assassinate him ; then they understand that the fight, even deadly, serves their cause ; indeed, those on the continent who denounce this war's uselessness and savagery, need massacres to become indignant and reverse public opinion. The rebels then covet a more cruel and clumsy enemy, they decide to kill the governor. But he, straight and dreamy inside his jeep, the hair of his bare arm upon the windscreen flattened by the breeze, drives through the ravaged island, stroking the scabs on childrens' heads, refrains from kissing their eyes swarming with flies, their purulent ears ; with impunity he crosses the forests and the gorges. In the gorges, he slows down the jeep and his gaze lingers over the rocks, over the cliffs riddled with blue holes, from which ash-grey doves escape.

The soldiers of the escort kill them, the way they kill storks on the shores of the lakes, — and for this, the platoon scorns them ; the wounded doves wheel, collapse on overheated shingles, by the edge of the torrent where intermingle, in the muddy current, the bunches of bamboos and lianas. The soldiers' screams and the gunshots reverberate all along the gorge and the resonance changes from darkness to light... The governor does not dare punish :

— Keep calm, my boys, keep calm ; awoken with a start, the fels would tear us to pieces.

The soldiers calm down, open their thighs and close them on the rifle's burning hot barrel ; they doze off, head against shoulder. The trucks drive under the streaming cliffs, the road is muddy, mud spatters the soldiers' buttocks, sitting heavily on the rails. The soldiers wake up, shiver, water hits the truck's roof. Further along, it is full sun : the metal, the bright-steel sheets, the rearview mirrors sparkle and burn the fingers.

The soldiers fondle the medals and the baptismal chains on their bare chest, raise them to their lips ; the coolness of gold and silver shakes their body. Sweat runs down on the eyelashes... The governor's young wife, Emilienne, is bathing in the sea, with her stepson, Serge, the folds of the dripping swimsuit sparkle when she comes out of the water ; the afternoon, in summer, she prowls through the corridors, the verandahs and the greenhouses, her breasts uncovered a little and the palms touch them lightly... The soldiers dream, give faint kisses, faint caresses, move, stretch out their lips, their hands, upwards, grip the butt of the rifle between their thighs. In the evening, at the brothel, they ransack the rooms, and hammer the whores half-dead on the hair mattress, mouths swollen with sperm, throats strangulated ; then they return to camp, drunk, belly and loins on fire. At night, all along the danger zone, they vomit in the darkness, on the cacti, on the white flowers opened at night on the edge of the fast rivers ; the bushes are filled with noises of vomiting and of rifle butts hitting the stones, of the flowings of vomit. But, further away, in the operation zone, all those noises and vomiting cease, the waists become supple, the thighs do not get roused any more by the swift contact, the brushing of fresh leaves, the slow, burning caress of the tall grass, on the cloth of the battledress.

The governor has, from his first wife, two children : Serge and Fabienne ; their natural mother, after a long illness, dies, her hand caught in the embroidering of the sheet. Fabienne is playing with her doll under the tamarisks. Serge, his forehead scarred by the beak of a cormorant, rises from bed, puts his penis back inside his shorts, washes his hands, smooths down and wets his hair ruffled in the pillow. He comes down from the attic, he runs across the park, to the rocks, lifts the boughs. Fabienne, sitting, legs spread out, dress tucked up over the thighs, doll overturned upon her knee, kneads her small breasts with her fingers. Serge roars with laughter :

— You too, you have a stain on your shorts.

The governor, his head plunged inside the furs of the bed, controls the shaking of his whole body ; he draws himself up, he rushes forward, his espadrilles slide on the marble steps ; both children hold their breath :

— Go out, your mother is dead.

They leap out from under the tamarisks, they snuggle against the governor's hips. At night, Serge climbs into Fabienne's bed, he lies underneath her, blood flushes at the scar on his forehead :

— Love me, my little mother. Love me. The moon is looking at my tummy, milk is seething inside your bosom.

Then, the governor marries again and Fabienne dislikes the young woman. She quivers when she watches Emilienne lean her head on the governor's shoulder. On the wedding night, with Serge, she follows the couple as far as the room's doorstep :

— Now, leave us alone, go to bed.

And the young woman kisses their foreheads. The door is shut, and the sentry stands in front, legs spread. A long time, both children remain, huddled together, the boy lifting, brusque, his head to stop the tears, the little girl hugging him and crying under the warm gaze of the soldier. Women come, who carry them away, gentle, to their room, to the bath. Little by little, Serge agrees to kiss the young woman ; then he begins to seek her company, Fabienne blames him for doing so, when they're alone, but the boy :

— Leave me, half-pint.

Outside, the sky darkens, the foliage and the shrubs are stirred by a cold breeze, the birds fall, shriek from inside the trees, chase each other between the columns, bump into the sandstone pillars. Emilienne and Serge are sitting on the boy's bed :

— It is you I think of when I write and draw everything, when I bury my hand under my shorts. I want you, I want you.

But seeing that she remains motionless and her gaze fixed on the half-closed shutter, her hands slightly trembling :

— Forgive me, we shall tell my father.

And he strokes those hands not knowing they tremble because of him. He can now look straight into her eyes, love her already less secretly, he does not even dream of pushing her down on the bed. The imminence of pleasure appeases him, disarms him. Rain hits the windows, digs the earth, brings the bathers back into the sea.

— O Serge, I too, I want you. In the evening, when your hand whips the bath water, I quiver, sitting in the lounge, I see water stream on your belly, cover your thighs and the plastic duck float around your cock.

He follows her in the corridor, then under the arcade ; he feels on his legs

the coolness of the rain falling close to them. Emilienne walks in front of him without looking back. In a playroom, near the verandah, soldiers are playing ping pong ; the noise of the balls, the shouts of the players, the flashes of their knees and of their fists piercing the rain, reach Serge, purified, the shouts especially with their primeval resonance — rain changes them into children's cries. Serge sees himself condemned to live without the love of women. Emilienne leans her hips and her swollen breasts against a pillar's damp sandstone, Serge strokes her bosom, his nipples are itching as if from the cold ; the cloth of Emilienne's dress stretches between the thighs and slackens between the breasts. Serge holds out a hand ; a soldier stops the game, keeps the ball between his wrist and the bat, glances at Emilienne : on his thigh, the shorts' cloth quivers and swells :

— She resembles my fiancée in Ecbatane. Her brothers are keeping her a virgin for me.

The other player slams his fist on the table :

— For my part, only tarts give me an erection. Outside their arms, my blood freezes.

Then bareheaded and his hand stifling a cry, Serge dashes forward in the rain.

Kment, in front of his mother, remains silent ; he watches her through the bars, he refrains from breathing too often ; the other children hang their head, the one who held the little dying child in her arms and rocked him under the moon leans against the wood of the cell door, her forehead bulging and shiny on which ill-groomed hair falls. She nips the top of her dress with her painted lips. The first day, the warder throws them all out, he strikes the bars with his weapon : the mother, clinging to the bars and the weapon smashing her fingers :

— Bastards. Bastards.

The soldiers push the children out. From the middle of the courtyard which the soldiers cross running because of the sun, the children hear their mother's screams and those of the guards hitting her inside the cage, the cracking of the lashes and the noise of rifle butts. They shudder, the soldiers hold them back by the shoulders ; Kment's teeth grind under the foam. Little by little, the mother agrees to see them ; but one day, Kment having put his head forward through the bars, she takes it and fondles it, first touching it only lightly, then driving her fingers through the hair, then pulling it towards her and her hand moving down, sliding along the cheeks, towards the nape. Kment takes fright, he struggles, already a guard is grabbing his weapon. The mother loosens her grip ; Kment draws back. She weeps, her head in her hands : a group of soldiers appears in the prison corridor : they abuse the prisoners, make obscene gestures, press

and shake their flies, jostle the children ; they each carry a towel on the shoulder, a wet bar of soap inside the shorts ; one of them, as he goes past, strokes the hips of Kment's elder sister, she clings close to Kment, but the soldier pulls her towards his belly, his fingers sliding towards the thigh and clinging to it, Kment holds back the young girl by the shoulders, he strikes the soldier in the belly, the soldier lets go, the girl breaks loose, runs towards the sentry ; the soldier grabs Kment by the throat, he tears his shirt, he hits him with his fist under the belly, he knocks him down on the floor tiles and tramples him ; the other soldiers move aside ; the soldiers howls, foams, bracing himself over the boy ; Kment licks on his lips the soldier's foam ; the sentry rushes up, leans his weapon's barrel on the soldier's temple ; he, feeling the metal, calms down, he unclenches his teeth and his fists, releases Kment's ear which he was twisting, flushed between his fingers, he gets up, he tramples with his foot the head of the senseless boy, wipes the foam on his chin, lifts with the tip of his boots the scattered linen on Kment's belly.

The sentry takes Kment in his arms, he carries him to the police station, he lays him down on a bench, he wakes a soldier resting between two duties ; the soldier gets down from the bunk beds, crosses the courtyard to fill a pail of water. Kment moves his lips, flies are stirring on his eyes, on the wounds, on the bruises ; a little dog jumps from the bunks where he was sleeping alongside the heavy hips of the soldier. It runs to the door, but the violence of the sun makes it retreat ; it strikes against Kment's hand hanging over the mud floor and licks it. The soldier, coming back, his arm wet up to the shoulder, washes the wounds. He has fair hair, white underpants underneath the battledress, and the skin swollen under the ears ; around the waist, instead of a belt, a knotted string ; on his battledress, there are traces of blood ; a fork sticks out of the top pocket of the battledress. The soldier's gestures are clumsy, the little dog keeps away from the spatters. The soldiers pass by again after the shower, one of them grabs the coffee bucket on the table, turns it over his mouth and drinks, his throat quivering ; coffee runs down the neck's arteries ; then seeing the small fair soldier bending over Kment :

— Oh, boatman, when they'll have cut off your cock, you will love them a bit less, darling ; and the women, before loving you, they will grab your flaccid cock with disgust.

He moves off. Kment breathes the smell of soap and sweat, the smell of soldiers, the smell of rapes, the smell of contempt. The peasants, the wretched, the children, the women fear that smell ; it swoops down on them, by day, by night, especially : it invades the houses, the streets, it blends with the perfumes of night, of trees, of water, it seizes the women by the throat, sometimes it can move them.

Inamenas, colonized for a hundred years by Ecbatane, wants to free itself. Half of its buildings, its houses, its places of worship are used as prisons. The whole population is suspect. The governor is now condemned by the rebels and thwarted by the military. He prays, he entertains the chaplains : those are

barely concerned about the soldiers, they pity the officers, celebrate mass in their midst, in the mess with gleaming bottles and the waiters are locked up inside the kitchens ; they tremble with fear in the mountain passes, they throw sweets to the escort soldiers. They get newspapers from Ecbatane for the officers, film magazines for the soldiers, but the soldiers have brought with them from Ecbatane their pornographic magazines and the Hundred and Twenty Positions ; the chaplains drink sodas with a straw, they stop outside the barrackrooms and the kitchens to hear the soldiers speak about women and smack the foam inside their mouth. Never, in the mountain, never at combat. They conclude in Inamenas their active career ; warm retirements, attentive nuns await them on the continent. Here, the morning host triggers off the malarial colic.

After five years of war, the large forests of Inamenas are three quarters burnt, the lands waste, the families decimated. In the harbours, dockers unload now only arms ; in the warehouses instead of bags of wheat, bags of ammunition. At midday, at the time when the sun is the strongest and the scents of earth and people, the more violent, flocks of vultures and buzzards swoop down in the ravines, then the children run and shout towards those ravines ; the birds already are tearing the dead bodies there, are dragging them towards the holes, are lifting them with their claws, are piercing the jaw and the trunk with their beak ; the children scream, squatting at the edge of the ravines ; the birds of prey shriek, throw the blood around their head ; a vulture shoots out of the scrum, flies up the slope, on his bloated belly, and pecks a child at the hand and at the knee. At night, the jackals put to flight these birds whose beaks are soiled with blood and flesh. Among the dead bodies, the mechanical shovels lift new-born children with slashed skulls ; they originate in forced copulations. Other new-borns are seized in houses by soldiers of the dog lover platoons and thrown alive to the dogs inside the wire nettings.

At the beginning of winter, headquarters sends a score of soldiers in the snow, to the col of Tifrit. Without respite they clear the road to the col. This one pierces the island's central massif at an altitude of two thousand meters. Soldiers bivouac under the tent, warm themselves with charcoal pans. They work with the shovel, the pickaxe, the bulldozer. A warrant officer commands them with three corporals. The first year of the war, the platoon is entirely slaughtered by the rebels. The soldiers caught unaware while hard at work, are shot, butchered, mouth open on the snow, mutilated by shovel and pickaxe, the tents and the equipment stolen or set on fire with the charcoal pans. The helicopter bringing the mail lands in the midst of ashes ; the bodies are already nibbled by foxes. The next day, a fresh platoon arrives by the road, erects new tents and lights the charcoal

pans again. An operation is planned in the massif, to which the isolated platoon unites. Soldiers, marines, gunners, cave commandos, the icy daggers beating their hips, jump out of the helicopters ; propellers blow off the frozen snow ; wrists bleed on the bare rock ; hair, wet, swells the camouflage cap holding it tight. The soldiers, assembled, move off ; the helicopters rise above the trampled snow and plunge into the pink mist ; the soldiers walk along the darkened side of the mountain ; they pass their fingers between the buttons of the battledress and shake their cocks stuck to the underpants by the night's secretions. Under the charred cedar trees, they slow down, they pull out their gourds and drink the courage-instilling brandy ; the ash mixed with snow runs down their forehead and their throat ; the crows soar, drink from the holes of trampled snow ; the soldiers' march makes the noise of a throbbing heart ; they crush the lungs of the snow, snot dries pricking their cracked lips ; the crows shoot out on the silent slopes strewn with cartridge cases and charred branches. Doucen, the chipped mirror he holds tight against his vest, makes his right nipple bleed ; he takes off his cap ; his fair hairs, released, he shakes and rubs them with his fingers where the brandy is drying : the bugs fall in his neck, roll on his shoulder blades ; he writhes in his battledress.

— Hey, Doucen, this night, you spoke...

— What ?... I said what ?...

— You were kissing God's cheek and you were ploughing his field with your hardened cock...

— At home, frost and snow cover my uncultivated field... My father, drunk, at night, pulls away the tattered sheets under which we keep awake, the sores of our hips and of our cheeks stuck together ; he attacks our bare bodies shaken by the cold, he crushes my throat with his fists, he tears the sheet above my belly, he spits out the pieces, his teeth clink upon my nails ; he covers my face and my throat with foam, he yells and throws his hair back, his red hair alight under the bulb smeared with steam from the soup ; I gently tear off the scab of blood keeping my cheek stuck to the cheek of my little sister Smaeh, I rise, I tighten my underpants wet with foam, a moonbeam warms my knee, I tiptoe towards the shelves, I lift my arm to the top shelf, salt brushes my armpit, I take the flask of elixir, I lick the neck of the flask ; my father, leaning over Smaeh, strokes with his fist reddened by the brothel's wine, Smaeh's bare thigh ; Smaeh, arms tight along her body, moves slowly towards the top of the bed ; the reddened foam drips from my father's mouth onto Smaeh's chest ; I lift the flask to my father's lips, his foam wets my wrist ; I keep my fists raised, Smaeh crosses hers over her belly ; my father's eyes become brighter ; I push the flask's neck to his lips, I tilt the flask, the elixir distends my father's mouth ; his back, suddenly, capsizes over my free arm ; once my father is asleep, I remove with my fingers the cobwebs caught in his red hair ; Smaeh is shivering on the bed.

— Look... see whether he is knowing women...

I unbutton him, my hand goes under the tattered underpants, shivers in the heat, takes the penis, lifts it ; on the prepuce still smeared with semen, my finger touches the mark of some lipstick :

— Once he's chosen her, he drags her in the depths of the brothel to fuck her upon a sack, his bare feet alone scraping the mud floor ; the sweat from his hair attracting the coal dust...

Smaeh, sitting on the milestone of the main road weeps, her bare breast shaking in the mist, her red lips create in the mist a golden mark ; Smaeh buries her head between my thighs ; dawn uncovers the tank turrets and makes them turn...

— Hey, Doucen, if you get bumped off, leave me your electric fan...?

— One night, I perhaps held her in my arms, in Ecbatane inside the brothel of the harbour where we were embarking ; the whore's lips had a taste of elixir, I pressed her in my arms against the washbasin ; she, her hair covered with the plasterers' lime, was unbuttoning me, and at one go grabbed in her hand my cock and my balls ; the semen was splashing the twigs of boxwood fastened over the bed inside the lead pipe filled with fibres and small haircurls ; motionless and silent I cover her then I rise and move my arms and my hips the way an eagle, weighing down on some prey and strangling it, salutes its death by a fluttering of wings...

The soldiers march down towards lake Goulmine ; the rebels are lying over the ice of the rocks ; a pink cloud passes in the frozen lake ; the crows are eating the ashes of the burnt cedar trees ; the soldiers encircle the outskirts of the lake ; at the massif's foot the roads radiate towards the sea ; the soldiers nibble their enrolment plates ; the sun caresses their back ; the shadow, the wind seize their faces, their chests, their cocks and their knees ; the rifles are turned towards the encircled shadow ; at the whistle blast, they tighten the circle around the lake ; the rebels, taken by the rear, leap out of the rocks ; Doucen, a last time, turns back, sun hits his face and his cock, he gazes at the valley drowned in a sunny mist, the fields, the houses, the trees, the birds of the sun : larks, robins, seagulls ; but turning back once again, he sees a rebel on the lake who, staring at him with his bright eyes under a bloody headband, is preparing his weapons, his fists. At the first impact, the crows shriek, wheel above the wrestling couple ; the scent of powder and blood flushing the veins caressed by the knife-blades warms up the frozen air. Doucen springs forward, he leaps over the intermingled bodies, he holds his dagger against his belly ; the hand grenades explode, the ice splashes Doucen's face and blinds him for a moment, the rebel rushes at him and knocks him down on the ice, crushing with his fist Doucen's throat and spitting on his eyes ; shouts, rattles rise in the sharp air ; reddened ice splits under the weight of the bodies, blood washes the black water ; daggers scratch the ice, rifles slide between

the injured bodies ; a soldier and a rebel are wrestling by a rock ; a crow watches them, perched on the charred branches of a cedar ; blood runs forward on the rock wall, between the legs of the soldier pressed against the rock by the rebel ; the soldier tears the rebel's face with the jagged lid of a khaki can ; the rebel crushes with his belly the soldier's belly, little by little, and hitting, digging the lower part with his knee, he chokes the disarmed soldier. Doucen, strangled, rattles ; the rebel disarms him ; a soldier wounded at the throat, grabs Doucen's hand, turns his head towards him, his lips are trembling, blood rolls inside his mouth, a golden blood bubbles at the slit in his throat, he is unarmed, naked : the rebel has undressed him in haste and his already frozen limbs are covered with tatters lifted by the wind ; Doucen clasps that hand. All around, rebels and soldiers intertwined, all of them lying or bracing themselves on the ice, groan, spit, scream. In the first hours of morning, the sun precipitates the mists, the crows shake their shiny wings. The rebels flee carrying away their dead ; the dying soldiers are alone, lying, their cheeks, their foreheads on the ice ; their rattle makes the ice blue ; their knees, suddenly, shiver, their hands open, the shadows of the crows and of the clouds unfold upon the bodies stripped by the rebels' numbed fingers ; buttons, teeth, shreds of rubber bands are strewn across the reddened ice ; Doucen rises leaning on his bloody elbow, he crawls to the edge of the lake and he dies, his head buried in the sunny mist and gorged and scented with birds' chirps, children's screams, fumes from stills and sun lotion ; the dying soldiers see him rise over the ice, his legs drag on the rock, his cartridge belts hanging from his thighs and his belt squeezing his bare belly, the buckle pressing the navel, the crushed ice, reddened, runs along his hips, his face is tilted towards the sky ; the soldiers' eyes mist over, their fingers try to tear off the glazed membrane covering the iris, their throat is cooing ; rocks tumble down, in the high valleys of the Akouker ; a woman, the madam of the Ecbatane Overseas Club climbs the rocks ; then her black boot smeared with vomit, tramples, turns over the heads of the dead ; the soldiers she walks to, her knapsack gripped in her fist, hold out their arms, moan, crawl on their back, towards the rear ; but she, her mouth opened on her flashing teeth adorned with confetti and gossamer, grabs their opened hands and, squatting down, lifts their feet, their legs and drives them into the sack ; then lifts the stiffened body and, the soldier embracing with his arms her nape and her bosom, makes the rest of the body slide in the sack ; the soldier's head falls on his knee ; the woman drags the sack on the ice ; the soldiers still alive crawl towards the edge of the lake, clutch at the rocks and the trunks of the charred cedars ; but the woman separates their hands from the ash and from the rock ; when the last living soldier feels his knees and his belly stiffen and harden, Doucen and all the other soldiers are lying upon the ice at the spot and in the position where the fist, the dagger of the rebels threw and held them, before they lost consciousness. A pink light bathes the naked bodies, their wounds are mirrored inside the reformed ice.

Down in the city, the chiefs call for retaliation, the governor throws up his arms, signs a death sentence, washes his hands in the alcove, beats his forehead with his fists, the officers retire, kiss the order for the execution. In the assemblies, he enjoys astonishing them, he speaks of law to these men of force. In the corridors, if he hears a sound of boots, he hides in a little room for brooms and brushes. Since the beginning of the war, he never went out of the island. On the days of national or religious feasts, the military overrun the brothels and the sacristies of Inamenas ; the governor shuts himself up in his palace. Emilienne puts cakes in the sentries' mouth : inebriated, nauseated, their cheeks, their chest, their eyelashes smeared with cream and sugar, they lift the carpets, spew up, and trample their vomit. The governor, squatting on the carpet, Serge and Fabienne hugging his neck in their arms, opens up the herbaria ; Emilienne sitting on the edge of the sofa, is writing to her former friends of the orphanage ; under the paper, her knees are shining, Serge sees them, his lips become wet on the governor's shoulder ; the sentry leans against the door. Fabienne, behind the governor's head, watches the eyes and the foam on Serge's lips ; then, she flings her mouth on the governor's nape, kisses the artery of the throat ; the governor pushes away the face with his hand ; Serge, his eyes staring at Emilienne's crumpled belly, strokes the faded flowers and the stems from the herbarium : the rebels' cocks, dried up flowers and stems. Emilienne does not look up. Serge falls down in a faint, blood withdraws from his cheeks, his wrists, his knees ; his head has struck the governor's heel. In the evening, Emilienne, still looking down, feeds Serge with her own hand :

— As long as you will not have loved me yet, I will faint again.

He licks the hand which is clasping the fruits, the cherries, the almonds ; Emilienne's phalanxes knock against his teeth. On the terrace, the governor is lying in a deck chair, Fabienne goes and sits on his knees ; her hand leaning on her father's penis, her arm, her other hand stroking the governor's ear and cheek :

— Why don't you want to love me the way you loved mummy ? Serge has Emilienne...

Serge nibbles Emilienne's wrist, his hand comes out from the sheet, covers Emilienne's hip, moves up to the belly ; his teeth pierce the cherries :

— If I crunch your eyes, they'd have the same bitter taste as the cherry stones. Come inside the bed. I am naked already, so it is not I who will force you to undress me. Come, climb in.

He pulls on the dress at the place of her cunt. Emilienne sits at the edge of the bed, strokes the boy's knees through the sheet, Serge crosses them, his cock rolls on the thigh. Serge takes Emilienne's hand and pushes it under the sheet as far as her cunt ; Emilienne's throat quivers, her eyes see the night.

— Could you play the whore all day round ? And I, my face bandaged, I pass by and you embrace me and you tickle me and you bite my laughter and you

did not recognize me. You shake and you wash my cock in the basin, you spray perfume on your pubic hair. You dress me again, you buckle my belt. On the pavement, I pull off the bandage, the dockers catch you by the waist and shoulders, you smoke their cigarettes, they spit the wine in your ears. At dawn, back in the palace and lying by the governor's side, you gasp for breath. At breakfast, I smell your shoulders, and over the steam of tea, in your ear, I utter a cry from the brothel, I smack my lips and your cunt opens and sparkles under the transparent and creased silk. . .

Fabienne's foam wets the governor's cheek : a dance lights up under the barbed wire, the babies turn over and over on the straw, the sperm and semen of the dancers mating and dancing unbuttoned fall down again on their back and on their shaven head, mix with the fresh earth which their fingers dig between the couples' feet.

Serge and Fabienne walk barefoot in the palace and in the park ; their feet have callouses. In the rooms, they live most of the time naked ; in winter, without heating, the torso enclosed in one pullover only. They have no pocket money, they repair their old toys themselves. Their hair is cropped close. Serge keeps grass snakes in his room, he lets them wind around his legs, coil up under his coil ; lizards bite his exercise books, beetles roll in the folds of his sheets. Serge, before going to bed, locks himself up in the dressing room, he pushes out his head and knee from between the curtains, utters brothel calls, he makes his saliva foam on his lips, he goes through his unbuttoned fly ; then at one bound, he's in the middle of the room and he walks, fists to his pockets, the hair entangled on his forehead, the belly forward, the shoulders rolled, crumples two fingers of his hand, examines the curtain from top to bottom, then his waist quivers, undulates, his lips open, his head leans towards the shoulder. And all night, in the haze of sweat, naked, he struggles with the pillow between his thighs and under his chest and under his teeth. At the first cockcrows, he goes to sleep, propped up, at the bottom of the bed, his unburdened cock in the shade of the belly. The coolness overturns his body on its back, opens his legs, dries the sperm on his thighs and in his unclenched fists. In winter, in the depth of the frozen nights, the window is open and the wind swells the sheet and lifts the locks on Serge's forehead. The sentry brushes past the wall. Serge wakes up before dawn, he walks, naked, to the window, leans out, whistles, the sentry sees the child's bare torso :

— The stars mirror in it, so polished and transparent it is.

— Lice are swarming in your hair. When will you take me to your whores,

Nano ?

— I told them about you. I told them the colour of your eyes, the tone of your

torso, the quivering of your belly. They pinned your photo on the wall of their waiting room.

— Nano, are their babies born on the soiled floor tiles ?

— They live there too.

— Nano, when you're dirty...

— The whore licks my filth, anywhere on my body. She crunches my knees and my elbows.

— Tonight, your wife, in Ecbatane, gets up and covers up your children undressed by the nightmare. She takes them in her bed, under her armpits...

— Here, all children are filthy, snotty-nosed, dirty-assed, crippled, soiled... Lean down.

Serge shivers, he leans his head towards the soldier, this one moves his rifle from one shoulder to another, he holds out his arm, moves his hand towards the boy's face, strokes his cheeks, his forehead, buries his hand inside the pyjamas, along the buttocks, draws the boy's head towards his chest and kisses him on the corner of the lips. The soldier's cheeks and the edge of his lips are hardened by frost ; under the light helmet, his hair, recently washed and rinsed, is dripping ; Serge half-opens his lips and his tongue touches the soldier's lips ; inside the nostrils, the hair is stuck by the black, too sweet coffee. The soldier's eyes shine and tears roll on his upper lip ; Serge drinks them.

Often, the soldiers deprived of their children or of their brothers, kiss the children along the roads, in the houses they plunder. If they find bedsheets inside those houses, they wrap them round their body, stroke them, they plunge in them their head and their penis. The palace sentries, in the suites of rooms, put their hand on the china and silver cutlery, on the wrong side of the sheets, on Emilienne's coats, on her dresses. But, on the first day of the third year of the war, the soldiers of Takintout post, back from a patrol in the sewers of insurgent Inamenas, after dark, fling themselves, half-naked, their bodies trembling under the tatters of soiled battledress, into the post's courtyard and drop down, all intermingled on the tent canvas unfolded upon the snow by the night sentries for the wind and the snow water to purify its fibres. Woken up at the same instant by the same suffocation, they make a rush, mouth shut, eyes closed, hands groping, for the post's staircase, and, their back touching the wet canvas, scream, cry, stroke each other's shoulders and knees. The lieutenant, barricaded in his room, candle put out, leans his forehead and his ear against the door and loads his automatic pistol. The native auxiliaries break open the kitchen door and, standing, bending, squatting, drive their rotting fangs into the quarters of fresh meat, tearing the shreds and burying them inside their shirt ; some of them, chest

gorged with meat, drink straight from the oil bottles, wiping their hands with the vinegar ; some others, already satiated, mouth filled with vinegar, doze off, sprawled on the scraps of nerves and grease piled up under the suspended quarter ; gradually, the vomit accumulating in their throat and their cocks growing hard, they wake up, their legs roll over, their belly grows bare, their lips open, sweat shines in the lines of their hand, in the rings of their cocks erect on the unfastened buckle of the belt ; saucepans, ladles, mugs tumble down on the overturned shelves ; a moonbeam lights up inside : the ear of a young auxiliary whose head is caught between the thighs of a comrade who, head laid on the rim of a dishwater bucket nibbles a tuft of cress and with the other hand is casually wanking, a pearl with blue-tinged gleam ; clot of sperm or bit of garlic spat out ... The young auxiliary releases his head and crawls onto his comrade's body, their cocks wind round one another, the young auxiliary takes hold of his friend's shoulders he hoists himself up, he moves his chest forward onto the naked and oiled chest of the watercress chewer, he kisses the throat smeared with cress, he kisses on it the nerves and muscles meshed under the skin gashed by the erratic mastication, often hurried by orgasm then slowed down, the mouth remaining open and the thighs opening on the cock grown soft... The sentries assemble in the watchtower adjoining the arcade ; pressed close together, they join their mouths to groan, scream, groan, while one of them, carrying the coffee cans in his fists, runs in the arcade ; the lukewarm and heavily sweetened coffee splashes the wattle of palms and lime ; the spilled coffee runs under the door of the lieutenant's room, gets close to the bed, drowns the cockroaches swarming in the screen ; then, rushing towards the crammed comrades, rifles raised sticking out above their half-naked shoulders, the sentry pours the coffee on their legs and, holding up both arms laden with cans, sprinkles the hair and the helmets ; then, all of them, writhing at the contact of the coffee dripping on their shoulder blades and on their loins, embrace each other ; the sentry throws her cans out of the watchtower, they jingle among the rocks soiled with rubbish ; he squats down, parts with his fists a comrade's legs and threads his way and draws himself up between the clenched limbs. Takintout village and regrouping centre, lies awake in the searchlight's beam : rats scamper by the foot of the slaughterhouse walls in the reddened snow ; the springing out of a sentry's elbow out of the shuddering group of which the clothes and the weapons gradually come undone, makes the searchlight tip up towards the sky : Takintout, in the rustling of the gumtrees, returns to the night's darkness from before the rebellion ; the children lying naked, their shit stuck to the straw matting and their night saliva drying on the fingers of their squatting mothers, whine ; the women sit up, hold their arms out towards the freshness poured by the window obstructed by snow ; the youths, sleepy pull their turban from underneath their buttocks and fasten it on their temples with veins swollen by frost ; the women take the buckwheat pancakes from the hearth's embers and, their jewellery

clinking on the flooring tiles, blow off the flour, open the sacks wet with snow, hanging above the youths' matting and fragrant with the juniper tree brushed, bent, trimmed by them, at night, in the maquis. Standing, the upper part of the body bending under the roof of toub, they kiss their mothers, the scent of their breasts covered with lukewarm flour shrouds their throat and their downy cheeks ; the children, woken up, crawl on their mats and huddle around the embers shedding a dim light on their navel, their breasts and their eyes open under the scabs...

— Your little brothers who were pulling out roots under the rubbish saw your father knocked down over the parapet, his blood was running on the lime, the Françaouia are beating his bare torso with their rifle butts ; your brothers, huddled at the bottom of the wall, drink, lick the blood ; the Françaouia, perched on the parapet, sprawled on your unconscious father, spit on their shaven heads, their spittle mixes with the blood on your brothers' lips... Watch... See... they can't go to sleep, the searchlight's beam lights up their birth, lashes their turds, their sores, their pustules, it lightens your departure in the night and your return, my hand stirring the embers and kneading the pancakes shaken against your loins during the ambush...

— Tonight, the beam lights up the sky, O stars ! judgment of the nations, libertarian heavenly bodies, O mother !... listen to the footsteps of their astonished fauna ; the placards of utopia rustle with the stellar wind ; nations of wounded men arrived during the night, are lying there, ignoring the scenery of flowers and springs where the blazing of dawn awakens them ; earth then covers itself with new tools ; in every ground of different level and colour, a plough, put up, is waiting to be taken and my hands grip the wood covered with dew...

The fresh snow covers the bodies piled up in the courtyard ; the doors of the latrine are banging and the wind blowing over the piles, pushes outside the frozen turds which, lifted up, roll over the soldiers' bodies, assault their loins, touch their lips. One of them, whose bare head is leaning against an outcrop of rocks, out of the tent canvas, shouts, his hands caught under a comrade's thighs and the group of sentries, face against face, at each one of his cries, whine, whimper, loins and back heated by the overturned searchlight...

— Death to the officers ! O my latrine, hug me stronger. I give you my wife. Throw my babies into the fire, to the dunghill, trample them under the foot of the marriage bed heavy with your intermingled bodies. She caresses, she kisses your worried muscles. Tear with your teeth rotten by the black meat and the bromided wine, tear with your tanned cock the linen hanging in the toilets, the linen fragrant with the talc and the vomit of the new-born. Ransack my furniture. The room exhales, you erect naked and wearing wool up to the knees, a fragrance of snow and grease. Strangle, knock senseless in their bed my father and my mother. Slaughter on his exercise books my brother dozing at the table. The bites of the

native whores reopen on the lower part of your belly under the hair. Dig with your dagger, ear cutter, the polished flooring and free the spring singing for me child in the foundations. Lie down in its water and the cuttings and the earth and the cement powder covering your jaw, fuck my wife to death and, standing up again, squash her head in the stream blocked by sperm. And feeling light, rifle hanging from the shoulder and mosquito net tied around your loins, push the door and, once you reached the border, throw yourself into our arms laden with dying game. O ear cutter, hoist yourself up with us in the hollow between the branches warmed up by our turds. The smell of the married men's blood is shrouding the city. To it we prefer the fragrance of the bugs gorged with our blood.

— O finger cutter I give you my wife.

— Rapehead, quench your thirst at the water of the rusty tap and climb back to bed, the curved nails of your toes tearing the sheets and the lace of the bedspread. Squatting on the edge of the bed I blow on your icy heels, I stroke them with my sweating hair. O my wife, I nibble your little scent bottles spilled in a fold of the sheet. I comb my hair with the baby's comb. I roll your haircurlers in the locks of my cock. Your wedding ring thrown into the fire melts together with the celluloid toys ; my comrades in battledress leaning on their elbows at the edge of the bed imprison you in the fragrance of the wind ; their fingers pick the cherries scattered on your bare belly ; the cherries tremble at their ears, at their lips ; the bedside lamp lights the filth of their neck cased in wool, the abscesses gluing their hair in tufts. Then slumber lies them all around the bed over the lace of the trampled bedspread ; but the quietest, the youngest among them has fallen asleep on the bed, the cellophane of the jampot stuck on his forehead. Then the moon spurring my flank, I can fuck you until dawn and wash all your body's retreats abandoned and dried up since my exile.

— O Bloody Scout, I give you my wife. By her side desire like the sun never goes to sleep...

The kitchen door gives way : three auxiliaries clasped in each other's arms roll on the flooring tiles covered with ice ; their united mouths are gorged with fresh meat which the kiss squashes against the teeth ; their hands embrace their stripped loins : « ... the feast of the free men draws to an end ; they vomit the honey cakes and the soda drinks against the pigsty's door ; the children, their throat laced by the confetti, the flag's dye melting on their sweaty chest underneath the shirt, they bend on the field adjoining the slaughterhouse, pick the dried grass ; the women pull the boilers on the sand. O my brothers, they are slaughtering the auxiliaries on the voting tables, the children are playing soccer with the decapitated heads in the sand ; a woman thrusts a ladle, a plate, a fork and spoon inside an auxiliary's decapitated neck ; a flock of cranes flees towards the border ; the sun irradiates the radio antenna ; then darkness covers the peak, the vomit drunk and eaten by the rats, fades away ; in the heart of night, a flower

is born on the edge of the manure pile ; all of us, we squat down around it, Mouloud gives it the name of his mother, Mansour the name of his fiancée, Saïd the one of his child ; leaning over, they caress it ; the pigs bump into our hips. To conquer our fear and make supple our muscles numbed by humiliation, unbuttoned, we make love to each other, propping ourselves up, hands and feet scraping the mud and until dawn we intertwine, straining our joints, pulling the skin, juxtaposing our veins, mixing our locks and our wounds. In the morning it is only one man who climbs on the slaughterhouse's wooden parvis and who whipped by the rebels' brooms, plunges his leg in the boiling water scented with herbs and all his muscles from the ham up to the skull are seized ; blisters burst on his skin still dry ; but the strength of heat snaps his loins ; the upper part of his body, smashed, collapses : the head splits on the edge of the boiler ; the women come to stir the boiled pieces of flesh, they pull them out of water on palmtree staffs, they throw them on the children ; they run away but the women force them to devour those bits of boiled flesh ; the sun, at its zenith, hits the still water where the flesh is bathing ; children, women, executioners, dropping in the grass, on the wooden parvis, at the foot of the piles, are asleep ; blood boils against their teeth ; birds dive into the water, they take away bits of flesh, they carry them to the hollows of the branches in the orchards ; in the evening, woken up, women, children, rebels, auxiliaries only wounded, hostages with smashed teeth roam under the peach trees and the apricot trees, chewing their flowers, smearing the weapons and the whips with pollen... »

Snow covers the intertwined bodies ; the mouths, gorged with snow, are silent. The youths leap over the brooms, they bump into each other in the middle of the forehead, they laugh, they fight in the trampled snow ; the overturned searchlight's beam lights the higher snow. The lieutenant, at dawn, pushes the door of his room, he's gripping a piece of soap in his fist ; he moves forward in the arcade ; the group of sentries is asleep, crammed inside the watchtower ; the lieutenant squats down, presses the soap against the sentries' lips and draws a cross on their chest ; then, while the sentries get up and spit out the soap, he goes down to the courtyard, smears the lips of the soldiers and draws a cross on their chest ; then squatting down, he smears the open mouth of the auxiliaries where sperm sticks to the teeth and draws a cross on their oiled chest ; in the morning, he has a wooden frame brought and put up on the tent canvas, over which two soldiers lay down a pan of hot water ; he orders the lined up soldiers to undress and, their battledress thrown into a boiler held by two auxiliaries, to enter the water and to squat down there, one after the other, water closing up over their shoulders : « ... Let the same water, soiled by the first of you, O my foster brothers, appease your muscles. Let the secretions of your wrath accumulate on the edge of the pan. And I whose hand has not touched cock nor wiped the wrath on my lips, I master the cry that my blood is carrying towards my throat. O you spirit and flesh

combined ! O flesh fucking the spirit ! My animals, my hands. A scent of fuck bathes your hair your hands your voice ; the ambush is heavy with the smell of sperm ; a species of birds new over here, settles down in this fragrance you left behind in the valleys and the forests, build their nests in the tufts and in the cavities where you breathed, in your footsteps and the ruins made by your hands. It precedes you in the ambushes, it grapples on to your cock when you squat down, to your lips when you abuse the women. In the villages, children orphaned by your fists grasp your hips and go through your pockets gorged with war bread and coffeebags and the girls injected with your venom do not flee when you approach, the sun irradiating the black sweat of your loins. O my foster brothers ! I have sucked the milk of your mothers. Then lying beside the young girls in the parks, I sucked their lips and their breasts. Then in the summer of my natural mother's death my lips dry up and hereafter alone my fingers knead my cock to appease it. O my chest lean over the breast of a girl or of a sentry, what does it matter. O my mouth, release my cry of love ! O my tears, gush out, splash the belly where I press my cheek. O my thighs, O my knees, press tightly ! Your cheeks and your lips smile when the scent of my sperm, released, surrounds us. You hide your eyes under my armpit. Your belly withdraws from under mine. You fondle my balls reduced and grown hard ; and my unsheathed cock, while you lie in the opposite direction to me under me, you blow your fresh breath on its edge. A drop of sperm trembles and in a bluish flash rolls on your lips and the last drops still beading, you let them fall on your eyes wide open ; and, your eyelids closed over them, you fall asleep, your head under my propped up loins. I stroke, having lain down and leaned on my elbow next to you, your closed-up cunt inside which my wild sperm is toiling. I smell it. I kiss it. I behold it until dead of night. My hand caresses, takes the shape of, skirts round the breasts, the belly. I lean my face towards your breasts and I watch them breathe. My sperm dries upon your lips, between your eyelids. O my foster brothers ! You whose gesture at once implements the idea, draw by lots from amongst you the one who closing the door of my room on all of you busy with the fatigue duties of equipment and barracking, one moment dazzled by darkness, walks to my bed and by my order lies down there close to me. Then when weary of lying down and his belly purring with hunger, he rises and gets dressed again, I go down into the village and children smile at the scent of shot sperm and dogs and cats coil around my legs... »

The youths, squatting in the deep end of the cave on the palm hurdles, are eating buckwheat pancakes ; snow covers the rocks around the cave's mouth ; weapons are thrown in piles between their bare feet ; their espadrilles are drying on the sand ; two crows, tied in the deep of the cave, are mating ; the youths laugh, head tilted backwards ; the lookout, perched in a cedar tree planted over the vault of the cave, warms up his fingers in the hair of his cock ; a fighter squadron sparkles for a moment in the blinding sky ; the lookout whistles ; the youths grab

their weapons, put on their wet shoes and rush to the rock where the two crows are mating. But the squadron plunges over the sea beating its eyelid against the snowclad plain. Then the youths come out of the dark, they untie their espadrilles, they lie head to head on the sand under a fire of weeds which the sentry puts up on an outcrop of the rock : « ... the Françaouia burn the palmtrees, napalm whizzes over the oued ; water carries the stones from the bombed houses ; a child cries at the bottom of a cradle carried away ; a barrage of palms and wicker stops the cradle : a soldier, unbuttoned and his cock beating the battledress, dashes forward, he leaps on the barrage which the torrent of ashy water presses back, he grabs the cradle, he holds the baby tight on his chest, he roars and he kisses the baby's loins. O my brothers with the mouth smeared of juniper gruel, the night of Independence, we lie down along the burst open pipes, we drink the water between the concrete blocks... Two little girls, downstream from our lips, are dipping bloody linen, shreds of shirt and scarf of their fathers and of their brothers killed and tortured... A naked youth, head bandaged, devours a worm straight from the earth, his mothers and his sisters hold him back by the hips and hide with their unfurled dresses the upper part of his body leaning heavily on the mud. The bodies of the traitor auxiliaries, hanging by the throat to the rusty hooks of the slaughterhouse, are spinning in the moonlight. An old woman wipes her face on the reddened grass covering the slaughterhouse sewer. A child squatting under one of the hanging bodies, sucks the fresh blood... »

Giauhare, little emancipated slave from Ecbatane, sews on again the soldiers' buttons and repairs the tears of their battledress ; her flesh is smooth, her eyes slanted, her lips white ; the field officer who used to own her, bought her a laundry hollowed out in the outside wall of the Palace ; she lives there with her mother, and soldiers have regard for her ; the smell of fresh linen, of the washing, in the evening, crosses the street, goes up to the barrackroom windows ; the soldiers turn over on their straw mats, excited and languid at the same time ; the soldiers like the shop, they bury their arms in the baskets of fresh linen and breathe their hands. Giauhare goes from one basket to another, her dress brushes the knees of the soldiers sitting in the semi-darkness ; she prepares tea for her mother, straightens a collar, sews a battledress button on again, her hand grazing a soldier's neck or chin, the thimble knocking against the bare throat and slipping on the sweaty skin ; the soldier gives himself up to those transparent hands, he sees, shining through the fresh and hazy shadow, Giauhare's lips and the needle between them, he listens to the cracking thread and the purring hips of the young girl squatting in front of him. The most violent among the soldiers do not dare touch her ; soldiers are afraid of virgins. Often, in Ecbatane, the field officer, at night, would lift the curtain of the cubicle, where, still a slave, she slept. He bends over her, awoken and her chest panting, he opens the top of the blouse, his nails

graze the nipples, his other hand tucks up the blouse, unbuttons his black pyjamas, but she, tears scintillating in her eyes, embraces the officer's neck with her thin arms. He takes them, unfastens them, he joins them at the wrists, he kisses them, his small golden chain, runs on Giauhare's breasts ; his breath smells of wine : at the corner of his lips, shines a rosy foam ; he wipes it with his fingers.

Serge, as a child, at the Junior College of Ouranopolis, is hungry ; his school friends, at night, steal bread from the kitchen. One evening, as he is running on the pavement of the covered playground, a boy of foreign race moves his foot forward : Serge falls forehead against the stone. He remains delirious all through the night. The priests who love him, want to make him confess the boy's name. Serge puffs out his mouth and they withdraw. He is lying inside a dark room. At night, when he's delirious, mouth open on the pillow, his teeth crunch a naphthalene ball, he spits, he screams. Rain hits the windows, squirrels roll among the branches bathed in moonlight and twisted by the storm. A little slave, roaming, shirt and shorts unbuttoned, rides a wet stone, in front of the statue of the Virgo. Worms are swarming under his eyelids, rain hollows and washes the wounds of his knees. Serge rolls over to the left side of the bed, he opens the window, the moon blinds him, the rain wets his sheets :

— Come to sleep next to me, stroke the watchdog between the eyes, make him lick your cock. Come up quickly, Little Hands.

The wind stifles his cry, the little slave dashes up the staircase, opens the door to the infirmary. Serge, leaning against the bars of the bed, holds a towel in his hand, the little slave moves nearer, Serge removes his rags, he lays them on the radiator, he rubs the little naked slave ; feeling giddy, he takes off his pyjamas very fast, he holds them out to the little slave, he flings himself on the unmade bed, breathes heavily, rolls his head over the pillow. The little slave slips on the pyjamas, he remains standing, bare feet on the torn linoleum :

— There is a sack of millet in the cupboard. Untie the lace and eat.

The little slave plunges his hands in the sack, then his head, the grains jump among his hair. He climbs into the bed.

— Snuggle up to me, Little Hands ; cover my forehead with your hands to refresh it.

— I've eaten grain in all the farms, today.

In the morning, the priests pull the blanket : Serge is asleep, appeased, with on his black forehead, the tramp's little hands ; as for him, from between his bare buttocks, comes out a flow of turds mixed with grains, his mouth is open on the pillow, his belly hollow, hard, his hands cold. After the little slave has been buried with the pyjamas, Serge, at night, walks in his room and in the polished corridors, wearing his rags. A wagtail sings in the ivy, underneath the shutters. Upon the wall, the moon caresses the rivers, the peaks, the lakes on the relief map

of Inamenas. As his father is ambassador, priests bow to him and call him my Lord. The boy of foreign race wanted to avenge an insult made to his country by Ecbatane's diplomatic body. His mother, back from the tropical seas, on the first day of Spring, kisses Serge's still shaded and aching forehead.

— My darling smells of fir tree and milk.

— But mum, we never drink milk, the farm is on the other side of the courtyard... and we never drink milk.

— I brought you some coconuts, dad took films of the flying fish.

And she combs the boy's hair while pinching his chin. In front of the Father Superior's door, she bends again over him, licks the tip of her forefinger and passes it around the boy's lips, she rubs with the wet palm of her hands, the boy's grazed knees :

— How come you are always so dirty, my boy.

She pulls the blue velvet trousers by the hem of the thigh and scratches the stains.

— Mum, why did you not abandon me ?

The rebels live inside the caves. At night, they come down towards the villages, the doors open, the dogs yap. In the middle of the village, on an artificial peak, the infantry post with its four walls of bamboo and clay. The sentry walks along the arcade, gives a start at every call, listens to the doors and the dogs, the rustling of the fruit trees, fights against sleep, strokes the butt of his rifle ; the sling weighs on the shoulder. The soldier's face, his battledress still keep the scent of the zones crossed during the night ambush ; brambles, patches of mud mixed with remains of mosquitoes and marsh flowers, caught on the lower part of the battledress, cover the gap between the rubber-soled canvas shoes and the cloth. In Autumn, soldiers gorge themselves of wild grapes ; the lips, the cheeks of the sentries are violet, their pockets bulging with figs and bunches of grapes, the juice runs through the cloth and drips on chest and thighs, forms around the waist a ring of sugar and filth which melts in the sweat of embraces. The soldiers who keep watch for the first time, are surprised not to see any other light than that of the moon. Inamenas, at night, closes its roads and its doors. Sentries watch over a deserted land : no moving lights between the trees, disappearing, appearing further or closer this time, frail lights, obstinate like the little flame running from the pyrotechnic wheel, between the fires and the gerbes. Only a few early trails of mist, a few smokes rising from the burnt down villages, a few trails of moon. Jackals whine in the valleys, on the hill slopes, among the piles of rubbish ; they dig up the forgotten charnels, unearth bodies of all kind and abandon them at dawn on the tracks, along the houses, corpses, masses of flesh and earth, shaken by the birds and quivering in the morning dew. When the jackals, at night, are hushed, it's because some rebels are on the march. And the soldiers cannot go to

sleep ; in their drowsiness, some cover their cocks. They crowd under the arcade, surround the reassured sentry, put a hand on his shoulder, squabble, abuse each other in a low voice. At the far end of the arcade, the calls of the radio operator, the machine's peepings, the small lights of the transmitter and the fat hand of the operator lit by these and untangling the wires and turning the worn knobs. On the table, a pool of black coffee attracts mosquitoes, a piece of bread dries, eaten by the worms and soiled by the flies ; the moth wing's powder falls on the radio operator's bare shoulders, on his arms tensed by the handling of Morse. On the walls, photos of naked women which have been blackened by the hands and the arms and the knees and the soldiers standing on their camp beds rub their cocks against them. On the radio operator's bed, a little black and yellow dog, is asleep, its paw quivering. Cockroaches are running on the mud floor, grazing the operator's bare feet. He, drops the microphone and the pencil, the earphones slide down on his throat ; he raises and folds his legs under his thighs, he grabs the message, he swivels on the stool, the shorts, stretched, tear under the thighs :

— Guys, an operation for tomorrow... Baby, your transistor arrived at headquarters, the post orderly will bring it the day after tomorrow, but he wants to keep the box.

Dawn comes, birds escape from trees, sow the light with their cries. The sentry, breathes, alone, against the oozing wall of dawn.

The young rebels, satiated, appeased, their cocks softened, walk back, up towards the peaks, towards the high valleys ; they leap from mist to mist, follow the paths of darkness and semi-darkness. They get back to the caves or else walk across the mountains to reach other zones of operations. They can walk sixty kilometers a day. They hide in the abandoned houses, in the dried up wells, in the trees, among the cattle. The soldiers smoke them out in the caves and point their rifles to the inside of the hole, head leaning on the shoulder, motionless, a smile hollowing their cheeks covered with ashes. Then, by midday, all of a sudden, they hiss, pant, shout, cut down the cacti with the butt of their rifle and with daggers drive their daggers in the agaves, push stones inside the hole. Above them, the mountain weathers, sections of rock break loose and tumble down the slopes. Clouds pass round the peaks. Birds, cicadas cry no more.

— Eat.

They squat over the sparse grass. Two sentries remain by the edge of the hole. The soldiers take out the cans of fish and the ration bread. In the jeep, the radio operator turns up the volume of the radio set and sits among the soldiers. Crazy Horse squats down at his feet. The sun heats the uncovered fair hair and the wine stain on his throat. Crazy Horse pulls his tin opener stuck in the battledress pocket, opens a can, he stabs the frozen fish with a small stick carved

as a fork, he lays it on the ration biscuit, the operator grabs it, and swallows it all. Crazy Horse takes the can, tilts his head backwards, he drinks the oil, his lips pressed on the tear of the tinplate, oil drips on his chin, on his throat, sticks his shirt to his chest ; the blue air curls the locks on his forehead and the ones covering the top of his ears. The platoon commander, a little redhead with the face of a raider of birds' nests, is carving a bamboo javelin, he bends it on the nape of Crazy Horse who chokes, spits the oil on his knees. The chief tickles like this other soldiers, under the armpits, under the waist, under the ears, between the thighs, under the feet. Crazy Horse, his stomach heavy, lying, legs spread open, on the stones, thinks with all his might of women, his penis heated by the sun, his knees made languid by beer ; then sperm gushes out, runs over his thighs and under, his knees shake, the radio operator places his hand on Crazy Horse's thigh, on the spot where sperm glues the leopard battledress to the skin ; Crazy Horse's knees give a start then calm down ; the soldiers laugh, Crazy Horse rolls over on his belly, but earth covers his wet buttocks and the chief pricks them with his bamboo. Crazy Horse, face buried in the pebbles, blushes. Sweat shines at the tip of his hair, the operator strokes his shoulders. Already the sun is fuming on the wet canvas. The soldiers dig their daggers in the earth, wipe their oily mouths, doze off, head leaning on the heated tyres of the command-car ; the hoopings of the dynamite crates, cut open, are gleaming. The chief, tilted over the jeep's steering wheel, is asleep, the bamboo hanging between his fingers. Two blue and gold birds, collapse on the overheated bonnet, the male chases the female and squeezes her against the windscreen, he covers her : their semen spatters the windscreen. The sentries, dazzled, see the gleam of lamps hanging in the darkness of the hole ; over them, hover large white and violet butterflies. The dust from their wings falls on the sentries' dry lips.

... Crazy Horse, when still a child, is running barefoot on the debris of granite ; dew and drizzle soak the sheepskin thrown over his shoulders. He runs, he leaps, his herd raises the branches of the fir trees, tramples the needles, horns the trunks and the stubs ; in the valley, the torrent floods the glade, carries away, at night, clutches of kingfisher eggs. Roïon, Crazy Horse's brother, strides over the barbed wires, his hair is strewn with violet petals, his hands and his knees are bloodstained by the rose trees. Their father digs the wet earth, in the electrified glade, higher up, on the southern slope of the Parnassus. Roïon comes upon Crazy Horse, he knocks him down, in the tall grass. They fight, their arms, their legs shoot out, smashing the digitalis ; they fight among the scent of poison. Roïon, with his boots, holds Crazy Horse's bare feet against the earth, but Crazy Horse's shepherd's pipe inside the pocket of his shorts upon the buttock, a loin movement crushes it and pounds it. Crazy Horse shouts, roils aside, throws his fingers around Roïon's neck. Both boys roll enlaced as far as the stone debris, Crazy Horse clawing Roïon's cheeks and ears. Then Roïon kisses the mouth of Crazy Horse, who foams,

cries and laughs at the same time ; both boys mingle their saliva, Roïon moves his knee forward between Crazy Horse's thighs. In the evening, Roïon, getting up from the table, his mouth spattered with soup, goes to the barn ; Crazy Horse gives him a leg up to the cupboard ; Roïon, holding himself erect, pushes his hand over the gallery, touches the buckshot box; his throat beats against the sharp edge of the gallery, his bare feet roll on Crazy Horse's shoulders. Then, the cupboard gives way, it topples over, on the two boys, the glass slits Roïon's throat ; the emptied drawers hold back the tilted cupboard : Crazy Horse, his forehead pierced by the knives and the billhooks, groans, his knees caught under the shelf; his head free inside the cupboard is covered with nails, as if by a swarm of wasps ; the brothers raise the cupboard, pull Roïon's body, their bare arms shaken in the dust of wheat : Crazy Horse crawls on the floor, the brothers push the mother back, by the door ; the wheat dust falls back on the slit throat and on the traces of soup at Roïon's lips, blood bulges his mouth ; the mother screams ; Crazy Horse crawls on his belly, he catches her feet, nibbles them, he wets them with his tears. The father comes out of the farm, he runs among the rocks bathed by moonlight where frost is sparkling, he falls among the branches, his chin hollowing the clay. In the village, schoolboys wearing hooded capes break loose, jostling his legs. The doctor sits his boy in the farm kitchen, he goes up to the room where Roïon is dying. The mother is lying over him, she takes his mouth, a red foam comes out between the boy's teeth, the mother drinks it, the boy rattles and rolls his head over the pillow, the mother kisses his hair powdered with wheat dust, she covers him up entirely ; the father lifts her by the shoulders, she clings to Roïon's hair, the brothers pull her away, make her sit in the alcove, the doctor bends over Roïon, the boy, a stream of blood gushing out on the pillow, dies. In the kitchen, Crazy Horse, the grandmother, lips tight, muffles him up in his brothers' cape, she makes him drink a herb tea ; Crazy Horse's forehead, hands, knees, belly are bloody, blackened, tears have dried in his eyes and on his cheeks, he shivers, his teeth vibrate against the cup. The mother, upstairs, lets out a long shriek and collapses on the alcove floor ; the brothers, the father wail, kneeling around the bed, Crazy Horse gives a start, he drops the cup, he buries his head under the cape ; the doctor's son bends down his head, hands leaning on his knees, the grandmother makes him get up, she pulls a chair towards the cooker, the boy sits down again, his scarf loosened between his thighs, the oven's gleam bathing the blue velvet of his shorts. The sobs from the ceiling have stopped. The doctor comes down again, his forehead is livid and wet with sweat ; he strokes Crazy Horse's shoulders, the boy holds out his arms from under the cape, he grabs the doctor's wrist, he kisses it with his dripping lips. The doctor, sitting at the table, is writing. The father comes down, he stands behind the doctor. Crazy Horse, risen, moves backwards to the charcoal kiln, the doctor leaves with his boy, the father lights the way for them with his lantern. Bending on the car's window, he bursts into tears, the doctor presses his wrist.

Along the path, the brooms scratch the car :

— All of them, I brought them into the world. When your mother came with me, all of them would offer her armfuls of flowers, on the way back, they were shooting out from between our mouths.

Roïon's head rolls over the father's arm, the grandmother washes the blood on Roïon's lips and throat.

In occupied Ecbatane, the mother hangs the washed linen in the charcoal dust. Crazy Horse's brothers work, mixed in with the slaves, in the coal and gold mines. The bones and muscles of their arms and of their chest, shaken by the pneumatic drill, pierce through their skin. The father gets drunk and shows his cock in the estuary's gambling-dens. Crazy Horse, in the afternoon, his head made heavy by wine, rises from the straw mattress, his mother is beating the laundry at the entrance of the cellar ; the pipes of the building's cesspools burst during winter inside their room, a cellar dug out in the coal ; Crazy Horse, standing on tiptoe, watches through the basement window : women are walking on the pavement, he sees their legs, their creased feet, a tube of lipstick clinks and shines on the pavement. Crazy Horse moves his hand forward, takes the tube, a woman's hand then covers his hand ; the whore, squatting, bends down her head, strokes Crazy Horse's moist hand, she laughs, she sings softly, Crazy Horse touches her arm, the whore, squatting, turns up the lamé dress up to the belly, she takes Crazy Horse's hand and lays it between her thighs, on the creased underwear. Crazy Horse turns his head towards the threshold where his mother is beating the laundry, a small cooing swells her throat ; the mother looks up, brandishes the beater, the whore gets up and moves away ; Crazy Horse raises to his nostrils, and to his lips the humid and scented hand. All afternoon, Crazy Horse rubs his belly to the walls, to his mother's legs and hips. In the evening, he sits on the doorstep, his thighs spread open, cock bulging the shorts' pale blue cloth, forehead and knees wet with sweat. He opens and closes his thighs, he grasps his cock between his palms. An enemy man, on the backseat of a black limousine, taps the driver on the shoulder ; the car slows down, the enemy opens the door, he calls Crazy Horse, the boy stands up, he moves towards the car, the man pulls out an automaton from his shirt : a little shepherd playing the pipe ; the enemy takes Crazy Horse, who's holding the automaton against his uncovered chest, by his free hand, he drags the boy into the ruins and already, among the tall nettles, fondles his loins, the grimy cloth of the shorts over the buttocks, and while lifting them up ; Crazy Horse spits then on the enemy, he escapes, his brothers are walking in the street, he places himself in their midst, he takes the strongest one's hand, the automaton is whistling against his chest.

Turds are gushing out of the tear in the pipe, the brothers bind the burst lead with floorcloths ; at night, the flow of turds touches the cheek of Crazy Horse asleep ; in the morning, the boy washes the soiled automaton, he lays it on the

doorstep, he lowers his ear, he listens to the shepherd's pipe. Crazy Horse's gang runs down the street, the boys are holding hands, they escort Crazy Horse riding his old bike, they steal fruits, combs and tubes of brilliantine from the shop stalls : in the ruins, they smoke, hold contests of spitting and pissing, they comb, they lacquer their hair and rub their hands smeared with brilliantine to their hips or in the holes of their pockets. In the building's staircase, on the upper floors, doors are open, on the landings, and the boys watch the furious matings of lovers and adulteresses on the unmade beds, salivate, lick their lips, gasp in chorus ; they stop Novarina, a boy from Ecbatane's Junior College : he's carrying rice and sugar to an old woman, the boys snatch the parcels, go through Novarina's pockets and run away with the Mutual Aid's money ; at noon, they stop him again on the landing ; the old woman, who still paints her lips, inebriated, held him against the door then pushed him down on the bed littered with cats and kissed him on the mouth, in the cavity of the subsiding eiderdown ; he's carrying two pails of shit, he has one foot in the latrines opening on the landing, wind comes out from the hole and curls the cloth of his shorts up his thigh, and his hair on his forehead ; the boys grip him, Crazy Horse picks up the soiled papers, he crumples them on Novarina's lips and in his black hair. The boy struggles, Crazy Horse gags him with the papers ; then Crazy Horse lifts the pails' lids, the boys plunge Novarina's head in the first pail and hold it under the turds, Crazy Horse grabs the boy's feet, he plunges them in the second pail ; Novarina suffocates, shit covers his hair, the boys press his nape down, Crazy Horse strikes Novarina's buttocks and back with the broom, he drives it under the boy's shorts ; the boys, the front of their body all splashed, laugh. The boy's back grows hollow, his nape quivers, his choked cry stirs the turds in the pail ; his whole body is soiled ; Crazy Horse, with the broom, paints his bare legs. When the boys release him, the body collapses between the two pails ; Crazy Horse strikes, then sperm spurts out of his hardened cock and wets his thighs, foam bathes his chin ; sperm darkens the shorts' blue cloth and runs down on his knees ; the boys notice it, they step aside, they run away ; Crazy Horse again, strikes Novarina's nape : again, sperm splashes his thighs, tears stream down as far as his shirt's collar. He throws the broom in the latrines, he lifts Novarina's shoulders, the head comes out of the pail, the mouth, livid, is open, liquid shit runs on the eyes, on the ears, out of the mouth ; Crazy Horse lifts the head by the hair, with his other hand, he wipes Novarina's eyelids, he caresses the eyes with the tip of the fingers ; his heart throbbing, he takes the body under the waist, he lifts it up in his arms, he lays it in the latrines, he picks up the broom, he hangs it on the soiled wall ; on the edge of the window, ringed worms are basking in the sun ; Crazy Horse carries the pails to the latrines, he unhooks the door bolt ; he squats down, he pulls his cock out of his shorts, he shakes it, sperm spatters his legs and the steps. The boy's body lying across the hole, his belly under Crazy Horse's buttocks, is bathed by the sun. Crazy Horse gets up, he buttons his shorts, he leans

over Novarina's soiled body, he blows on his eyes, on his lips, he unfastens his belt, unbuttons the boy's shorts and shirt, he covers the chest and the belly with his hand : the heart, the throat, everywhere he removes the shit, unsticks the clothes. He sets his lips on the soiled ones of the boy, he blows into his mouth, his tongue touches the tongue of the boy. Then, his hands leaning on the stoneware and his palms brushing the heap of turds and papers, he bites his head ; but the boy is dead, and in Ecbatane's sky, the bombers cast shadow under their glistening bodies. With the screams of sirens, women, children, leap down the stairs : children's fists against the latrines' door. Crazy Horse puts his fists on his ears, he leans his back to the wall ; the building shakes under the downpour, it falls in ; by evening, among the rubble, his nostrils open to the scents of broken wood, a young soldier wearing a light helmet, discovers the enlaced bodies of Crazy Horse and Novarina.

Crazy Horse, knocked senseless, Novarina's smashed jaw caught in his mouth, moves a knee. All around, on the steps of the shattered stairs, the maimed bodies of children and women caught while fleeing. The soldier takes Crazy Horse in his arms, he carries him under the khaki tent. Through the holes in the canvas, Crazy Horse awoken sees the flares die in the wake of stars, bombers, fighters, burst in flames, explode, collapse into Ecbatane's estuary, incandescent bodies bounce over the piers, burn the fleeing children, slice the bare feet of slaves tied to the stakes, topple over the barracks of the Slave Trade. On the straw mattress, the mother comes to lie, she hugs Crazy Horse against her bosom ; the soldiers plunge their blackened head in the water holes, open their mouths to the tears in the pipes, water streams under their battledress ; the brothers, decapitated by the building's gutter, shirt tucked up to the shoulders, the tanks' caterpillars flatten them out ; the mother is trembling. Crazy Horse falls asleep, mouth open in the heavy soaked hair. The phosphorus bombs whizz on the estuary ; the orphans, on fire, fling themselves against the walls of toppled bricks, howl when a night breath brushes their hands or their lips.

Crazy Horse changes the sheets after each embrace. The mother beats the laundry at the town wash-houses. Crazy Horse, drunk, in the evening, hits her with her laundry beater. In daytime, he trots along the brothel's tiled floor, with foamy lips, and the sperm held back, arms laden with fresh sheets and sponges ; the whore plays the Pianola on Crazy Horse's naked body, the lamp's dust falls on the boy's nostrils ; the whore raises her cunt, she smears it with lipstick. The mother, at night, undresses Crazy Horse, washes the reddened cock : the naked boy, feet in the bucket's water, arms held up, eats a brioche, crumbs fall on the mother's uncombed hair, kneeling against the bucket. At the brothel, men and whores make him drunk, a whore climbs on the table and sways her hips, loins jutted out backwards ; she takes in her hand her dress and her secret linen, she strikes them with her other hand ; Crazy Horse bursts out laughing, he jumps off

the men's knees, he runs behind the bar : in the cash-register's drawer, he takes the sabre-razor, the one the madam shaves the girl's pubic hair with, the tramps' and night dockers' too hard cheeks, and often the pimply ones of a young customer who dawdles, a flower on the ear, inside the whore's bed : he picks up his satchel behind the bar and he runs, the wind chilling his refreshed cheeks, towards the rebuilt high school. Crazy Horse grips the razor board in his fist, he undresses, he throws his shorts on the table and he strikes with the board ; with the movement, his penis held only by the underpants of colourless wool, is shaken : the whore, coming down, squats down at Crazy Horse's feet and kisses it through the wool ; Crazy Horse strikes the shorts, tears scintillate under his pale eyes : then sperm spurts out, pierces through the wool, runs over the hem : the whore covers the whole cock with her open mouth and her tongue licks the sperm on the wool ; her hands grip Crazy Horse's thighs ; the men sitting or leaning on the wall or on the bar, pant, laugh, the whores clap their hands, they lean their heads on their chest and on the men's shoulders, nibble their ears. The storm blows a green dust under the door, casts shadows and scarlet glimmers on the windows, the dust goes up Crazy Horse's bare legs, clings to the sperm spilled on his thighs ; the whore kisses the boy's navel, he, pulling with his teeth the skin from the chin, holds back his tears beneath his eyelids ; the whore tickles him under the armpit : he bursts out laughing, he waves the razor, he scrapes the sweat on his throat and on his stretched neck :

— My mother, at night, crawls towards my bed, the razor lying on her bare back : she wants to cut all the hair on my body and keep me as a child. Often, I push her hand away from my cock and her muzzle her with my clothes thrown on the ground. She quivers behind the latrine's door when turds burst between my buttocks, she passes her tongue over her lips. She eats the hair she cut on me asleep, she goes out through the window, she tucks up her dress over her knees and the moon bathes her sleeping cunt, she trots on the paths of Leuctres, the green dogs jumping around her : she gives them to eat the skins and the dead pleats of her cunt. When she comes back, I wait for her under the window and I hit her with her beaters, until dawn and sperm streams down my legs...

The whore covers her head with Crazy Horse's shorts and grunts underneath, the boy caresses her breasts with his hair ; the madam, coming out of the laundry, forehead and cheeks wet with steam, seizes Crazy Horse by the ears, she snatches the shorts from the whore's head, she drags the boy away : against the streaming wall of the laundry, Crazy Horse buttons his shorts again, he passes his fingers in his hair, he takes the warm sheets in his arms, he nibbles the hem and the madame's initials : on the landing, he looks at himself in the mirror wardrobe, he arches his back. In the dark room, there is a noise of lark's and kite's wings.

The day before embarking, Crazy Horse and two other soldiers escape

from the Transit District, they run along the Ocean, on the deserted piers, their espadrilles hitting the shadows of the battleships' masts and turrets ; two men stop them on the cove's pebbles ; they sit down in the boat, Crazy Horse watches the underwater lights and the straps caught under the pebbles : the rolling of the boat gives him a hard-on ; both men have painted eyes and lips : Crazy Horse climbs the rope ladder, on the blue cutter's broadside, underneath him one of the painted men pokes and shakes his hair against his buttocks ; Crazy Horse, a lump in his throat, jumps on deck, he tilts his head backwards, the moon dazzles his eyes and runs on his throat ; riggings, tackles, masts are vibrating : a young man, in white clothes, comes towards the soldiers : the two painted men lie down on the ropes at the bow, a black dog is asleep in the furled sails ; camp beds, deck chairs, blankets, are laid out in the centre of the deck : the young man invites the soldiers to lie there ; then, he squats down, he crawls under the deck chairs, under the beds, lifts with his jaw, with his back, their loins bearing on the canvas, he purrs, he lies underneath them and, straightening up on his elbows, he rubs his belly and his hardened cock against the canvas ; the soldiers pull out cigarettes from their shirt, they smoke, their free hand dragging on the deck. The young man comes out, gets up from between their legs ; his hand swift and light fondles their hardened cocks under the battledress cloth ; a girl then lifts up the hatch, at the foot of the mast : Crazy Horse sees her hand, her painted nails brush the iron fittings of the hatch ; she leans against the middle mast, her body held tight, naked underneath, in a grey schoolboy's smock with red edgings ; the young man presses his hand more heavily on Crazy Horse's cock :

— He who fucks me tonight will get twice as much money ; the girl, the two other soldiers may fuck her in exchange for the agreed sum. I choose the boy. You. You. Get up.

The young man seizes Crazy Horse by the neck, his fingers move up into the boy's hair, under the beret, he draws the boy against the handrail :

— I love to fuck boys standing up. You, they made you, leaning against the latrines' door and the orgasm interrupted by the tenants passing on the landing. And it's your mother who taught you to fuck. Look at the other soldiers : neck too long but you...

And he squeezes between his fingers the throat of Crazy Horse choking :

— belly soft, and you, yours is as hard as a shingle.

And he kneads Crazy Horse's belly under the battledress cloth. : — ... a cock too short and too sharp but you...

He drives his hand under the belt, lifts the cock, pulls towards him the testicles :

— It hangs between your legs, down to the knees, and one loves gobbling it up...

The young man drags Crazy Horse to his cabin, he holds him against the

bulkhead ; on the table, fruits are shining ; the young man unfastens Crazy Horse's belt, he takes from his bed a leather wolf's mask, he puts it on, he rubs it against Crazy Horse's chest and his hands pull the battledress down on the hips and knead the buttocks thus tightly fitted. Then, in one go, he makes the battledress slide down as far as the knees and his hands sink under the underpants ; Crazy Horse, arms held up, back leaning against the bulkhead, the wax and varnish covering it sticks to his shirt soaked with sweat ; he breathes and the wolf's mask looks up, closes his mouth.

The young man, his wolf's mask thrown on the floor, knocks down Crazy Horse on the bed, trampling and biting the soldier's throat ; Crazy Horse, his forehead heated by the spirits he drank at the district, gives himself up to the hands, nails and lips of the young man, who, with his hands moist and furious as flies, pulls back against the boy's half-naked body the lace and embroidering of the bedspread. Their sperm squirts out, spatters, sparkles in the moonlight, shimmers, poured out over Crazy Horse's belly. The young man crawls, writhes, pants over the naked boy, he opens the thighs with his knee, he holds at the same time, in his fist, the boy's cock and his own ; Crazy Horse's foot, tight, sweating inside the rope-soled shoe, brushes the fruits in the bowl, and the heel's sweat mingles with the juice secreted by the fruits' rents. The cutter pitches, Crazy Horse, the young man's burning tongue scouring his forehead and his eyes, pulls away his hand caught under the young man's fist, he covers his mouth with it, but the young man bites that hand, he spits into it, he closes it up, saliva comes out between the boy's fingers, the young man opens the hand again, he rubs it to his uncovered chest, then to his cock.

The porthole is open on the night, the seabirds cross the moonlight ; Crazy Horse, mouth distended by vomit, lifts his loins out of the bedspread's folds : sweat runs between his buttocks ; on deck, soldiers lying besides the girl, take her in turn, without changing beds : their sperm scintillates on the girl's half-open cunt. The young man opens his hand on Crazy Horse's belly, he lifts himself up a little on the fist, he spreads the sperm over the boy's chest, up to the throat, glues and combs the down and the hair of the torso, of the armpits ; then, he turns over the boy on his belly, he picks up the wolf's mask, he puts it on, he kneels down, his thighs squeezing the boy's loins. Crazy Horse, his head buried in the lace, vomits, chokes, the young man strokes the quivers of his shoulders, the young man's cock beats against the upper part of the boy's buttocks ; vomit moves forward under Crazy Horse's throat, under his chest.

At dawn, money is running in his hand ; stars have gone out ; Crazy Horse, showered, perfumed, steps over the sleeping bodies of the two other soldiers, the wind freezes the sperm in their fists ; he comes down, pushes the

cabin door.

— Go away. Go away. Wind is burning me.

The young man covers his face with the sheet, the money chinks on the planking, Crazy Horse squats down ; the young man throws his hand risen out of the sheet : a coin hits the boy's forehead, he bursts out laughing, he has a drop of sperm behind the ear, at the tip of a lock from his fair hair. Crazy Horse, in the kitchens, sits in front of the bowl of steaming milk ; the girl strokes his shoulder, milk burns the boy's lips, the cream froths under his nostrils. The top of the girl's blouse is unbuttoned ; Crazy Horse places there his hand warmed up by holding the bowl, the girl gives a start, her lip bears a ring :

— He bought me in exchange for a boy he wanted to get rid of, for one night he bit and injured the end of his penis. This way, through me, he lures soldiers from the district to the cutter and while he fucks you, the soldiers turn me over and tear me. He cannot bear making love alone, in secret and against nature. Often shame grips him, he sets sail towards the high seas. On the third night, he rings the bell : kneeling at his feet, he leaning against the bed and stiffening his legs, I press his cock and I give him a wank, his hands pull at my hair. In the morning, he orders the sailor to return to Ecbatane, he rubs against him. The two painted men follow him everywhere, they flatten themselves, legs spread out, to the doors, before he opens them ; they fall asleep, in the afternoon, on the ropes, enlaced and their rosy cocks sticking out of their blue-jeans, but he does not touch them ; until night he stares at the land, thighs tight on a vibrating rigging. The sailor has only just anchored in front of the cove, the two painted men jump into the boat : the Tcherkesse, on the shore, are beating their soaked tatters on the shingles : a little Tcherkesse runs to the district, the post commander goes up to the idle soldiers on the barracks stairs, those returning from the clubs, having lost their money in drink and gambling. My master wants to fuck only soldiers ; before fucking them, he does not make them pass under the shower, he prefers to lick on their body the blood of the squashed bugs, on their lips, the traces of the gulped down soup. He takes them on the point of leaving for Inamenas, they then come out of basic training, tough, cheeks grazed, hands pierced by blisters, muscles bulging, beaten, restless.

Crazy Horse's hand sinks under the half-opened smock, covers the breasts ; with the other hand the boy lifts the bowl, drinks the lukewarm milk ; then, putting it back on the table, he takes the girl by the waist, kisses her belly, stuck to the smock by the soldier's sperm, his hands kneading the buttocks under the smock's opening ; the girl strokes Crazy Horse's wet hair and at the same time as the sperm squirts out on the boy's thigh, a drop of milk, all of a sudden, glimmers on her breast.

Crazy Horse is the platoon commander's favourite : he drinks his whole pay. Drunk, they fight, they bite each other's jaw. The commander sits down on the

straw mattress where Crazy Horse, lying, stripped to the waist, his belt rolled under the nape, is reading film magazines, he grabs Crazy Horse's cock under the blanket. Around, soldiers are combing their hair, delousing themselves. Crazy Horse casts a white gaze above the film magazine ; out of his chest comes a whimper ; the commander holds the cock's end tighter, pinches the blanket ; then, he shakes again the film magazine and his finger pushes on Crazy Horse's throat, the nail scraping the sweat and pressing the muscle. Then, Crazy Horse sighs, moans, bursts out crying, buries his head and his torso under the blanket. The commander withdraws his hand, caresses the shoulders quivering under the coarse blanket.

A soldier, eyes half-closed, raises his leg and, with his bare foot wet by sweat, touches the technicolor photograph of a naked woman, a rope between her breasts and her thighs and going up along her back as far as the throat, around which it is wound.

Crazy Horse, on his days off in Inamenas, hangs his mirror to the bamboo of his mosquito net, he dips his comb, his razor and his hands inside his helmet, heavy, filled with lukewarm water, he smooths down his hair, he cleans his ears, he shaves his throat and his cheeks, dabs the grazes with the palm of his hand. A soldier, next to him, kneads his linen boiling in his heavy helmet, he turns it over with a bamboo stick. Crazy Horse perfumes his hair and throat, he slips on his recut battledress, he tightens it around the loins, he fastens the belt, thrusts his fingers in his hair, puts on his beret, hangs his Mat to his shoulder. The soldiers pile up his heavy and fuming linen :

— You're as beautiful as a truck, Crazy Horse.

In the street, Crazy Horse, his eyes dazzled, his teeth bared, makes his Mat's breech click. A woman, widowed, saw him march past ; he reminded her of her husband and her son both killed in the great Ecbatane war, she has Crazy Horse called to the police station.

All afternoon, she stuffs him with cakes and fruits, he follows her to the wash-house, they sit on the cement ; the other washerwomen laugh over the water ; they quiver at the soldier's white gaze, the backwash of the soapy water wets his buttocks rolled on the cement. The noise of the beaters makes him turn pale, foam scintillates at the corner of his lips ; the Mat's barrel lies in the foam : the woman takes her hands out of it ; Crazy Horse lifts the basket, he carries it against his belly ; in the laundry, at the woman's, he sits on a stool, his cheeks are gleaming, his lips relax ; but when the woman once again beats the washing, he jumps up, he rushes towards her, he snatches the beaters from her hands, he throws them to the ceiling, he spits in the woman's face, he plunges her head in the foam ; she struggles, her fingers pinch Crazy's thighs. He, weakens, his knees, his wrists are shaking ; she pulls her head out of the foam, she pushes the soldier into her room,

she knocks him down on the bed, she fondles his pale and frozen face, his quivering lips, his thighs where the battledress's cloth is swollen and wet, sperm having spurted out in wrath ; with her tongue, she unclenches his teeth :

— My baby, my mud... my love bite...

When the radio man, during operations, is sending his messages, Crazy Horse comes to rub against him, against his back curved by manipulation, he fondles the receivers pinned to the operator's ears, the hand jumping over the radiographer ; he lies back on his camp bed, he raises a leg towards the heavy and burning roof of the tent, he whistles, the dust from the canvas runs down his leg, as far as his penis. The radio operator lies down on his camp bed, opens his knapsack, pulls a book out, crosses his bare legs. Crazy Horse dozes off for a while, when he wakes up, his tongue heavy, the operator, sitting on his camp bed, is sewing a button on his battledress ; Crazy Horse gets up, he lies down on the operator's bed, his hip touching the operator's bare loins ; the reel of thread rolls on the operator's uncovered thighs, Crazy Horse moves his hand forwards, and takes it :

— Crazy Horse, I'm not your wife.

Crazy Horse withdraws his hand ; the operator, his battledress sewn up, leans back on his camp bed, pulls back a piece of the blanket over his bare legs ; Crazy Horse opens his lips, he nibbles the operator's ear, licks, on the lobe, the mark of the receivers ; the operator takes the book again ; Crazy Horse reads for a moment, his head leaning on the operator's cheek ; then, he groans, he turns over on his belly, he whinnies.

— You have lipstick on your navel, Crazy Horse. Your wife doesn't wash you after sex ?

— She washes me, she rubs me. But I keep her lipstick everywhere on my body. Look.

He unbuttons his shirt, a stain reddens the right nipple. Crazy Horse rolls to the side, he unbuttons his battledress, pulls out his cock from under the underpants, and strokes the red mark on the edge of the cock's lips ; he presses them against the radio operator's hips ; this one pushes back Crazy Horse's hand and cock. The commandos are asleep on their camp beds, skin wet with sweat, languid inside the green and brown camouflage canvas ; mouth open and purring on the edge of the dusty blanket, cap crumpled under the cheek, hands between the thighs and the legs folded up under the buttocks ; knife lifted up by the breathing, on the hip :

— It is I who deliver you and defend you against the Panthers. With Roïon, I was playing : I kissed him on the mouth after he seduced and kissed the farm girls. Drink my wife's saliva upon my lips, and we shall be brothers.

But the radio operator, his back soaked by sweat, has lost consciousness and the sweat freezes between his upper lips and his nostrils...

In the middle of the afternoon, the soldiers are woken up with a bamboo stick by the platoon commander. Two rebels, a young man and his boy, come out of the hole ; at once the commandos knock them to the ground, they search them, they smash their jaw with rifle butts ; the boy huddles up to his father, who shields the child with his arm. The young man refuses to betray the name of his rebel friends, a soldier grabs his hand, he tramples it on the rock ; another soldier grabs and tramples the other hand ; the child is set on his feet again, knocked about, lapidated over the loose stones then tied with a rope and barbed wire under the throat, to the wheel of the command-car. The young man, his hands slashed into shreds, howls. The commander tickles the wounds with his bamboo stick :

— Speak and we let you live you and your kid. Speak.

The soldiers crowd around the body ; two of them squat down, they pull out their daggers, they drive them into the young man's belly, they tear it apart ; the other soldiers look away and try not to vomit. The daggers' blades shine underneath the skin, the rip secretes blood and water, like a pierced agave leaf :

— Kill him, he won't speak.

The two soldiers pick up stones, drive them inside the torn belly ; the blood and bowels, forced back, overflow ; the soldiers trample the belly swollen by stones ; the young man's slashed hands crash down, convulsive, covered with angry flies, on his cheeks and on his eyelids ; two soldiers, shoes soaking wet, lips foaming, jaw bulging, teeth clenched. A soldier tramples the head under his foot, the studded shoe tears the ear. The boy, hearing the rattle of his eviscerated father, whines, the foam swells and bursts on his lips ; Crazy Horse steps forward, he grabs the boy by the hair, he draws his dagger, he cuts with one thrust of his blade the edge of the boy's lips and gum, the blade scratches the teeth ; the boy, his wrists tied up, chokes, he falls, head on the stones ; the rope vibrates between his back and the wheel of the command-car. Crazy Horse raises his dagger, he lifts the boy's head, he makes it roll against the shoulder, he lowers his dagger gripped in the fist ; but the radio operator, in one leap, steps over the front seat, holds Crazy Horse's arm back ; his eyes glare at the soldier : Crazy Horse looks down :

— ... the ears only, please, radio ?...

The boy, his hair pulled in the soldier's fist, trembles, snot runs on his torn lips and on his chin ; his tongue drinks the blood from his gums. The soldier wipes the bloody blade between his fingers, he sheathes the dagger ; the radio operator looks away, the vomit gushes out of his mouth, splashes the mudguard ; Crazy Horse strokes his shaking shoulders ; a soldier leaps forward, cuts the bonds at the boy's wrists, tilts the head back on the overheated bonnet, the blood and

the vomit on the boy's back sizzle, fume ; the soldier presses his fist on the boy's chest ; the child's legs strike the radiator covered with burnt butterflies and birds ; the soldier draws his dagger, he thrusts it in the child's throat, before he could lower his chin upon his throat ; blood spurts out, splashes the hair of the radio operator leaning over the mudguard, and vomiting in jerks. The operator stands up straight again, he grabs the soldier by the throat ; Crazy Horse, stares, with his white gaze, at the seething wound where the sun casts a golden glow upon the fresh blood. He laughs, tears sparkle under his eyelids and burn them. The radio operator, helped by Crazy Horse, digs a grave, they take down both bodies, throw the earth and trample it. The silent soldiers are sitting in the command-car. The radio operator digs the earth around the bloodstains and covers them. The fish cans, torn, half-opened like shells, glitter on the red earth. The radio operator climbs back into the command-car, puts his receivers on. Crazy Horse smokes ; the canvas shoes and the bottom of the battledress and the hands of the commandos are scintillating, the blood drips and reddens the dust upon the metal ; the operator wipes with a greasing rag his lips and his chin soiled with vomit :

— Slaughtered boy and you, his disemboweled father, become ash or food for the solitary and stubborn beasts, then I shall find peace...

The black rain knocks down the cocks in the slush, weighs down the command-car's adjustable hood, bends the shining broom plants ; the commandos putting their mouth out, drink the rain. They halt at the Thilissi monastery, underneath Tifrit ; on the mountain slopes, in the dark rain, jackals run on the snow patches. The sisters make the soldiers comfortable in the dining hall, prepare the tea. The commandos take out the war bread and the rations, many fall asleep over the table. Outside, in the icy night, purple birds roll in the puddles illuminated by the command-car's headlights. The radio operator, wearing a sweater, washes his hands in the toilets, in the entrance, of the dining hall, his head is vibrating, his hands trembling :

— Corpses, loved bodies in the past, I forbid all living men to look at you. I call all the flesh-eating beasts...

A young sister brings the pot of boiling tea ; the commandos hold out, clash, their battered mugs. The radio operator plunges his hair in water, the young sister brings the pot back, her robe brushes the operator's loins, the steam from the tea makes his wet back shudder ; the young sister lays the pot on the oven, she stands at the kitchen door, the operator looks up, he presses his hair, he pulls off his sweater, he rubs his hair with the sleeves ; the young sister takes a piece of linen on the string stretched over the oven, she comes near the operator, she lays the lukewarm linen on his bare shoulder ; the operator looks back, she lowers her young lioness's face under the coiffe ; the operator shakes his sweater, he wrings it, he slips it on his back ; the young sister steps forward, flings her mouth on the sweater, at the shoulder : her lips touch the blood on the khaki wool, her

tongue licks it, her eyes close ; the operator leans his head on the young sister's forehead ; she, pulling her lips away from the shoulder, flees in the vestibule, her lips bloody ; the radio operator runs after her, he holds her against a window, he nibbles the coiffe ; the young sister's head is pinned, nailed to the pane like a moth ; he kisses her on the eyes, on the mouth, his nails scratch the pane ; the young sister struggles, crucified under the soldier's belly ; against her chest, the dampness of the sweater ; against her eyes, the soldier's breath ; against her nape and her shoulders, the cold of the pane spattered with rain ; the operator's little dog jumps off sleeping Crazy Horse's knees, it runs across the vestibule, it licks the operator's legs, stands up, nibbles the battledress where it is stretched by the hardened penis ; a blow with the knee knocks it down on the tiled floor ; the radio operator steps away, the released sister escapes, locks herself up inside the kitchen cubicle ; the radio operator, pushing his little dog in front of him, goes to the dining hall, he shivers, all the commandos are asleep, their forehead on the table linoleum ; the operator takes his mug of tea from next to Crazy Horse's hair, he picks up his rations, he presses his warmed up mug against his chest, he walks through the kitchen, through the pottery workshop where the sisters work under the neon tubes, their breast and arms smeared with clay, he enters the dark chapel, he kneels down, he walks up to the altar lit only by the workshop's neon tubes, he lays the mug and the rations upon the altar cloth, he sits on the edge of the altar, he draws a cross on the war bread, he bends over, he lies on his side, his elbow stretches the cloth ; he eats the war bread, the fish, swallows the tepid tea like a light blood and the blood from the slaughtered boy he took on the young sister's lips dissolves in the tea.

In camp, until dawn, Crazy Horse and the platoon commander, belly swelled with tea, beer and wine, intermixed on the mess tables, sweep away with their hand the lines of empty bottles ; a prisoner woken up by the soldiers and out from jail, picks up the broken glass on the tiled floor. The other prisoners bustle about in the pigsty, between the squalling pigs. A young officer with his head wrapped in a bloodstained bandage leaps on the courtyard flagstones between the puddles, with his electric torch he lights the face of the sentry leaning to the pigsty door bumped into by the prisoners with opened shirts and the black pigs. The soldier shuts his eyes, a smile dies upon his cheeks, the lamp searches the crusted-over eyelashes ; vomit is drying on the collar of his shirt :

— You were wanking ?... Listen to their voices, and they want to rule on their own...

He bangs the door with his shoe, the pigs fall silent, their turds splash the prisoners' hands.

At the far end of the village, underneath the infantry post, drunken soldiers, out in pyjamas from their barrackrooms, pistol beating the hips, take possession of a house : the awoken children cry then fall asleep again, nostrils

tucked up against the bamboo partition ; the women, already, turn up their dresses and lie on the common straw mat, legs spread open ; the soldiers push with their knees a young police dog towards the bed, he nibbles the women's bare legs ; the soldiers pull an old woman from between the stable's calves, they drag her by the shoulders on the manure, their bare feet sink into the soiled straw ; they force the young dog to mate with the old woman unconscious in their arms. The watchtower's searchlight illuminates the stable for a moment : the dog's semen, burning hot, runs down their tight pyjamas legs and their hands work loose from its ardent fur.

Kment steals day and night ; his fingers slide lightly on the clothes worn or folded or hanging, on the seams and in the pockets ; often laughter shakes his hands, his throat beats in the semi-darkness, his hand passes over the sleeper's torso crossed by the blind's stripes : the sleeper turns over on his side, purring. Kment holds back his laughter. Breathing gives life to the tattoo on the sleeper's belly. Behind the dividing wall, forks, spoons, knives clatter, sugar sparkles on the redcurrants. On the bedside table, under Kment's armpit, a pastille sizzles in the glass. Kment bending over the young sleeper, searches his clothes hanging on the chair ; the sick boy's breath closes in on his throat ; the pyjamas' lace bathes in sweat, unfastened down to the navel. Dreams are cramming the sleeper's pricked forehead ; Kment's hand pulls the money, the lighter, the fountainpen, the penknife ; the sleeper turns over once again, his head under Kment's thighs...

A naked girl is crawling towards him the sleeper in the surf, he awakens and the girl takes his mouth, he listens in her mouth like in a shell ; a cart loaded with pastry, is rolling, lightly, behind the screen of palmtrees, a slave is pulling it ; cream and sugar overflow from the baskets, spatter the slave's back and bare loins ; the girl is dragging, by its jaw, a dolphin on the sand ; the young man moves back, he runs towards the cart, he climbs in, he sinks his legs into the baskets, he rolls in the honey : a swarm of wild bees falls from the palmtrees, closes in on the slave, pierces him, slaughters him, kneels him down, knocks him over, beheads him, tramples him ; the young man jumps out of the cart, the swarm moves up again towards the palms, it tears them, the shreds of palms cover up the body of the slave. The girl, on her knees, is cutting open the dolphin. The young man, lying on the sand, his hair smeared with honey, his legs spattered by the blubber from the dolphin, lets the sun dazzle his eyes : the girl cuts a piece of flipper, she holds it out on the tip of the knife to the drowsy young man, she awakens him with a strike of the blade on his cheek ; a jackal pulls the slave's body on the beach, it licks on the body the sugar and the cream ; the girl drives the flipper into the young man's mouth : he, stares at the maimed dolphin, and the jackal tearing off the slave's head ; he spits out the flipper on his knees, but the swarm swells his mouth and his throat...

Kment quivers at the start and the cry from the sleeper, he moves back

towards the cupboard, he opens it, he squats behind the sports clothes : a young woman sits on the bed — on her lips, a trace of whipped cream — she strokes the belly and the chest of the boy : he, his hair stuck to the forehead by sweat, takes the young woman's head, lowers it towards his mouth ; the young woman's saliva comes down, gleams between her teeth and the boy's ; Kment, nose in the tennis petticoat, holds his breath. The young woman, a wedding ring around her finger, rolls over the boy, she drinks his sick breath, she rubs her belly to the bare belly of the boy who, his hands dragging on each side of the bed, spreads his legs under the sheet and his toes glued together by sweat :

— My mother, love me more gently : the scar is bursting. My mother, bring me some dessert.

But she, moaning, bites the boy's livid lips, saliva runs on his cheeks, wets the pillow. A fire is burning army clothes, underneath the window, below the terraced orchard, the smoke darkens the pane, under the blind. The boy's knees rise under the sheet ; the young woman sits up straight again, her hand trembles under the boy's belly, on the penis's brown hair :

— My mother, do not touch. My father, while sounding me, would guess the mark of your fingers. Already, he recognizes your perfume on my chest and in my hair.

The sleeper asleep again, Kment escapes : the clothes, in the cupboard, regain their stillness, the tennis shoes, trampled by Kment, bridle up : Kment's saliva and snot dry up on the petticoat.

Kment buries his thefts under the rotten sheets of his mother's bed. The father searches under the sheets, Kment appears, he strikes the father on the forehead, he spits in his eyes, he knocks him down on the mud floor, he tramples him. Kment and his brothers, sitting against the dividing wall, throw him pieces of meat, he crawls on the mud floor, moves his hand forward ; Kment, with his stick, pushes the piece away ; the father foams with rage, crawls, he lets his clothes slip off his loins. The meat is burning on the brazier, Kment and his brothers tear it apart, they burn their fingers — lips and shreds red in the semi-darkness.

The sisters — the top of their dress bloody — comb their hair in front of the broken mirror, paint their lips ; the younger one puts red everywhere, as far as on her hair : the father crawls towards her, he grabs her leg, he sets his wet mouth on the little girl's muddy knee : she, brisk, looks back, she grips the nail file in her fist ; she pricks the father's forehead, blood spurts, splashes the wrist. Kment, a shred of meat hanging from his teeth, bursts out laughing ; his hand, closed, pricks his knee ; his brothers tear off a quarter of meat, they wolf it together, they bite each other's lips ; the door bangs in the dust ; the girls, all made up under their dusty hair, pass their hands between their breasts, under the dress's neckline, take the creases out of the bloody cloth ; the hand covers the breast, pulls it out of the dress, saliva squirts out on the fingertips, the hand rubs

the nipple, the skin, soft and red under the nipple's filth ; the filth slides in powder onto the breast ; the hand supports the breast marked with imprints, of nail scratches, of teeth, of badges, of army buckles.

Kment gets up, he spits out the shred of meat, he hugs his sister, his hands cover those of the girl underneath her breasts ; Kment, his hair running over his sister's shoulder, opens his mouth, moves his lips towards the breasts, the girl tilts her head backwards, her mouth licks Kment's ear, the honey scintillating deep inside :

— My little mother, dig my ear, pierce it so I can hear the noise of milk inside your breast, the milk coming up, awoken by my tongue and my cock risen against your hip.

The mouth smeared with fat and blood, brushes the girl's breast, the tongue hollows the nipple, saliva runs in the tongue's rib :

— If one of your lovers resembles me, hug him tighter inside your arms, lick him everywhere your tongue, usually, does not dare touch. Squeeze him, suck up the blood from his veins, so that it rolls under your fist and your jaw, livid and the blood and the sperm keeping cool on his softened skin and he, unable to do anything more than smile, shaken, lifted up, turned over. My little mother, smash up my cock...

The girl sets back her breasts behind the top of the dress ; Kment fondles them with both his hands, they swell, they wet the cloth already soiled, bitten, ripped, sewn up again, fastened together. Kment buries his mouth in his sister's hair ; his nostrils smell the scent of soldiers : sweat, rust and grease from their hands, sugary, purplish salivas, snot, sperm, shits released during orgasm. Kment bites the hair, he licks the stains ; the girl, sitting in front of the mirror, her arms languid, curved over Kment's shoulders, closes her eyes, lets her breasts move upwards and shoot out again from the dress and weigh upon the hem, and lets Kment knead them and pinch them, saliva boil inside her mouth and wet the edge of her lips, her thighs open up and sweat run from between them on the straw of the chair, a shudder wakes and freezes the sweat all over her body. The little girl wipes the bloody nail file on the linen hanging alongside the mirror ; the father, his brow and the top of his nose slashed, crawls towards the bed, pulls a piece of the sheet, he wipes his forehead ; the little girl tucks up her dress up to the belly, she comes to squat in front of the brothers sitting against the dividing wall and dozing, belly distended by hot meat ; she touches their knees ; they wake up ; their eyes, for one moment, blink under the hair stuck to the cheeks by blood and fat ; the little girl lies down on the mud floor, the brothers sit up straight, they kneel down, lower their head towards the little girl's belly, they kiss her battered cunt ; then, they, leaning back on their elbows, spread out their legs : the girl rising again, her dress uncreased, kneels down and props herself on her fists ; with her teeth, she uncovers her brothers' belly, and kisses their cocks between the rags.

Rising, they plunge into the sun, eyes cast on the ground. The soldiers and the women passing by touch them and choose them on the brothel stairs.

Kment, in the evenings, visits the brothels and the secret rooms, he musters his brothers ; he gets them dressed again, he snatches the money from the madam, he pushes back the drunken clients, he steals their belt ; the brothers show him their lovers of the afternoon. Often, a brother, intoxicated, clings to the bed sheets ; the man or woman client steps over the bed ; the brother coils up in the soiled sheets. Kment pulls him by the arm ; the man, the woman client washes his, her sexual organs and thighs at the bucket, they press the sponge on their face ; Kment, his hand slides on the traces of sperm on the wooden bed ; the feet of the man, of the woman client, bathe in the soapy puddles caught between the rents of the linoleum ; the brother gets entangled in the sheet stretching on his loins, on his skull : sperm and saliva glue the sheet to his belly, to his throat, to his lips ; suddenly the vomit gushes out of the brother's mouth, swells, reddens the sheet ; the shoulders start, the vomit runs on the throat, on the chest, under the armpit of the imprisoned child. The man, the woman client throws the sponge in the bucket where filaments of sperm dissolve in the lather. Kment draws the soiled sheet aside : the child stares at the transparent sheet stretched over him : the sun and the cool of the evening are bathing the sheet ; on the bolster, Kment's hand brushes the man, the woman client and the child's intermingled locks, the wet fold made by their joined lips and, lower down, the stain of semen strewn with small brown curls.

Kment pulls the child away ; the man, the woman client, naked, slaps Kment's hip :

— You whose hands are not soiled by vomit, dress my body again. It is agreed on in the price of the lay. First, stroke my loins and my belly and my sexual organs with the flat of the wrist.

Then, the dressing completed, the man, the woman client, holds out the belt :

— Fasten, first upon the sexual organs, then go up and check the buttons.

A small purple bird, lame, hops on the outside edge of the latticed window :

— Get up. We're alone. You're eating your vomit ?

Kment hugs the laughing little body through the sheet. A boy comes in, carrying fresh sheets ; he lays them on the bedstead ; he squats down, squeezes the sponge over the bucket, he lifts the bucket, he takes it into the corridor, he fills it with red and sandy water — a sand wind covers Inamenas — he brings it back, he lays it on the linoleum, his finger pulls a filament of sperm stuck to the edge of the bucket ; the boy rubs it to his jeans, on the knee ; he stands up straight again, he taps on the bedstead, Kment pulls the brother's arm out of the sheet, the boy

pulls the other arm : the head appears, throat bathed in wine vomit, lips bitten till blood was drawn : Kment looks down :

— Love, you feel hot ?... You're sitting on your little eggs ?... The madam is coming up to pick them from under you. Get out of bed, quick.

The child raises his leg, he gets up on his elbows, he pushes the sheet away, he stands up, a foot in his vomit ; Kment takes him and lifts him up by the waist, he pushes him in the corridor, he plunges his head and neck in the washbasin ; the boy pulls the sheets off, he throws them in a heap on the linoleum, with the sponge he cleans the stain on the mattress, he unfolds the fresh sheets, he makes the bed again ; the brother, his mouth over the water, holds with his fists, the edge of the-washbasin :

— The purple bird, Kment, comes and sings on the edge of the window when the shadow of the man, the woman client covers my belly. Kment, can the women clients have babies with me ? The madam says she throws them on the manure heap. I want to keep mine. All clients, today, men, women, wanted babies, all cried over the pillow, implored the whores. The madam says it's because of Spring which softens the skin of the cock and the skin of the heart. Kment, a customer came this morning, he laid his instrument on the bed : I was naked on the bed ; he didn't touch me ; he took flowers and leaves from his shirt, he'd spit on them, he was shaking them ; his eyes and his mouth are painted like those of a clown ; he brings the leaves and the flowers over my belly : « Revive these dead flowers and leaves, you, child. » I get up, I press my fist on the bedstead, I stiffen, I wank, the client presses his ear to my little panting chest, the breath of my hardening cock bathes his face : sperm gushes out, spatters the dead flowers and leaves : « Love, I thank you, I take them with me, refreshed by your dew. » He then takes my gluey cock from which my trembling hand withdraws, he sets his lips there, he drinks the drops of forced back sperm ; my other hand, sweating, leaves marks on the wood's varnish. On his lips, there is some blood and the end of my cock is reddened by it.

At night, his brothers and his sisters huddled against him, Kment is riding a horse, by his natural father's side : his bare legs press the horse's fiery flanks ; the natural father's knee collides with Kment's. They gallop towards the sea : the dusty blackberries are soaking in the tumultuous waters. The mother, squatting, blows on the fire, washes the knives and the rompers inside the stream that crosses the beach : the fish caught in the rapids, jump on the carried away pebbles, sparkle through the thistle tufts. A three-mirror wardrobe sticks out of the sand, the hangers shaken by the evening wind bang against the mirrors. In the morning, on the sheets tucked in the golden sand, children play, tickle the sleeping parents. Kment, naked, catches a viper in the current, he strangles it in his fist, he lashes the water, he ties the viper around his forehead. The natural father takes his spurs from the bottom of the wardrobe, officer's badges are painted on his chest,

on his shoulders and on his wrists. He carries Kment away on his horse, they enter the bright and putrefying city and the father slaughters and tramples under his horse's hooves the military who were Kment's lovers. Many are spared, they dig a trench around the brothel, they masturbate, they trample the sperm in the earth turned over ; the natural father pushes them forward and chains them up inside the circle, to the beds and to the brothel's petting seats ; the circle bursts into flame :

— My natural father, save the sheets from the fire !

The forks, the spoons, the knives tinkle inside the blaze ; the glasses, the vases, the chamberpots explode under the ash ; the sponges, the currycombs soar, lifted up, into the middle of the flames. On the beach, the mother lures, caresses the seagulls ; they fall on their back against the hearth stones ; she touches, she bleeds their belly, warm like those of the little whores. The natural father swills down the sail, he strikes it with laundry beaters, he hammers it like a skin ; the brothers roll naked, in the pink puddle at the bottom of the boat. Over the cliff, inside the groves of blackberries and pomegranates, monkeys devour the beasts forced back by the fire set to the city.

Kment tears the heart of a seagull, the wings flutter against his cheeks. The mother snatches the bird, she plunges it in the boiling water. The natural father and the brothers, naked, shiver in the green storm : the storm puts out the flame of the hearth, riddles the sand, drinks the tears of original solitude from the cheeks of the natural father bending over the sail. Kment locks himself up in the mirror wardrobe, a seagull, thrown by the wind, hits the mirror and spatters it with its pink and violet droppings. A stone comes out of the seagull's boiled heart. The storm gives birth to a long and wet stone which reflects the lightnings, then the sun, and Kment, the brothers, the mother and the natural father roll towards the Ocean, bracing themselves against the stone. A procession passes on the road to the dunes, children carry the coffin of a boy who died of illness : no iron has torn him, he passed away, he fell asleep : inside him was the ailment and decay was seething, during the night, noiselessly ; the tears are pure that weep for him, his body is white, his throat intact, the children carry the open coffin under the foliage : the dust of the day falls on the forehead, on the lips of the dead child ; water caught in the leaves brushed past, wets the shroud covering him, from the chest to the feet. But the viper, on Kment's forehead, gets untied, runs down Kment's chest, down his cock, bores into the sand ; swift and shiny, cleaves the dry grass, bites the foot of a child bearer : blood swells the child's cheek pressed against the coffin's wood ; the child kneels down on the sand, the poison burns his leg, the coffin overturns, the corpse slides to the ground, the forehead tears on the armed stones, the coffin's edge falls on the dead child's knee and smashes it. The procession scatters, the children have fled, the snake writhes under the bitten child's armpit, the natural father steps forward, raises his spur, crushes the serpent's head. The natural father walks into the sea, Kment runs after him : the

mother embraces a man from the procession, her hands shimmer, knead the man's hips, the man's knees move apart, come close together again and the mother bursts out laughing, howls in the stormy air — the straw slides between their legs. On the cliff, the military, unbuttoned, are waiting, they call Kment, settled on the petting seats. The waters of the dream come running against Kment's knees.

At dawn, the purple birds dive in through the window, towards the bodies asleep in the rays of light, vibrate, settle on an arm, on a hand, brushing with their warm and fragrant plumage the cheeks, the ears, the hair that receive life from the sleepers of dawn, appeased, freed from the tumultuous dreams of the night. Sunbeams warm the linen, the cloths, the woods, the irons of the room, light up the golden globes of the abandoned bed. Kment opens an eye : a purple bird pricks the knot of the string which he uses as a belt for his shorts, Kment throws his hand forward, grabs the purple bird, squeezes it between his fingers and tears away its heart, he drinks the fresh blood, the beak quivers on his nostrils ; Kment throws the bird away and goes back to sleep.

Later, a sudden and languid movement by Kment waking up, scatters the birds : they fly off towards the bed's bars, blowing its dust with the fluttering of their wings ; the droppings flow, seeds of dawn, glistening, along the bars. Love, lying on his back, legs spread apart, shields his cock with his hand : his nostrils, his lips, his hard and purplish-blue eyelids quiver. Kment gets up, steps over the bodies, opens the door and goes out, the whole front of his body seized by the sun. The noise of the door wakes up a beggar : he stirs, he grumbles, he pulls back around him his tatters dispersed over the swampy land by the wind of night and the tremors of the dream.

Kment walks towards the grass, the sun vibrates and spits through the trees. Kment shakes his clothes, wipes off his lips and off his cheeks the saliva from sleep ; on his bare feet, dew is glimmering, foam of night.

Serge goes down towards the sea beside Emilienne : two sentries come with them. At Serge's feet, the hot sand mixed with thistle thorns and cuttlebones, then the foam from the sea.

Emilienne takes out chocolate and soda drinks from the cloth bag hanging from Serge's shoulder and lays them in front of the soldiers :

— Drink and eat while we bathe.

The soldiers sit down, drive the butts of their rifles into the sand. Serge and Emilienne dash towards the sea, dive in the brutal water, swim far away, cross the gulf, their shoulders and their hips jostled by the motionless outboard motor boats, enter the high seas. The soldiers laugh, eat on the beach ; they fill with sand the empty bottles, they unlace their canvas shoes. Young people are go-kart racing on the cliff : often one of them flattens himself against the metal grating : his spotless

shorts, the sports cars, the club's walls, the girls squatting at the edge of the racetrack, their throat and their breasts rolling, the gold of the cheeks, the hands, the knees and the ears ; the soldiers, mouth sweetened, feet sore, are having an erection ; crawling on their back towards the metal grating, they bite it ; the flags of the clubs and camps are flapping in the wind, the asphalt of the tracks and roads, the stone and marble of the terraces and perrons, the iron and wood of the balustrades, are glowing underneath the sea sky, reflection of ancient lands.

Serge and Emilienne appear out of the sea, run after each other on the crumbling sand, skirt round the rocks — leaning against them — and the puddles :
— Go and bathe, we'll look after your weapons.

Dripping wet, hair stuck to her temples... O beautiful, beautiful... knees covered with sand, she kneels at the standing soldiers' feet. Serge looks away, then he takes Emilienne by the shoulders, he lifts her up along his body, he joins his hands under her breasts, pinches the bathing suit's lace :

— They'll be seen by the officers.

The soldiers move away, undress behind the rocks, run towards the sea, their bodies bearing white marks at the neck and the loins, marks of insect bites : the hair locks on their nape, bathes in the boils' pus. Serge strokes the rifle butts :
— I could kill you.

She shivers, she sits down on the sand, lays her arms and her head on her knees. A boy stands flattened against the metal grating, an orangeade bottle sticks out of his white shorts' hip pocket, the shoulder juts out, bare, from a black wool sweater, he watches Emilienne, he nibbles his phalanxes pressed against the grating, he tightens his thighs, he rolls his head, he whines. A girl, leaning against the club wall, furtive, watches the boy, then Emilienne. The boy looks back, he grabs the girl's arm, he pushes her in a changing room, he knocks her down on the mingled shorts, and his bare feet scraping the lukewarm cement of the partition walls, he covers the girl, he makes her eat his fair hair ; his bone joints are on fire ; a stomach ache of love seethes inside him :

— I give it to you to taste, to drink, like a fashionable liquor. Here, here. But she's the one I love. Emilienne. All the girls dream of holding my cock between their lips. But she's the one I love, and I'll kill Serge. I want to see the inside of his forehead.

Emilienne buries her legs, Serge fondles her breasts under the bathing suit, he bites the salty hair ; Emilienne moves back between Serge's thighs, she lays her elbows on the boy's knees ; against her back, Serge's cock hardens ; she moves her knee bones, dreamily.

... Emilienne plays the part of the Virgin ; but in the last scene, she is demon and the governor recognizes her. It is raining on the glass roof. He comes into the greenhouse, Emilienne takes off her costume of hell, water runs down the panes. Emilienne holds out her hand. The sister strokes her cheeks smeared with

fat and charcoal. In the far end of the greenhouse two girls fondle each other while taking off their costume, behind the palmtrees :

— Don't remove your make-up.

The sister says :

— Children are wild.

— Her beauty will appease their blood.

In the autumn, he lends to the orphanage the cinema equipment from the palace. Emilienne, accompanied by the sister, comes to collect it ; a soldier, with rifle at the slope, bends down with Emilienne to pick up the projector, the rifle's barrel strikes Emilienne's temple, so hard that she faints. The soldier lifts her up in his arms, he lays her on a bench ; while the sister talks in the vestibule to a slave, a former cook at the orphanage, the soldier tucks up Emilienne's dress, he covers her belly with the palm of his hand. The governor, parting from an officer on the perron, catches the soldier leaning already over her, he pushes him aside, he blows on Emilienne's face. The sister dips her handkerchief in the washbasin ; the governor strokes the young girl's icy forehead, he pushes his fingers between the sealed lips ; the sister lays the wet handkerchief on Emilienne's forehead. The governor carries Emilienne to the infirmary, the soldier sits down in the first room, on the bed of a wounded comrade ; the sister holds the wet handkerchief on the forehead. The governor lays Emilienne on the camp bed, the nurse rushes up along a pale sunbeam, she just left the arms of a soldier injured in the head : at night, she lies in the convalescents' beds. Emilienne wakes up. A scream. The nurse rushes to the latrines : a soldier, his bandaged penis sticking out of the pyjamas, leans his forehead against the wall : the bandage is bloody ; the nurse strokes the soldier's cold shoulders : in the iron basin, a filament of reddened sperm is spreading :

— Why didn't you wait, Rico ? I would have done it more delicately...

The soldier embraces the young nurse naked under her blouse :

— You weren't coming any more... You prefer Rancho and his noble wound...

That evening, in the orphanage dormitory, the girls, nightdress opened on their swollen breasts, crowd around Emilienne's bed :

— He took you in his arms ?

— He kissed you on the mouth ?

— Is it true that salivas mix at that moment ?

— Was he touching your buttocks ?

— Did sweat run down his chest ?

At dawn, the dredgers lift the eucalyptus boughs, on the pits where they throw the ancient weapons picked up from the slime of Sebaou river ; they drag out the weapons of their free ancestors : swords, daggers, spears, mallets, pistols ; they clean them with their rags : shreds of suicides' dresses, slaughtered and

drowned soldiers' battledresses, murdered squeezed to death whores' leotards. They carry those weapons to the poor districts of the city ; the whores slip the weapons under the straw mattresses. All day round, the dredgers assembled in the brothel's cellars, drink, crunch almonds, hurt their lips on the figs offered by the madam ; the sewer pipe bursts over the coal : the filaments of sperm, the fragments of sponge, the clots of sperm and blood discharged by the lead, flow between the coal nuts. By the night, the whores pull the weapons from under the straw, they kiss the dredgers ; those, inebriated, shivering in the cool, turn in their fists the rusted swords, the mallets encrusted by sand, the daggers with blades encrusted by shells ; the searchlights from the palace dazzle them, they sit under the beams along the walls, roses grapple on to their foreheads, they whimper ; up on their feet again, they walk down towards the river. The lights from the orphanage go out : the dormitories' night lights glow over the canals where bathe the red brick walls and the swans swim between the locks under the moon ; water is swallowed up by the cellars' ventilators : the swans harpoon the small fish and the rats caught in the whirlpools.

The sentries walk down the roadway ; the dredgers stab them and push them in the canal : blood bubbles in the back and mixes with the black water. The rebels run up the emergency staircase, they invade the dormitories, they brain the supervisor sisters in the alcove curtains ; they throw themselves heavily on the orphan girls, vomit on the pillow, slaughter ; the corroded, chipped, encrusted blades make freakish wounds on the throat, on the belly of the orphan girls ; squeezed at the throat, scalped ; they scream : their mouths, their nostrils spit, their nails pierce the rebels' wrists : one of them winds a supervisor in her cubicle's curtain and he clubs her with the dormitory's crucifix, then, tearing off the Christ's head, he drives it into the supervisor's cunt : the thorn crown tears the cunt's labia ; the rebel's arm gets tangled in the supervisor's underskirts.

Emilienne, covered by the languid chief of the dredgers, grabs his head by the ears and pulls it between the bed bars ; she picks up the sword from the floor, she raises it, she makes it slide on the rebel's back, she pushes, she throws the point on the rebel's nape : the point tears, divides the hair, pierces the skull ; the rebel's mouth opens, a flow of blood spatters the bars where the head is caught ; his hands crush Emilienne's breasts, his fingers pinch the nipples ; Emilienne keeps the blade thrust in ; the night lights are swaying, spattered with blood and sperm — the rebels, standing, half-naked, on the wounded or dead bodies, grip the bulbs in their soiled hands. A commando platoon, at dawn, surrounds the rebels asleep on the dead girls ; from the top of the emergency staircase, they throw the rebels' bodies in the hazy canal :

— Go and dredge yourselves, now.

But, — once the rebels are captured, locked up in the latrines, — the commandos rape the wounded orphan girls or the ones driven insane ; the

embrace dispatches the dying girls...

The waves have hollowed a cliff at the bottom of the beach, they break against that moving wall and foam is running all along. The sandy sea is the only pure surface to be seen here : the sky is covered by smokes from the fires, scored by dismal flights : birds of prey, helicopters. The sea, young people from karting and tennis courts come to it to wash out their noble sweat ; bandits, rebels, lost children, to wash out their filth, their stains, their shed blood. On the sea, ships carry wheat, weapons and soldiers : wheat to appease, reassure, weapons and soldiers to kill, scare, dishearten.

These lie in their vomit at the bottom of the holds, their belly lifted up by rage, fear, thirst : they roll over the soiled planking, the empty bottles, head banging against the bulkheads and the binnacles ; some are asleep, beret flat over the face, lips white covered all round with vomit, flies are humming under the beret ; the thighs' quivering crumples the cloth of the battledress and makes the knee jut out.

On the deck, officers and tourists enjoy the journey and the command ; small children dressed in light colours run after each other in the hatchways, stop in front of the officers, dream of battles, wonder at the fragrance exhaled by those shiny napes, parasols fly open over the handrails, birds follow the wake of the ship.

At night, on the upper deck, a cinema screen is stretched between the yards and horses then trample their unseated riders ; children mixed with soldiers gone up secretly, sit on the hatches and watch, head between their knees : spindrifts spring up, spray the screen with a little noise of rain ; the children : girls and boys, huddle together, their hair mingling at the mercy of the rolling and wind. The soldiers moved by the scent of velvet floating up from the children's bodies, tilt their head backward beneath the sky, offer their face to the pricking, the fondling by the night sky, to the dangerous downpours from the moon... The children move up and make room for them, are astonished to see them without weapons, stroke their badges. The book is filled with noises of locks. The officers drive the soldiers away, they go down to the hold again, step over the sleepers' bodies, slide on the vomit and weariness lays them on the crates and on the sacks ; in the morning, they wake up, crushed, face crumpled, belly cut by the bodies of other soldiers, hand caught under the crates ; sailors drag soiled ropes over the chests, the shoulders, the thighs of the soldiers half-awake, heads stricken by the sailors' bare feet.

Dawn freezes the heavy bodies, sea dew runs over the wood and the iron ; the rot, the vomit are fuming in the sun. The damp dust from the sun falls on the sleepers' lips, on the palm of their open hands, on their eyelashes. The liner enters Inamenas roadstead. All the soldiers are at the doors, in the hold, bending

under the weight of sacks and weapons. The most ill among them are supported by the obscene, jolly, gum-chewing comrades ; the sailors push the soldiers back. Collision. The sailors open the doors, light hits the soldiers. The soldiers jump on the cargo pier — general staff imports goods in secret. Old men are sitting on the crates and smoke a sour and stringy tobacco ; the soldiers, hardly out of the ship, abuse them : the old men shut their eyes, the smell of pepper and cinnamon puts one to sleep ; birds hop on the walls, cats run away, shreds of flesh between the teeth ; women in rags and tatters leave the warehouses at the arm of drunken sailors and dockers ; masses of abandoned children stir in the shadow of the doors, black streams and flies escape from those heaps. Higher up, along the seafront boulevard, sentries, rifle pointed at the sea, motionless, silent, watch the soldiers marching towards the station, wipe with their hand the dew on their forehead, sweat from the night's anguish — and, seized by desire at the sight of the ragged and nagging women, flatten belly and thighs against the stone wall ; the soldiers march in six columns, towards the trains with iron plates scintillating through the smoke ; the warrant officers strike those who break rank to buy the drinks and the brioches. The officers swing round. The jeeps with vibrating antennas drive at full speed on the seafront boulevard, along walls covered by inscriptions and sinister initials.

In the capital, on the squares, at the crossings, under the trees, armoured cars are turned towards the street : soldiers wait there, sleepy, red, lips and eyelids swollen, standing and sitting, hand between the thighs, sweat wetting the battledress under the armpits and at the waist : the soldier, in the morning, is scared by his weapon when, awoken or surprised by the rays of light, he feels it against his hip. The city rises from the shadows, foliage turns green in the diffused light, birds shoot out in the whitewashed sky, windows open on dark rooms and unmade beds, the stripes, filtered by the blinds, caress the naked couples enlaced beside the washbasins.

Trains leave towards the mountain, towards the little deserts of the South. In the mountains, the train passes along the camps and under the remote posts ; there, soldiers half-naked, unkempt, red skin speckled with white, cling to the barbed wire, hold out their arms, shout unknown cries, crumple in their fists photos of naked women.

In each post, a watchtower : a sentry goes round in a circle, throat throbbing under the light helmet's chin strap. The soldiers, inside the train, do not sleep ; tall yellow flowers with stems squeezed and burned in the stone piles, meadows of ashes around the forests, villages destroyed ; at the sight of the first dromedaries, the soldiers rise, burst out laughing, strike each other's round backs. Arrived at the camp, they march through the station with its fresh and gaudy tiles, they tread the path's red earth, look at the children, the dogs, the dark shops where fruits explode ; objects, subjects of the repression ; the soldiers marvel at

seeing again alive children with a smooth throat, languid young people whose sexual organs or breasts bulge the rags and tatters. In the camp, for three days the seniors have been preparing the tent for the newcomers.

They drag themselves along towards the barrier, towards the barbed wire :

— Do you have cans of fish?

— Is the weather fine, in Ecbatane ?

— Ask to be in the first section, the hill climbers, we're free there.

— Camerone, the captain ? A madman. If a dog happened to piss against a tent, he forces us all to unbutton ourselves and he selects a culprit for his night. We're his only family : his wife fucks with the division's armourer. So, the evenings when he longs for it too much, he comes to sit on our campbeds.

— Women ? Haven't you seen the hags in the village ? We wouldn't have enough soap to wash them.

— Yesterday, we bumped off ten rebs, not to mention the scores.

— ... in the villages, we have good fun.

— Babe, say, tell us a bit what you've done to Zaknounge. Babe, women can't resist him, even dead. Babe, the dead ladies' killer.

— When is the ceasefire ?

— Babe, he ain't so much interested by negotiation, he's every woman's pimp in this area.

— That's Pops, the radio operator, he's looking for bits of antennas. A learned one. He scares the officers. They give sugars to his little dog.

— Membré, the dog wanker, he also covers the asses.

— Doudou Artistic, orphan, good-looking, the company's mascot : he draws with blood.

The island has three towns and a thousand villages. In the south, small deserts inhabited by nomads indifferent to the rebellion. Elsewhere, the invading settlers quit little by little their endangered lands : they set fire to their houses, their crops, their blankets, the sacks of wheat and sweetcorn, in front of the eyes of servants, workmen, unsold slaves, assembled and restrained by the whip.

The slave merchants, the pimps watch from behind the gumtrees : as soon as the masters have gone, lips tight, in their black limousines, armed soldiers standing on the running board, they fly at the slaves, they grip them round the waist, they fetter them. The soldiers, on their way back, plunder the ruins, grab from the peasants' houses the objects and livestock which these had already seized and hidden, break the oil and grain vases, pull, tuck up women's dresses, the petticoat sliding on their helmet, and, head under the petticoat, snatch, open their jewels ; run after the children and steal from them what they found in the ruins : dogs, ablaze, howl across the village, stop, whirl round, then collapse on the sand, hair fuming and blackened ; cats, poultry burn within the ruins, writhe, the soldiers are shaken and wet by laughter ; rats run from under the planks and

stones, throw themselves into the water holes and their dive swishes over the water ; chickens bounce on the roof tiles in a swirl of blazing feathers, their eyes sparkle through the smoke. Soldiers run, arms bare, bump into each other's forehead, shout, push away with rifle butts the children slipping between their legs towards the fire and pulling out the remains : the pimps, helped by a few soldiers to whom they promised free fucks in the brothel, overpower these children, tie their waist with ropes ; the children, overpowered, thrust flaming brands between the soldiers' thighs, hurl down the pimps into the blaze. Inside the vans, slaves and children, hair burnt, blow the ash from their lips ; their charred bonds disintegrate ; a pimp and two soldiers dab their mouths with chloroform.

The fire dies out in the night ; at dawn, trails of smoke and ashes, lifted by the sharp wind, rise in the bright sky. Jeeps gleaming with dew, drive over the shimmering asphalt ; the soldiers, face whipped by the wind, sit or squat there, the dew from the foliage under which the jeeps have been driving since morning, drips on their shoulders and on their shaved temples ; wind swells the battledress cloth, freezes the skin, chaps the border of the lips, sweeps the eyes ; mists arise from the valleys ; shepherds appear suddenly from the darkness into the sun, women, arms weighed down with washing and brushes, walk down singing towards the rivers ; the ones raped during the night by the soldiers, dare not look at themselves in the water ; children climb up the trees, their bare shoulders, backs, scratched by the foliage and the thorns. The rays of light pierce soldiers' backs and temples like hypodermic syringes and the sun spreads inside their bodies, drowning hatred and desire. The soldiers quiver, dream without seeing themselves. A solitary bird flies through the foliage ; despite the engine's noise, and the wind, the soldiers hear its cry and the clear rustling of the leaves, the driver looks up towards the trees' moving vault where the sun is scintillating. The jeeps progress between the gumtrees, on the edge of a torrent, the coolness awakens the soldiers. Monkeys leap, bend the branches, chatter in the torrent's din : humming of mosquitoes over the waters. The monkeys swing over the jeeps, raise their tail, show their red buttocks, pull each other's ears and hair, search each other's sex organs buried under the hair, spar, split the leaves, whistle, break the tree barks, throw them over the shoulder, shake, growl, simulate war : one of them collapses in a branch hollow, hand on the heart as if being shot. On the upper branches, other monkeys burst out laughing : they throw bark and foliage on the soldiers, who hold out their fists, pretend to be raging, point their weapons ; the monkeys hide in the upper foliage, lament, sigh, but their eyes throw out sparks between the leaves : a young soldier, half-lying down in the jeep over a comrade's feet, unbuttons himself and moves his taut cock inside a sunbeam : the monkeys, little by little, part the leaves and follow with their head the movement of the stirred up penis.

At the entrance of the Thilissi gorges, the jeeps accelerate, the cold

sharpens, the smiles harden, the hands touch the weapons ; the noise of engines chases doves and pigeons out of their holes in the cliff.

Gunfire.

Some soldiers collapse, blasted, their bodies hang along the jeeps, shaken by violent starts, head banging against the wheel. The other soldiers jump on the road, squat behind the jeep and fire without aiming ; the bullets whizz, pierce the metal and the foreheads, smash the radio set : lamps and crystal, dig the earth like raindrops ; the pigeons and the doves, panic-stricken by the detonations, fly about in disorder, fall on the contorted bodies, their spread wings covering and beating the blanched faces, white of the eyes showing, lips still quivering, nostrils transparent, pearly, on which are running already the little flies of death. The windscreens fly into pieces, the broken glass slides on the helmets, the wounded rattle, crawl along the slope, roll into the cacti, bending, gun dragging on the ground like a broken wing. The rebels, hiding behind the cacti, throw grenades on the jeep ; the soldiers fall, arms stretched sideways through the smoke, break their spinal column on the asphalt, howl ; helmets roll, bodies collapse among the fragments of cacti, hands cling to the alfa grass, claw the earth, close up on the cacti. Rebels fall on the survivors, disarm them, search them, make them lie on the asphalt, trample them, slaughter them, mutilate them without even unbuttoning their clothes and run away with their weapons...

A survivor crawls towards the torrent, a black open wound between his thighs and the battledress is torn : he lets himself slide down the bank, his body rolls inside the water, which stops it quivering. The grass snakes follow to the bottom of the water, on the copper coloured stones, the rays of light and the trails of the blood.

Amyclée washes the corpses piled up in her shanty. The soapy water splashes the two windows' broken panes. At dawn, Amyclée scours the rubbish heaps and the reeds by the river ; she pulls the little bodies from under the straw, the sharp cans and the disjointed frames ; the slaughtered, disemboweled, drowned rebels, from between the smudgy lianas and the rotting faggots where fish and rats bite one another. She loads the bodies on her cart, she lifts the bodies, she lays them on trestles, under her shanty's windows, she tears off their tatters, she washes them, she wrings them, she sews them up ; she washes the naked bodies with soap, she scatters fresh-blown flowers upon them and lets their sap penetrate the dead flesh. The blood, diluted with water, runs from the freshly killed bodies, wets the mud floor under the trestles : Amyclée lifts up the penises, washes the testicles ; the lather pricks her eyes ; the kneecap rolls under the palm of her hand ; the soapy pubic locks become tangled in her fingers, the cake of soap slides on the trestle slats as far as under the corpse's buttocks.

Amyclée shaves the down on the young rebels' cheeks. In the afternoon,

she dozes off, head leaning against the trestles, hair unwound on the hip of a young whore too violently deflowered and thrown to the rubbish pile with the morning's shit. At nightfall, she once more loads the combed, dressed, closed up corpses, she pushes the cart to the bank of the river, she digs a grave ; flies, birds shroud the bodies sliding on the tilted pole, the wounds reopen, the tatters become red ; the slime crumbles into the fresh grave ; Amyclée cuts the dry reeds and throws them at the bottom over the slime, then, she pulls the bodies, one by one, she lifts them in her arms and takes them down inside the pit ; the corpse's head rolls on her arm ; she lays the corpse on the reed litter, she wipes on the pale brow a bird dropping, she kisses the eyelids and the stones of the eyes. The purple birds peck the trampled earth.

On the way back, Amyclée washes the cart in the river ; the fish graze the pole, play among the axles and the bars of the wheels. Amyclée ties the cart to the shanty's latch. At night, lying among the naked corpses, the drop by drop of the blood dripping from the trestles, sends her to sleep. Kment, his hand leaning on the lifted pole, watches Amyclée's breasts ; they breathe in the moonlight and the hair is bathed in pink blood. Kment taps the window pane with his finger. Amyclée opens her eyes :

— I want to drink milk.

He enters, he rushes in Amyclée's arms, his mouth is swelled with wine and beer, he vomits them over Amyclée's shoulder and back, she makes him lie on the camp bed, she holds a pitcher of milk, she pours it in his bowl. Kment rises on one elbow, he puts his lips on the edge of the bowl, he drinks : a clot of blood pierces the surface and sticks to his lips ; Kment spits, throws the bowl against the wall, spits, grips his throat :

— Blood, blood, blood everywhere. Your hair comes out of blood. You change blood into milk. You drink the martyrs' blood.

Milk streams on the wall and in the camp bed's articulations. The blood clot is hanging from Kment's chin, it vibrates when the boy shouts. Amyclée walks around the trestles : turds are coming out from between a young slaughtered rebel's buttocks ; a purple bird is pecking at them. Amyclée strokes the shaven head, the mark of the noose on the stiffened throat. Kment rolls over the mud floor, he crawls, he catches Amyclée's leg, his chest is bathing in the blood, his teeth bite the trestles' feet :

— Give me your milk. Give.

— I have no more. It has receded from me when they killed my child, long ago, in the North.

— I'm your little boy. Let me stroke your belly and your breasts, the milk will come up again, for my lips.

All night he spits, he holds Amyclée against the walls, he knocks her down over the corpses, he bites her, he claws her cunt and her breasts ; he presses

her waist, he licks her neck and throat, pushes on her belly with his fist. She, the blood clot stuck between her lips, her bare back crushing the softened cock of a dead rebel, lets the boy hollow her out, take her breath away with his mouth, drown her in his spittle. Only at dawn does he fall asleep on her, birds fly into the illuminated shanty, the broken panes scintillate, the sharp wind freezes her shoulders and the tears in her eyes. At the tip of her breast shines a drop of milk. Then, waking up the boy with a blow of her knee, she gives herself up : Kment, in a half-sleep opens, pushes forward his lips and his tongue licks the drop of milk on the erect nipple ; then, he falls asleep again but gives little strokes with his tongue on the nipple, every time he groans or becomes immersed again in the dream.

Amyclée lies in the bed of the dying and helps them to die. She also hides the hunted rebels, they hold their breath, crushed under the heap of dead bodies ; the soldiers respect Amyclée, by order of the governor, they bring her sacks of flour and sugar. Some evenings, sugar sparkles on the lips of all the lower district's children and their belly is swollen by flour eaten raw, head inside the sack. Then, Amyclée, secluded in her shanty, her trestles emptied and washed, waits for Djafar. Rebel, commander of the river area, pimp of thirty women, Djafar, on days of flour and sugar, visits Amyclée. He carries the sacks to the mountain where his strike commandos camp. Inside the shanty, he lifts, he chooses the sacks, his pistol, his dagger, beat on his hips. Amyclée holds him back by the wrist, by the waist, Djafar pushes her away : he holds his rifle in his hand, he looks back, the mica eyeshade of his cap darkens his gaze, his hair comes out in locks from under the crammed cap ; the battledress is held tight at the waist and falls in pleats on the buttocks, on the hips, on the thighs ; Djafar grips in his floured fist the top of Amyclée's blouse, he shakes Amyclée, plunges again his free arm in the flour, makes it run between his fingers. Under the battledress, crumpled, its pockets tucked up, the sweater and the sheepskin stolen from the occupation army, fatten his arms, his shoulders and his torso and eat up his neck...

Amyclée strokes his back, he gives a start, he tilts his head backwards, presses his mouth smeared with sugar and flour on Amyclée's cheek and hair ; he hugs the young woman against his chest hardened by the grenades and bullets crammed in the pockets, he bites her mouth, her teeth ; his jaguar's head rolls, crushes Amyclée's shoulder, his paws knead the mass of flesh, hair and fabric wet by sweat on the front of Amyclée's body. Rays of light stripe Djafar's back and legs ; Djafar yells, he slobbers over Amyclée's face, her shoulders, the top of her blouse ; every time she unclenches her lips or looks up, moves her cheeks, tilts her head backwards, at once filaments of slaver develop and scintillate and Djafar licks them and blows on them. The way a beast covers its prey with foam. Djafar squeezes her loins between his thighs hardened by forced marches ; he knocks her down on the camp bed spattered with milk, the canvas makes cracking sounds

under their bodies, the fastenings are stretched tight, the articulations of wood and aluminium, bow. The frame at the head of the bed comes out of joint under their fiery heads ; Amyclée, strangled, holds Djafar's floured head, her nails claw the cap of camouflage cloth, Amyclée raises, pushes back Djafar's head ; he, with one hand unbuttons himself and with the other he tears, her belly lifted up, Amyclée's blouse from one hip to another, with his sugared spittle he blinds Amyclée's eyes ; he shakes his head, he rids it of Amyclée's hands like a horse of its girth. The pieces of cardboard flap on the broken panes. The night wind raises the dust around the shanty ; the searchlights illuminate the brothel windows, the bodies intermingled in the darkness of the outside latrines, over the soiled planks, the pitchers, the washbasins, the mirrors, the steel towel rails, the spattered bars, the folds in the untidy sheets where a transparent sperm is shaking :

— He who sees his blood strongly flowing, knows his intelligence ; harshness lifts up, swells his chest...

— ...gentleness.

— I laugh while fleeing a village we set on fire, cattle and families intermingled in blood, under the moon. The smell of ash and grilled blood gives me a hard-on. Often, I walk back to the slaughter, I touch the muscle, the still throbbing vein of some naked child huddled up beside the heap of bodies. Then, he opens an eye, he stares at me and I strike that eye with my rifle's butt. I call the jackals halted panting behind the smoking ruins, I lift up the child and I throw him in the smoke : the fangs knock against one another in the smoke, blood runs out of the sheet of smoke, limbs shoot out all bloody, I put my foot on them, the jackal bites my shoe, it tears the lace ; my comrades squatting in the vines are devouring the grapes, juice runs down their throat, then mixes with their slaver on the battledress swelled by the cock hardened in the slaughter and kept so by the jackals' uproar and my panting ; the jackals pull bodies knocked down on the slope of roofs and sheds made of thatch and bamboo, the bodies fall, feet bitten by the beasts.

I sit on the heaped up corpses, blood wets my buttocks, a throat quivers under my cock, two breasts breathe under my thighs and I tilt my head backwards, and my eyes become lost in the starlit sky ; the breathing, under me, weakens, my hard-on points towards the stars, my chest moves up again towards my throat, the jackals' paws claw the flagstones. At the bottom of the valley, the jeeps' and half-track vehicles' headlights dazzle the kingfishers mating on the reeds and on the pink shingles, the monkeys mating inside the ruins of the thermal power station, or playing on the motionless driving belts and gear wheels. At the noise of engines, breaths, moanings have started coming out of the pile of mingled bodies but, under me, the breathing has ceased and I lean back hands joined under the nape and I spread my thighs and I let my cock fall back on my belly and lift my belt. Headlights pierce the smoke, I spring up, I strike the comrades dozing in the vines,

throat strangled by the grapes, and we run till morning towards the sea, to purify the harshness of our bodies and of our minds.

In slaughter and in fire, in laughter and relaxation while questioning, we bend forward, we vibrate, we weather like stones. And you love me, you want to change my sharp-pointed cock into a child's hand, change my glaring jaw into a casket for your tears ; I, stone crushing thee my ploughed earth, fire burns all round and do not burn me, sweat hits us, and here we are wandering in the night sky and suddenly twisted and whirling towards the rising sun, towards the zone of silence where all the clashes of the battle assemble and sink into the ground.

Djafar drags Amyclée to the brothel, he throws her against the walls of the common hall. The whores, the boy servants, horsehair mixed with their locks, make a circle around her, they caress her with their soiled hands, they lime her belly, her arms, her face ; their hands are still shaking from having wanked and drunk all day :

— Thus prepared, sprinkled, blessed by our hands, little sister Amyclée, you may embrace those touched by Djafar, without regret.

And Djafar delivers Amyclée to his comrades. At dawn, he takes her from their arms, their legs, he wipes Amyclée's hair with the flat of his hand, his back leans against the wall, he unbuttons himself, he shakes forward his unbuttoned fly. He grows rigid against the wall under its latticed window. Whores, clients, madam, sleepers, give a start when a beam touches their bare feet, their nostrils soiled with snot, their throat where the wine is drying, their belly where the sperm sticks and flattens the down, their lips where the sharp wind make their sexual organs' locks shiver. Amyclée buries her hand between the thighs of Djafar stiffened and hissing, a soda straw between his teeth, she catches the cock, presses it to her lips, she wanks him : the cock, ringed, heats up, swells ; Amyclée presses it against her half-opened lips and saliva sparkles between her teeth : her upper lip covers the top of the seething cock like the cap of a poisoned cup and her eyes shine, mist over, shine.

... ..For a month women have been treading the ravaged plain where Spring rises up a little ; the soldiers, very young ones, strike them, whip them ; one evening, Amyclée, lies down on the earth, the captive women carry her to a tumbledown hut along which a wisteria is blooming ; on the ashes, the child is born ; a gust of wind raises the ash, like a man's stride. The soldiers drink, sing, throw blackened stones and pieces of metal on the women. A soldier reaps the wisteria with his butt, he tramples it, he pushes the women aside, he grabs the gluey and frozen baby in his arms, he steps outside, he runs towards the soldiers sitting around the fire, he throws the baby over his head, he catches him again, he sprinkles him with wine, with earth, he holds him by the feet in his gloved fists.

Amyclée doesn't move, the women guard the door of the broken down hut. A captive woman, whom the soldiers are raping, screams, her head bangs against their hardened shoes rounded off by frost, they crush her toes in the spongy earth : the black spider woven on the soldiers' armbands has faded with the sweat of blows and embraces, with the rain, with the splashed soup. Women grown ugly, ground by weariness and too great a misery ; only, the still pure curve of a cheek, a spark in the glance, the tender joint of a finger, could move the young soldiers, but they do not notice them, they harass those unimportant bodies, they beat them by habit, they crush them by boredom. The soldier throws the baby on the belly of Amyclée knocked down on the rails. At nightfall, the same soldier picks up the baby still alive, he lifts him up by the arm, he runs, he holds a bottle of spirits in another fist ; the baby gets caught in a heap of barbed wire, the soldier pulls, the barbed wire rises ; the soldier ties the baby to the barbed wire, he drags the wire to the gates of Gas. Eagles shoot out from an enemy bomber, gunned down, stranded on the top of the fir trees, by the lake : fifteen year-old soldiers are pushing prisoners towards that frozen lake, they strike them with oars and frames of pedal boats. The prisoners — many are naked — jump on the ice, the squalls knock them down against the bloody blocks of ice ; a soldier catches a little girl who escaped and huddled inside the pedal boat shed, he takes her by the waist and, dancing, he pushes her towards the shore, he forces her to enter the frozen water up to the throat, he pushes one moment her head under water, then, bringing two sharp ice blocks close together, he grips the little girl's neck, until death.

At the Gas, the soldier unties the baby from the barbed wire, he throws him over the living and the dead, standing, lying, intermingled and their shit released in fright and anger. The iron gate is shut again, the soldiers lean on it, their elbows, their chests, their knees ; the gate is shaking ; the soldiers hold their breath : a murmur of girls' dormitory in the morning, rises from the iron. A soldier opens the gate, purulent corpses of children slide like dead fish at the soldier's feet, he tramples those shaven heads, those hollow cheeks, those skinny shoulders marked by the whip, those legs so frail that one blow of the fist would smash them, those eyes in which the blows have awoken the blood in the iris, those battered brows which some natural mothers, once beautiful and happy, have kissed in the evening to chase away the monsters of the dream, those withered lips that alighted upon their cheeks, at morning, red, warm with sleep and sensing already the jam and the tea ; the soldier shakes his boots ; the eagles soar from watch-tower to watch-tower. In slow motion, a train runs towards Amyclée asleep on the wet rails, squashes the rotting corpses, the cradles, the pushchairs, the children's eyeshades piled up on the railway and covered with a powdery and sparkling snow ; the fifteen year-old soldiers climb up the cattle trucks filled with children alive and dead, tear away the small chains and the medals and the gold teeth with the pliers in the mouth of the living, agony's pink blood gushes out, bathes the stolen gold

and the pliers that are searching for it.

In Spring, the river where the wood glides down, water flows on the rocks, in the grass, under the tree roots, between the ruins, rolling the wilted flowers, the pieces of bark, the remains of toys, the jingling fragments of metal. Freshness rises from the waters. Amyclée and the women are washing the children in the liberated lake ; the fifteen year-old soldiers forgiven, disarmed, wearing khaki vests, are fishing, chasing the frogs along the shore. Amyclée and the women lay the babies on the straw litter inside the pedal boat shed ; they beat, they wring the fifteen year-old soldiers' jackets and shirts ; the armbands, faded, are burning under the pots of soup. The fifteen year-old soldiers, their jacket soiled with slime, tear with hoarse laughs the frogs' legs and throw them in the boiling water. At night, they rise silently from the litter, uncrease their straw-strewn jackets, cover their shoulders with the wet jackets, go out in the bright night ; they run like a herd, their heels hitting the rock covered with pine needles ; in the forest, they stroke the enemy bomber, they spit on the double cross mark painted on the fuselage and on the wings, they take out from their jacket a portrait of the Master of War, their suicided master, photo torn off from the pedal boat shed's wall, they hang it to the trunk of a fir tree, they salute him, hand raised, they shout, they trample the ground with their bare feet ; they seize the youngest among them, they undress him, they tie his feet with a pedal boat mooring rope, and they suspend him, upside down, to the lowest branch of the tree ; they press him, they whip him with their belts unfastened from around the jacket, they wank over his shaken back, on his unfurled hair crowned by the mark of the helmet ; then, having untied him, they drag him to a stream in the deep forest, the stream erodes the trunks, it flows towards the sea — the diverted lake ; they plunge the boy's head in the tumultuous current and they flee, silent, panting, their brow whipped by the reborn leaves and the random glimmers of the moon and of the bombers.

Amyclée wakes up, the children, the babies huddled against her hips, fast asleep in the machine-gunned dawn :

— O my mother, princess of Ecbatane, attentive to your slaves' blood ; your head, heavy opium poppy. From now on, I cannot live outside the cruel worlds.

The sea is grey, the children, the adolescents, wearing loose-fitting sailor uniforms, play on the deck, fall asleep huddled on the piles of ropes ; in their sleep, their hands, their shoulders shiver, they groan like little gundogs dreaming of chases and the kill ; on their cheeks, the whip has left white marks ; at the corner of the eyes, wounds that the sun burns ; the spray, the salt falling back on their sleeping bodies, make them quiver. The sailors step over the bodies. They've taken the children in their cabins, they sew up their worn clothes. At ports, they disembark with these children and come back, arms full of toys, barley sugar, shoes, smocks and straw hats.

On deck, everywhere, the children follow them but quiver under the

caresses. Amyclée, leaning over the rails, smokes long cigarettes offered by the young captain of the ship. He doesn't dare caress the scars on Amyclée's face and arms ; he loves her for a deep scar she bears on the top of the throat, at the border of the neck, that decapitates her ; at night, he bends over her while she's asleep, he kisses the scar, under the sheet. A seagull dozing on the outside edge of the porthole, flies away : the wing hits the pane ; Amyclée moves ; the young captain withdraws. In the morning, gone down to the capital of the hundred inlaid cupolas, he brushes with his hand the studded gate of the imperial prison, she, Amyclée, throwing back her hair and the torn tufts soaring around her.

— My mother, revolutionary, was here locked up and beheaded the night of her labour, and I was screaming, alone, abandoned in the prison, on her deserted trestle bed.

Amyclée tilts her head back, offers her taut bosom, the young captain plunges his fair and curly hair, his lips cover the scar...

Amyclée's lips press the cock of a languid Djafar, his battledress rubbing the wall's saltpetre. All around, clients and whores rise, get dressed again ; with their head down, the clients plunge into dawn, stumble over the crates, wipe their soiled hands to the tyres of the market lorries ; behind the banging doors of the small covered market, rats stir the heaps of chopped heads of pigs and lambs, lick the fresh blood, pull at the eyes, dig under the teeth, tear the ears off ; sea birds imprisoned at the departure of stevedores and butchers, bang into the glass roofs, cry, their droppings splash the pools of blood ; the breath from their wings shakes the hooks in the cubicles and the nylon curtains, bloody and pierced by the apprentices' knives. Sleepy children, behind the brothel's bar, fire at each other with air pistols they stole at the slaughterhouse : they press them on the forehead of clients asleep on the tiled floor. Then, Djafar seizes a child by the waist, he grabs the pistol from his fist, he presses the barrel on Amyclée's forehead and he kills her : Amyclée gives a start, her lips part from Djafar's softened cock, she falls backwards, her head bangs against the tiles and the foot of the petting seat ; Djafar, his cock shaking on the battledress, tramples Amyclée's head. The children crowding around the madame's hips, lick their pistols. Djafar, putting his cock back in his battledress and buttoning himself, walks towards the bar, he takes a bottle from the hands of the dishwasher — inside the dishwashing basin, sperm filaments swirl in the soapy water — he drinks straight from the bottle, he throws it against the dishwasher's bare torso and he escapes into the street, his felt sandals striking the drenched asphalt.

In the evening, he is at Loutrakion, on the other side of the river : his aides erect a blackboard in the middle of the village ; he, Djafar, standing on the town hall roof, watches for the people and threatens them with his rifle, his pistol,

his dagger ; he keeps the slaughterhouse pistol inside his shirt, and he often pulls it out to kiss its barrel and its butt.

On the other side of the sea, in the ski resorts, secret messengers, officially disavowed by Ecbatane's government and by those countries in favour of the Inamenas rebellion, jump from helicopters, holding their hats in position ; morning and afternoon, they quarrel around a conference table ; in the evening, they make it up around a game. Ecbatane despises and considers to be slaves and criminals those scoundrels who, to free themselves, kill those very ones they intend to free, or else spare them to later command them as sovereigns.

The military, defeated in a former colonial war, seeing themselves victorious in Inamenas, — and without glory — in the field, persist in believing that they are so in the heart of the people too. Then, very fast, they conceal their inaptitude for right and duty under the pretext of martyrdom and surrender of the State. In the corridors of luxury hotels, staff and Intelligence generals congratulate each other, conspire, mix their perfumes, place themselves in the sun to make their medals gleam, break with their fingers the pot plants' leaves — a demolisher's reflex — and, incapable of killing rebels, they pester the waiters. Those men, for the most part, have the bloated and puffed up face of looters, of pimps. They are laden with honours and privileges and this is fair : they have sacrificed their intelligence.

Bandello the sergeant, the night of his arrival in Inamenas, clears the barrack block wall, he undresses in a deserted sentry box, he puts on his civilian clothes ; shirt and jeans ; he rolls the battledress under the sentry box, he runs away : his automatic pistol tight in the pocket of the jeans — which, too short, he stole from his younger brother, when leaving Ecbatane. Bandello enters the brothel ; Serge squatting in the brothel's small garden, is waiting for Audry, the son of the police chief. Bandello keeps his jeans and shirt away from spatters. But, when the whore undresses him, she recognizes, around the boy's loins, the military underpants : she crumples them between her fingers, she unfastens them and, catching the boy by his cock, she pushes him against the bedstead, the underpants flopped down around his ankles :

— You have the skin of a metropolitan. Here, even the underneath of the mens' cocks is tanned.

Lying under him, she fondles and shakes the boy's contracted testicles, he, bending on her and his belly moving up over the breasts and brushing them :

— They tinkle like sleigh bells.

Bandello, his entire penis strikes his thighs when, the flesh merchant's favourite, wearing only a schoolboy's short smock and the dagger and the mallet hanging from his neck, he steps over the cots and beds where Ecbatane children

are quivering ; and the child, woken up by the cock's beating, he stuns him with a blow of the mallet on the temple, and the natural father, woken up in his turn by the noise of the mallet, he bleeds him with his dagger, and he carries the child away and the flesh merchant throws the child in a van bound for Abroad : under the customs house, adjoining the border-village butcher's shop, a barracks houses the undeclared slaves and the ones smuggled through ; the child is chosen and sold ; a piece of chewing-gum in his mouth, the madam uncovers his teeth with her nails and presses his cock and feels his balls or his breast.

The whore embraces Bandello, she covers his ears. Audry squats down against the garden fence : moonlight bathes his hair, runs behind his ear and on the buckle of his belt ; a naked child wanders on the straw, in the middle of the square in front of the brothel, a dog follows him, licks his feet ; the child digs a hole in the straw, he lies there with the dog in his arms ; the dog shudders at the wind, it releases its turds on the belly of the child sleeping underneath ; a little girl, naked, ribbons in her hair, lifts the frame of a deckchair, she hurts her wrist, she moans while licking the wound, the straw dust moves up along her legs. Bandello tears away the whore's hands from his ears, he quivers at the child's moaning, at the others' footsteps on the straw, he gets up, he walks to the window, he looks out. The whore, knees raised, wipes her lips, strokes the crumpled jeans on the linoleum, her hand touches the pistol inside the pocket ; Bandello's shoulders give a start against the moonlight, a trail of sperm sparkles on his hip. Bandello returns to lie next to the whore again, she kisses his belly and torso refreshed by the wind, her lips follow the marks of the sheet, the scars of the embrace. Bandello rolls over to the edge of the bed ; with his foot, he picks up the jeans, he makes them slide as far as his belly ; the pistol sticks out of the pocket, slides on Bandello's cock, on the soiled hair ; Bandello sees on the butt the marks of the whore's fingers ; he catches the pistol and with one hand, and his raised leg drawing on the jeans as far as the thighs, he brushes the whore's lips with the wet pistol ; she bites and her teeth clink on the metal.

Bandello pays the madam, he goes out on the square ; his bare feet inside the felt lined with Turkish towelling trample the straw dust bathed by the moon, on tiptoe he comes up to the sleeping children, he awakens them by touching their shoulder or their breast, the child rises, Bandello pulls from his jeans pocket, a sweet that was stuck to the cloth, he rolls it in his hand, the child takes it, he crunches it, Bandello pushes the child towards the warehouses ; when he discovers the sea sparkling below the stairs, the child gives a start, he clings to the iron banister, his head pinned against the wall in an inscription of death ; Bandello pulls the child by the arm, unfastens his fingers from the banister, he lifts up the child in his arms, he presses him against his chest, the dog's turds on the child's belly soil Bandello's shirt ; the child struggles, bites Bandello's hand covering his mouth, Bandello thrusts his fist in, the child suffocates, his shit

explodes on Bandello's wrists ; the sea birds bustle around on the last steps of the staircase, mate inside the air holes ; Bandello tramples them under his feet, the droppings, lukewarm, run on the knit of his sandals' felt. Bandello jumps into the warehouse ; at the back of the butchery depot, a young man is sleeping on a camp bed in a brightly lit cubicle ; Bandello delivers the child ; the young man, once Bandello is gone, money swelling the jeans' pocket and waist, chloroforms the child ; he locks him up inside a case of meat about to leave, marks a red cross on the case. The rats run along, bury their snout and their claws between the slats of the case. All night they nibble the wood, they tear it, they scamper against the door and along the cubicle's partition, where the gas night lamp lights and tinges with blue the bare torso and the cheeks of the young ringed-lipped watchman.

Bandello passes over the wall again. Audry and Serge pick up the unconscious children, they carry them away, they deliver them at the caretaker's lodge in the archbishop's palace. They go back to the brothel district, they pick up the men, the boys, the girls, the drunken women : they lay them on benches or on the straw, apart from the streets, out of reach of the wheels ; they dip their handkerchieves in the fountain, they wash the faces soiled with vomit.

Bandello, back from operations, jumps over the wall and prowls on the straw, Audry and Serge fight with him about the children, Bandello draws his pistol, the bullet riddles the gumtrees, and releases the fragrance ; Audry and Serge, lying behind the trunk, embrace : against Serge's ear, Audry's scar on the throat : a grenade, at thirteen years old, in an attempt against his father, a policeman. Bandello drags the body of the child stunned by the shot. A patrol moves towards the brothel : the commandos in three ranks, weapon in hand, the sergeant an electric torch beating his fly lighting the folds of the battledress on the thigh, trample under their feet the pebbles and the cans.

Bandello, Audry and Serge run into the closed down latrines of the former dredgers, they lock themselves up in the cubicles, throat throbbing in the dark, feet sinking in the layer of human and animal shit overflowing from the holes ; the commandos spit at the brothel windowpanes, the sergeant lights the windows on the first floor and the spatters of soap and sperm, and the shadows and the gleams of naked bodies, at the panes.

On his return, Fabienne gets out of bed, bends over Serge asleep all dressed ; he wakes up at his sister's breath upon his eyes :

— You have worms behind your ears, your chest smells of straw, of powder and your bare feet of eucalyptus and shit...

— In the brothel, all desires, all despairs, all laughter spatter, cloud the windowpanes.

— Emilienne, just now, lying beside our father, longs for you ; the faecal flavour of your body at night excites her and softens her heart, her hand turns you over and powders your buttocks, changes your underwear...

Fabienne caresses Serge's belly, unfastens the shorts' rubber belt, Serge gives a start, he sits up straight, he slaps Fabienne's cheek :

— Audry does not love you. Never, when I speak your name : Fabienne, does his cock move, neither do his lips sparkle. Audry loves whores and in the brothel, he wouldn't choose you.

— I love Audry, your hand that touched him tonight, he, Audry, doing evil and good. For him I let dry on his cheeks the secret tears of our natural father that in former times my tongue used to lick, I sitting on his knees and spitting for fun the cherry stones on his lips.

Audry's hair, very black, always wet, — his mother and sister enjoy doing it several times a day, — is combed backwards. After he has spoken, his lips still tremble for a while. Audry comes to the palace, Fabienne is passionate towards him, but, for the whole day, she disappears, accustoms her eyes to the darkness of a locked closet, holds back her tears, dresses Audry, hugs him, undresses him, hits him, protects him, convalescent, from the rain, keeps him, convalescing after an operation on his penis, from stumbling between the boat and the pier ; and, in the afternoon, when Audry and Serge walk side by side and riddle the young trunks with notches, with spittle, with buckshot, — Emilienne, sitting in the verandah and sewing up lovingly the seams of Serge's shorts and shirts, — she goes out, looking down with her dazzled eyes, she comes up to the chair where Audry's jacket is hanging, caresses the collar, slips her hand on the inside lining smelling of ink and tobacco, tries to catch a woman's perfume ; she quivers when both boys appear on the perron, shirt half-opened. Audry slips on his jacket and in the movement, his shoulder shows and Fabienne notices the white spots — marks of injections and childhood vaccines ; she runs away in the park and screams, the sobs choking back the cries, the tears wetting the top of her dress ; she, unbuttoning the top of her dress and half-uncovering her breasts, climbs up the magnolia tree and, straddling a branch, flowers open on her knees and the pollen from the highest flowers powdering her eyelids, her cheeks and her breasts, she leans over a nest of purple birds and fondles the fledglings every time the mother-purple flies out hunting.

The Iguider farm's sentries bring coffee to the soldiers. The police chief crunches cherries ; Iguider's children, wearing pyjamas, the chairs' caning pricking their buttocks, go through the fruit dish with their fingers ; one of the little girls has forgotten her comb in her tousled hair ; a boy squatting down at the feet of the police chief, holds out his hand and the police officer spits his stones inside it. The natural father takes Audry aside, walk down the front steps : the children hang cherries to their ears, unbutton themselves and shake the cherries at the place of their sexual organs or of their breasts ; the maidservants lift them up from their high chairs and push them towards the bath ; in the backyards, shepherds strike

their animals, bury their fingers splashed with milk in their gleaming hair. The police chief climbs back in his jeep, he throws a handful of cherries to the driver :

— Hurry up, Bosphore. We must be in Thilissi before noon. The rebs are marching across the mountains. I want all of you to arm your guns.

The soldiers sprawl on the seats, they make their arms and knees crack, the seams tear under their thighs ; they take off, rub, crumple their camouflaged caps, cram the burning helmet over, the chin strap beating the uncovered throat, they fall asleep, cheek leaning against the dusty metal. Beetles shoot out in the darkness of the command-car, hit the foreheads. A young soldier wakes up, he tramples the beetles on the vibrating metal :

— Shit, let them attack, those rebs. I want to fight, shit, as well as to fuck, shit.

— Shut up, Gay Zodiac, brat, you still smell of the train's smoke... Don't talk bad luck.

But the soldier, his heart is throbbing, he puts his hand on his chest, over the medal.

The rebels surround them, they disarm them : the police chief is gripped round the waist, then slaughtered at the feet of the disarmed soldiers : the bones, the muscles of the throat, make a rasping sound under the blade. The slaughterer gets up again covered with blood, he runs towards the torrent, he plunges in it all dressed, swills his head and his hands ; around the body, ants, insects, worms are caught in the blood ; flies vibrate on the dead man's tight lips and on those of the soldiers ; who, flattened against the oozing walls, trembling, feet in the mud, are searched by the rebels. A rebel holds out his fist towards a soldier :

— You killed my brother, this winter, in Yakouren. Since then, every night, I dream I'm turning over my dagger between the bones of your throat. You all think that we cannot live because of the way you despise us. You, slaves, sons of slaves. He was playing at knucklebones next to our house. You, leaning out of the command-car, with a blow of your stick you smashed his back and your convoy plunges, vibrating, inside the storm. And, that evening, in camp, in the refectory where the quartermaster-sergeant is preparing to show a film, you show the stick to your comrades and with it you strike the neck and the loins of the youngest and the cowardliest among them ; and he, my brother, the child, later killer of your own, dies in the arms of our natural mother ; and you, standing against the watchtower's sheet steel, pricking up your ears to the cinema kisses and gunfire bursts, you wank and, in the intoxication of wine, you call your god, the dumb god, whose absence and silence earn the wrath of men.

The rebel steps towards the soldier, pushes his chin up with his weapon's barrel. He hits his cheeks, he smashes his jaw, the soldier is crying, he clings to his comrades, he holds his jaw ; kneeling in the mud, he presses the rebel's knees, he holds out his hands ; the rebel moves back, he walks away and, quick, turns

round, fires at the soldier who collapses over his comrades' feet, belly split in two, blood spurting at the corner of his lips, his hands twisted and kneading the belt. The wireless peeps : the radio operator, disemboweled on the torn cushion, grabs the sender, types a short signal for help and collapses, head in the tufts of horsehair caught in the seat's springs. The rebels run away, except the one who, his ears deafened by the muddy water, washes in the river and is swimming breast-stroke over the water. Iguider's commandos appear on each side of the torrent, the rebel sees them, his head spins round, his hands beat the water :

— Come out, you're caught, you're alone.

Helicopters come down on the fields, at the edge of the cliffs, the fighter planes machine-gun the fugitives, the broom-plants are stained with blood ; the commandos covered with dust jump from the choppers, weapon in hand, slip between the brooms, on the grass tall and smooth, as far as the torrent ; the rebel swims towards the bank. The soldiers freed, rearmed, carry the bodies of their two comrades to the command-car, officers gather round the body of the police chief, they shout messages to the radio operators, orders to the soldiers stamping on the banks :

— Catch him alive.

— Captain, it's he who slaughtered Mr Audry. He turned the torrent into blood. The fish, excited, are nibbling his feet. Captain, come and see. You'll never make him drink that much water.

The body of the police chief is lying in the jeep, an officer, very young, with iron-rimmed spectacles, unfolds a tent canvas over the body. Against the truck, Gay Zodiac is struggling, he gnashes his teeth, a sergeant strikes his livid face, two comrades hold him by the shoulders :

— Spray him.

The soldiers, push Gay Zodiac towards the wall, they push his head under a muddy waterfall. The rebel is swimming towards the opposite bank, the soldiers are waiting for him, weapon in hand, cigarette in the mouth ; the rebel wears himself out, the soldiers play ducks and drakes around his temples ; he reaches the rock with his hand, a soldier presses his shoe over it :

— We'll make you fry, the American.

The rebel screams, the soldier raises his shoe, the rebel crawls on the bank, he vomits, he rattles, the commandos trample him on the crushed reeds ; the rebel is lying over the rock, feet in the sand, hair stuck on the forehead by the blood ; the soldiers part his fingers :

— He has blood everywhere, the American !

— With us, you'll be killed more clean.

They tie the rebel to the command-car, his hand vibrates on the tyre, in shreds, marked by the rock and the soldier's shoe. The officers step forward :

— If you talk, we'll let you live. If not, we'll abandon you to our beasts.

The rebel keeps quiet. So, the officers hand him over to the soldiers ; they part the rebel's legs, draw their daggers, a soldier — negro — grabs the cock, he holds it in his hand, he pulls at it, he makes the dagger's blade slide against the root whilst pushing apart the hair locks, then, watching, quick, the rebel's eyes, and bursting out laughing, in one go, with the blade he cuts off the penis ; the rebel screams, the soldier gets up, he squats, in the sand he drives his dagger, and his hand, spattered with blood and flesh ; the other soldiers trample, dreamily, the sliced off penis, kick it... The black sweat shines, runs on the forehead, on the hands of the rebel, the belly heaves, grows hollow, the soldier throws away his dagger :

— Papers, quick, newspapers, quick !

Shaken by laughter, he waves his hands, in front of him ; the soldiers tear the newspapers covering the sheet-metal of the command-car and the explosives in the crates, they throw them between the rebel's thighs. The soldier draws his lighter, he grips it in his fist smeared with sand and blood, he lights it, he sets the papers on fire ; the flames lick, harden, blacken the wound, the rebel rolls his head against the tyre ; the slaver, red, runs on his white lips. The soldier, through the vibrations of the blaze, dances, makes his lighter crack :

— Water, water, guys. O Gay Zodiac, guys, make him guzzle the reb's cock. Gay Zodiac, eat war, eat war.

A soldier fills his heavy helmet in the river. He comes back to the body, he pours the water over the blaze ; the flames, flattened, subside, water sizzles in smoke hiding for a moment the agonized body ; the soldiers, hand over the eyes, step back. The young officer with broken spectacles catches the soldier's bloody wrist, the lighter chinks on the stones :

— Enough, Barclay. Stow away your tools.

And the young officer turns away and vomits on the cacti.

Two soldiers pick up the rebel by the feet and by the shoulders, they throw him in the escort's command-car :

— Lock him up in Questioning Centre, from tonight. Absolutely forbidden to show him to the cadet officer doctor.

The convoy starts off : Gay Zodiac is sleeping, his soaked head leaning on his neighbour's knee. Barclay wipes his fist on a tarpaulin flap. Iguider's commandos invade the countryside, choppers, pipers wheel over the villages, nosedive, skim the roofs, the groups of panic-stricken women dropping washing, brushes, among the sand raised by the wash of the propellers, the children flattened against the walls of schools burned down, roughcast again, burned down again ; the Sikorskis, at a distance, raise the dust and the sand of the banks, the light pebbles, break the branches in the bush, push in front of them the swarms and the sparkling flights of wasps and birds, which explode on the windscreen and on the vibrating metal of the fuselage, the green-blue-black blood splashing the

khaki ; drag their frightful shadow over the waters, over the swamps, over the forests, blowing the ash of the glades, the sand near the holes and lairs of the beasts, the lightened carcasses and the heaps of detritus.

Gay Zodiac's screams, his delirium fill the whole floor. While the soldiers carry the police chief's body, in his office, Gay Zodiac rushes inside a palace room with its door open, he falls over the bed, buries his head in the pillow, his helmeted head, the soldiers lift him up, he bites the lace of the bedspread with his teeth bathed by snot and salt, he holds the bars in his fists. In the glassed entrance hall filled with palms, officers and soldiers sitting on the stairs, standing against the cases of laurels and palmtrees, lying on the benches of red and blue velvet, are smoking ; a slave, pregnant, squatting down, wipes on the tiled floor the blood of the police chief with a floorcloth, a soldier from the escort squats down, weapon dragging on the wet tiles, he laughs, he strokes the slave's shoulder, her bent back, her loins, her hips, then her breasts pressed by the blouse, he nibbles the ear, he spits his foam inside the slave's ear, he takes her hand, he pulls it off from the floorcloth, he parts the fingers violently ; the slave groans, the soldier covers the ear with his mouth and keeps her fingers parted ; the slave, her head leaning on the shoulder, the soldier's dribble running on her taut throat, opens her eyes, closed until then because of the soldiers :

— Yes.

The soldier pushes back the floorcloth with his shoe, he drags the slave in the boxroom for brooms and pails, at the far end of the hall, next to the pantry door ; he knocks her down in the dark, over the floorcloths and the brushes, the raised dust rasps their joined mouths, the soldier coughs, the soldier's foam and snot spatter the palate of the slave whose mouth swells ; the soldier spits, he disjoins his lips, his dribble and his snot vibrate in filaments between his teeth and those of the slave ; the soldier bites the slave's teeth, the slave's gums bleed, the soldier unbuttons himself, he undoes the knot made with the tails of the blouse at the level of his cock and uncovering and freeing the slave's legs for both pleasure and work, he covers the slave, he injects his venom into her, sperm held back during slaughter. The slave, shaken, grapples on to the soldier's shoulders with her nails, pinches the battledress, the soldier infuriated by these movements of unintentional fondness, grabs with his fist a tinsplate shovel, he pulls it as far as the slave's shoulder, his cock burrowing into the slave's loosened belly and lifting the entrails and the child's germ ; the forced back sperm, swells the locks of the soldier's pubic hair ; the slave groans, her teeth bite the filaments of snot and foam and cut them off, her hair becomes tangled with the horsehair of the brushes and brooms ; the soldier withdraws his cock, he rises, he squats down, his softened cock resting on the fly's stretched buttonhole, he brandishes the shovel, he strikes

the slave's belly, her cunt closing up under the stain ; the semen caught on the back of the waved shovel, spatters the soldier's face, his eyelashes, his eyebrows, his lips, the lobe of his ears, the wrinkles of anger on his forehead, his cheeks wet with tears :

— She's scoffing at me, my Ecbatane mouse. She betrays me with the factory mates. Pregnant. By them or me ? The birth, that will give me a leave. If it's a girl, one more cunt to fuck later on. You, who fucked you ? I add my colours.

Gay Zodiac soaks the pillow, the soldiers are sitting on the bed, they look at the walls, the trinkets, the portraits in the room. On the working surface, against a pile of books, a photo of Serge and Audry, tense and huddled together in a speedboat crossing the bay of Inamenas. Gay Zodiac, night darkening the room and the soldiers' cocks hardening under the battledress by the contact of the bedspread's warmed up fabric and by the sound of women's voices and sobs inside the palace, calms down, his shoulders become lighter and weigh upon the pillow, he falls asleep. The soldiers pierce the darkness with their weary eyes ; the distant sound of footsteps, of linen, of scent bottles fills them with sadness, a lump comes into their throat, they lay their hand on their guns.

Audry, kneeling in the death chamber, his chin in the shroud, looks up towards his father's pierced throat. The servant girls, his mother and Bietrix his sister, sponge up with military cloth the pink and fresh blood still springing from the wound. A little slave, picked up by Audry in the brothel garden, and whom the police chief enjoyed bathing himself and tickling in the evenings, after the games and the petty services — and long after the bath, in the night, the little slave still laughed, head under the pillow, at the bottom of a cubicle in the linen room — tightens his small fists around the bedstead, tears run on the collar of his half-opened blouse : an officer grabs him by the shoulders, then by the neck, and pulls him out of the room ; Audry rises, he rushes to the officer, releases the little slave, takes his hand, and makes him kneel against him and their heads are touching, on the crumpled shroud ; outside, the crowd has gathered at the Palace gates ; Audry hears the stamping, the women's you-yous, the cracking of snot in the children's nostrils, the rustling of tatters. He gets up, he moves his hand towards the wound, stops the women's hands covering it to sponge it up, strokes the scabs of hardened blood, dips his finger in the fresh blood ; then, rushes out of the chamber : on the landing, Serge appears, a rose at his ear — a whore whose child he saved a short time ago from Bandello's hands, stuck it between his ear and his temple while he was sleeping this late afternoon, head leaning against the closed down latrines ; Audry catches him by the shoulders and kisses his armpit through the light shirt ; then he goes down, swiftly, he crosses the hall, pulls a rifle from the rack, loads it, jostles the sentries dozing in front of the palace gate, fires into the crowd until he has no bullets left ; the barrel burns his hands, he presses it against his bare belly, he keeps it ; sentries overpower him, the crowd shouts,

scatters : two children, a woman lie quivering on the tepid asphalt. The sentries disarm Audry :

— You did well. We're on your side.

Audry is trembling, an officer takes him by the hand ; the women, on the top of the stairs, embrace the boy ; Audry is lying in his room, on the bed from which Gay Zodiac rises, leaving the hole of his heavy and warm and wet body ; by his bedside, Bietrix, his mother, and Serge, standing against the dressing cupboard ; Audry whines : since he is in bed, he hasn't once turned over, his shirt is wet at the armpits, sweat makes a long scintillating trail along his back, from the nape down to the waist.

Soldiers, officers, reporters go out into the night, the softened asphalt sinks under their feet ; dead bodies have been picked up, streets are deserted, the sand brought by the crowd, stirs on the dark asphalt. Jeeps drive slowly by the footpaths, crammed with helmeted soldiers, their weapons raised.

Gay Zodiac, just recovered from a fever, weapon across his shoulder, pours water on the bloodstains, and picks up the cartridge cases, he empties the water from his helmet on the sand, the stream shines under the moon, he puts his helmet back on his head, he spits, pushes back a lock from the forehead under the helmet and enters the hall : two sentries are guarding the door : their navel appears above the belt's buckle.

In the poor districts, miserable groups assemble, stirred by a young rebel come down from the mountains at the noise of the rifle fire. The two dead children are lying in their shacks, drunken men and whores escaped for a moment from the brothel keep vigil, the bullets have torn forehead and belly. Headquarters orders to leave all doors open until dawn. Platoons invade the poor districts, throw stones against the open doors. Women have closed the shack's doors on the dead children. The soldiers shake the old wood, break off the locks with their daggers, shout, fire in the air ; the doors give way, they rush inside, weapon in hand, ready to strike, to rape, but they see the little bodies lying in the darkness on straw and rags, they stop, lower their weapons, some of them kneel down, cross themselves on forehead and chest, step back towards the door, rejoin the bawling reinforcements.

The night is warm ; in the upper city, headlights, searchlights and lamps become covered by slashed insects ; the birds, heavy, fly from tree to tree ; the river banks resound with shouts and love calls. Kment is sitting on a water gate of the orphanage canal, outside the city ; he dips his bare and bruised feet inside the pungent and tepid moss of the water gushing out of the illuminated tanneries, the moss moves up to his knees, to his thighs ; he pulls a piece of bread from his shirt, bites into it, stands up, keeps his balance on the thin end of the gate, jumps in the meadow, enters the tall grass, mud stains his cheeks, he slips under the walls of the slum, steps over the fences of iron and wood, the abandoned chevaux de frise;

he walks in the middle of a deserted street, along half-opened doors and fetid gutters where he tries to catch in the black stream a scrap of meat or fish, a rotten fruit, a softened bread ; he listens to the tears, the groaning of women, the little warm cries of pleasure, the muffled laughter, the blows, the sighs, the gasping, the calls, the orders, the whistles, the orders shouted to whores by drunken clients : he smiles and he shivers. Moss runs down like water along his legs.

Towards the top of the hill, behind the camp's barbed wire, commandos hunt cats among the scrap heaps :

— Come out, show yourselves, American cats.

— Just look at the white cat under the GMC truck's wheels !

— And that one, huddling inside the tyre. Barclay, mind your arm's tattoos, it's showing fight.

They burst out laughing, they strike the cats with their rifle butts, they nail them to the tyres with their daggers, they bleed them, they cut them up, they cook them on their gas rings in the barrackrooms, under the tents, after the roll call. Then, they go to bed, belly bloated, lips smeared with fat. Flies sweep down on the leftovers, vibrate above the dusty blankets and the faces shining with fat and sweat.

Barclay gets out, moves his hand on the blanket, the hand is stained with blood : he's eaten a half-raw piece ; the flies sting his tattooed arm. Outside, sentries walk on the deep sand ; breeches slap, ladders creak along the watchtowers, night trembles. Sleepy soldiers come out of the guardroom, blanket under the arm, pockets packed with comics, sugar, transistors ; chilliness cuts the belly, freezes the heavy eyelids, the sweat of armpits and thighs. At the foot of Alleghanys watchtower, Jimmy Borghese, feeling sick, staggers, stoops, vomits in the scrap heap :

— You all right, Jimmy ?

The other soldier comes down, blanket and rifle mixed on the shoulder, he jumps on the sand : Jimmy Borghese, chin and throat soiled with vomit glowing in the moonlight, grips in his fist, the ladder's rung and he turns on his foot : « O fucking army. Fucking army », spits, sniffs up his vomit, whimpers :

— O mummy. It's those fucking Americans' fault. In the commandos they eat cats. They've hanged the paws and the claws on the tent stakes, they spit the pieces in the beers... haven't seen anything ?

— Nothing-To-Report, Nothing-To-Wank-About, my fat one. Up there it reeks of sperm ; Eber Lobato, he took the first turn to read the Hundred and Twenty Positions. Don't sit on the seat, he wanked over it. Say, O Jimmy, the Alberts, they're in rebellion. Fuck, all we have to do is drop an atom bomb.

— Yes, no more Americans, no more Alberts, no more jackals and no more Jimmy Borghese.

— O Jimmy, I saw the Caravelle fly carrying the atom bomb to the desert.

Jimmy Borghese climbs up the watchtower, rifle beating his chest, battledress buttons getting caught to the rungs of the ladder. He lays the blanket on the edge of the tower and the rifle against the protective sheet metal, he moves the searchlight : the beam scours the barbed wires, the trenches, the swamps, the shacks in the slums, the shelter of the trees, the heaps of debris, the sewers at ground level, the droppings and the turds on the wet sand, the broods of jackals asleep or hypnotized. The soldier is alone, drowned in the haze of heat, where the crowings, at the first of dawn, of cocks, burst, muffled ; crushed by the damp shadow ; he raises the searchlight towards the mountains : far away, immaterial, frozen, ice packs of rock and shadow : Jimmy Borghese drowns his gaze in them, breathes their altitude and their darkness, but his eyes close : mosquitoes strike his brow and roll down his cheeks ; the petrol running from the tanks under the trucks, croaks, solitary and stubborn tree frog and Jimmy strokes it by the water, but Jacky, the brother, paints his eyes and his lips and prostitutes himself inside the sports cars of Ecbatane, but back in the village, the farmhands throw him bound hand and foot in the clay, they slaughter him with pruning knives and hoes, Jacky's head rolls in the pond's swillings where his blood and his makeup blend :

— O ! Jimmy ! Nothing to report ? You're asleep, my fat one ?

The sergeant aims his torch at the watchtower ; Jimmy Borghese, dazzled, protects his eyes with his arm : he's on the seat and Eber Lobato's sperm wets the bottom of his thighs ; he rises, he leans out, he shivers, the sergeant sweeps the sand with his rubber-soled canvas shoes :

— There's been trouble, at the commandos, they bled Hecate, the captain's bitch, to eat it. The captain, he's been whipping them for two hours on their beds with his belt. The bitch they ate half of it : the bowels and the legs. Barclay, 'e was dancing all naked with the ears of the bitch, bloody, fastened to the temples with a shoelace, the captain, he came in, he lashed him with the belt, Barclay's head was ringing against the stove. The captain, he's in a sweat, he hits, he whips ; the naked commandos hide under the camp beds, protect themselves with the knapsacks. Gay Zodiac, entangled in his sleeping bag, he holds out his arm, the belt's buckle pierces his hand, and the captain, he huris himself at Gay Zodiac, he tears the wound, he widens it.

The tent is all spattered. The burning candles fall on the blankets. The captain, in the smoke and dust, he whips the white bodies passing and leaping on the blazing beds. The prisoners, set free by me, pour pails of water, the tent collapses. Fuck, all of them, except Gay Zodiac, they got out in time, they hide in the trucks, the captain, he strikes the flames, the dust, he strikes himself, he whips the prisoners and their hands gripping the pails' handle, he tramples the flames, he pulls out the charred limbs of Hecate, he presses them on his chest, he bites them, he burns his lips on them, the prisoners extract from under his blazing camp bed Gay Zodiac unconscious, burnt, blood is grilling on the wound of his hand. I

take him in my arms, I carry him to the infirmary. The captain, he climbs the GMC truck's running board, he whips the commandos huddled inside the cab and shivering in the rising wind ; the probationary medical officer overpowers the captain ; with the tears, water rises in the captain's burnt eyes. The guys from the garage and engines, have sheltered under their tents the naked commandos and the grilled hair. They smear their hands, their thighs, their lips, with ointment and margarine, they bandage their burns, the guys from the garage and engines make coffee on the charcoal pans ; Barclay unties the shoelace holding Hecate's cut ears on his temples, he drinks three mugs of coffee, he opens with his teeth a big bottle of beer, he dips his pink-lipped cock in the head and rising over the neck and in one gulp, he swallows the beer and his feet strike the pebbles ; the commandos fling themselves on the empty camp beds — those of the boys carrying out a mission — and fall asleep, lying on their side, knees against the chin, buttocks parted and dawn's sharp wind freezes their asshole.

In the morning, and during the whole of morning, platoons are on patrol in the streets of the lower city : soldiers sing, their arms are red, their eyes search the façades of cob and sheet metal and the half-opened doors, try to catch sight of a bare arm, shoulder, breast through the panes : a naked child, squatting in the ravaged garden, drinks water caught in a battered cardboard box : dust runs in the folds of the battledress ; the weapon, barrel pointed downwards, bruises the hip, the soldier carries with him the smell of dust and sweat and beer mixed together, his speech hoarse and suddenly clear during slaughter : peasants, craftsmen, merchants of the poor district, fight, slaughter the soldiers, whores betray them but all pity them. One never kills one's foe, only his slaves.

Giauhare lifts a basket overflowing with fresh linen, rests it against her hip. Kment, sprawled on the dirty linen and eating honey cakes stolen from the brothel's kitchen, gets up, he lays the cakes on the ironing board, he puts his hand on the basket, he looks Giauhare straight in the eye :

— Let me carry that linen. Have some rest.

— Your hands are sticky.

Giauhare pushes him back, gentle, rests the basket's edge on the boy's uncovered belly. Kment makes his hand slide on the young girl's fingers, the fingers part, move back, clutch at the wicker handles ; Kment smiles, sees the veins tremble in the hollow of Giauhare's forearm, his lips move forward, Giauhare steps back towards the semi-darkness ; the tip of her fingers, the line of her lips, her eyes, shine with a wet sparkle : already the folds of her blouse, over the hip, scintillate like under a caress or a slightly violent embrace ; the boy's face, quick, has softened, the skin flutters and the shadow of the eyelids veils the cheeks, the blinking of lashes puts a black motion in his face as though covered by a close-meshed net ; the boy's hand settles on Giauhare's hip, moves up towards the

breasts ; then, Kment takes away, gentle, the basket from Giauhare's hands, he pushes the basket on the ironing board ; Giauhare flattens herself against the wall, breathes, holds up her head a bit, her hands hang a moment along her hips, opened, inflamed ; again Kment's stormy hands glide on her blouse ; the boy's face comes up to Giauhare's, the boy's warm breath closes in on the cheeks, the forehead of Giauhare, burns her eyes and her lips ; Kment pushes Giauhare towards a corner of the shop where two hammocks are slung to the walls, intermingled by the excitement of the day, the brusque motions of the washerwomen ; the boy pushes Giauhare against the hammocks, the meshes open, close, slide over Giauhare's blouse, the net shrouds her hips ; both young people are face to face : she, cannot look down any more, their chests are touching, the cloth burns, the boy's sleeve burns Giauhare's shoulder ; around them, within them, against them, everything is trembling, everything is scintillating ; the whole skin, is throbbing ; Giauhare fears and desires this chest, this belly, these lips that are tearing her, this gaze that erases memory, this hand that destroys order, this knee that stops time, she is going to die, but she smiles, her teeth, one moment uncovered, shine and the boy's lips settle swift and fresh, upon them ; Giauhare seizes the boy's hips, saliva runs between their lips like the milk from the stems.

Kment draws Giauhare against him ; the hammocks, free, become disentangled. A look from the boy and Giauhare breaks loose and lies down in the first hammock ; the boy lies down in the one which is in semi-darkness and near the wall ; opposite, the rays of light and the silent walk of the washerwomen give life to the bamboo partition ; the boy rolls his head on Giauhare's side and in one movement, swift but gentle, of the loins, throws his hammock towards Giauhare's ; the young girl does not move ; the boy's hip, several times, brushes her hip, at greater length every time ; after, it is the shoulder, and the boy is still swinging, a sleepy smile on his lips, in the darkness mixed with steam and sun. Then, she turns her head, sees the boy's uncovered torso through the mesh, the sweat running in the hollow of the throat, on the chest, between the folds of the belly where live the stains of darkness, the unfastened buckle of the belt — stolen from an artillery captain, after love — shines over the hip, the steel point aimed at Giauhare. She, almost asleep, gives herself up to this rocking, grows accustomed to the contact of the hip. She suffocates, lets herself get covered with sweat, her swollen breasts gradually come out of the blouse, her hair, blackened by sweat, run between the mesh of the net ; she does not move, for fear that sweat stream over the skin, she half shuts her eyes under the waxen eyelids, she presses her parted fingers on the net ; through the lashes, she sees shining over there, on the board, the iron under the whitewashed wall and the water inside the bowl where the red dust of the sandstorm settles ; the regular contact of the boy's hip makes a wound on her side ; then, Kment's hand brushes her half-bare breast, slides over the blouse's first button ; Giauhare sighs and the breath of the sigh cools the sweat

gathered over his upper lip ; Giauhare's hand settles on Kment's hand, strokes its palm, hard under the sweat, enters the hollow of the phalanges, parts the fingers lifting the button ; a smile appears on the lips of the youths, the smile of water, of stone, contemplation and action harmonize, and the smile is born from this perfection. Their faces join, the boy holds back Giauhare's hammock, passes his arm underneath the stretched mesh, clutches Giauhare's shoulders through the net, then, swift, rolls inside the young girl's hammock ; he covers her ; the hammock, under the weight, closes up on the body ; semen glitters, scintillates on the shaken hammock's mesh, spurts out intermittently between the bones of their hips joined and bruised by the rubbing.

Opposite, above, the windows of the barrack block become filled with quarrelsome and dusty soldiers, bare torso, hair wet at the temples, cloth tied around the neck.

Eber Lobato opens his hands smeared with rust and blood ; all day he's been unloading carriages of scrap iron at the harbour ; a red sweat runs towards his chest, between the nipples ; a golden red dust shines in his hair, on his eyebrows, on the down of his belly and lips ; a reddish-brown foam spurts from between his teeth, strikes his chin.

Eber Lobato enters the shower, he pulls off his underpants, he hangs them on to the pipe ; under the jet of water, naked soldiers are boxing, their toes get caught in the broken slats ; all of them, they piss down their legs, they lift their cocks, they compare them ; Eber Lobato holds his cock in his fist :

— That's me. The whores of Ecbatane anointed it king, long ago, I was fifteen.

Lying under the tent, his loins held tight in the wet underpants with folds stained by rust, arms folded under his neck, Eber Lobato licks the foam on his lips ; his jay-blue lacquered hair, shines on the sheepskin unfolded as a pillow under the head, Eber Lobato rolls his head a bit, he nibbles the sheep's hair, he spits in it, he buries and stirs his mouth inside the spittle, his hips — the skin over the bone is worn out — crack, the cock, warm, rises and rolls over the thigh, swells the light and humid cloth, Eber Lobato turns round on his belly, he rubs his cock against the dusty blanket, the tufts of hair get tangled with his eyebrows, he opens his nostrils to the scent of grease.

... In the harbour, a child was passing, arms filled with icy bottles from the fountain : they grab him by the shoulders, they snatch the bottles away from him ; the kneeling child kisses their shoes powdered with rust. Eber Lobato throws his shoe at the chest of the child who falls on the heap of scrap iron and bricks ; the soldiers empty the icy soda water, throw the bottles against the walls ; the child, getting up, buttock pierced by the barbed wire, throws himself on the soldiers, but they press him, they apply their hands rubbed with rust and grease on his cheeks, on his shoulders, on the tatters beating against his chest and his

belly, tied over the thighs ; they cram Eber Lobato's heavy helmet on his head, down to the eyes, they bang on the helmet with their pincers for barbed wire. The child screams, cries under the white sun. The jeeps, at top speed, creak, vibrate along the seaside, they striate the sun, shatter the plasterwork, pierce the amber of the air, tear the cacti, metal burning under the buttocks of the soldiers splashed by the plants' milk. The white marks of the blows on the child's flesh, turn crimson, he pulls off the helmet, he throws it on Eber Lobato's feet, he spits, he runs away, body shaken by sobs.

The soldiers having left the deserted harbour where rails glitter under the rays of the dying sun, dogs appear, they fight over a piece of rotten meat that the soldiers pulled from under the scrap and dragged in the dust. Meat strikes the asphalt, dogs' fangs clatter in the blue silence, flies swarm over the dogs that bite them and spit them out again, on the shaken meat which squashes them. The child, his temples torn by the helmet's buckles, runs under the trees, in the fresh and green shade of ancient fountains. In the dust, broken glass, sharp bottlenecks cut the gums of the raging dogs...

The soldiers, sprawling on the straw mattresses, grab the film magazines : ink stains the fingers wet from the shower. The blue sun pierces the tent canvas, flies vibrate on the hem of Eber Lobato's underpants while he's lying on his back, they penetrate the seminal shadow, climb the locks of pubic hair ; Eber Lobato, his cock growing hard, rings taking shape and tinkling under the membranous skin, tightens his thighs violently, the captured flies vibrate, sting the cock. In front of the tent, the tired soldiers, heavy of flesh, light of mind, leaning against the stakes, sitting, back against the canvas stretched under their buttocks, breathe the dimmed day ; noises from the plain withdraw towards the sea : engines, machines, forges, saws, sickles, slaves, children ; red sand slides down cliff and quarry slopes, on the green palms, covers the floodgates' burning metal, in the still sunny penumbra, it falls from the hammocks and from the soldiers' hair.

The cardinal walks in his garden, wearing shoes of leather and fur, his feet, suffering from the wait and immobility, are macerating. He is thinking of the solitary meal that will soon be served in the fresh and sweet-smelling dining room, of the white arm of the young sister, on the tablecloth, of the apples coming out of her bosom. Birds shoot out of the clumps of boxtrees, beetles roll upon the roses. He has met the army chaplains, they have assured him of the troops' religious cleanliness. Since the beginning of the war, his mind is asleep, he does not see the war around him ; he wonders at the great number of gunshots and explosions, of maimed children, of widows ; he wonders at the puffing of the soldiers kneeling and receiving Holy Communion from his hands. Here, the trees of the enclosure stop the scents of blood and fire ; heaps of carrion, of dead carcasses, are picked up every evening by the slave gardener. At night, rats dive

in the ponds, but the cardinal is sleeping behind his damasked curtains, hands crossed upon his chest ; on the bedside table, under the lamp in front of which darkens a small photograph of a boy wearing a sailor suit, hands joined between the parted thighs on the navy blue shorts, the sister has laid the flasks, the glass, the carafe of icy water ; at night, the cardinal often wakes up with a start, he then rises on his knees, looks at the holy image of some fop with a bloody forehead, joins his hands and prays ; after that, he softly lies on his back again and falls asleep, listening to the sea. The waves from the sea and the wind from the mountains lull prisoners and slaves to sleep. A tall iris is trembling in front of the cardinal's window.

The sister, lying in the cubicle, dismisses the bad thoughts, pushes away, unlaces her coiffe, unbuttons the top of her dress, places her hands on her bosom, stares at the warm whitewashed wall, prays. A gust of wind brings inside the cubicle the scent of grass, of man ; the sister prays, clasps her bosom. Outside, the tinkling of the springs smells of blood, of sap, has the flavour of sperm, the eucalyptus trunks crack like arms, glisten like knees, the mountain peaks capsize, shaken like the sweaty hair, darkened, on the pillow. In the cool shade, on earth and on dry sand, insects are mating, luminous, jerky.

The cardinal can't stand the cold, he likes sweets, he has no more desires, he isn't turned on by women any more, not even by the slim youths diving in the pool ; long ago, at the Ecbatane college, they talk about their worried souls, legs bare on the armchair's red velvet. In front of the door, after confession, he strokes their cheeks bathed in tears, his hand moves downwards, flattens the down on the neck, palpates the back's vertebrae rolling soft and fragile, under his fingers. During walks, in holiday camp, schoolboys let « mummy » twist their arms and pull their hair. In summer, he spends the day watching absentmindedly, the games of the naked schoolboys in the pool's green and filtered water. The title of former army chaplain gives him authority over the boys. Those see, in his slight limping — adolescent, he was kicked by a comrade smoker and tout for the brothel where he hides from his divorced mother — denounced by him to the Father Superior — the result of a wound of youth at the army front. Summer shines over Ecbatane ; meeting the parents, he sees that the most handsome among the boys, enlist in the flying camp :

— Your boy needs to live in a team. The open air will harden him.

— This boy has thin legs, a bicycle will make them strong. Light clothes, very light.

In the evening, his desires throw him quivering on the bedcover ; the desk drawer overflows with confiscated newspapers, comics and nude photos, with crumpled papers, on which he writes passionately, a hundred times a night, the sole name, the sole initials of his favourite boys. He gets up, he walks to the window, he leans out, caresses the wisteria trembling in the night with the breath

of birds and wind. He plunges his head in that fragrant pond that appeases and elevates desires.

He listens to the rustling of leaves at the edge of the pool, the lapping of water pierced by green rays of light against cement and marble.

He goes out, he wanders in the cloister, his cassock's collar half-opened, towards the dormitories.

A boy, barefooted, pyjamas shirt unbuttoned, faces him all of a sudden, at the corner :

— Where are you going, Jean-Baptiste ?

— To enjoy the fresh air.

— You know you're not allowed to go out ? You must be fast asleep in the arms of God.

— Yes, but I'm doing no wrong and I want to see the night.

They walk towards the staircase :

— But, you're barefooted ?

— By the Ocean one walks with bare feet, even in the thistles. Kate too. With us she boxes the boys who push small slaves in the thistles.

At the bottom of the stairs, an evergreen's palm brushes the boy's hip, his hand relaxes in the priest's. They walk through the cloister ; on the ground, broken glass, quartz crystals thrown by the students glitter under the moon :

— You're not afraid of cuts ?

— You would suck my blood... my feet are made of horny matter, like the devils'... Why weren't you sleeping, Father ?

— At my age one doesn't sleep much anymore.

— Why ?

— God keeps one awake.

The boy holds out his arm, his hand drags on the tennis court's wire netting, puddles littered with rotting leaves shine on the asphalt, fleeing birds make the nets tremble. In the valley, factories, train stations crackle, rumble, throw rays of light into the sky and over the high forests. The boy draws to his mouth his rust-stained hand, roses tremble along the fence like after rain :

— Go and bathe, Jean-Baptiste, the night is warm and bright.

— It's forbidden.

— Bathe, you have my permission.

— The Father Superior is still awake, his window is lit, what if he hears the noise of water ?... You'll stay by the edge to explain ?...

— Bathe naked ; we're among men. Go.

The boy runs on the cement, he hides behind one of the diving board's pillars, takes off his shirt ; his hands, his knees are shivering, the green breeze flattens the down under the belly ; the boy unlaces his pyjamas, he makes them slide on his hips down to the toes, then tramples them ; swift, he runs towards the

water, he dives : the priest, one instant, has seen the little white body, fed with millet, spinach and prunes, where the taut muscles make no shadow yet, the short penis shaken on the thighs, he has seen the brief and sharp glance the child cast at him before diving ; he buries his head in his hands and shakes it, the child surfaces, shakes his head above the foam, draws a long breath, springs and dives again ; here he is clinging to the border wall, belly cut by the dark water, attentive to the rustling of leaves interlaced to the shady pillars, to the lonely calls of whores in the illuminated street below the curtain of shivering trees ; the priest, leaning on the steel handrail, smiles to the gasping boy, little doleful animal that the gaoler frees so as to love it, dazzled ; the boy's pauses are brief, his pleasure, feverish, secret, his throat beats against the cement. Around the pool, the earth is cold and black, the grass flattened, littered with silver paper and espadrilles' shoelaces.

The boy is panting under the moon, hair flattened on the forehead, chin dripping, saliva scintillating on the throat :

— Still a bit of time, Father ?

— Yes, don't catch cold. Float on your back.

The boy dives, the priest sees the body unfurl, turn, roll under the water, the foam spout up at the tip of the fingers and feet ; the boy rolls on his back, lets himself be carried, legs and arms and head abandoned, the water swells and crumples the swimsuit, lightens the penis within. The priest half-opens his cassock, down to the belly, his hands grip the handrail :

— Come out of the water, get dressed.

The child surprised by the sobbing shout, knees to the belly, comes to a stop inside the water :

— Father, already ?

— Come out of the water. I see blood reddening the water around your neck... stay a little more.

But the child out of water and standing, naked, on the wet ground, hands hiding his penis because of the priest's anger, cannot throw himself into it again. He runs on the cement, he twirls his arms and shoulders, he strikes his chest with his fists, he takes position behind the diving board's pillar, he rubs his dripping body with the rumpled pyjamas, gets dressed again. Then, he faces the priest, he is shivering, the cloth of the pyjamas stuck to the knees and belly.

They walk towards the cloister, silently, the priest's hand clutches the boy's humid and quivering shoulder. In front of the dormitory door he bends towards the boy, he offers his scented cheek :

— Kiss me : you children, all your acts are pure.

The boy, standing on his heels, brisk, kisses the priest's cheek, opens the door and runs away into the pestilential dark.

The cardinal is fast asleep under his feathers.

Illiten, chief of the rebels, is in Inamenas until morning. With his own hand, he slaughters two traitors, chases their children in the night and takes their women. The dead bodies are dragged in the middle of the street by the rebels. The children are pushed away by the armed rebels, they cry at the bottom of the city, they walk towards the illuminated shrubs in the brothel's small garden. Illiten has two women underneath him.

Serge rolls his head and his hips on the bed : Audry, lying, quivers, desperate, on his own bed, stroked by his mother and his belly by Bietrix. Audry, head and body shrouded in the net of his tears and of his trembling, whines, gradually gets his second wind, like a sprawled beast, after the hunt and capture. He is now free to steal, to kill, to make himself be loved by men. Serge, standing against the window, naked, the sheet flowing on the tiled floor, rubs his cheek to the shutter.

Down below, soldiers come out of the tents, for the ambush. Belts slap in the warm and rotting night. Under the tents, the blankets, the straw mattresses, the stakes are stained, smeared with rust ; a rat, rubbed with excremental mud, scampers along the infirmary, it jumps on the small cement staircase, the door is half-open : Gay Zodiac and Barclay are asleep and wheezing in the far end ; the rat runs under the camp beds, nibbles the shoelaces and the blanket flaps dragging in the dust, drinks from the puddles of coffee and blood, gobbles up the remnants of biscuit, sniffs at the bloody spittles, the flows of pus and ashes ; Gay Zodiac's arm, hand wounded, hangs out of the camp bed, the rat bites into the bandage, pulls, the bandage gets undone, Gay Zodiac, woken up with a start, vomits on the stretched canvas of the camp bed :

— Murder. Assassin. Barclay, help !

The rat bites into the wound, Gay Zodiac howls, shakes his hand, the rat digs in further his sharp teeth ; Gay Zodiac, with his other hand, strikes the rat, the teeth go deep, they join through the torn flesh. Barclay naked jumps from his bed, shivering, abandoned, his shit bursts out and runs down his legs, on the bone and the taut muscles ; Gay Zodiac's hand turns round and round, the rat thrown against the bamboos of the mosquito net, squeals. Barclay, silent, moves forward, his open knife throws out sparks behind the dimmed mosquito net, Barclay squats down, his feet bathe in the warm shit, he catches Gay Zodiac's hand through the net, he brings it to a standstill : the rat isn't moving, intoxicated, Barclay strikes it with his dagger under the throat, then, with his fingers, he parts the rat's jaw, the teeth withdraw from the wound, Barclay beheads the rat, Gay Zodiac rattles, sweat blackens his face and his uncovered belly, the rat falls in the torn, bloody mosquito net ; moonlight bathes the mosquito net, the hands of fresh blood on the mesh ; Barclay squashes the rat on the cement, he lifts up Gay Zodiac in his arms, goes

out into the night, carries the wounded man towards the central infirmary, Gay Zodiac's hand, torn into shreds, beats on Barclay's bare hip ; Barclay kisses Gay Zodiac's burnt hair ; between his toes, the little toads jump, born three days ago, obedient, restless, ignored, slavish.

In the central infirmary, two soldiers, wearing a green armband, are asleep at a white table, forehead on the icy wood. Barclay lays Gay Zodiac on the camp bed.

Gay Zodiac, his black face tilted backwards, his belly and hips cold and hard, is still rattling. On the tiled floor, among the fragments of phials, the shreds of bloody bandages and the tufts of cotton wool impregnated with shit, a rebel, half-naked, trousers smeared with tepid slime, whines, mouth open, face battered, nails bloody.

The two sentries, awakened, stir.

The probationary medical officer appears, tape measure around his neck. An insomniac, he makes his own furniture until dawn, every night, from ammunition crates. The sentries hold out the bandages and flasks to him ; between nursing, they trample the rebel to make him shut up.

Gay Zodiac is dying, his body's whole skin is blackening, his muscles, stiff, his tightened lips are growing hard and stretched over the teeth. By dawn, since there is no room for him in the staff helicopter, bound once a week for Ecbatane, where the saviour medics are, he dies. Then, the medical orderlies, the sentries stopped on their return to the police station — they prefer the infirmary's coffee — attack the rebel, they lacerate his face with the phial fragments and the bent syringes. The rebel howls, his knees jump, soldiers dance over his belly, Barclay, sitting on the dead man's bed, covers his eyes with his hands :

— Do not watch the revenge, Gay Zodiac, do not watch their dance. Go down, while your avengers strike and kill on the earth you're sinking in to. But, do not look back, shut your ears to their sobs.

The sentries leave the rebel alone, they wash their hands, they comb their hair, the sun streams in the barrack, sets brasses and ironware ablaze. The orderlies wash Gay Zodiac's body, wash the wound, the mark of rat's teeth in the burst flesh, scrape the ash from the burns ; then they make him wear a new battledress, they carry him through the headquarters' corridor, they cover the body with a fresh and light flag, the captain salutes, hand on his burnt temple. All day secretaries, armourers, quartermaster sergeants pass in front of the body, one of them lifts the flag over the face :

— « livelier, dead than alive... »

In the far end of the central infirmary, the rebel, his back broken, one eye torn out, lips slashed to pieces, is rattling, the sun burns the wounds of his face and belly.

A sentry, sent by the captain, comes in and dispatches him with a bullet

from an automatic pistol — lent for a moment by the captain to the volunteer soldier. The sentries, later on, lift the dead body and throw it behind the barracks, on the manure pile.

They cover him up, using pitchforks, with excremental straw and hay. The forks' prongs slide over the rebel's throat, pierce the lips and the eyelids ; pulling away the fork's prongs, the soldiers enlarge the wound. After, they wipe the pitchforks on the straw. On the other side of the barbed wire, a little girl, naked, watches the soldiers ; she's sucking a bone, two boys are fighting in the dust under the gumtrees ; their feet and hands rake the earth, push away the dried shit of camels and dogs ; one of them, between the other's legs, spread over his forehead, sees the bone in the little girl's mouth, he gets up, he runs towards the little girl, they grab the girl by the shoulders, they snatch the bone from her hands, they strike her belly, the little girl falls in the dust, the two boys fight over the bone smeared with slaver and dust. One, defeated, rolls over the little girl's inert body, his hand clutches the child's mouth, twists the lips then slackens, the boy stands up again, hands on his belly, groaning and runs away towards the bushes laden with women's and children's multicoloured tatters. The other boy, sitting on the senseless girl's belly, turns the bone between his teeth and roars.

The sentry, by Serge's side, walks, heavy, hands on the hips. Birds shriek, their wings beat in the holes in the wall. Serge thinks about Audry's heart. Audry, happy, was saying :

— I have purple birds inside my chest.

Sunbeams, through the red foliage and the flowers moving in the light air, warm the canvas of Serge's espadrilles, dry the night's dampness on his knees and his thighs ; on the platform, over the harbour, Bandello, in civilian clothes, bends over the playful little slaves, he pulls glass marbles out of his blue-jeans : the little slaves laugh, let Bandello tickle them between the thighs : he lures them, he drags them towards a closed down warehouse, he locks them in until evening, they beat the sheet metal with their little fists, they sit on the ray of sunlight entering under the door ; they throw their marbles on the cement permeated with petrol and droppings, they sparkle while crossing the ray of light ; at night, Bandello, the door opened without noise, dives on the little sleeping slaves, he gags them, he pushes them towards the meat warehouse where the young slave keeper packs them in crates.

Inamenas welcomes the new chief of Ecbatane's democracy. The excited crowd moves towards the palace, towards the stadium ; vessels, battleships, liners put out the flags until evening. The crowd escorts the official cars ; on Inamenas Democratic avenue, still vibrating from the passing of the crowd, and of the visitors, a naked child, ear torn, is going through the dustbins : he takes out the

rotten fruits, the too sickening honey cakes thrown there by the crowd ; his head, his shoulders plunge in the shade of the dustbin, cats, standing up, belly leaning on the tinplate, claw his head, the child eats greedily from the pail, bites the leftovers with his teeth, his hands continuing to search under the vomit of the feast ; the cats bite, pull the shreds he holds between his teeth. The child, later, is sitting in an inside courtyard onto which open the kitchen windows ; the maidservants get tired of pushing him away and striking him with their rolling pins ; the child watches a fish thrown by the maid on the cement of the courtyard : a cat crouching at the edge of the kitchen sink's transparent roof, muscles taut, watches both fish and child. The child, with a leap, runs towards the fish, but the cat, swift, jumps and snatches it ; climbs on the roof again and gobbles up the shiny fish. The maids laugh in the kitchens' half light ; the backbone of the fish slides on the corrugated edge of the roof, falls on the cement, the child grabs it between his fingers, he goes back to sit against the wall, he sucks the bone, he crunches it, he chokes, he runs towards the fountain, he drinks ; the kitchen lights go out : the maidservants, wearing ribbons, cross the courtyard, lock the cells and outbuildings where fruits, grains and meats are stacked up, and go to the festival at the stadium : at the noise of the microphones, they rush forward, their breasts shaken inside the scented blouse. The child, alone, still choking, crawls towards the locked doors, he breathes the sweet smell of fruits and meats piled up and bearing on the wood, he licks the spatters of juices and blood on the edge of the door, on the latch gripped by the delivery boys' soiled hands.

Serge, after the high school and the sea bathing, leaves the stadium, he runs to the palace of the police ; the doors are wide open, soldiers, blankets on their arms, are hurrying up the stairs. Serge enters Audry's room, the boy gets out of bed, he lets himself be dressed and combed by his mother and Biatrix :

— He's leaving, to the jail, at Elö, in the mountains. He hasn't said a word since yesterday. He didn't go to visit the families. He's been trembling all night long.

Biatrix, when she leaves the room, goes down to the entrance hall, strokes the piled rifles, the one that took part in the slaughter ; for her, it still vibrates and burns.

— Serge, you're not the one to carry a gun. Pussycat, I want to go with you, to Elö, I'll live in a tiny hut, next to the Centre, and in the evening, I'll stroke, I'll kiss your hands still vibrating from the pneumatic drill and all the other tools of slavery. Serge, you too, kill and come with us to Elö. Kill : during your mother's agony, they were shouting beneath the windows to soften your father and enrol him in their rebellion. Go out and kill.

— He killed children...

— Biatrix !

And all of a sudden, Audry utters a long, dying animal's cry.

Illiten, the chief of the rebels, after fucking, is asleep, sprawled over the women he has taken, face against the ground, hands buried in the women's heavy and damp hair, knees between their thighs and feet in the dust.

At the house entrance, a young rebel, leaning against the open door, tommy gun in hand, on the lookout, his eyes shine between the long eyelashes. To his dusty shoes, a little dog clings, poisonous lizards run on the fallen walls.

At the other end of the street, a group of huddled children, watching the rebel. At the slightest movement, they draw back.

Women, returning from the fields and rivers, jug or faggot on their heads, do not dare pass in front of the house, but the young soldier sees them and aims his gun at them ; the women scatter, then re-assemble, run along the wall ; under the threat of the gun, they move forward and pass in file by the rebel ; he fondles them with his hand and the gun's butt, touching shoulders and breasts, his hand abruptly moves down under the dress, tucks it up, tears the cloth, at the shoulder, grips the arm tightly, and the throat, the gun's barrel searches the back and the belly, the strap slides, winds round the neck ; the soldier draws one woman against him, embraces her against the door, chases the other women away ; the woman drops her jug which rolls inside the room ; Illiten moves on his women, the young rebel breaks loose, the woman stays against the door ; Illiten stays still, the soldier looks back, draws the woman to him, the door cracks under their weight, the soldier nibbles the woman's lips and shoulders, spreads her legs, with his knees, pins down the woman's hands to the wood of the door and bites her mouth ; dust rises around them, children shout in the glittering gutters, the soldier bends down and takes the woman.

At once, a dagger brushes his back, the cool blade moves upwards and, swift, slides under the neck and sinks into the soldier's throat ; he breaks away from the woman, his face turns livid, his pale lips, almost violet, work loose, he falls backwards. Illiten grabs the gun, turns the knife inside the wound, the dry noise of the blade on the bone, in the light of noon, insect's cry under the dry leaves. Illiten pulls the knife out of the bloody mass of flesh ; the women rise, naked, at the end of the house, step back towards the wall, their painted eyes shine between their fingers.

Illiten drives the knife in the ground, whistles twice, a young soldier comes out from the house opposite :

— Take this traitor out, carry him into your house.

And he kicks the dead man's head, then he turns to the woman, seizes her by the shoulder, drags her towards his bed, knocks her down under him, tears her dress, bites her mouth, gives a broad hand signal ; the other women come to lie by his side and begin stroking him again, and caress his hips, his back, his

chest, his cock. Illiten bears heavily on the woman, rolls, writhes on her, groaning ; the taut cock gets tangled in the torn dress ; the woman's head rolls in the dust, flies gleam in the rays of light, run between the man's fingers, on the sweat running from the woman's breasts, settle under the eyebrows black with makeup and sweat. The two bodies glow in the dust, Illiten slides over the woman, his fingers claw the earth, raised dust falls back on the man's shoulders. The soldier, now and then looks back, his heart beats inside his chest, he leans against the wall, flattens his belly, the battledress gets crumpled and white with the saltpetre ; a cock at the bottom end of the village, crows.

Illiten, at night, comes out of the house, fastens, buttons, laces the battledress on his weary limbs, the battledress sticks to his belly, to his damp thighs. The night is cool ; soldiers leave the houses, and join their chief ; the young rebel's body is lying in the latrines, head lolled back on the soiled clay, throat and chest covered by a mud of blood ; he is naked down to the waist ; the door is closed with a rope ; now and then the gutter swells and soils the dead man's hair. Through the wooden partition, the waterfall's pebbles rolled by the current, tinkle.

Illiten and his men run between the cacti, rifle over the hot sand ; small birds with warm feathers shoot out from the bushes and throw themselves between the soldiers' legs.

The chief shakes Crazy Horse, asleep on his straw mattress. Soldiers get up, tighten their belt, take their rifle from the arm rack and leave the tent. All tilt their head backwards under the clear sky. They walk along the oued, stride over the little rapids where fish are swimming, vipers too ; greenflies sparkle along the water, shells open up under the moon. The cliff's crumbled parts form whirlpools from one bank to another. The column turns to the right, leaves the beach, enters the cacti : toads, moving up from the river, come to settle there, soldiers step on them, their leg begins shaking, making them jump ; some of them stumble, the gun gets tangled in the cacti.

Crazy Horse is walking behind the chief, hand between the thighs. The sky over them is like a huge rock trodden upon by luminous beasts. All of a sudden, a noise ; the chief opens his hand and lies flat on his stomach ; soldiers tumble down one after another on the thorny earth, cover their rifle with the battledress jacket ; shadows, at the summit of the hill, between the gleaming tops of the cacti. Soldiers crawl on the earth, the dripping fragments of cacti refresh them, thorns stick to the chin. The shadows, on the hill, undulate between the cacti tops. The path, where the soldiers are crawling, leads to the hill's summit. The rebels run, leap, light on their espadrilles. The soldiers are getting near the summit ; they see, at the end of the path, the leaping silhouettes of the rebels, they fire, each one over the shoulder of the man preceding ; one of them gets up, flings himself to the side, tommy gun in hand, he positions it in the middle of the cacti ; another soldier dashes among the cacti, opens his ammunition haversack and

loads the gun ; already the rebels —two of them have fallen, blasted, their belly sawed by the bursts of machine gun fire — have turned back, they dash at the cacti ; bullets tear the cacti ; Crazy Horse, wounded at the shoulder, falls backwards ; he rises at once, gets back his gun, falls on the sand again. Illiten lying behind a dead man, machine-guns the path, two soldiers collapse howling, their belly still beats on the hot sand ; the chief, with Crazy Horse, and two other wounded soldiers, move back towards the river, they let themselves glide down the dune, then they observe the hill and take the rebels in the rear ; Illiten, now is alone on the hill ; his hand, still bloody with the young rebel's blood, trembles on the burning hot weapon ; the three soldiers encircle him and fire at his legs ; Illiten falls forwards, arms stretched out sideways ; around him, the rebels' bodies still start, over the hacked cacti. The soldiers disarm Illiten ; Crazy Horse takes his knife from him :

— It's full of blood, chief !

— You may keep it.

— To slice my bread !

Then his shoulder begins hurting, he strokes it with his other hand ; his face is covered with thorns, the bullet has run through the armpit, the chief pulls out Crazy Horse's handkerchief and ties it around the wound, then he walks down towards the two soldiers braced on the path, passes the hand under their shirt, the heart has stopped beating, the chief brushes away from their forehead the hair stuck by blood, unfastens the slashed belt, takes the arms, draws the torn hands over the chest ; up there, Crazy Horse and the two soldiers strike Illiten lying on the ground, lift his head up, slip pieces of cacti underneath, then, three times, flatten the head on the thorns :

— Don't kill him.

The soldiers move away, Crazy Horse bends over a rebel's body, a soldier bends down, draws his knife :

— Wait ! Leave him for me ! I'm the one who bumped him off !

The dead man's lips are still trembling ; Crazy Horse bends down again, draws Illiten's knife, takes the rebel's ears and cuts them off at the root ; then, he slips them in the pocket of his battledress, over the thigh ; at once, the cloth turns black, the blood, still warm, goes through the pocket's cloth and runs down Crazy Horse's thigh :

— It feels smooth like a woman's hand.

The two other soldiers cut the dead mens' ears, then one of them takes Illiten by the feet and drags him as far as the path, the head jumps over the stones. When the soldiers see their comrades dead, and mutilated, they tear Illiten's clothes and strike him with cacti, they unbutton themselves and piss on his bare face and his lacerated chest.

Then, after having done with Illiten, Crazy Horse turns pale and falls

unconscious at the feet of his comrades. These, still dragging the rebel by the feet, lead Crazy Horse to the edge of the water, and refresh his forehead. At the first light of dawn, here they are, the living, the wounded and the dead, at the foot of the surrounding wall. Crazy Horse lets himself slide against the wall down to the ground and half falls asleep ; a mouse runs under his thighs. Large birds are flying among the trees, above the soldiers, utter now and then, a long rat's cry, then, soar towards the ashen sky. The sentry raises the barrier, the soldiers enter the post ; Crazy Horse alone continues sleeping on the ground. The sentry takes him in his arms, carries him to the guardroom table. The sentries rise from their straw mattresses. The one posted in front of the infirmary takes Crazy Horse in his arms, the post's chief covers the wounded with a blanket full of holes. Already, on the post's watchtower, the sentry stirs, draws the flaps of his blanket, sets a foot, outside the safety sheet steel, upon the tiles ; the sentries come out of the post, stomach heavy, a lump in the throat, feet sore, a horrible taste of coffee and wine in the mouth. The gumtrees rustle under the high breezes ; nailed to the bottom of a trunk, nailed through the throat, an old man, half rotten and eaten away, is dripping with dew.

The echo, the smoke, the embers of the ambush, raised, enter the village of Bâli, settle on the granite posts and the palm porch roofs, stroke the faces of the children asleep on the terraces, between the drying grounds of pomegranates and figs. The boys lying naked on the straw mats, knees folded against the belly, the movement spreading their buttocks soiled with violet turds, mouth stained and swollen with juniper gruel, the girls huddled against their mother, brow and hair wrapped in a headband scented with pepper. Between the stone village and the torrent with banks eroded by the tide's salt, the tent village stays awake : young men play music under the repudiated wives' tent ; children with shaven head, except for a tuft of hair greased with ebony powder, growing from the fontanel, are dozing on the sand, naked and the cheek leaning on a palmtree stake ; those whom nightmares torment, their mothers lift their shoulders, open their mouth for their fingers to smear it with a cypress jam that they brought back from the desert, gathered and given to them by nomads, on the last day of the cool season, in exchange for their bodies offered at the time of the rising sun in the hollows covered with cut grass from a high valley with painted walls of rock ; the children, when the jam touches their lips, whimper, nibble their mother's breast.

The rebels, two commandos formed of former Tamrit butcher's boys sent on a punitive expedition against Bâli, a village resisting both the rebel recruitment and the collection of taxes — two collectors were thrown into the torrent, the night before the yearly departure towards the desert — are prowling along the torrent

; when the moon touches the watchtower, the cornloft and the public square of Bâli, dazzling the lookout men and throwing the immediate surroundings into darkness, the rebels jump in the torrent ; soaked, choking, mouth nauseated by the magnesian water, cloth and wool sticking to the body, cock retracted, they cling to the bank's reeds, they spring, knife pointed forwards ; the sand they trample and raise smears their legs, their knees and the bottom of their thighs, the bend of the knee and the bottom of their buttocks ; in front of the tent village, they break up ; each one hurls himself at the chosen tent ; in the same time, women and children, animals, — everything that yells —, are slaughtered : then the rebels encircle the young men's tent — the older ones who were rambling on squatting in front of a fire of rush, on the bank, the rebels already kicked them in the water and drowned. The rebels knock the tent over, throw stones at it, hit, club the young people and the repudiated wives with stakes, bodies writhe under the collapsed tent, a woman's leg sticks out through a torn seam ; the stakes smash the young men's legs, pound their heads and their genitals ; stones crush their bellies and their chests ; dogs run in circles on the canvas permeated with blood, the rebels grab them by the tail and the ears, they slaughter them ; one of them tears off with his knife and fingers a young dog's head and fastens it to his face by tying on his temple two bloody straps passed through the dog's mouth and holding it open. They trample the canvas where it is swelled by the women's rattle ; scents come out from under the canvas ; the rebel with the young dog's head tramples a violin pressed against a young man's neck ; then, squatting down, he tears the seam and bites from the stirred earth mixed with incense a piece of butter smeared with sand, he devours it, growling and spitting out the sand ; when he gets up, his whole face, his throat, the top of his chest and his shoulders, are shining, he puts his hand on his forehead covered with a cold sweat, he collapses on the pile of canvas, stones and stakes ; a light and scented wind, coming from the orchards of the opposite bank of Tletz, bathes the torrent, the reeds, the pebbles, the rose laurels ; the young rebel rises on his elbows, he breathes the perfume, on his lips and on his uncovered throat are blending the butter and the blood that spurted from the mouth of the young people smothered head to head ; he gets up and ties again the dog's head to his bloody temple. All dash forward, they wipe their knives on the grass, the blades slide on the violet flowers where bees are vibrating. In the Tletz post, soldiers pull the prisoners out of the pigsty, they bind them naked to a ladder they lean against the latrine's roof, the greenhorns are pushed inside the latrine, forced to plunge the sticks in the shit and, out in the air again, to paint the prisoners' buttocks, their backs ; the radio operator works the electric generator, the wind shakes the inspection lamps hanging from the washing line, shakes the shadow of the prisoner's cock and tuft of hair under the belly : a greenhorn drives the stick between the buttocks of a young prisoner with his head bandaged, and searches his ass until it bleeds ; then he fixes the other end of the stick against

the latrine's steps and, wiping his hands on his hips, he goes to sit on the mess staircase where crates of beer are stacked, between the legs of the soldiers, drunk and vomiting : he takes a bottle, he seizes the neck between his teeth, bites the cap but one of his teeth breaks and, uttering a little cry, he spits ; a negro soldier, sprawled against him, takes the bottle, bites the neck wet with spittle, pulls off the cap and spits it on the greenhorn's penis, drinks a quarter of the bottle and, turning away to vomit, throws it on the young soldier's belly, foam runs between the thighs, blackening the battledress at the spot where the cock swells it ; the soldier, after drinking, takes his cock in the cloth with both his hands, he presses it, he crushes it against the cement of the stairs ; flies drink in his eyes the rising tears ; the rebel with the bandaged head, groans ; the ties binding his feet and knees to the ladder loosen, the loins weigh heavily and the stake penetrates further in ; soldiers dressed with civilian pyjamas in tatters, come down from the gallery, to drink, their dogs pressed between their thighs, their trampled hair all rustling with lice ; the stake, driven as far as the middle of the body, pushes forward the penis and the testicles ; a flight of grey cranes soars above the post ; the soldiers spit in the air ; a soldier remaining alone in the barrackroom, kisses, naked and holding his cock with both hands, the technicolor photo of an undressed actress, he draws away his lips marked by the printed colours, he throws himself, groaning, flat on his stomach on the straw mattress, mouth gasping, then he rises on his knees, leaning on one hand, the other one clutching his cock and beginning to wank, head bent under the shoulder watching the cock glow red under the shade of his belly.

The rebels enter, wearing rope-soled espadrilles, in Bâli's lower streets, they brush aside the palmtree boughs covering the gardens, the scent of beans and illicit opium, released, rises to their nostrils, softens their heart and strengthens their hand. They swarm into Bâli fast asleep ; the lookout men, dazzled by the moon, are watching the torrent ; the bright smokes of the fires where old men were warming themselves, in the reeds vanish in the darkness veiled with blood. The rebels scale the watchtower and the cornloft, they bury their knives in the backs of the collapsing lookout men, their head hitting the cob made of turf and palms ; the rebels, with one stab of the knife, slit their throat ; then they lift them up and throw them over the rampart walk, the bodies crash on the white rocks, blood and brains flow down as far as the torrent and the toads wallow in them. Then the rebels scatter in the village : the peasants, woken up, grab palm sticks, sickles, wooden ploughshares ; the rebels leap forward, pull away their wooden weapons from the peasants, they push them back towards the public square ; the young rebel with the dog's head, who is carrying the commando's only firearm, threatens the peasants with his automatic pistol ; now and then, he lifts his mask and his face appears smeared with blood, brains ; the rebels smash the doors, plunge in the darkness on the women huddled against the cob, they

unbutton themselves and rape and kill at the same time ; often two rebels drive their knives together in some child's lower body, blades grind in the perforated intestine. The young rebel gives his weapon to the commando chief, who, lips foamy, insults the peasants ; the young rebel, still wearing his young dog's head, runs to the plunder ; with his mask, he burrows into the women's open belly, the children's slit throat ; the rebels run, round-shouldered, among houses and streets ; a naked child is screaming on a terrace ; four rebels climb up the house's corners, jump on the terrace ; they seize the child, they lift him up and four times, they throw him in the air and move backwards ; the child falls on the cob, his back, his loins, his nape, his knees, broken, turn blue under the moonlight : a rebel grabs from the drying room a hatchet for grafting fig trees, he brandishes it, the rebels step back, the hatchet slits the throat, slashes the chest, the belly and the knees ; the penis, cut off, sticks to the hatchet, the rebel rubs it against the bend of his knee, the penis stays hanging there, the rebel shakes his leg, he insults the child, he angrily tramples the head, it comes apart from the neck, the rebel chops the neck's vessels and muscles and nerves, with the hatchet, he grabs the head by its hair, he thrusts his fist in the wound, the rebels let themselves fall along the walls, they join the other ones assembled on the public square ; all are trembling, their hands hold scraps of fabric, tufts of hair are stuck by blood on their throat, their hands clutch broken toys, wooden spoons ; the chief orders the peasants to run to the far end of the village ; with his commandos, he pushes them in an alley, he packs them in the village slaughterhouse ; the two latticed windows and the barred door look on to the precipice ; the chief has the door smashed by two young rebels with throats decorated by stolen coral necklaces ; he leans his back against the dividing wall ; a scared old man's urine runs in the gutter smeared with dry blood which divides the centre of the room, gently sloping towards the smashed door ; the chief points at a young peasant whose tight headband holds a few thorny flowers, the two commandos grab him by the hair and push him in front of the chief whose arms are copper coloured by blood ; the chief hits the young peasant's throat with his fist, he takes his cock in the same fist and strokes it with the butt of his automatic pistol ; then, leaving the weapon pressed on the cock, he tilts the barrel towards the peasant's throat, pulls the trigger, the bullet smashes the jaw, the teeth, shattered run on the chief's wrist, the two commandos support the young peasant by the shoulders, the chief kicks the peasant's loins, the commandos hurl him down the ravine, the body bounces in the darkness, the belly and thighs one moment uncovered — the tatters are hovering around the body — cast a glimmer of rainy dawn. Thus, the slaughterhouse's mallet smashing their nape or penis, the peasants are all hurled down, except a frightened old man sitting in his urine, they pull him up by force and hang him by the throat to the portico's shaken meat hook ; the young rebel with the dog's head pulls crates of sodas and sacks of semolina out of the grocery ; while all, sprawled on the public

square, drink and eat the grain, head in the sack, a few injured women and children, come crawling out of the houses, drag themselves along the walls, marking the cob with long red trails, often vertical, the two rebels decorated with earrings and necklaces, jump up, throw themselves on the women, bear on their smashed or maimed limbs ; then, when the wind freezes their sweat, they get up again, the front of the body covered with shreds of dress stuck to their clothes by blood ; the little children who flee covering their wounds with both hands, they nail them to the blacksmith's wall with the points of blue steel, facing the orient. A few vultures, chased from the slaughter bathing the rock and the onyx slabs, fly up the ravine and, clinging to the cob, tear the crucified bodies ; they soar over the terrace and dive in the streets ; the flapping of their wings hits the back of the squatting rebels, mouth smeared with soda and semolina ; a vulture soars above the dog's head rebel asleep on a punctured sack, it wheels, it comes down ; the rebel yawns, the vulture rises again and drops its shit in the young rebel's open mouth. The tumult of the slaughter awakens the officer at the Tletz post, he goes down to the empty courtyard : the soldiers have locked up the prisoners in the pigsty, the one they impaled is writhing on the manure, he spits a blue foam on the wrists of his comrades holding him in their arms. In Bâli, the groaning has ceased, the rebels, sprawled, rise to their feet again. Dawn appears in the torrent, the vultures fly away from the reeds and the rocks, some of them hold in their beak a quarter of flesh crossed by a leather strap or by lace from some cloth. Dew sparkles on the ransacked tents, vultures tear the collapsed canvas, uncover the bodies caught in the sand, a stake piercing the belly. The officer tramples the smashed bottles, he walks up again inside the post, climbs the hatch of the watchtower, the sentry shivers, sleepy, his forehead covered with dew, the corner of his lips smeared with sweet coffee ; the officer, moving his chest close to the soldier's, drops a quick kiss on the trace of coffee, their eyebrows touch, the officer places his hand on the soldier's cock, and the soldier, his on the officer's thigh : « The wind is blowing blood, lieutenant. » The officer pushes, gently knocks down the soldier on the protection sheet, pressing the boy's loins against the top of the steel sheet, with his hips and his hand supports the nape tilted in the searchlight's beam ; then appear on the soldier's shadowless face, the razor's gashes, the dried salivas and snots, the stings and the excremental and seminal deposits from mosquitoes, the small curls pulled off from the hair of his hardened cock by the soldier and laid, rolled around his fingers on the sweaty cheeks ; the officer kisses the cuts, blows the curls towards the soldier's nostrils, his tongue pierces the carapace of snot at the opening of the nostrils and searches them ; the soldier's cock hardens against his hip and his against the soldier's hip ; the machine gun, abandoned, swings in the wind :

— At one o'clock, during the third guard, vultures filled the valley, their smell bathed the fragrance of the sea. Lieutenant, we are rotten corpses, I got

scared, my skin is rotten, they soared for a while along the searchlight's beam, I poured a flask of eau de Cologne on my forehead. They flew away.

— When you'll be free, hold back from eating too many pastries.

— My wife says : « Cover my whole body with sperm and our child will be more beautiful. »

— I allow you to cut out my battledress again...

— Do not touch it, lieutenant, there is some hardened dirt inside the folds.

— My love, I who, sticking out my tongue sparkling with a saliva secreted each day in your name, touch and soften the hardened snot of your nostrils...

— Lieutenant, do not drive your hand further... I never learnt how to wipe my ass... my mother then my sisters fighting around me with my trousers off, their hands clutchings shreds of soiled paper... my wife, in the middle of the day, locks me up with her in the bar's latrine, after I've eaten and drunk on the pavement with my mates... O my captain the seam is cracking... she unbuttons me and while I'm shitting, she blows on my plaster-powdered hair, she kisses my mouth, the hair on my chest, in the scent of turds, squats down and kisses the lower part of my belly and my cock taut and wedged against the stoneware ; I close upon her raised head my shirt smeared with hardened plaster ; the water stirred by a running of turds, splashes my buttocks and her nostrils and her lips when she kisses, having pushed it upwards, the underside of my cock, licking the balls... when I tear off the paper, she fights over it, with her wrist, she bends my nape downwards, she lifts the tails of my shirt and she wipes me... in the morning, she kisses and licks, before I'm awake, the tears running from my eyes to my temples, the foam at the corner of my lips, she doesn't let me dress myself alone, she grabs, she presses my cock against her cheek before covering it and buttoning up over it erect... she would abandon her body, on the top of the roofs, to my comrades : they wouldn't chase her away, thus could she all day long watch me, see my muscles swell and the motions of work pull my shirt from underneath the belt and uncover my loins for a moment, hear me puff, whine under the weight of the sacks, gasp against the ladder, shout orders to the apprentice, answer myself, shouting, to the team-leader, gaze at my legs spreading out while I move down on all fours towards the roof gutter, and at the folds of the cloth in the hollow of my thighs while, standing on the scaffolding, I pull to me the winch's rope...

— O cock of yours, my love, machine gun of my night, and I rebel, I prowl in darkness my chest offered to his aim and by despair and desertion I scream and flinging myself in the searchlight's beam, I hear it turn, I see you, I see you turn it towards me, unveil it, load it, I open my mouth the bullets explode on my tongue, roll against my teeth and I collapse on the bed of palms forehead against the earth and the bullets tear my loins apart, sweat already freezes on your

brow and on your shoulders your moist fingers vibrate and covered with powder your lightened belly...

— O lieutenant you're biting my shoulder at the spot where she bites it and where my mother and sisters used to bite...

— Look... Bâli deserted... neither cocks nor children cry... the waters held up along the shores in the rushes are made heavy and dark by blood... Vultures and rebels flee, their back pierced by the sun... Look back, look back and while your eyes stirred in vain try to reconstruct the slaughter uncovered by dawn, let a gentle dagger tear your loins and the poison fight against your tears.

In the morning, the head : veins, lips, eyes, nostrils, hair, set ablaze by the beams filtrated in the high reversed fanlight, Crazy Horse, sliding out of the stretcher, his hand gripping his ringed neck, gets on his feet, wipes with the blanket his bloody armpit, strikes three times his weapon hanging on the arms rack, leaning against the walls crosses the deserted infirmary — his elbows his hands leave a trail of ochre blood on the plaster, outside strokes the rose bush and the roses become covered with blood, crawls under the barbed wire, throws himself in the oats, turns pale, blood withdraws from his knees ; he falls forward on the edge of a well covered by the oats.

Until noon, Crazy Horse, his warmed back travelled over by locusts, worms attacking his half-opened mouth, sleeps under the violet sky.

In the evening, leaning against a pomegranate tree, he munches the fruits, his hams strained by the fangs of invisible dogs ; between the rocks of Tifrit, he slows down only to sh..., without undressing or squatting : turds run down his legs, harden on the folds of his socks and on the laces of his army shoes.

The branches weighed down by floorcloths point to a village where Crazy Horse, vomiting, has stolen alarm clocks, soap, jewels. The maggots under the moon, scintillate in the blood of his wound ; he watches them, leaning against a trunk, the floorcloths beating the nape of his neck. Inside the butcher's shop, the portraits — taken down during daytime — of Béja and the other rebel chiefs are hanging far from the course of blood : Crazy Horse, bending over the stall, holds out his entire arm ; the butcher chops at the armpit, Crazy Horse winces, he grinds his teeth against the bloody wood.

The midnight breeze softens the wound ; Crazy Horse, his cut-off arm thrust under his shirt, climbs the rocks : the arm's blood runs down his belly, wraps his cock ; he lies down over the slabs, his head leaning on the base of the orientation table ; a band of jackals following the trail of his blood since the village, encircles the mountain summit; Crazy Horse buttons the shirt over his arm, the hand, cold, covers his belly.

Crazy Horse's head rolls on his shoulder ; milk runs under the slabs, under the stones, gushes from the end of the broken stems, flushes at the bottom

of the violet sky ; Crazy Horse's lips open up, kiss the crystals, the stars, the jackals' icy eyes ; the arm comes out of the shirt ; the battledress tears at the leg, the tear creases as far as the knee ; the jackal's tongue licks and warms up the kneecap. The moon is resting on the orientation table.

THIRD CHANT

The slaughters, the blood from the rapes, the ashes of the burnings, nourish the earth. The governor is dreaming about his assassination. The military whom he disappointed, take to the maquis, the regular troops are resting, rebels from both camps butcher each other way up in the mountains.

Soldiers, after burning the villages, push before them women and children, under the threat of their guns, to the gates of the city. There, they sell them or rent them to pimps living in small huts of wood and corrugated iron, under the ramparts. Officers allow this trade. Many of those pimps are each night, slaughtered by the rebels. Children and teenagers are locked up several weeks in those huts ; men and women coming from the bottom of the city fuck in front of them and corrupt them. Captive women are driven to the city brothels and forced into prostitution.

Gradually, the pimps do not fear following the soldiers in operation : pimps themselves or youths bought and corrupted by them wait in the villages behind the wheels of cars or small, dusty secondhand trucks. The smoke, the stones crumbling from the fire, chase the women and children away ; old men collapse on the burning stones, on the reddened irons, on the embers, the skin of their forehead sticks to them, sizzling. Women and children flee, screaming, clasping blackened bundles under their armpit, horsehair mattresses, half-charred paillasses. The pimps or their helpers, drive their vehicles away from the fire then stop at the crossroads ; women and children let themselves get locked up inside the vans, which move off at once ; further away, soldiers, face and knees blackened, hands bloody, push in front of them terrified women and children, stop the vans, and under the threat of guns and knives hand over these women and children in exchange for money. Before handing the women over, they knock them down, on the roadside slope and rape them, their shoes ploughing the earth and the grass. Children scream, wail, cling to the tyres, the newborns crawl under the trucks, head hitting the oily and burning chassis. The soldiers get up, shiver, trample the slope ; the women groan, writhe on their shoulders, knees raised, the pimp and his helpers catch their feet and drag them over the soiled grass.

They drag the women as far as the trucks, the women scream, cheek sliding on the slush of grass, sperm and blood, whites of the eyes showing, belly and thighs shining, where the soldiers' cocks have trailed, and scratched by nails and teeth.

The soldiers, off duty, go to the brothel, armed. All dressed all armed, they throw themselves on the naked women waiting on the leather seats, they rub themselves against the walls, behind the women, who look backwards slightly, back bent, then against the quivering women, stick out their chest in front of them, cock erect under the battledress cloth, camouflaged cap crammed down on the eyes. Belly forward, belly on fire, they turn around the women, brushing them, then every one picks a woman and turns alone around her, stepping over the seat, hip brushing the woman's breasts ; then he grabs her by the chin, presses on her lower lip and on her teeth and lifts her up ; the woman undulates and struggles like a fish hanging by the gills. The soldier lets go of the chin, grips the waist and presses it against him ; the woman's moist, warm and throbbing cunt is pinned against his hip, against his thigh, he raises his knee towards that warmth. Already other soldiers have captured the women ; some of them walk up to the rooms, but many have fallen over the captives, across the seats, on the bare tiled floor spotted with swatted flies, with tufts of hair stuck by sperm or sweat, and the women's shiny cheeks or temples rest there, tremble under the soldiers' dark hair, their hands, their arms writhe on the tiles like worms, cut by the rays of light, falling from the closed shutters.

The soldier crosses his arms around the woman, whose breasts roll on his rough shirt, the woman slips her hands behind the soldier's back, crosses them over the line of sweat piercing the shirt, from nape to waist ; she strokes the damp cloth, crumples it, the contact makes the soldier shiver, he shakes his head then his lips part from those of the woman, his mouth moves up towards the temples, he opens it and his teeth mix with the hair blackened by sweat, his tongue licks ancient powders, fragments of wood, of stones, small aromatic seeds, thin layers of dried milk, of children's saliva ; he presses his nostrils against the woman's nape ; through the shutters, he sees the street where dust rises, the dogs' paws, the children's black legs, the jeeps' wheels, the soldiers' impatient boots, the barbed wire from which are hanging withered bits of dead birds covered with ants, tufts of grass, shreds of cloth and leather.

His eyes fill with tears, he takes the woman's breasts, he presses them to his lips and sucks, his cheeks and nostrils covered with tears, his hands slide on the woman's hips, plunge between her thighs, warm, sweating and crumpled they brush the down of her cunt, give themselves up to the warm and damp breath of the half-opened cunt, play with the down covering quivering flesh. The soldier dreams : a fountain of grey stone, high up in the mountain, where runs an icy water inflaming the face when he drinks ; later, he stands, his eye dazzled, his forehead

cooled, in front of the slope of meadow or wood and he watches a squirrel running away in the nightfall.

The soldier's head rolls over the heavy and shady breasts, warm grass smelling of milk, the woman tilts her head backwards, the soldier's hands move up along the woman's belly, towards the breasts, follow the line of the ribs, sink between them, the woman moans, her breath caresses the soldier's temple and the tip of his ear. The soldier continues sucking, nibbles, slobbers, the woman draws her hand back to her breast, and supports it, the tears, the soldier's dribble, run on her fingers. In the street a galloping horse comes to a stop, rears up, whinnies, throws off its rider, a young man in tatters, who falls, arms stretched out sideways, flat on his belly, in the sand. Children come out of the cellars and run towards the injured man. The horse, girths sliding from its breast shoots forward through the suburbs, breaks past the gates, then slowing down, treads the sand under the eucalypti, the trampled sand, sees the river, feels the water, shakes its mane. Dogs run, muzzle low, jump under the trees, turn around the trunks, clutch to the bark, snap up the small birds falling from the boughs. The horse stops by the water, blows on the water still and black, the horse's breath whitens the surface and stirs it. The woman, now knocked over the tiled floor, moans, her breath chases the shiny dust from the interstices, her cheek covered with sweat, stuck to the tiling ; the soldier shakes his loins. Around his cock, the battledress, opened, crumpled, black with sperm and sweat. His shoes scrape the tiling, hit, bruising them, the woman's toes. The soldier, his gluey hands going from the woman's temples to her cunt, gasps for breath, moves backwards, roars. The dogs howl, tear off scraps of flesh from the rubbish heaps fuming along the shore ; old cans pulled from the slush, glitter, tinkle under their fangs. The soldier, with his fingers, with his nails, spreads the woman's cunt open. The woman's head rolls on the tiled floor. The soldier, lifted on his belly, claws the cunt, the neck of the woman. The children sweep down on the injured man ; lips split over the sand, eyes closed, mouth filled with blood, he's still breathing, a child squats down, lays his finger on a vein beating at the injured man's neck, pinches it with his other finger, the injured man jumps. A soldier, from a room window, a soldier half-naked, out all moist from a whore's arms, has seen the rider fall : he goes to the far end of the room, brushes the straw mattress where the woman lying on her back, legs spread, arms under the head, watches him walk and smiles when he brushes the bed again, his rifle in hand this time, the soldier moves the barrel close to the woman's belly, makes it slide, shiny and cold, between the thighs, the woman stretches herself, wriggles, laughs softly, pushes away the gun slowly with her hand, her hot fingers on the barrel, leave marks. The soldier moves towards the window, half-opens it, raises the blind, sees the group of children and the injured rider, aims his weapon, pulls the bolt, presses the trigger, children and rider jump in the lifted sand and fall back in a heap, without a shout, doors slam shut, the soldier withdraws his finger, puts

an end to the burst of gunfire, looks back, rifle fuming against his hip ; the room is filled with a heavy smell of powder and straw, the woman is trembling against the wall, the soldier walks to the bed, looks at the filthy mattress, bashed in by men's knees and by their fists, slides his finger through a hole in the bed, and pulls a wisp of straw, sticks it between his lips, moves closer to the woman, embraces her again, sticks his mouth against hers and slips the wisp of straw between their lips. The horse crosses the river, its breast hits the islands of sand, it trots in the little streams of the beach, on its hooves slide grass snakes and vipers pushed by the current towards the river and tumbling down among the stones. Above the cliff, rolls a chariot of hay ; a jeep, some trucks appear, speeding on the edge of the crumbling cliff ; sand, stones, tufts of ragged thistles slide along the slope, towards the still horse. Two soldiers jump out of the jeep. Two children are playing on top of the chariot, in the hay. The soldiers haven't noticed them, they march towards the driver, talk to him for a few minutes, then beat him with their rifle butts. A soldier comes close to the hay, takes out a box from his battledress, throws a burning match in the hay, setting it ablaze at once ; the flame makes a hole in the hay, shoots out at the top, surrounds and seizes the children, then engulfs the hay ; the driver, beaten to death, lies under his mule. The soldiers jump back into the jeep, the convoy starts off and disappears in the vale. The horse watches the chariot burning, the mule neighs, shakes its reins. The horse, all quivering in the evening air, lowers its head, buries its nostrils in the tepid sand. Fire runs along the shafts, the reins, the mule lifts its foreleg, shakes its head, its tail catches fire, the mule's cries draw some peasants hiding in the vale's bramble bushes, they come closer, see the pile of ashes amongst which a trail of grease is fuming ; the mule pulls, the charred shafts and reins fall to bits ; the mule, most of its hide burnt, collapses, mouth wide open, body covered with pustules and long trickles of grease squirt out and run on its scorched coat ; under it, a charred body, shrouded again and engulfed by the flame. The peasants look away, one of them staggers, runs to lie down on the slope. The horse, its nostrils blowing on the sand, a wet shudder runs throughout its body ; the smell of smoke makes it move back towards the river, there it gulps down, slowly, eyes half-closed. Behind it, against the cliff, a tree is trembling under the breeze, the horse's flanks quiver, greenflies sparkle between its hooves. The smoke from the blaze melts into darkness, a smell of burnt flesh comes down over the water, the horse dives again in the river, crosses it. On the bank, two old women and ragged children, are searching the rubbish piles, feet in the multicoloured slush, legs covered with flies and maggots, they pull bits of bread softened by moisture, shreds of raw meat, lift them to their teeth, a little girl devours a piece of blue meat, holding the bone with both hands against her breast, dogs are on the prowl ; a little cat clings to the girl's tatters, hangs by its fangs from the bone, and lays its claws on the child's lips ; a boy grabs an old rake, hooks the cat, makes it fall on the ground and gouges out its eyes, he strikes

the cat, cuts its head off, blood blends with the mud, the little girl continues tearing the meat, her hair filled with blood ; the dogs growl, one of them steals between an old woman's legs, under her rags and snatches the ball of wet bread she was kneading in her hand ; a rat appears out of the sludge, squelches through the vomit, dives again under the liquid sheet uttering a small cry, sharp and wild. The horse escapes under the trees, brushes the damp bark, huge birds fly off towards the last rays of light ; from the shaken boughs, falls the dust of the day. The children bustle around on the heap of rubbish, their bodies dripping wet, covered with insect bites, some are naked, tatters hanging from the shoulder. Slugs, maggots are writhing in the hollows of their thighs. Two of them are fighting, in the sludge, one clutches the other's throat in his hand dripping with vomit, the other grabs a fragment of smashed bottle and claws his belly and back, blood spurts and runs through the filth and vomit down the child's legs, his hands grip more tightly, the strangled child cries, his cheeks swell, his hands let go of the glass fragment, it falls in the glowing slime, the other boy's teeth shine between his black lips, his cock hardens against the strangled child's thigh, the horse rolls in the sand, gets up again, trots under the eucalypti, rubs its breast against the trunks, enters the city, comes back to wander along the street where its rider fell, turns around the ravaged and bloody sand, a grass snake coiled up in the sand, springs between the horse's hooves, slips and disappears at the bottom of a wall ; in front of the brothel's door, a jeep is stopped, moonlight falls on the battered bonnet, ripples on the vibrating hood ; the brothel's windows are shut. Only a basement window, at the foot of the wall, is lit. The horse comes up to the jeep, its nostrils brush the metal, breathe the nauseating darkness of the seats and greasy rags, sink in a heap of bloody fabrics and tepid ashes. Inside the smoky cellar, the drunken soldiers throw themselves on the women, knock them down underneath them in the coal. In the cellar's entrance, stands a young boy smoking a cigarette between his slit lips, he takes the money from the soldiers' hands. The coal dust rises towards the window and falls on the street. When a woman has been well fucked and passes out, the young boy comes along, grabs her feet, pushes away the soldier sprawled on the unconscious body, separates his sexual organs from the woman's and drags the woman on the coal nuts, as far as the door, at the bottom of the stairs ; the soldier, his cock dragging on the coal, moans, crawls, mouth wide open, chin dripping with black slaver, arm raised towards the door, his fingers catching the young boy's bare legs. In a corner of the cellar, two soldiers with fevered faces, are driving a coal nut into a woman's cunt, one of them arousing her by harsh caresses all over the body, the other holding her knees in position with one hand ; then they set her pubic hair on fire. The woman screams, showing the white of her eyes, belly streaming with sweat. The young boy steps forward and, still smiling imperceptibly :

— Twice the price of the lay for the damage.

And, squatting down, he blows between the woman's thighs, puts out the little fire, passes his hand on the half-charred fleece, gets up again, takes back his stand at the cellar entrance.

At dawn a jeep drives by with a trailer, among the eucalypti, stops in front of the rubbish pile, three soldiers jumps off the jeep, uncoupling the trailer. On the quivering pile, vibrating already under the crude light of the sun, two bodies : the two children who fought during the night, one of them strangled, the other his body slashed, the wounds black, covered with shiny flies. The soldiers turn livid, lower their gaze, look at each other, hesitate, their throat throbbing ; then they overturn the trailer, the fetid sludge, pink and green, spills on the two corpses washed by dawn. The soldiers spit, they chase away the flies with their hands. At noon, a jeep (and a trailer) drives on the sand, enters the water. Children are bathing below. The soldiers climb on the trailer containing two casks of turds and tip them over the water.

— Stop, they're some kids bathing.

— They don't give a shit, filthy race, disgusting, disgusting. They don't even wipe their ass. Go on, pour the shit. Anyway, they always stink, those whores.

The soldiers tip the casks. The turds splash in the white water, casting a shadow on the water moving down upon the children, shrouding them and soiling their shoulders ; they swim towards the bank, suffocating, vomiting in the tepid water. They come out of the water and crawl on the sand like rats. The soldiers raise the casks with chains. At camp, they put them back in place under the cesspools, their shoes sticking to the black slush swarming with worms ; inebriated for a moment, there they are now standing in the sun, dazzled, back broken, they wipe their hands on their hips, the battledress cloth, burning, gets crumpled with a sharp noise, then they walk heavily towards the tents ; in front of them are the tables covered with pieces of black meat, dribble, beer head ; the soldiers, with a weary hand, take some bits, eat them, rubbing their hands, slip under the tents, collapse on their straw mattresses, on their back, legs spread apart, their glistening hands sunken behind the belt, of which the point gleams like a dart, in the shadows of the fire, in the steam of the sun and in the vibration of the bodies.

Inside the cellar, the drowsy women, move an arm, a foot ; the coal dust, mixed with sperm, sweat and dried slaver, runs down the indifferent and icy skin, in the rays of light ; the young boy, standing, one leg folded against the wall, is smoking, motionless, hand on his belt.

In the underwood, over the tents, an insect's slow and obstinate flying, sets off amongst the charred foliage the flowing and fall of sand and ashes.

The young boy claps his hands, the women awaken, get up, crowd in front of the door, follow the boy. He opens a door, the women scream, rush on the shower's planks, take position under the jet ; in a corner, a sailor, tall, fair, entirely naked, is asleep on the moist planks, coiled up, his hip and his shoulder stained

with mud, his cock soft upon his thigh ; his uniform folded under his nape ; his soaked shoes against his back.

The women, standing on tiptoe, offer their face, their breasts, to the trickle of lukewarm water coming out of the dusty pipe. The boy closes the tap, with a brusque flick of the wrist, the women hold out their hands towards the pipe, crane their neck, mouth open ; the boy lifts his leg, sits on the tap, squeezes it between his thighs and staring at the women, strokes it, half-opens it, closes it, opens it again, kneads it with both his hands, opens it fully, the water falls on the women's lips, on their shoulders, the women shake their hair, small bits of coal slide, fall and dissolve on the planks ; several women, their lips are bleeding, other ones, the soldiers bit their cunts and breasts.

There is, at the upper end of the street, a permanent fair where the rebels hide, in the merry-go-rounds, in the stalls ; lower down, a fish market. Between two merry-go-rounds, next to a deserted garden, a shed made of planks, sheet metal, and hides ; inside, a butcher's stall — the wood still bears red graining — where a girl is bound, naked except for a kind of faded loincloth between the thighs : hanging above the girl, a placard :

— She has two cunts.

All day long, the men, fishmongers, bricklayers, mechanics, come to lift the loincloth, touch the double cunt, put the finger in, then they slip a coin between the girl's thighs, fold the piece of cloth back and go out under the sun, their cocks grown hard. The loincloth is damp with gall and fresh cement, fish scales are stuck to it, dirty oil, grease have blackened it. The girl moans softly, her head hangs out of the stall, the coins chink under the loincloth, a man lifts it, thrusts his hand, puts the coins in his pocket, comes back to sit at the far end of the shed, on the mud floor. Against the sheet iron partition, a merry-go-round is shaking, children are having a fight, the man can hear their toes crack ; in his half-sleep, he sees the dust and the horses' old colours ; behind his back, the boys' panting, their teeth.

The cardinal goes out in the garden ; with a hand creased by sleep, he strokes the flowers heavy with dew ; draws the other hand from under his sleeves, bends over a clump of shrubs, breaks a flower, raises it to his lips, drinks the wild dew. A window opens on the façade, a nun's cornet shoots forward, the cardinal smiles, waves his hand, but seeing the flower in this hand, he blushes, the window closes at once on a smell of bed an ether, the cardinal walks towards the orangerie where the orange trees and the castrati are ; he opens a door, moves gently between the tepid boughs, stops in front of a second door through which he hears muffled laughs, and crackings of beds, the noise of water in the sheet metal bowls, he pushes the door, he sees the boys stripped to the waist, bending over the bowls a towel on the shoulder, the supervisor claps his hands twice ; the boys sitting on

their bed, get up, arms along the hips. The cardinal steps forward, a lump in the throat, he walks towards the supervisor, a white young man dressed in black cloth, and takes his hand ; here they are in front of the unmade beds, a boy kneels in front of the cardinal and kisses his ring, another throws himself at his feet, kisses them, the cardinal lays a weary, plump hand on the boy's nape, lifts his head up ; the young man, next to him, shudders :

— They're not so kind to me, your Eminence.

But the cardinal doesn't hear him. A bed, sheets, suddenly stained with blood, the boy stands in front of the stain, his lips are trembling and his eyes, the white young man puts his hand on his hip and pushes him away gently. Then, he lays his fingers on the sheet at the place of the stain, the cardinal steps forward ; the young man rubs his fingers together :

— It's still fresh. Aren't you ashamed.

The boys come closer with a noise of wool and muscles, but the young man stops them. The cardinal looks away :

— Leave this child alone.

— He has bad thoughts, your Eminence.

A red-haired boy throws himself at the cardinal's feet :

— In the morning, I see him, he turns over in his bed, he rolls...

— I'm scared.

The cardinal goes to the window, sees the market gardeners, and the dairymen leaning on their carts, legs spread, nostrils shining, under the kitchen stairs. A glass door opens, cornet, a nun comes down, opens her arms, the man takes tomatoes and figs, makes them flow against the nun's bosom, she smiles for a second, turns away, goes up the stairs, her hips swinging in her tight skirt, the door slams in a sunbeam ; the man smiles, wipes his hands on his hips, spits, brusquely holds up his head again, the sun hits his uncovered teeth ; behind the pane disappears the nun's face, furtive, hopeless ; the eyelashes, the bridge of the nose gleaming behind the glass splashed by the sun. The cardinal puts his hand before his eyes, comes back towards the bed :

— Leave this child alone, do not judge him, lust consumes this world, from top to bottom.

Then he passes by and the child looks down, the cardinal chokes, suffocates : that smell of blood, of sweat, of soap, of night saliva. He goes out, pulls his soutane's flaps over him, walks through the orange trees with their scent of tepid blood, passes the gate, enters inside the sun ; he hears a joyful brass band in the upper part of the city, his comrades are carrying to the grave a young slaughtered soldier three nights ago ; as the procession gets nearer to the sky, the band plays faster, it comes out of the trees and resounds in the blue, a trickle of blood falls from the coffin, the bearers' arms harden, the dead man's blood, projected by the jolts of the march, spurts out on the lower part of the battledress,

the dead man's face is uncovered and his whole body wrapped in bandages to stop the blood ; that face, those limbs so frail, so cold, that mother of pearl, the sun would smash them, would burn them with one single breeze. They walk up, the passing shadows of birds and branches flow like water on the dead man's face and make him smile, the soldiers, dazzled, see lamps in the blue of the sky, the rivers of blue flow through the sky, like blood, the tops of the trees are burning, the horizon crumbles, with the noise of a drum.

The cardinal, moved to tears by the band, stretches his limbs beneath the veils, toddles along.

A nun is waiting for him, on the top of the steps ; the little castrati come out of the orangerie, walk in line towards the chapel, at the far end of the garden ; one of them, a rose gets caught on his hip, he stops, looks back, unhooks the rose, his eyes slide for a second on those of the cardinal, it's the child with the bloodstained sheet :

— He touched our youngest sister in the linen room, your Eminence. Since then she can't sleep anymore, she watches by the windows.

The cardinal smiles to the child, the rose swings above the clump :

— Come and get dressed, your Eminence.

The fat man fed on peas, stew and custard, lets himself be escorted to his room, be seated on a chair facing the window, the nun kneels at his feet, takes his slippers off :

— Sister, why do you despise that child, a creature of the Lord, with his hand which touched your youngest sister he also crosses himself — what do we have for lunch ?

— ... We have a surprise for you, your Eminence.

— Oh, please whisper it in my ear. What a sun. I'm a giant, sister.

— Do not crush me, your Eminence.

— When I was a little child, I loved the dew, my father, knees and corduroys covered with dung, used to leave for the fields, with his horse, followed by his sleepy footmen ; my mother tickled my feet, I laughed, I stroked her hair, I undid her chignon, she'd become angry, tap my cheek ; but every morning, kneeling in front of me, she offered her head, her nape, her chignon, for me to undo it with my gentle and insistent hands, then, before getting angry, she arched her neck a bit more, and her hands moved up along my shoulders and came to join mine...

— Your Eminence is becoming emotional. I cannot remind your Eminence of her mother ; the young sisters loathe me, I can hear them in the kitchen, the dormitory, the chapel. I have become used to not loving any more.

— Sister, love your fellow being like yourself.

— I do love my fellow being like myself ; I am clean, I wash my fellow being.

— Sister, do you know your own body ?

— Twenty years ago, I stood in front of the mirror, the top of my dress half-opened ; I fainted almost immediately.

— He who is not moved by his own body cannot love himself and he cannot love.

— Give me your right foot, your Eminence... Oh, is it not awfully red ?

— Yet I haven't walked very far.

— I believe our youngest sister is anxious with her body. Earlier today, after the market gardeners passed, she was trembling like a rose after rain.

— I shall take her into my service.

And he remembers the dress and the hips caught inside the tight and severe cloth, the gardener's laugh... moved mainly by the young men who watch her and desire her. Now, he stands up straight again, he throws his cape over his shoulders, his hands are shaking, he goes out, the nun pats the cape, chases away a lock of white hair and some dandruff, the cardinal smiles but he feels a lump in his throat, he gently pushes the woman away :

— I shall go alone.

He sets foot inside the sun, he moves forward, the sun rises along his legs, his hips, his chest, up to his skull ; in the upper part of town, muffled brass bands ; in the lower part, smokes, cries of children and dogs. The cardinal walks up towards the cathedral : it appears, all white, bougainvillea red, black with the sun. The cardinal drags himself up the steps, leans on the porch, passes along the nave, his hand scraping the stone, hurts itself with the glittering potsherds, mutters childish words, prays aloud, pushes the sacristy door : an old man, with wild eyes, a running nose, welcomes him in his arms :

— Your Eminence, all alone, all alone ! a result of God's grace. A result of God's grace.

— Fill the cruets, instead of stifling me.

In the doorway, the jumble of flowers, branches, vibrating insects, the shadow of the leaves on the gilded wood of the sideboards, on the gold and mother of pearl of the chasubles, on the milk of the maniples.

— Your Eminence, there is a bird in the sacristy ; I suppose he got in during the night ; this morning, it was turning inside the chapel, around the statues. Truly a beautiful bird. Fine plumage, fine singing. Roasted, for your Eminence, it would still speak, and speak of gold. A result of God's grace.

— Shut up, please, let me say my prayers.

And the cardinal bends down, out of breath, over the sideboard covered with linen. Three times, the chapel becomes filled by soldiers and settlers in light clothes. The cardinal, dressed up, heavy, shoulders drooping, passes into the large sacristy. There, are getting dressed noisily, the deacons and subdeacons. All bow down. Their gestures, when among themselves, are like women's :

— Oh, the sister ironed your surplice so well ; better than mine, I don't know why, she must have a grudge against me. Oh, that immaculate white over your tanned neck. How were things at the big dam ? Did you play the tracking games ? The children behaved well ? I hear you had handsome soldiers to protect you.

The procession takes shape, it stops before entering the nave. The organ trembles. The little castrati, on the right of the altar, hold their breath. The procession moves towards the altar. Gloria in excelsis Deo. The little castrato with the rose, is singing, his eyes fill with tears, the cardinal bends his head, and turns it, lightly, over the ciborium ; he sees the child's legs, his quivering throat, the slaver shining at the corner of the lips. The child, his clothes are trembling, sings alone through the silence. And the bird flies out of the confessional ; shoots forward between the whitewashed walls, bumps into the pink columns, the statues ; the flutter of its wings flattens the flames of the candles, on the altar ; the child remains motionless ; the cardinal bends his head... with the scent of wine rising from the small table, blends all of a sudden a smell of feather, of nest and of blood. The cardinal looks down, between the child's thighs, a stain blackens the cloth of the shorts, grows larger : a trickle of blood runs down the leg, to the knee. The bird passes over the child, brushes his hair, turns around his hips, drawn by the blood. The child sings louder, blood runs more violently. Then the choir intertwines and the child falls down in a faint, leg streaming. The black young man makes a rush, takes the child in his arms and carries him to the sacristy, lays him on a bench in front of the garden door, he comes back to the nave's door, closes it, looks through the keyhole, goes back to the child, bends over him, places his hand on the child's shoulder, drives it under the armpit, in the sweat, brings it back to the chest, he bends over, sets his lips on the child's cheek, on his lips and the hand crawls over the chilled belly, on the canvas soaked by blood. The young man stands up straight again, stares at his hand, moves towards the door, goes down into the garden, crouches, buries his moist hand in the sand, comes back to the sacristy, puts his hand in the washbasin, opens the tap ; the child comes back to life, his knees are trembling, the dried blood falls in a powder on the bench. In the doorway one can see a dog pass, whiter than the garden.

The children maimed during the slaughters are kept in hospitals ; those whose penis only was chopped off, the pimps sell them to the deacons, the cardinal receives money from the governor to buy those children back and feed them. Very soon, the pimps start paying assassins : they creep in the streets, by night, in the country tracks, by day, capture children, mutilate them in the sand, in the mud. Towards the end of the war, slaughters becoming rare, most of the cardinal's castrati had to do with these murderers. Mutilation is better performed so.

Thus, Kment, one night — in Iguider valley, rebels and soldiers fight with their knives, under the moon, along the Iguider river — two men are chasing him since nightfall ; he leaps over the sand, his tatters get caught in the brambles.

Below, knives are chinking ; his heart throbs, the men's breath in his back. Eagles, very high, on the smoky moon, they sweep down silently on the fight. Kment dives into a deserted barn, rolls in the hay, his bare thigh hits a scythe in the dust, Kment grabs it ; the two men leap next to him, Kment waves the scythe above his head, the men cling to his hips, dust rising from the floor brings light in the darkness ; the scythe slips on the men's backs, tears their shirt away ; one man catches hold of Kment's cock, through the cloth, pulls, Kment howls, waves the scythe and plunges it into the man's throat ; he staggers, his tall body soaked with cold sweat turns around Kment and collapses in the hay. The other man has caught, with both hands, the boy's leg, Kment slips and falls, the man strikes his forehead and belly, snatches the scythe. Kment, crouching, hands to his belly, dives, quick, in the man's legs, throws him down. In the valley, soldiers and rebels are running along the river ; a fighter plane is wheeling above them ; the soldiers break away from the rebels, the plane nosedives on the rebels and machine-guns them ; inside the plane, the pilot and the gunner shiver and yell, laugh, powder intoxicates them ; a bit of foam and snot shines over the gunner's lip, a bit of soap on his right cheek ; a small ice cream sticks out from the battledress chest pocket, it weighs on the nipple, he bends his back slightly and raises his shoulder, but the ice cream seems stuck to the nipple, as if by blood, through the cloth.

Kment strikes the man's face with the scythe, blood spurts, shades the face gradually, like a net. Kment throws the scythe, flees, rolls on the path, hands to his belly. On the plane's cabin the burning cases chink, they sizzle on the steam. Birds cry in the black peaks, excited, panic-stricken by the battle ; the plane nosedives, machine-guns, flies up again into the night, brushes the trees, dives towards the cliff, machine-gunned soldiers and rebels fall on the pebbles, along the river. Kment crawls on the sand ; the plane passes over him, long vibrating stone, Kment enters the sand, half-buries himself, like a crab and, the plane vanishing, the stone extinguished in the night, he brings back the sand against his cheek like a face, by the neck. Soldiers and rebels leaning over the pebbles, tremble, rattle, blood withdraws from their lips : fish jump in the rapids, insects, coiled around a couple of reeds, loosen the grip of their legs, and, belly covered with grub, escape in the warm night, the loosened reeds vibrate ; in the marshy water, bullets and dead toads roll, smeared with rust. There descends the ultimate, bloody, pink saliva of the dying soldiers. The plane comes back, nosedives, machine-guns again, bullets jump, patter on the pebbles, reap the reeds. The gunner's hands are black, he vomits suddenly on the butt of the machine-gun, lets his forehead, his temples lean against the fuming metal, he shivers, closes with gluey fingers the collar of his battledress. The pilot looks back : on his mica spectacles, leather and copper-rimmed, a crust made by the bodies of hacked insects, a crust already dried, from which stick out, here and there, trembling, a leg, a feeler, a wing :

— Machine-gun them, machine-gun them ! For Christ's sake, aim a bit better !

— Lieutenant, lieutenant, I'm sick, I'm dying, my fiancée, I'm dying, I killed them all, they're waiting for me with their knives, the city is closed, a knife is driven into my back, I run, I'm not moving, the walls of the city rise with the snouts of sad insects, the muzzles of the wild beasts, a claw shoots out of earth and grabs my foot, my lieutenant, over my fiancée, you're taking advantage, it's my turn, I've got pins and needles in my cock, my thirst, my trees, my legs are burning like candles, it hurts, oh how it hurts, lieutenant, get down from the bed, crush them.

The soldier catches the pilot by the shoulders, grips his neck tightly, the pilot leaves go of the controls, the soldier foaming, vomiting, strangles him with his soiled hands. The plane flies straight towards the cliff, the soldier fires at the cliff, bending over the machine-gun, he gets up all of a sudden, holds out his arms above the wings, the plane comes closer to the riddled cliff. The soldier standing in the cabin, arms raised, face and chest soaked with dribble and vomit, raving mad. An injured soldier, on the pebbles, opens his eyes, sees the plane go into the cliff, like a fish in his hole.

Kment falls over on his back and goes to sleep. The little castrati, woken up by the noise of the battle, stir in their beds. The black young man, in his cubicle, eyes wide open, listens to the whizzing of bullets ; the cubicle's curtains move gently, the reflection of some fire runs on the copper rings. Birds and bats hit the Virginia creeper around the open window, shake, make the white and blue dust run from the leaves ; a robin shoots out from a corner of the cubicle, falls, struggles behind a painting. The black young man gazes at the sky, the night on the march, the whirlwinds, the manes, the teeth, the fangs.

Illiten captured, Inamenas breathes with relief. A truce is agreed on, the crowd crushes at the gates of factories, workshops, farms, the crowd works twenty days, morals become strict. The rebels, hunted down, denounced assemble inside a grotto, precisely where, a hundred years earlier, their ancestors decided to resist the invader, where they died, ten years later, smoked out, abandoned by the people, divided. An underground passage dug under the mountain, leads to a large cave, with openings looking on to the sea ; the wounded, head and belly bandaged, are lying on camp beds stolen from the occupying forces ; young women in battledress look after them ; others serve them and bend over them at night so that they can touch their breasts ; convalescents may embrace them and take them on a straw mattress set at the bottom of a hole, in the lower part of the cave, near a small canal where soldiers throw fishbones and eucalyptus rinds after chewing them, and which disappears into the cliff until it reaches the open air. During the truce, chiefs informed of the weariness of negotiators in the mother country, start

making plans for an entry into the cities. Sometimes they quarrel violently, they then walk to the openings, contemplate the slack sea, boundless flesh, melting with sparks under the sun, seagulls gently slide along the cliff, brush the tufts of alfalfa grass, fall nonchalantly on the sand, bathers now and then walk across the beach, rebels watch them through binoculars. Then, they go back to their cards, take one another's hand above the game, there are three of them ; around the wrist, the mark of hanging ; on the youngest's throat, a long scar that scintillates when he moves his head :

— We must be seen most of the time well dressed, well armed, limit our action to usual executions : tarts, informers, rich people, their children ; but, above all, in some less accessible areas of the island, begin to rule, to build, to teach, to impose ourselves naturally as the local representatives, the forerunners of a revolutionary government marching against the capital. In the mother country, our friends will obtain Illiten's pardon.

— The soldier who gave up to us the Tiritine post, committed suicide, yesterday evening, during platoon rest : two bullets in the mouth : he was a good shot and a good radio operator.

— I remember his tears when one of our soldiers was killing a stork.

— Soldiers didn't like him, neither did our brothers.

— We did not fight for those people's sake.

— Useful traitors, though.

— We'll force them back across the sea. Beyond, who cares about their fate.

He speaks, barefaced, throat uncovered, arms folded low on his belly, his voice suddenly tears like a leaf, saturated with heat and water, his foot trembles on the rock :

— You Béja...

— What's the matter ?

— Let's step outside.

In the far end of the cave, a soldier groans, pulls off his bandages, turns over in his bed, pushes with his back, the bed collapses, the soldier rolls over the rock, he screams like a rat, a shrill scream ; a young woman dashes forward, bends over, lifts the soldier by the shoulders, but the soldier, eyes shut, draws her to him, knocks her down over him, hugs her, his body's open wounds stick to the woman's battledress, his livid, almost icy lips, bite the woman's mouth, then break away, frozen : the grip of arms and knees relaxes ; the man's head rolls on the rock, a trickle of pink saliva spurts out at the corner of the lips. The woman gets up, leaning on her wrists ; her bloody, crumpled battledress works loose from the dead man's wounds, throwing red sparks.

Béja, alone, at the cave's entrance, standing on a granite slab, looks back inside, sees the dead soldier and the squatting woman, shuts his eyes, throws

away the cigarette he was holding in his fingers, wipes his lips with the palm of his hand :

— Koba dead ? The last one, perhaps. Forty days from now, we'll be in Inamenas.

He lays his hand on the sentry's shoulder, he gazes at the rocks, the wet plain, the fog's silent smokes through the slashed trees, the birds coming up from the sea.

— I carry everything in my chest, I carry you all on my shoulders.

He lets his arm lie on the sentry's shoulders :

— You see Inamenas on the horizon, the water towers ? That's where the revolution began ; I was with Illiten, we killed the guard, a traitor : he's sitting at his table, under the lamp ; I fly at him, I snatch the pistol from his hands, Illiten attacks the man, knocks the table over, catches the man by the shoulders, I hold the man by his waist, Illiten draws his knife, drives it into the man's shoulder, I feel his belly's muscles contract under my fingers, blood spurts out, runs on my arm, the man screams, tilts abruptly his head backwards, it hits my chin. Illiten pushes him against the glass door, the man collapses in front of the door, among the fragments of glass, I dash forward, I lift him by the shoulders, and push him forward into the arms of Illiten who strikes his knee with the knife, the man stumbles, twisting his leg. We laid him on the floor, Illiten holds him there, I grab the paraffin lamp, Illiten opens the man's mouth with both hands, I tilt the lamp over it, the light shows the red, quivering palate, where saliva spouts up and blood rises between the teeth, in one go I pour flame and burning paraffin oil, the man utters a long scream, groans, weeps, tears run on his charred face, a red smoke comes out of his mouth, his lips crumple, with the gasping breath, like charred paper. The dissipated smoke lays bare the ash-covered palate, at the bottom of which stirs a bit of shrivelled tongue, Illiten gets up again, his hands are trembling, he grabs the lamp and smashes it on the man's face :

— He's dead, let's flee.

I throw a small badge on the dead man's chest. Illiten drags me outside :

— Now you're a real revolutionary.

And he embraces me in the frozen night, his bloody hands slide on my belt, move up along my back, as far as the nape. This is my first kill.

The sentry keeps staring up at Béja's face, but the young chief jumps on the stones, he picks a tuft of mint, squashes it in his wet hand :

— Illiten is still fighting.

The mist, visible shape of silence, rises as far as the sun ; Béja lies on a rock, arms stretched sideways, legs parted, the shadow of a bird veils his face a short moment, Béja sees the still head, the hanging claws, the yellow beak above him, the wet eye, out of its orbit, running on the black feathers, the dead belly, the hard throat, the bird glides down wings spread but rigid, its outlines cast a shadow

on the sky, Béja feels his cock hardening under the sun, a naked, burning woman comes down and settles on him, lays her lips on Béja's, his belly, his cock, his knees, Béja rolls over her, are you dead ? He leaps to his feet, the woman's skin breaks loose and remains stuck to the boy then becomes fire powder, help, I'm burning, the bird buries his beak in Béja's neck, the skinned woman, weeps against him, she hugs him, she drinks the blood spurting from the neck, she sucks it up with her lips of bone and muscles, before dying, Béja lays his hand on the woman's cunt, which swells under the caress, he pricks his hand on the cactus, he dances with the woman, he feels, against his chest, the woman's open chest, the heart's living flesh throbbing against his battledress button. Towards the elevated square where the tents are pitched, the train moving between the tall wet grass, enters the station, carriages covered with mud and worms, the women passengers, cheeks smeared with mud and worms behind the panes, a scented glove, a black leather glove against her lips, her tears on the glove, sun pierces the metal ceiling and strikes them down in the midst of the musicians, the dog drags its snout over the shoes' gold buckles, over the spears. Béja, Béja why do you always stink so, as though you slept among the sheep. On the red tiled floor, cockroaches are running. Béja could you eat a cockroach, his shoes against my naked feet, my hand on the damp straw wrapping the water pipe, a piece of foliage is swinging in front of the small window, Béja could you eat that cockroach, full of them inside the flush, the smell attracts them here, then they move up towards the cool, you can see their trail on the wall, eat, a black monkey climbs up the poplar, a dead cat is floating underneath, in the greenish gleam, I'll give you some money, eat, he makes the coins chink inside his pocket, Béja, Béja, where are they both again, see I put the money on the window, it's for you, if you eat one, the coins shine on the dusty lime, three coins, a mirror all for myself, I crouch down, Béja, Béja, madam wants to see you, there is a spider in her room, she's trembling with fear the poor thing, she's calling for you, I lay my hand on the tiled floor, a cockroach runs towards my bare foot, I catch it, I stand up again, the cockroach is moving inside my hand, hard, humid, its legs scratch my skin, I open my mouth, my hand, the cockroach between my fingers is struggling near my lips, Talbot looks back, hand on the mouth, leans over the stoneware throne, I close my teeth on the cockroach, I cut him in two halves, a bitter then sour liquid spills under my tongue, Talbot suddenly vomits hands leaning on the wall, I swallow the two halves of the cockroach, I keep my lips tightly closed, I grab the coins on the window, I climb on the ledge, I slip through the window, I jump into the garden, I run away, the coins melt in my hand, I'm lying in the empty canal, upon the dry cement, the water gate falls on my throat like a cleaver, a heap of small slaughtered birds is fuming, Talbot vomits in the blackberry bushes, Béja, Béja, a big white feather is placed on my thighs, greenflies are jumping under the quilt, in the plain, the movement, the undulation of palms and harrows, the earth covered with slashed roots, the big bird moves,

dives between the rocks, Béja moves his leg, opens his eyes, sees the sun, scintillating cobweb, the tip of the rocks, he leaps to his feet, runs towards the sentry and shouts :

— Kill that bird, kill it, we'll eat it tonight.

— What bird, chief, what bird ?

The sentry stares at the sky, then at the rocks :

— What bird ? to eat it ?

— I don't see it any more. Go back inside, get yourself replaced. It's such a scorching sun.

The sentry salutes : a small flock of sheep comes out of the cave, the sentry, holding his gun with both hands, pushes them back with the butt, the sheep trample the rock, shake their head ; the sentry strikes, the rifle's sling gets caught in the rams' horns :

— Hit them harder, like you used to do.

— Why do the sheep want to escape ?

— Because we've become impure.

The sentry pushes the sheep in the cave, towards the far end : those among the wounded who have grown fond of some lambs, go to stroke them, the lambs escape and crowd against their mother's belly ; the soldiers go back to sit on their camp bed ; the sheep are trembling. Béja leans over the dead man, kneels against his hip, the woman is crouching in front of the sheep, hands crossed on his bloody battledress. Béja waves his hand, two soldiers in arms step forward :

— Take Koba and carry him to the little cemetery. Be careful, the slope is slippery because of the mist.

The two soldiers lift Koba, the blood that was drying in the folds of the battledress, runs on the bearers' fingers :

— He has a little harmonica.

— Leave it with him.

Béja, in daytime, never touches the woman ; at night only he crawls towards the straw mattress where she sleeps, legs open, face on fire ; she feels the cartridge belts and the dagger's scabbard roll on her hip, Béja's burning breath on her uncovered chest, hands smeared with mud and rifle grease grip her hair on the temple, the long lithe and heavy body move up like an animal shadow on her body and cover it ; she sees through the cliff holes the starlit sky where stars flow from one to another, far above the sea, she listens to the fall of birds and stones along the cliff, to the distant noise of wet sand crumbling beneath the beach, into the puddles where little solitary fish get caught. The sheep start moving when her knee scrapes the rock between the woman's thighs, he has pulled her from the mattress, their salivas mingle and scintillate ; for a moment the cold of the buttons on her cunt, then the warmth and the nails of the soldier in her shoulders ; a look towards the cave's entrance ; the soldier comes and goes under the moon, the

battledress cloth stretched on the hip between the thighs with sharp pleats.

In the middle of the night, the delegates come out of the cave, descend towards the plain. Soldiers rebels against the State are awaiting them in the Thilissi gorge. Commanded by a captain, young, scarred face and throat, they are crouching behind a broom hedge, on the side of the road. Most of them are born in Inamenas, sons of settlers ; silent, they see, through the hard and sharp-pointed brooms, the rebels approaching without a noise, leaping, wearing blue and black espadrilles, on the soiled sand ; they see the knives beating on the hips, they squeeze the rifle butt under their armpit, their hands are shaking on the black magazine, the throat throbs, covered with cobwebs ; small mosquitoes slip on the chest, bump into the lips, get between the skin and the chin strap under the chin and on the cheeks, between the forehead and the helmet, get caught in the sweat at the root of the hair and inside the ear, vibrate in front of the eye, under the eyebrows ; little columns of smoke rise from the sand, like breaths of air ; the soldiers keep quiet, lying, a large streak of sweat in the back : through the black stems, from which eggs' ash and powder flow, the rapids where water leaps, white and shiny and the foam under the banks ; the feverish backward and forward motion of mosquitoes between the water and the brooms, above the road, casts shadows on sand and pebbles, the brooms' lit up tops are scintillating.

A rifle barrel glows inside the brooms : a rebel sees it, stops, makes a sign : all throw themselves in the hedge, finger on the trigger. The soldiers fire from under the brooms, a rebel screams and stirs under the charred stems, the rifle fire increases ; a soldier grabs a hand-grenade from his belt, pulls the pin out and, elbow on the ground of ashes and sand, throws it over the brooms ; it explodes in the midst of the rebels ; a big black bird flies across the battle, the motions of its wings chase away the smoke from the explosion. Soon nothing is left but, between the fighters, a small field of slashed stems and ashes ; they crawl towards each other, their fingers sink in the ash where the fuming cartridge cases jump ; lying, belly beating on the ash, they shout insults, spit, their screams reverberate against the cliffs but, in the moments of silence, and of moving forward, the river's little obstinate noise binds them to the world ; two soldiers only are left then, face to face ; behind them, at the end of the long bloody trail, a heap of dead and dying, mouth opened on the ash, hands on their belly ; entrails flow between the thighs, knees, lips tremble ; on a dead man's chest, sticking out of the pocket, a broken mirror where the burst of gunfire throws sparks and the moon, through the undulating and shaking of the brooms.

The two soldiers, cartridge pouches empty, cling to each other with their burnt fingers, then having suddenly stood up again, leap forward, hug each other, knock each other down in the ash, roll over their still warm rifles, shout, grab each other's thighs, throat, bite, spit in the face, claw ; the rebel snatches the soldier's belt and rips his cheeks with the buckle ; the soldier takes a handful of ashes and

throws it in the rebel's eyes : he, blinded, spits, spits blood, and bites, ash running down his cheeks, holds his mouth open, his jaw shines over the writhing soldier, a rifle under his nape, a hand-grenade under his back ; behind them, groaning, rattles, noises of bones, of blood cracking inside the mouth, bubbling of entrails ; in the moon-stained ash, hands open and close ; a dying man, throat opened, violently thrusts his fist into the wound, a bloody slush spurts out, the fist touches the bone of the throat which the knife sawed ; the two enemies stand up again, strike each other with rifle butts, the rebel is half naked, the shreds of his shirts fly, flap around his chest, the soldier, in his fury, beats them; the rifle barrels knock against one another ; small birds, chased away by the gunfire, come back and jump on the bank, fishes bounce over the pebbles, in the rapids ; the small birds shoot out and brush them with light chirps ; noises of wings and fins, in the plain ; beyond the gorge, where the river grows wide, a pack of jackals trot through the grass, the stems' milk wets their fur, the plain is covered with abandoned tools and machines, rusted scythes, overturned ploughs under which snakes and lizards coil up ; the jackals run, destroying the inclination of the grass, scattering the mating animals, raising their mouth to the moon, paws and claws softened by the warm sand they're trampling, foam to the teeth, tongue vibrating ; in front of them, the black cliffs ; below, the lighter undulation of the grass, the mist of dust and vegetal vapour and lower down, the throbbing of the river, like a fluttering of snow.

Here they are in the gorge, on the battlefield, the two soldiers, bending, head to head, collapse in a great cloud of ash. The jackals move back towards the river ; once the cloud has dissipated, they come closer to the two bodies, turn around, smelling them out, nibble them, search underneath them, growl, blow on the ash ; a jackal seizes a soldier's arm and lifts it up, it pulls the soldier from under the pile of corpses, but the soldier is still alive, his hand closes up on the mouth of the jackal which bites him, the beast moves off in the brooms, then comes back towards the dying man and, this time, buries his fangs in the throat, the soldier utters a light sigh, his head revolves in the ash, the jackal then sets to work on the body, tears the throat, the chest, the belly, buries its muzzle under the belt and pulls out shreds of flesh, it tears the thigh, the hip, devouring all : flesh, muscles, nerves, bones, cloth and leather, moving upwards from under the thighs and its muzzle lifting up the penis, its tongue digging in the navel, and its fangs tearing it, its claws mauling the nipples, the shoulders, burrowing in the armpits, pulling out the hair and, with a grunt, spitting them out on the ash ; its fangs strike the broken mirror, the bloody fragments of glass prick its gums and tongue, crack under the fangs ; the jackal groans, raises the front paw and scratches its muzzle with it ; then it attacks the dead body again, it tries to remove the helmet from the head, the head only adheres to the body by a bundle of crushed flesh, bone, nerves and muscles in which the chin strap bathes, the jackal tips the helmet, the head rolls in the muddy ash, swivelling and the bundle holding it up twists, some

nerves split, the jackal rushes and slices, pulls out, tears by shaking its muzzle, claws hooked to the soldier's shoulders.

All around, the jackals, whining, devour, mouth deep between the soldiers' thighs, pull the corpses by the arms, and by the hair, as far as the brooms, then, satiated, drop their shit over them and clawing the ground, cover them up with earth. Then, their belly heavy, they go to the river bank, sink to the chest in the tepid water and gulp down, under the powdery palms.

High in the mountains, weapon in hand, the rebels listen : the gunfire, the fight hand to hand, the jackals...

Already, three helicopters, coming from Inamenas, roar above the gorges, they come down, they land on the sand, soldiers, doubled up, shoot out of the cabin, jump, cans and hand-grenades clash, shine at their waist, some of them rub their eyes, yawn, stretch out their arms, the raised battledress jacket lays bare the bottom of the chest, the navel and the top of the hip, the fold of the skin between the belt and the trousers' loop ; the propellers, slowing down, blow sand and grass, the water ripples, the propellers' shadow sweeps as far as the cliff's grey marble, on the opposite bank, veiling the angles and the debris, waking up the birds in the nests and making them start and chirp a bit : shoot out of the holes as if under the bombs. The soldiers are squatting next to the bodies, they remove their own from those of the rebels, carry them inside the cabin, assemble the pieces of each dead soldier in tent canvas, open the mouths, hold them open while making them bite their metal plates where the regimental number is written. Some look away and vomit in the brooms ; arms full of those bloody bundles, they run under the wind of the propellers, feet striking pebbles and dried shit, arms bare, tattooed with skulls or naked women, breath stinking of beer and pâté, cursing, grumbling, rubbing the bottom of their back and belly :

— Those bloody worms that eat you behind, those crabs that eat you in front.

A cool breeze flows on their bare arms, runs like milk on their wrists ; a jackal flees in the tall grass, its grey head dances over the ears covered with shards. Soldiers take shovels from the cabin, walk to the middle of the remains, throw earth over the bloody scraps, trample it, blood spurts under their soles.

Above them, the moon's flashes on the slow, vibrating propellers. The officer walks along the bank, pokes holes in the sand with the tip of his cane, a small bird, deafened by the rattling of the propellers, flutters around his boots, the officer bends down, catches the bird, unbuttons the top of his tunic, slips the throbbing bird under his shirt.

All climb back into the helicopters.

... Waves of grass, overturned harrows, the sky explodes, fragments of glass in the foliage, deadly, crawling along the rivers, entering the black earth, sucked in, strangled by the rushes, slapping mutiny, banners pink with sky and

blood, syringes under the armpits, scarlet cry, vomit in the afternoon on the buzzing brambles...

Nape rested on the cabin's vibrating sheet of steel, the squatting soldiers dream, shiver, hands to their knees, sweat running down thighs and chest, hair caught in the helmet rim...

Palms rise, walk with the wind, rain comes, the hurricane tears away the red grass, a tomb guarded by two sleeping soldiers, standing, against the stone. I disarm them, they open their eyes, smile, let me bind them, the stone scintillates, the trunks jump, down the mountain's muddy slope ; on the watercress, at the bottom of the valley, the clanking of wild horses, the stamping of wolves on the dry hay rustling with shards and feelers, I bend over the soldiers' eyes ; in the palace of gilded wood, women make the beds, the sheets swell, flow, flap over the gilded wood, pigs stir among the barrels at the end of the yard, small birds flutter around, the sun vibrates in the blue, the prisoners howl, lying on the slush of cock droppings, a child, iron-armoured, tightly wrapped in leather, pricks them with a stick, they then become silent, hold out their arms, open their hands, frogs jump out of them, their song dies on the slush ; the prisoners' feet are fettered in iron arcs, driven in the ground ; by dusk, the caparisoned child falls in dust over them, evening shadow, shadow of death, mass of ashes ; then they feel his kiss on their lips ; the river carries pieces of red bark, squalling monkeys ; on the big paddle-boat, old blue, rusty irons, oil puddles, the seller of cloth and of slaves ; sitting behind a desk, one soldier cutting the cloth, another cutting the slaves' arm, hand, tongue, a third one wrapping each limb in a piece of cloth and throwing the shreds of bloody flesh to the fish running up the yellow waters ; he writes, counts and weighs ; the bundles are laid in heaps at the bottom of the boat near the helm, blood spatters the ropes ; trees rustle along the river, wild animals rise, heavy under the leaves and slide towards the water, the cliffs of ochre and black clay, crumble in the water turning blue under the sun ; silence : nothing but the the march of heavy animals on the mud marked by hooves, claws, tails, wings, fangs.

The child, standing on the cloth, naked, laughing, both feet against his father's and mother's hip, the servant woman, sleeping with her cheek resting on the top of his arm ; the father cracks his hip joints, and the child pisses right on his forehead, the wet sheet shines in the rays of light, two white horses pass in front of the window, in the wind.

Béja screams at the bottom of the valley, around him, his children's bones ; the wind lifts the ashes, a shining, horned, green insect, along the rock ; Béja weeps, far away, beyond the valley the sea-like undulation of the grass under the white villas, the white paths littered with maimed lizards, trampled by children's and tennis players' espadrilles ; grunting of pigs inside the barrels ; blue flows between the islands, the continents draw nearer, the gods mingle their sacred saliva ; a frog, smeared with ash, jumps on the bones. Béja sits on a bronze chair,

the bones chink under his neck, two young slaves wearing coarse cloth push the prisoner at his feet, he looks away from this scoundrel, smeared with shit, nostril pierced by a cock's beak :

— Go and take the weapons from in front of the tomb, kill the two soldiers, then come back here, and kill this prisoner and throw the bodies in the river after the boat has passed.

The two young slaves, cloth fuming under the sun, scamper through the garden, between the tall white flowers and the flesh-eating plants ; behind the rows of flowers, the pigs grunt, intoxicated by the wine drying at the bottom of the barrels ; above, the flags float in the sea breeze, salt erodes the posts and the piles. The two soldiers, killed ; the rifles burning in the trembling, wet hands ; the prisoner jumps, hands to his belly, his skull cracks on the marble. The young slaves, bare arms, bare feet, lick in front of king Béja the salt on their lips ; the three corpses scintillate in the ship's furrow ; a young slave is tied to the paddle-wheel ; at every turn, he plunges in the water, suffocates, slobbers ; at the stern, next to the helm, the heap of bundles fume in the dust bound for decay. The tomb empty, on the sand run the little flies of death ; from the walls, hang lichens, heavy with chrysalides.

As night was falling, Béja, the king, took fright, he raised his hand and said to all surrounding him, little slaves, soldiers and women :

— Touch me, all of you touch me so that my death be not a lonely one.

Once dead, they opened his mouth, filled it with fresh wood chips, his feet were cut off and given immediately to a young slave the king had mutilated for strangling the princes his children, by order of the cloth seller.

The armour-clad child pushes the women away and climbs on the bed, for a moment his hand strokes the gilded wood of the pillars, then he brings the sheet back upon his armour's iron and falls asleep. The fire takes under the jerricans of petrol, shrouds the pile of cans, the jeeps drive slowly among the slashed cacti, a large red butterfly trembles on the starter, the radio antenna whips the blue sky. I can't move my lips, lick the salt on my lips, touch my chest, a mirror, it's forbidden. Reach Leptis Magna before night, sentenced to death, far from one's mother, from one's village, one's body to be cut into pieces, eaten, a woman make love with a piece of meat then eat it without laying her hands on it, eating the flies and the maggots with it, one's body, though dead, to be desired, devoured, used. Leave my arm. Alive, they cut me into pieces, they slice my thigh and carry it away ; every morning they open my prison, my cellar, they step forward holding knives and pincers, I'm a tiny quivering and obedient animal, on the bloodstained straw. Their breath on my grazed arm, they sing over their knives... We must walk behind a cursed fence, on the cement platform above the canal.

— If you refuse, a guerrilla will hunt you until your death ; everywhere a black mark. From now on, nothing but fear reigns in this world : up there we've

already destroyed a hundred villages, ransacked the harvests, we've eaten green fruits ; by my side, a young guerrilla writhes, hands on his belly : I laugh, I'm struck.

They believed me dead, I came back ; only a short while and I'll be king. I shall relight the pyres. You, touch the banner's velvet. No more mercy now. Live, stretch out your arms, crack your muscles. Alas, to give fright, one cannot dress in blue.

As we march, fields, roads, streets, courtyards, playgrounds grow covered with prisoners, martyrs, lepers ; men, women, children come out of the wooden houses, take off their clothes, put on their old tatters. A shadow over the body, a shadow inside ; the knife, the gas, the hounds. Exterminate. Let tears flow from your eyes by constant killing, your eyes you hounds, brute beasts by God beloved ; halfway through your nap, squatting beside your beds, I touch with the tip of my fingers your wrists smeared by blood and dog's slobber ; they still vibrate from the blows they gave, straps binding them, stretched and pulled by rutting hounds. Believe me or kill me.

Hell is born around me, rises ; hell is rising again. Grass from hell. Beyond the barriers of terror, a desert where sterilized men and women, lay down to die, mouth opened... the poisoned waters disappear from both the surface and the deep of the earth. Flowers from hell. The army is lying on the clay, mugs and knives shine between the soldiers' thighs ; blood under the rain ; dogs bite small children's knees ; guerrillas pull women, with canes, by the neck. A heavy iron door is open : flow, out of the dark, two hundred naked corpses intermingled like heavy rushing rivers... A party of shaven children, in tatters, legs smeared with shit, walks on the sandy road, the big supporting the small ; pulled away from the women looking after them, they strew pebbles on the sand. Behind them, a steamroller driven by a young guerrilla wearing a mica eyeshade on his brow, rolls between the spongy meadows where skeletal does are jumping. A little girl, supported by a red-haired boy, collapses on the sand ; the boy bends down, the steamroller is coming closer, the little girl remains lying on the sand, her hair slides folded back on her forehead ; the boy looks up, sees the petrol shake over the yellow bonnet, in the flashing sun, suddenly he takes the wailing girl under his arms, and pulls her towards the slope ; the guerrilla laughs, his thighs spread on the burnished metal seat ; the roller reaches the girl, the track snaps up the legs ; the head, blackened, obscured, rolls on the boy's arm ; the track throws him head on the ground, crushes his back ; the head, smashed to pieces, splashes the stirred sand. In the evening, all the other children are pushed into the torture chamber and hanged to meat hooks ; the little bodies jump in the raw brightness of the floodlights — blood splashes the neon tubes —, then come to rest ; then, the young guerrilla with his eyeshade, and stripped to the waist, steps forward, a hatchet in hand ; he gashes the tortured children's knees and wrists ; his arms, his

living torso become covered with blood and shreds of flesh ; under each hanged child's feet, a little heap of bloody scraps : nerves, muscles, bones ; the bodies are taken down ; lain under the hooks ; women, whores, fallen nurses, at once rush forward, squat over the half-naked bodies and strip them while uttering little cries. They pull their teeth, their eyes out with hooks and pincers, then the sex organs, for the commandant's collection. They tear the soft and wet skin with their nails, some, with their teeth. The young guerrilla moves the eyeshade up and down over his brow, with a light smile...

The trucks await the soldier on the airstrip : the soldiers jump, wipe their hands on their battledress, tighten their belt, spit on the tarmac ; around the darkening airfield, the white villas of general staff officers, below which sleepy sentries walk up and down, woken up by the noise of engines and propellers, lulled to sleep, and woken up again with a start ; a light wind in the excremental darkness, lifts the dust on the sentry box and the searchlights ; the sentry tramples the box floor, the comic strips, the film magazines, the local newspapers stained with sperm and vomit, the orange peels and the stones, caresses the damp folds of his battledress, between the thighs then the hips, the buttocks ; his hand moves down on the knee and up along the thigh, unbuttons, slides on the bare cock, hardened by the contact of the dusty and rough hand ; his throat is throbbing.

A noise of footsteps and weapons.

He draws his hand out of the battledress, waits, then, the footsteps moving away, thrusts it in again ; the battledress cloth rubs against the wood, tears on a nail, the soldier lays his tommy gun on the ledge, stretches his arms, spreads his legs, squats down, grabs a film magazine, places it on the ledge, unsticks its pages, and eyes fixed on the image of a whore leaning in the lobby of a brothel, he opens his battledress trousers ; the cock springs up, hard, vibrant ; the soldier strokes it with finger and palm, flexes it against the cloth, caresses its root and, making his whole body rigid, standing on tiptoe, back leaning against the wall, he grabs his cock with both hands and rubs it ; the breeze lifts the pages, the whore grimaces, her face caught in a fold of the paper ; the soldier smiles, an exciting, childish moistness appears, spreads in the hollow of the thighs and below ; a large blue butterfly soars in front of the sentry box, the soldier shakes his cock more violently, the seminal odour rises along his chest, sweat streams under his throat and behind his knees, pricks his eyes. Sperm spouts out, the small drops spatter the wood of the sentry box and the battledress, then a filament forms, mixed with burning clots, from the cock to the floor ; the soldier gasps for breath, presses the end of his penis ; with the spasm, new drops of a lighter, more transparent, hotter sperm, squirt out ; the soldier cuts the filament at the end of his cock and, shivering, tramples it in the dust ; a light breeze brushes the sweat on his forehead, his throat and his arms ; the softened cock hangs between the thighs on the crumpled cloth ; the blue butterfly comes to wander over the soldier's creased,

warm and moist hand, set on the edge of the sentry box — drawn by the seminal odour, the heat that arises from it and the vibration of the skin ; the soldier takes his cock, rolls it inside his hand, then thrusts it inside the battledress, buttons, opens both his hands, rubs them together, his whole body quivers, loneliness swoops down on him, the whore grimaces on the page ; he grabs the magazine, he throws it on the floor ; he passes his creased hand in his close-cropped hair, seizes his tommy gun, slings it across his shoulder, leaves the sentry box and walks along the villa. At his feet, sings a little spring, circled by an iron ring ; he bends down, he crouches ; under the cloth, the wet cock rolls on the thigh and soaks it ; the soldier plunges both his hands in the spring ; the tommy gun hits the ring, the soldier jumps up, quick ; at the far end of the landing strip, a body of soldiers coming closer ; orders are shouted in the intervals between the cockcrows. The soldiers march by the box. The sentry, a foot in the ring, breathes the scent of powder and blood emitted by their rubbed thighs and armpits.

After the last soldier passed... The sea, again the murmur of the sea, the spinning frame, the sand lifted on abandoned tyres, the greenflies on the tufts of thistles, the horizon in waves of lead, lightnings, fogs and mirrors. The sea is warm ; vapour rises to the sentry's face ; the sea is boiling at the end of the shore, all around the island.

Seagulls, cool the sea, cover my blazing temples, I bite into your salty plumage, I eat your flavourless flesh, I stretch my hands shining with raw fat. Prick my ear lobes and the hollow of my shoulders. Stopped right in the middle of your flight over the rushes twisted and soaked by the wind, ludicrous, skillful birds, I crawling in the clay, abandoning with each movement a scrap of my clothes to the flies, I joyfully snatch your claws and cut them off with my teeth.

A large seagull is lying on the beach, near the fire, on its back, legs leaning on the sand.

I walked days and nights, fear binds my knees ; I plunge in the warm plumage that opens and closes on me ; during sleep, greenflies come out of the feathers, from under the wings, and run on my arm ; at dawn I awake, my cock grows hard, tangled in the humid feathers, and I make love with the seagull.

The fire dies out, the seagull cries, plaintive in the sand of night. Dawn, mirrored in the river of the occident.

In the compartment, face to face, shivering by the window pane spattered with the morning shit of a child under guardianship, the two enemy brothers make friends again while speeding through the night ; the pheasants flee in the underwoods, the peewits grow heavy in the furrows :

— I've known women, over there. One word, and after crossing the seas they strangle you in your sleep and the struggle is seen on the blue wall of the childhood room.

— As for myself, I fought. You believed me king ; I wasn't any more, my

job was to mount guard, there is a ring under my foot. A soldier loves me, I want none of it, his lips and hands are swelled with blood. I loved a seagull which had sheltered me ; at dawn, it said : « I am your mother » and died. Three days, three nights I rolled beside its decayed body, head buried in the sand. The third day I saw, at the centre of the earth, the river of tears ; tall thin boatmen tried with gaffs and oars to divert it from the god. Love me, love me. See those bundles of flesh and blood inside the luggage rack, please love me, please love.

A strong hand catches the bundles, opens the window, and throws them on the rails. My foot is caught in the ring...

The sentry's shoe is resting on the spring, the water's coolness makes the soldier start, he shivers, looks around him, walks towards the sentry box. At the end of the courtyard soldiers lay on the ground the tent canvas swelled with flesh and blood, rub their hands, wipe them on their hips ; the captain shouts orders and goes back into the villa ; in front of his room a sentry is waiting :

— Captain, second platoon caught a reb, during patrol. You'll find him in the bathroom.

The captain passes a hand on his forehead, wrings his cap with both his hands, puts it back on his head ; in the bathroom, three soldiers, the platoon deputy standing, the reb sitting head against the bathtub, feet and hand bound, mouth bloody, face black, flies stuck to the scabs on his lips, marks of shoe soles on his bare chest. The captain questions the silent reb, throws his cap on the tiled floor, stretches his arms, starts to take off his battledress jacket, unbuttons his shirt ; at once, a caress, a warm quivering on the hair of his chest ; the bird shoots out, chirps, dashes through the misted up room, bumps into the pipes, the taps ; the captain leans out of the window ; the bird settles for a second on the prisoner's skull, its feathers are warm, its claws scratch, lightly, the swollen skin, its heart throbs against a throbbing vein of the prisoner. The captain plunges his head in the Virginia creeper, the platoon deputy stands behind, the officer waves his hand, the deputy steps forward, leans his elbow against the window sill. Under the leaves, the lilacs are heavy with beetles hanging to the flowers and bathing in the moonlight :

— Did you distribute flour to the peasants ? Your men's behaviour during the operation...?

— A good, respectful one, captain, some took the children on their knees. Eber Lobato didn't touch the girls.

— You may go, I'll stay alone with the prisoner.

— Look out, captain, he has some concealed muscles.

They go out. The bird shoots out again, the fel keeps his head down, the captain stands up straight again, his army shoe slides on a piece of soap ; the captain plants himself in front of the prisoner, hands on hips. He pulls his automatic pistol from its holster, he lays it on a wooden white stool. He looks at the

bathtub, imagines a woman's body : one leg is still in the low and soapy water, the other leans on a small square blue cloth ; the hair hides the forehead and the eyes, runs over the shoulders and the top of the breasts ; a line of filth and soap crosses the back and the knees, the cunt, for a while, rests against the bathtub edge...

— What's your name ?

The reb looks up :

— What's your name ? you're still a child... Show yourself a bit.

The reb child tilts his head on the shoulder, his mouth is shut, his eyes closed and his long black lashes cast a shadow on the top of his cheeks. The captain throws his pistol to the end of the room and sits on the stool then, bending over the child, he cuts the bonds of the wrists, throws the knife in the bathtub ; the child opens his eyes, looks down at once, lets his arms fall on his hips, tries to get up but falls on his knees again. The captain squats down, unties the bonds around the reb child's feet ; his shoulder brushes the little reb's muddy tatters, he stands up again, he walks to the window :

— I won't hurt you. I sent away those who caught you. The war is near its end.

— I am tired neither of fire nor blood.

— Well, I am. How fortunate you are, who still have the urge to kill.

— You're trying to soften me up.

The child clutches the bathtub edge with his fingers :

— I'll remain silent. I am silent. Flay me, my veins are silent.

— Once I've been, when I was your age, tortured : snow weighs on the barrack's corrugated iron ; for three years I had a number on my arm next to the scars left by the dogs' fangs. Hanging in the shower, my body was spinning in the steam ; outside the snow was crumbling among barbed wire and watchtowers ; Spring was coming. Two thousand children were marching, dying in that cesspool. In the evening, I'd lie on the operating table, docile like a little animal in the heat ; we all loved the sunset, the mask of sleep, the little death, far from snow, cold, mud, dogs ; there was a night light above the table. When I awoke, a stale and intoxicating scent of flowers : blood choked me ; jingling in the room next door, voices, clanking, small wheels on the tiled floor ; I pick up my tatters, a woman shrouded in soapy white squeals leaning against the door, she has blood on her hands, her eye is dead ; under the night light, letter scales swinging : two small balls of flesh shine in the steel scales ; I look at them, the hand slaps my face, there is a jewelled ring on the hand, it scratches my cheek, I walk towards the door, I set my bare foot on the snow, wind seizes my body : « They've taken something from inside me. »

In the dormitory, the children — blackened, excremental tatters hang between their legs — feel me :

— What did they take from you ?

— Where's Piotr ?

— He didn't want to work any more, they knocked him down, they broke his glasses in his eyes, they trampled his eyes under their soles, Piotr got up again, he moved forward, arms held out ; we passed by the pits, tall flames were running on the dead bodies, they pushed Piotr ; he fell in the flames, the head hit a small blazing cane, they were shouting, they turned back towards us, we stepped back, they jumped on us, they grabbed Erika, Serge, Ann Bouxtre ; they dragged them towards the fire, laughing, the smaller ones were laughing and crying between our legs, pissed on us, they threw twenty children in the fire...

— Piotr is dead, Piotr is dead...

I hide my head between my hands and collapse on my straw mattress, a wisp of straw tickles my nose, I can breathe Piotr's odour ; against my temple, a tuft of his fair hair.

I don't want to get up, I can't feel the cold any more, the blows are breaking my back. One morning, they unfold my body, shaking hands unfasten my hands from my temples, I am carried as far as the courtyard, the children striped by sun, shadows and wrinkles wave their hands and scream, jeeps are driving around the camp ; I say : « I want to walk. »

Someone lays me on a small stage, a very tall officer puts my arm around his shoulders, leans sideways, a woman takes my other arm, I set my feet on the floor and I walk, two birds are singing on a dead tree ; guards in chains come out of the operation room, pushed by soldiers wearing white helmets ; all of a sudden the children become silent. An order, and a large blanket is thrown over the guards. Women, young girls walk across the courtyard, carrying babies in their arms, they wear an armband ; we hold out our arms towards the soldiers who are writing on small wooden boards and we show them our tattoos, the branded number, some soldiers look away...

The captain suddenly bends over the bathtub, his face is white, his fingers tremble on the stoneware, the young rebel holds him up and with a swift hand, snatches the knife in the bathtub, the captain vomits, head resting on the taps ; the young rebel raises the knife and drives it into the officer's neck ; a muffled cry, the tall body collapses, the chin hits the edge of the bathtub. The rebel, his hand spattered, throws the knife on the blue cloth, grabs the pistol and escapes through the window, lets himself fall on the lilacs ; looking up, he sees the bird flutter over him among the torn leaves and the boughs shaken by the fall. The young rebel gets up again : « ...no, I'm not tired of blood », ties his tatters around his belly and knees and runs away, leaping over the barbed wire and the trenches, the pistol in his hand : « No, I'm not tired of blood. O blood, I love thee, O blood, milk of spirit, seed of hatred, sperm gushing out in battle. »

His bloody mouth gleams in the mist, slaver runs on the dried blood, falls on the chest, the child wipes it off with the pistol's butt.

Serge watches rain flow on his bare legs : « As a child, I was so beautiful ; under my thighs, the large warm stone, and under my feet the clear and copper coloured water ; melancholy, like a ring, to my neck. I was handsome, my face bare. Too much loved. Too handsome. Then, later on, to conquer, to lie, indifference, avarice, jealousy, wish other men never to be as clear as oneself, to doubt, to doubt... a javelin whizzes above my head, it came out of the fir trees. One comes to worship me on my stone, a man pushes his head out of the water and kisses my foot. When I come and sit on the bank, a naked woman applies her belly against my back. But I push both man and woman away, wind swells my blue shirt, the woman collapses among the charred branches ; all the sluice gates of the river loop hold back the heavy and golden water ; beetles bump against the gates, the rusty metal tinkles above the water, your heavy thighs shrouded in velvet, the warm swelling in their hollow while I hold them in my hands and they burn my temples, my lips looking for the opening through which to bite your skin and your heart... »

...He gets up, he walks up towards the top of the building site, enters the palace, walks under the cloister : two soldiers, stripped to the waist, are playing ping-pong, in the diffused light of the storm. Serge goes up to the apartments. In the stairs he overtakes a soldier carrying a tea tray ; a golden medal on his khaki sweater. Serge looks at him ; the soldier :

— I'm going to the governor's apartment. All those are lucky to have us ! What are you doing here, you, a month since I've arrived and I see you running everywhere, free...

Serge remains silent, a raindrop falls from his eyebrows on his cheek, he rushes in the staircase ; here he is at the floor above the soldier's, the smell and the steam from the tea brush his face, he sticks a thumb in his belt, he stops, bends over the soldier :

— Do you love a woman ?

The soldier looks up and says :

— Yes, she's waiting for me on the continent.

— How old is she ?

— Like me, eighteen years old.

— Could you love a real woman ?

— They make love better, that's for sure, but the young, one has to teach them, it's more exciting, isn't it ? And also, they feel their way...

Serge shivers. He runs away :

— She's not a woman, she's not a woman, I'll ask her if they make love, she's not a woman, he took her from the orphanage...

The boy drags through the corridors, his heart throbs, he passes along Emilienne's apartment, the door is half-open, he leans against the wall, raindrops are drying on his legs like blood, he draws long breaths, his hand moves up his chest, clutches his throbbing throat, blood withdraws from his knees, from his

wrists, he looks away. Tilts his head against the wall, crosses his legs, thrusts his hands in his pockets, his eyebrow beats against the lime. Serge pulls a hand out of his pocket, it smells of orange, he drives it under the armpit and rubs his sweating back :

— Emilienne, Emilienne...

A sudden breeze pushes the shutter inside the room, Serge hears the curtain swell ; in the garden, rutting insects collide in their flight, flowers, stones gleam, the sky's blue flows red and golden on the roof tiles, and on the walls.

— Emilienne, Emilienne...

Serge licks, stealthy, the whitewashed wall.

Two sentries appear at the end of the corridor, then a general officer ; he stops for a moment in front of Serge, strokes his cheek, Serge turns his head towards the officer, the two sentries are talking to the soldier, at the governor's door :

— I will try to convince your father, rebellion has to be tamed.

— Dad is tired, leave him alone.

— You too want peace, but Audry, your friend, is in Elö. I was the first to hold him in my arms after his crime. Did you see his murdered father, the throat of his father ?

— In order to live, you need blood.

— Serge, your mother is dead, white, beautiful, covered in jewels.

— I know, I walk at night in the city ; with Audry I used to see the dead, the blood, the mud, the maggots ; with Audry we took the abandoned children, your soldiers never noticed us.

— And you'd take them to the cardinal, that old bugger...

— The cardinal does not touch them.

— You're too pure.

Serge looks away again, towards the lime, the general strokes his shoulder :

— Do not touch me...

The general and three soldiers enter the governor's apartment.

From inside the room, comes a call, a moan :

— Serge, is it you ? Come, come in, I'm unhappy...

The boy slips past the door, slowly steps inside the room ; the young woman is lying in semi-darkness on the bed ; on the dressing table gleam the scent bottles and the earrings ; the young woman breathes under the mosquito net, holds out her hand, the boy moves towards the bed, lifts the mosquito net, sits on the edge of the bed, lays his hand on Emilienne's :

— I'm unhappy, all my life I'll be unhappy...

The boy stands up, sweat runs on his thighs and the back of his knees, he closes the door and comes back to sit on the bed, he can hardly see the young

woman's face, drowned in a mist of tears and sweat. Alone shine the lips, the nostrils and the eyes, the foam, the sweat when the nostrils move and their tears at the corner of the eyes.

The boy, still holding Emilienne's hand, bends over, the mosquito net brushes his arm and sets him ablaze :

— You must not, Serge, you must not, it's not fair, how do you want me not to love you, your youth, your limbs, your skin, your clumsiness... leave me, leave me, Oh ! you're so warm !

— Say nothing, shut up, I have the daring, shut up, take my neck, my chest, do not scare me away, do what I say, take, take, hold me in your arms, the bosom, my darling...

— My little dog.

— Emilienne...

— Yes.

He leans over her, on her breasts rising in the semi-darkness, he moves his open hand forward, but Emilienne pushes it away gently, their hands touch, intertwine, rise, brush the mosquito net, Serge presses his lips on Emilienne's wrist, the young woman shudders and withdraws her hand ; Serge grabs it and draws it to his chest, both hands glide on the shirt soaked with sweat ; the boy bends forward, lets himself fall on the bed, against Emilienne, his knees lifted for a moment then unfolding across the sheet, the pillow is warm all of a sudden against his nape, at the root of the hair ; his nipples hurt, so he opens the shirt, with one hand — the other one clutching Emilienne's — and caresses her breasts with the tip of the fingers, the shirt's mother of pearl buttons flow on the palm of his hand ; Emilienne lowers their intertwined hands over her chest, Serge's hand breaks loose, slips on Emilienne's wrist then on the top of the dress, the palm opens up and covers a breast, while the fingers pull at the cloth ; the breast rises, beats under the boy's palm. Emilienne tilts her head backwards on the pillow, Serge sees her profile revolving, daylight revolving on sweat, like dawn on the oily and phosphorescent sea ; the boy's arm weighs over Emilienne's shoulder, the hand unveils the breast, the shoulder grows hollow, Emilienne sighs, the boy moves his hips, his espadrilles get unlaced above the floor, he rolls a bit on the side, his thighs now brush Emilienne's, she does not move, Serge pulls his hand from under the shirt and lays it on Emilienne's other breast, then he sets his lips on the young woman's shoulder, nibbles the cloth soaked by sweat ; sweat runs down Emilienne's neck, the veins throb, Serge sets his lips there and foam mixes with sweat, the young woman's hand rises towards the mosquito net then comes down again, settles on Serge's cheek, on his eyes ; outside, in the distance, in the flashing sun, the waves of lead and grass beat the bare island, the sailors' hats get caught at the bottom of the pier, the fish sparkle on the blue wood :

— Emilienne, look at me.

Sun makes the stones spring up, they come down on the floor, they whizz through the sky, smash the tree tops, explode above the water.

Serge do not leave me alone in this desert, in the palms of this island. Command me, know my life, caress me, tear me, find my heart, caress it, kiss it, I would be dead. I feel your tongue on my eyelids, on my lashes ; I feel your tears on my tongue, my lips trail on your cheeks, on your lips, under them the hardness of your teeth, the bubbling of your saliva, foams under the waterfall, at night. A rebel catches you, takes you away ; a whole year round you live among the savages in battledress, they dance in front of you, their long legs tight in muddy cloth shine, they come closer, their breath on your chest, you love them, the coolness of their belly where their hands are hanging. At night, the rifle between the handsomest and you ; on his half-opened lips, the stolen sugar sparkles, you put your lips over it. At dawn, you shriek out, you've been crying, he rolls over you, bites your shriek, bites your heart. It is I ; your breast in the morning, the wind flies, dries the milk on your lips. You suckle the rebels ; grovelling, they suck, hair in the fir trees, shoes scraping the frozen earth, the wind revolves around the sun, wipes it out, turns it to ice.

Serge lies over Emilienne, elbows on each side of the torso, his radiating chest raised above Emilienne's bare breasts, his hands almost joined on the young woman's lips ; she, looking down, smiling and pushing her lips forward, the boy's belly alive on her ; the sheet flows on the ground :

— Don't fall asleep, don't fall asleep...

But she, her eyes are blinking under the boy's palms, shivering, drops off to sleep. Serge keeps her awake by gently licking her breasts, tilts his head and makes his close-cropped hair slide on the young woman's shoulder, then he crawls on Emilienne and with his sweat-sticky fingers, between their chests and bellies, raising himself on his knee, slowly unfastens Emilienne's dress — and fire seizes him : he violently strokes the breasts, the belly, then his hands, wild, trembling irregularly, move down and fondle both Emilienne's fresh and quivering cunt and his cock, wet with seminal sweat, through the shorts' thin cloth ; he unbuttons the shorts, thrusts his hand under the stretched white underpants, pulls out the cock and, with one hand, guides it towards Emilienne's cunt, the stretched underpants hold back the testicles ; the hardened cock against the young woman's fair down, so soft. The boy laughs and shakes ; his shirt, open on Emilienne's breasts, sends a light breeze, a tail drags on the left breast, the mother of pearl button shines, sweat runs down the boy's neck, Serge's golden medal hangs, sparkles ; Emilienne half-opens her lips, the medal chinks on her teeth, she holds it between her teeth, she pulls, the boy's face comes closer to hers, she leaves go of the chain running on her chain and pushes her lips forward, the boy takes them, nibbles them, drives his tongue into the young woman's mouth, the tongue burrows into the gums, the teeth, the palate, Emilienne withdraws hers, but the boy's tongue winds round it,

foam bubbles around their lips, Emilienne hugs Serge, joins her hands behind the boy's back, on his loins, the boy's cock sinks within her, tears well from her eyes, flow on the pillow, she tilts her head to the side, groans, her hands clutch the boy's shorts, by the belt, push away the boy's hips, but in the same time she throws out her chest, rises, she is caught ; her hands claw the cloth of the shorts, move up towards the belt, get caught in the loops, then, tucking up the cloth, open on the boy's skin, fingers feeling their way, nails scraping the sweat from the buttocks ; she feels the throbbing, the pulsations, the obscure and obstinate work of the cock ; the boy's muscles' weariness, the boy little by little becoming empty of his sperm and of his desire, the slowing down of the spasm ; sweat cools off over their bodies, seminal spatters like an ice field on which their bellies are revolving ; their embrace becomes more gentle, more tender, the fury recedes ; from their intermixed bodies, quivering like injured animals, rises a sort of steam by which the mosquito grows soft and languid ; their legs relax like bows ; nerves are still vibrating. Then only, Serge looks at Emilienne : pale, cheeks, nostrils hollow, she's dozing already ; the boy leans on her, licks the tears, stopped by sleep on the cheeks' edge, crawls, slowly withdraws, freezing at the slightest rustling of nerves and lets himself roll against Emilienne, at the edge of the bed, cock half sticking out of the shorts, belly and top of thighs gluey, belt buckle bathing and shining on the slope of the thigh.

Then, he rises again, slips out of the bed, closes his shorts, his feet search after the espadrilles ; standing against the bed, a bit of sperm running still under the shorts, towards the knee, he looks at Emilienne ; naked on the ravaged sheet, she's asleep, her chest rises imperceptibly, her lips, half-open, dried by her breath, tremble like lightened leaves, in the little wind that follows rain and storm ; one hand hides the cunt, the other is drawn back between the breasts. Serge leans over, takes the sheet, with it he covers Emilienne to the top of her chest ; he moves back slightly, his cock grows hard again, he comes closer to the bed, lays his hand on the sheet, at the level of Emilienne's breasts and strokes them ; the stretched sheet rises, the nipples quiver under the boy's moist palm. Outside a sand wind is blowing. The boy turns pale, lifts his hand to his forehead, to his mouth, chokes, leans against the wall, he moves away from the wall, runs to the bathroom, bends over the toilet seat, vomits, both hands clutching the stoneware ; the room window bangs, closes on the red cloud ; it blows on the flattened island, burns the water, the lovers' sweat, the sick children's eyes, the opened cunts of the whores standing in the doorways ; the sand whirls around the scythes, the harrows, pierces the teeth, the teeth crumble inside my mouth like sand.

Lovers, statues, rocks, arise... roll as far as the sea... ; fish, salt, eat away the rust clinging to your limbs ; pistons, carburettors, axles, wheels, vibrate, eject oil racing engine under the eternal sun, paws, feelers, nippers, fangs, thorns, blades, spears, sex organs, vibrate ; tears, molten lead, blind the repentant

torturer. Cloud, smoke, beat like the heart above me ; sand wind, rekindled ash, men's and beasts' hide turned to powder ; of the embrace all that remains is a bit of powder and the vomiting behind the window pane :

— Serge, Serge, are you there ? What are you doing ? You're feeling sick...

He gets up, turns back, hand wiping mouth, eyes looking down, knees trembling ; through the bathroom pane, he sees Emilienne lying, the sheet thrown back at her feet, shivering, naked, her opened and crumpled dress around her, quivering butterfly, nailed, the lashes blinking quick and black ; the corridor door, the wind slammed it shut. Emilienne rises, takes the dress, slips it on, without buttoning it, then enters the bathroom, the boy is leaning against the partition, hands crossed behind the hips. Emilienne buttons the middle of her dress, lets her gaze slide upon Serge's downcast eyes, goes towards the washbasin, lowers her face in front of the mirror, her hands holding her hair up, on the temples, above the ears ; in the mirror, on the right, she sees the boy leaning against the white partition, legs crossed, shorts crumpled, shirt open, a glimmer on his forehead, he looks up :

— I'm leaving.

And, pulling himself together, he walks to the door.

— No, stay, come by the mirror.

She holds out her hand, the boy comes back, hand in Emilienne's hand ; here he is against her, in front of the mirror, his shaven temple against Emilienne's warm black hair ; a button from the top of her dress, jumps and rolls in the washbasin :

— See what you did to me ; my cheeks are all hollow, I have no strength left any more...

And she smiles ; he catches her by the waist, he feels rolling on his wrists the heavy, wet breasts ; she brings back the tails of her dress on her thighs then on her breasts.

He, quivering and languid, nibbles her ear underneath the hair :

— Leave me alone, Sergio, leave me, what if dad arrived...

— He'd see you so tired...

— You have the same arms as him... you embrace, you kiss like him...

She lifts her hand to the temple, pushes away the boy's lips.

They are standing in front of the washbasin, they embrace over the red window ; the sand wind sweeps into the pipes, whirls around the rose trees, covers the water in the ponds, the birds' feathers, in the poultries of the lower city cocks crow, run against the wind ; five foxes sneak in under the wire nettings and swoop down on the squatting hens, trembling, buried under, they let themselves be slaughtered without a cry ; Serge's hands tightly grip Emilienne's neck ; they play, frivolous laughter ; they touch each other furtively, on the knees, the breasts, the

thighs... they kiss each other's eyes ; the tap wide open, lets a red water flow, Emilienne takes some in her hand and throws it between the boy's thighs, he strokes his wet shorts and places his hand on Emilienne's cheek ; both of them tremble, blush ; now Serge has slipped his hand between Emilienne's breasts, a hand harsh all of a sudden, that parts the breasts violently and moves down to the waist, the tip of the finger hollows the navel, the hand moves up again to a nipple and pinches it ; the young woman's breast writhes, she utters a little cry :

— O ! Sergio.

Tears well from her eyes, he doesn't notice them, his hand shrouds the breast, his lips, his teeth suck Emilienne's mouth, the young woman's tears run down on his lips, he breaks loose and sees Emilienne cry, his hand lets go of the breast, he releases the grip and here he is, back turned, in the corner of the room, nibbling his fingers ; then he looks back :

— Forgive me.

She remains still, in the window's reddening glow, she buttons top and bottom of her dress, her shining eyes fixed on the boy :

— Come and look at yourself in the mirror ; forgive me too, come.

He moves towards the mirror, she leans forward, their shoulders touch...

— Not so long ago, when I felt desire in my room, and I yielded, after, my hand all warm and my body burning, I came to look at myself in the mirror and I looked at my eyes ; never did they look down, I was ashamed but I could keep my eyes opened : it's you who freed me, it's you...

— Go, leave me alone, now, go away...

— Tonight also I shall come ; and you will go to Elö with us, won't you ? come by the sea tonight ! Now Fabienne means nothing to me any more !

— You're so happy, you hurt me so much. You're beginning your life, I'm your first pleasure ; you are my first pain...

She pushes him away and in the same time, closes the holland curtain ; he's standing motionless in front of it, the floor creaks under his espadrilles, he hears the shower splash the ceramic tiles, then the reduced noise of the jet :

— Water is running on her shoulders, on her back, she's happy.

The window bursts open, the red sand crackles on the floor, on the pane, around Serge's espadrilles ; the boy goes to the window, leans his head out, eyes shut, holding his nose because of the sand ; a hand falls on his nape, a small knife slides on his shoulder, he leaps back, raises the bathroom curtain, climbs on the laundry basket, opens the window which bangs against the wall moist with steam, pushes his head in, a brown mass falls down along the Virginia creeper, rolls on the gravel, gets up again and flees : it's a child, barefoot, wearing a sackcloth with holes at the neck and the shoulders, he looks back and spits, he runs through the rose trees. Serge sees a sentry move on the enclosing wall, the soldier raises his rifle, brings it to the shoulder, aims at the child :

— Don't shoot !

And he steps over the window sill and jumps into the garden, he runs after the child, the soldier aims at the child, the right eye closed against the rifle butt, he fires, the boy leaps, flings himself in the boxwoods, the soldier is still firing.

The soldier fires, a bullet runs through Serge's shoulder, another bullet grazes his hip, another one smashes his right knee, Serge collapses at the foot of a pond, the goldfish huddle together under the little staircase that disappears in the sludge ; the soldier lowers his weapon, panics, jumps down the other side of the wall and flees in the streets of the upper city. The child comes out of the boxwoods, runs as far as the wall, climbs on it, lets himself glide along the slope of a roof and jumps into the street.

Serge, head against his father's arm, groans, his blood-filled mouth swells and unswells like a flute player's, blood smacks between his lips ; in the middle of the lawn a huge dead bird of prey is drying in the sun ; the child who smells of boxwood is running down the alley, his heels hit the pavement, he pushes a barn's gate, enters, feels his way, his forehead bumps against the beams ; in the darkness, the door has closed on its own. He moves forward, drawn by the animals' breath, he climbs over the manure pile, his foot strikes a calf's hoof, he sits in the manure, huddles, quivering, against the animal and waits ; he listens to the little spring-like noise of the manure flowing down a gutter in the middle of the stable, his shoulder brushes the animal's eye, it stirs and grunts.

The child remains sitting until the end of the afternoon ; at last he gets up, goes to the door, pushes it slightly ; at the end of the street still bleached by sunlight, the soldier walks on tiptoes : looking up, he sees the child, who moves his head back at once in the darkness of the stable ; but the soldier, his rifle hanging from the shoulder and beating his hip, walks towards the door : over, is a red and black placard : « Death commando ».

The child lies down behind the calf, chin, belly and knees in the manure, temple leaning on the animal's muzzle : the little knife shines on the window sill, over there in the daylight, the child opens and closes his hand, he wants to feel the cold of the blade ; the door swings open, appears the soldier, the child can see against the light, the outline of the hips and of the thighs between the legs, the folds of the battledress at the place of the cock, the rifle's butt and light ; the child, lying in the manure, becomes more heavy, hollows the manure, with his knees and belly, sinks, grows heavy like a crab, the soiled straw pricks his nostrils, his eyelids, cow dung gets caught in his lips, his eyelashes, his close-cropped hair, the scabs on his head, he suffocates, the soldier starts, sees the child's half-naked body against the motionless calf, the quivering back, the bare buttocks of the child, his soiled feet, his knees covered with manure ; he grits his teeth, turns his head, right, left, sees a hayfork behind the door, grabs it, makes it jump in his hand,

holds it before him and rushes upon the child.

The child gets up, his arms shoot out, he is standing, he runs towards the end of the stable, towards darkness, the soldier runs after him, pricks the dark with the hayfork, his forehead bumps against a beam, a cockrel flies off, beats its wings over the soldier, gets entangled in the rifle strap, through the excremental dust, calls, its claws get caught in the soldier's epaulettes, slide on the battledress, for a second, the comb, crumpled, fresh, touches the soldier's lips ; he pushes the cockrel away with his free hand, the crying cockrel falls along the soldier and escapes between his legs, runs towards the door, feathers all ruffled ; the soldier : « Fucking cock », and he throws the hayfork forward.

A scream, the child collapses, heel caught in the fork, in between two prongs, the soldier roars, beats his chest, lets himself fall over the child he cannot see. The child struggles, the soldier tilts his head backwards ; kneeling on the child, he strikes him :

— A pity you're not a woman !

The child struggles, bites, his fingers search for the soldier's eyes ; the soldier strikes the child whose heel gets twisted under his knee ; he strikes, his hand, a moment, slides upon the belly ; the child is naked, the hand lingers, the fingers brush the navel ; the soldier feels his penis harden between his thighs stretched by kneeling ; his fingers move down to the lower part of the belly, his hand gently takes the child's penis, holds all of it, gently presses it, the tip of the fingers brushing the light down above and beneath the penis, the penis's extremity warming the centre of the palm ; the child suddenly relaxed, his arms fell back on the manure, on both sides of the chest :

— A pity you're not a woman ! A pity you're not a woman !

The soldier lets go of the child's penis, gets up again, steps over the child's body, squats down again, releases the child's heel.

A voice, strangely firm, rises from the darkness :

— Fuck me, if you wish.

The soldier feels two small hands held out but failing to reach him. He walks towards the door, silently, rifle on the shoulder, goes out, closes the door. The child listens to his footsteps on the white dust, he gets up, makes his way by the sound of the footsteps, towards the door, waits, his ear against the wood.

— The soldier ran away. The child, he was found, dead, in the commandos' stable, pierced one hundred times with a hayfork...

— O God, I had forbidden you to enter those stables, those sheep pens, those pigeon houses, outside the palace, outside the camps...

— The commandos fill them with animals stolen from the villages.

— Who killed that child ? The soldier ?

— Your Excellency, the commandos did ; last night ; they enter the refectory, drunk, half undressed. They break plates, brain the cooks ; I arrive, I see

the folds in their hands red, the blood all fresh ; the sentries overpower them, throw them in the jail ; I listen : five or six of them asleep, the other ones come closer, help themselves, speak in a low voice ; they whistle, they puff and blow, they whine... then, gradually, sneer, laugh.

The youngest, a little blond guy, gets up, jumps out of the circle, rushes against the prison walls, his hands tremble before his eyes, he writhes against the wall, unfastens his belt, unbuttons his battledress, suddenly turns over, back to the wall, his trousers slipping down his knees, his jacket open and uncovering the right shoulder ; he strikes the ground with his army shoes, tilts his head, leaps sideways : a soldier, opposite him, throws his arm towards the wall, steps back, bends, throws again his hand forward, the soldier by the wall, stoops, hand, arm raised against the forehead, the other soldier gropes in the dark, squats down, touches the ground, now he's by the wall, he moves his hand forward, clutches the soldier's heel and, waving his other arm, thrusts it towards the soldier's chest. He yells, struggles, flattened, nailed against the wall, the other soldier still holds his arm, his clenched fist in front of the chest ; the other ones stand in a circle around him, the crucified soldier struggles, all the front of his body is bare, his arms beat his chest, pull off, push away, his chest grows hollow, his belly comes out of the darkness, returns to it, sweat, black, runs along the penis, the muscles of the thighs, the nerves contract, grind (at night, during fucking, their sparkling under the skin, their whining, their foam) the soldier collapses, head against the wall, his hands jutting out, in jerks, from his chest...

I visit the jail, at dawn, under the threat of the relieving guard they confess their crime ; in their state of inebriation they played him...

The child is at the infirmary ; to carry him, one needs some tent canvas or a stretcher, the limbs fall apart, there are a hundred fork wounds, your Excellency.

After surgery, his knee heavy and tightly wrapped, Serge moves his lips, his head falls on his imprisoned shoulder, his teeth pull the bandage, the sea tolls at the foot of the bed, the photographs float on the hollow sea ; in the waves, the jeeps leap, the antennas beat the salty air, the iron muscles, under the coachwork, hit the rocks, in the sunny water, jeeps, leaning on the waves, seats slit open, horsehair coming out of the cloth, hair-seaweed between the slaughtered soldiers' legs, four by four, blood smacking inside their mouth, spurting at the corner of the lips, the morning spreading over the world, helmets, leathers where blood's ants sparkle, heads reddened, ear shivering in the morning wind, fish nibbles golden medal on uncovered throat, the waves blacken the hair on the nape, small flames of salt, water swells my underpants, Emilienne puts her hand, it's blood, here I am leaping, noon, sliding in the saltpetre, on my belly and getting up again, under your breasts, in the granitic shade, mummy, I want to be a conqueror, mummy the Romans, the Romans, my horse quivers, its nostrils scouring the green plain, I am

a conqueror, but I see the frog shoot out of the green water. My big boy, don't forget those frogs, Mummy the Romans, the ground shakes, under them, you will meet Audry, he comes out of the bushes, he's holding a woman by her hair, her feet are on fire. Keep quiet, Serge, go to sleep quickly. Why do you draw that cross on my forehead again ? better draw it on my belly. Sleep my darling, Emilienne, Emilienne, if I die, take Audry, put your hands on his belly, dress him up, he's trembling, the barbed wire pierces his hips, the sheep flee across the whipped grass, take him, touch his shaven skin, make love to him, take him out of Elö, his hair sprouts again, he lies over you, at noon, you fall asleep after fucking, you feel warm under the wool. The bronze sphere flies under the clouds, it's looking for you, it falls among the trees, you're making love together, it crushes you both, rolls towards the pond, and whizzes on the water. I want you to name me Sossello, to touch my costume, to adore me, or else a fox searches under your blouse and devours you Tarcisius I spit on the host, it melts on my chest, it slides inside my shorts, on my thigh, the high tension wires are humming through the burnt air, the powder from mating insects flows in my ear ; girls and boys leave the tennis court, leap, immaculate, in the brooms, run after the blackbird in the tunnel ; you know, they grow mushrooms since the trains do not pass any more. Serge, my little poet, she strokes my cheek, takes my chin, in her fingers and smiles to me ; she escapes, she jumps on the rails, her white skirt brushes the nettles, drops of water fall on her shoulders, run along the vault and dig holes in the golden sand covered by coal. I run after her, Véronique, I catch her waist, she falls on my arm, gives herself up, I kiss her lips made bitter by the coal. Leave me alone, Serge, daddy died inside a tunnel, they beat him up. She shivers and cries in my arms. But, you should be happy, for him, for them. I love you. Mummy is going to die. I shall be your mother now. In the tunnel entrance, branches, wings, leaves, rocks, transparent, sparkle like ice ; Véronique, put your hand on my belly, it burns day and night ; it's you who are inside, touch. Under the large lonely summer leaf, a dragonfly, shrill, threatens our bare lips.

The commandos are put in irons, inside the palace jail ; the people mutter around the palace, bite the guards' rifles, a group of young artists carry a red banner on which is painted a portrait of the slaughtered child.

At sunset, the governor, against the advice of all his officers — one of them slapped him in the face ; immediately overpowered by the guards and thrown into a coal cellar — decides to see Illiten. Two jeeps, an armoured car take Illiten, under Elö and bring him back to Inamenas. On the way, children, pushed by the rebels, come out of the huts, wave little white and green flags ; the soldiers, standing straight in the half-track vehicles, keep silent : order given not to shoot.

The convoy enters Inamenas, by the North gate, behind the palace. It's the highest gate, the one leading to the mountains : consequently forbidden to the people. Illiten is pushed in the courtyard, he staggers over the white sand.

The governor, escorted by three guards standing upright against the columns in a clattering of breeches, comes down in the courtyard, a soldier grips Illiten's head, tilted back ; the governor steps forward, the guards draw aside ; a soldier, by the North gate, pushes away the naked children ; young boys, behind them, search for bits of bread and meat, in the gutters along the wall ; crows, heavy and shining like ingots, come out of the holes, above them, fly for a while inside the shade then, as soon as the sun touched them, rush back into their holes.

Illiten is kneeling on the sand ; his knees are bleeding, the soldier strikes Illiten's nape, the governor touches his wrist :

— Do not harm him ; the one who dares slaughter children, how great is his craving for freedom ; move away.

The soldier looks at the general ; he raises his hand, the soldier then releases Illiten's nape.

— Remain with me. General, escort Illiten to your office ; I follow you with the sentry.

A glass flies into pieces at the end of the courtyard, on a table, where escort soldiers are drinking, guns and magazines are hanging from the office shutters. Illiten gets up, the general, walking behind escorts him to his office :

— You make me think of a woman. I hate women.

Illiten tied up to the chair, his head trembles in the rays of light ; by the shutters, a bare magazine and over it, a soldier's sticky hand, and lower down, through and against the slits, his uncovered hip between the belt and the cloth, steaming and the sweat squirting out of the pores, in the evening's faint sun. The governor stands up, walks towards Illiten, puts his hand on the rebel's shoulder :

— We'll talk again tomorrow. General, make him sleep in the old school.

He turns towards the sentry leaning against the door, rifle between the legs :

— You'll guard him until midnight ; I'll be next door in my office. After ; the corporal will have you replaced. You'll go back to Elö the day after tomorrow only. General, don't make the cardinal wait.

— On my return I'll come and see you, your Excellency.

— And do not be caught, like the day before yesterday, in the orangerie, under the bed of a little chorister...

Under the branches tied in strips of cloth wet by the evening mist, the cardinal walks holding the general's arm :

— He believes I'm stupid. He can say he's pure, he still is. His son too. Grandeur is natural to them. In front of Illiten he was even more of a rebel than that scoundrel.

Illiten lies on a bench, the sentry sits on the desk, one buttock on the inkwell, the other in the desk's hinge, his feet scraping the floor covered with sawdust and crushed chalk, his hands clutching the rifle barrel : he has eaten, his

mouth shines with fat and milk ; the guards throw their knives in the refectory's bamboo screen, grab the meat with their fingers and tear it in the cooking pot. In front of him, on the blackboard, a map of the mother country. A rat is moving inside the duster, on the platform. The soldier, eyes fixed on the rat, dozes off, his head falls back on his chest... gets undressed in front of the bed, as for me, I'm under the sheets, covered with sweat, naked, I'm waiting for her ; the bra slips on her belly, gets caught to the panties she already unfastened baring the injured cunt and the bloody down ; she lays her hand on the sheet, at the place where my cock stands erect ; on the dressing table, her combs, her brushes, her scent bottles are shining ; in a stoneware basin — I can see it in the mirror tilted towards the table — a piece of meat is steaming. Strokes the sheet ; couples are laughing in the staircase. My working clothes, soiled, creased, she takes them and rubs them against her belly, she ties the jeans around her breast, she bites the buttons, she slips it on her head and passes her arms inside the legs, the panties and bra hang on her thigh ; she leans thus over me, all warm, I throw my arm around her waist and knock her down over me and I take her mouth, her breast rolls on the sheet, milk squirts out, she pulls the sheet and there she is, naked on my skin and the milk still flows, rolls on my belly, between my thighs, forms a soothing puddle under my buttocks, my loins, and my back, my cock grows soft ; her hair retires from my eyes, slide under my lashes like a thread under the nails ; I turn over, squat down, I push her under me, milk is dripping from my hips, I tear the bra and the panties soaked with sweat and I throw them on the ground, on my jeans and my shirt, I take my cock and I drive it halfway through her torn cunt, her hand hangs to the bars of the bed, settles on the stoneware basin, her fingers come closer to the meat, her nails draw a small cross on the steaming flesh, then tear it, her hand closes upon a black and pink shred, burning hot, her hand offers under my mouth, I lick the piece and bite into it, her head rises from the pillow, her mouth snaps up the piece, her teeth grapple on to it, her throat swells and mine at the same time as my cock, my sting touches and kills her heart...

On the blackboard, a map of the mother country ; the awoken soldier, shivering, his thighs moist, gets up, goes to the blackboard, pricks the rag with his rifle's barrel, his fingers brush the trail of the chalk ; the rat leaps, rolls under the platform ; kick from the soldier, little squeal, the soldier bursts out laughing, presses his weapon's barrel on the rat's back and, clenching his teeth, foam filling his lips and overflowing, he pushes the rat against his shoe, then underneath and slowly squashes its head ; he takes the rag, shakes it, above the rat, throws it to the ground, lifts his foot, wipes the sole on the rag, pushes the rat under the platform ; he bulges his cheeks, rubs his chalk-covered hand on his hip, squats down, pulls the rat by the tail, stands up again, comes closer to Illiten and throws the rat in his face ; the murmur of the trees and sand rises with the death of the sun. The soldier goes to lean against the window, he breathes ; a waiter from the

mess wipes the table with a wet rag ; the soldier smells an odour of alcoholic vomit, he sees through the shutters the waiter's bare arm and the rag shining under the sandy moon, the taut muscles scintillate under the fair hair ; the waiter, with his other hand, holds his nose, soiled foam runs on the wood of the table, the waiter, stripped to the waist, lying on the table, stretches out his arm, stops with his hand the flow of foam, sponges it up with the rag ; under the rags, the underpants stick out of the shorts when the waiter stretches his arm further and the soldier remembers his youngest brother, squatting, playing marbles...

Above, the mirrors of the sun are clashing ; under the vault of the trees, with branches heavy with shivering magpies and crows, the tanks' tracks tear along the sand where leaves are running, lifted by a little land breeze ; the soldiers throw their knives in the slashed trunks ; the river : rafts on which blond families lie crucified, knees and breasts bare, are rotting in the still and petrified water, now and then fish jump, snatch a foot, a hand, a shred of dress ; under the water a dagger is vibrating.

The tanks are moving through the plain.

Mummy is throwing sheets and pillows out of the window.

Daddy is writhing in the straw, over a girl the first soldiers have been pushing before them from the sea ; they are Scythians ; mummy opens their mouth and stuffs it with mashed onions ; Marien comes ; they are sitting in the hay. Mummy closed the barn door ; with Hans, I watch through the holes in the door, my little sister climbs in the hay, near the soldiers ; they are tired, their eyes are closing themselves, they have mashed onion on their lips, she caresses their fair hair, her fingers pass through the holes in their sweater ; then unbutton their breeches of blue serge ; her hand spreads on the belly then grabs the warm cock and shakes it ; around the barn, in the night, the tall fir trees are stirring ; dropping small branches in the icy water of the pond ; other soldiers, Persians, will come, they pull the children's sexual organs, they carry them away to sell them to the Dakanils of the other army ; Marien tightens her lips, Hans clings to my chest, his hardened cock against my hip :

— It's Marien, you're like a little dog.

The soldiers, wanked, one by one loll back, hands behind the head and legs spread out on the straw. Marien wipes her fingers on the straw :

— The bitch, the bitch, I'm going to kill her, make her eat her fingers.

My lips tremble, a tear squirts out, falls on them :

— Mummy allowed her, they were talking while peeling the onions.

— She too is a bitch, I'll tell daddy.

— Daddy is sleeping with the girl... say, she's a fine one tonight, in the laundry, she made me touch her legs.

My slap throws him back in the dark, he cries, hand on his cheek. Marien jumps on the barn floor, she rubs her hand against her dress, she has blood on her

hand, blood and wool, she opens the door, she sees us, I pounce on her, I clutch her throat, I scream, I cry :

— Bitch, bitch, bitch...

I drive my hand into her mouth :

— Eat, lick, eat, you believe it's alcohol, it's snail slime, lick, lick...

I see the blood and the wool on her other hand ; she unfastens my fingers from her neck, she falls on her knees at my feet :

— It's blood, I helped taking off their shoes, there was blood on their socks. Don't hit me. I felt their weariness on my finger tips. I was thinking of you ; it's you I was touching and lulling to sleep...

In the room next door soldiers are rolling barrels, they laugh, sit on the barrels, ride them like women or horses.

It was to put them to sleep ; she holds my hands, I hit her, I fling my knee in her belly, I kill her belly's baby ; I lay my hands on her thighs, rats are running beneath the skin, between the muscles, move upwards, squeal softly under the belly, she clings to my arm, clasps my waist, my chest, she's trembling, her teeth are chattering, she's all black, the rats tear under her cheeks, under her shoulders, her yell smashes my head like a flower of fire, I clutch her shoulders, I feel the rats, they raise their snout under the skin when they feel my fingers. She writhes in my arms, she bites my hair on the nape, tears my shirt ; I clutch a rat inside her shoulder, I strangle it, I feel it quiver, die, stiffen, grow cold under the skin wet with sweat and tears, on a bed of slashed nerves and muscles ; I look at her, she shows the whites of her eyes ; I grab her hand, I lay it between my thighs, on the cloth, and I make her take out my cock and wank me off, sperm runs under my thighs, wets the cloth of my shorts, only then do the rats withdraw from her body, and the rage from my head...

Illiten, head down, stares at the dust on the floor, long and black animals are running in the intervals between the planks, the lines on the shoes, the recent scratches in the fresh wood :

— You smell of pig.

The soldier leans over :

— Do you wash yourselves in your maquis ? and how do you fuck ? You fuck your men, right ? against the rocks. All those we caught said you had a sharp one. Savages.

He returns to the desk, sits down, looks at Illiten crouching and the dead rat beside him, the rat and its fringe of red foam along the mouth...

Caressing my whole body, clothes it ; I was tired, she laid me on her bed, I was hungry, she fed me with her milk, I was abandoned, she came inside me, defended my body, armed it. Above the door the ceiling was pierced, in the nests of wood, under the plasterwork, bats are quivering :

— Every night I kill two of them.

I get out of bed, I lay my bare foot on the bedside rug, underneath, two small bodies still warm, they crack under my foot, ... stretches out her arms, holds me back by the waist, her finger presses on my navel, her nail pricks it, I turn back suddenly, she's naked on the bloodstained sheet, the down of her closed cunt shines, black ; sweat runs on her thighs :

— You're a filthy whore, a filthy whore.

She looks down, puts her hand on my cock, I go to the window, I am strong ; in two weeks my arms became hard, my belly has well developed muscles, that whore, I hurt her, the bones of my belly smothered the public baby germinating inside her entrails ; wind blows down along her hips ; flags are flapping under the searchlights : « I too, am a prisoner », I feel cold, my nape is itching under the hair.

— You've been allowed to come and kiss me ?

— Yes ; I still feel desire for you.

— Come, but it's the last time, after you'll be tired... Do they make you work a lot ?`

— No, I work in the garden, I bury myself in the earth ; in the evening one must climb out, clean the doctor's instruments ; I've stolen one ; with it, I kill field mice and dragonflies ; I sleep next to the maidservant ; before, the police constables came to take me every night and lock me up...

— You were caught with weapons.

— I crossed ruins, rivers, dead bodies ; here I found a platoon, they say : « Let's fight, come back to our motherland to defend our daughters and our wives. » I say : « They raped and killed mummy, raped and killed Marien, threw Hans into a fire hydrant. »

I'm sitting on the grass, worms are squashed by the rifle butts on the black earth ; down there the sky is red, birds shoot out of the bushes ; the following day at dawn, I get caught.

The window swivels and stops on my thigh.

... I'm hungry, I leap into the orchards, I eat the green fruits, I hide behind the hanging sheets flapping in the night, above the shiny stones, the moon flees with the clouds ; the soapy water runs along the sheets, I crouch down, a hand settles on my wet buttocks, very gently like a bird alighting before shooting off again ; the hand slides under my buttocks, moves up along my thighs ; on the horizon, a shadow rises, beyond the forests, like a wing, like a huge fin ; the hand's voice says : « It's finished ; they've got their victory. Let's die. »

The hand knocks me down over a tall crouching officer, between his thighs, my elbows running against the knees ; I struggle :

— I don't want to die. For three days and three nights, I've been looking for a pure being with whom to die.

He hugs me against his chest, I shake my head, his hand moves down on

my belly :

— But before, I want to fuck you.

I feel his cock harden under the uniform cloth, press upon my buttocks, I look down, my hair falls back on his hand, I bite it with all my teeth, he lets go, I escape, his saliva dries on my nape, I run, I dive in the barbed wire, I scream ; my bare toe, my navel, my knees are bleeding, the tall officer runs after me, I push the fence, I close it again, he's running, his medals, his stripes, his buckles sparkle under the moon ; the pistol holster beats on his hip ; I hate the colour of his uniform ; Mummy says : « They kill children, they throw them into pits of fire. »

Daddy says : « I love my chief, those children aren't even little dogs. »

A soldier, his eyes are slanted, he has fur around his hands, a soldier shows Marien and throws out his belly, daddy steps forward, he holds her tight against the wall, he says : « Don't be scared, it's nothing. »

They slaughter mummy with Hans in the pigsty, a soldier holds me hands tied behind my back ; daddy opens his trousers, Marien is trembling, I scream, I dash forward, foam spatters my nostrils, my bare throat : « Don't do that. Marien, strangle him. Kill him, Marien. », she utters a little groan, she quivers, her feet contract in the mud, the soldiers laugh around us, their fair hair wet with wine ; Marien's head falls on daddy's shoulder, he grows rigid, the head jumps ; a tall soldier holding a chipped glass in hand leaps on daddy from behind, draws a sabre from his belt, I become silent, burning tears gush, flow on my cheeks, on the hands of the soldier holding me ; the tall soldier raises his sabre, drives it into the back of daddy who flings his right arm on his loins and hits the sabre sinking, running through Marien and bending against the stone ; both bodies collapse, the soldier holding the sabre is flung on them, forwards ; the poplars are on fire, the pigs squealing between the trunks, soldiers shoot them point blank, the animals start, bump into the trunks, ashes, embers slide along the branches and fall on the animals' backs, on their flanks ; then large embers, blazing branches, the tops fall in, the soldiers throw them, sweep them up, push them over the pigs ; the pigs burn until evening, the soldiers with hayforks hook their bodies, pull them on the fresh grass, cut them up and wolf them still burning hot, spit out the raw bits ; the grass is littered with shreds of charred bones ; I am drunk, they open my mouth, fill it with meat, caress the border of my lips, my shoulders ; my eyes are cooked ; they cram a helmet around my head and bang on it with their sabres and guns ; a drunken soldier, over there, in the light of the glowing fire, drags my mother's body by the feet around the fire, along the embers ; poplars break down on the pond's icy water, ash walks on grass, I hold out my arms towards the flames, the soldier's hands clutch my chest beneath the arms, mummy turns her eyes towards me ; Hans's feet and knees are sticking out of the pigsty ; mummy's head is jumping on the pebbles ; the lilac burns against the pigsty ; the fire takes underwater, the clouds flee towards the sea : « Do not avenge us, live, love,

love... », the soldier with his foot pushes her into the fire, her shoulder sizzles under the fangs...

... « Come and warm yourself up against me, come. »

I go to the door, I raise my arm, my fist makes the plasterwork crumble, in the mirror I see the sweat on my forehead, she opens her arms to me, I fling myself upon her, I devour her, my fist covered with plaster parts the lips of her cunt : « How many men devour you day and night ?... », I hit her on the face, I twist her breasts, I pull her head over them, my thumbs groove her belly : « You love me because I'm abandoned, because I bring you the smell of wind » then I make love to her, we make love among the motionless things, the window shuts off the noise of the waterfall, her belly, her breasts, her shoulders, under me, fish in the golden sweat : « Because I have nothing you can love, except my skin, my eyes, my hair, my sperm. »

Ah ! I crawl over the sea, I feel proud beside my captain, our horses are touching one another ; inside the jeep, I eat a biscuit, red silex spatters the blue sky, plants, flowers discharge their milk, their sap, grass where emerald flows, is covered with beetles ; my hand hangs on the burning sheet iron, my fingers hit the red reflector, the powdery cherries, they explode, the lieutenant's cheek is spattered, blood wets his shirt's collar, but he smiles, he speaks to the driver, he looks back, smiles and speaks to me, his lips are moving, saliva shines at the corner of his lips :

— Lieutenant, you're not wounded ?

I feel proud, the jeep runs on the rustling wheat, on the robes of anointing ; shame covers me like blood. No more shame, my glory ; on the grass corpses are burning, petrol explodes in the afternoon, birds assemble in the dark and cool bottom of the valley and sing when the bodies burn ; gibbets, telegraph poles, blocks crumble in the fire ; a ray of light runs on the snow, along the slope ; soldiers grip our necks : « See what you've done » ; outside the circle of fire, a dead baby shrivelled up on the grass, his foot charred ; I'm standing behind a tall woman in a coat, I bend behind her hips, she laughs, her hips are trembling : inside the blaze, a long and thin leg springs forward, then an arm towards the foot ; the woman bursts out laughing, a soldier pushes me away, hits the woman's shoulder, with his rifle butt, he has spring foliage on his helmet ; the woman falls, head forward in the blaze ; her arms flame, sizzle like paper, ash hovers above the bodies, in the quivering of flames, like a swarm of inebriated insects.

I'm facing the fire, the soldier grabs me by the shoulders, he makes me swing round, and pushes me through the villagers ; an officer is reading a map in his jeep, he looks up, takes my chin, in his fingers ; a very young woman is sitting next to him on the canvas cushions, she gets out of the jeep, she comes to me, the soldier salutes :

— Let's go, Philippe, that smell is awful.

The officer gently pushes me in the young woman's arms.

— It's important that they see.

She hugs against her waist my little quivering body, my eyes close on the flowers of her dress :

— In Bender, in the camp laboratory's courtyard, we found three hundred corpses of children, castrated or covered with grafts ; in Sosselo, along a main road, one hundred and fifty children-soldiers, hanged for desertion.

She lifts me in her arms, climbs into the jeep :

— They have created horror, let them see it, now that they've sobered up and that their creation belongs to them no more.

I fall asleep.

In the evening I'm lying in a deck chair, facing a forest border on the terrace of a large house of gilded wood streaming with resin : bees are shining against the hanging, flapping sheets ; the grass snarls ; on my toes, two vipers, intertwined.

She comes out of the house, her hands settle on the deck chair, brush my shoulders ; the officer is sitting on my right ; on his knee covered with a handkerchief, his dismantled weapon which he's cleaning without a word :

— That awful smell doesn't come as far as here.

She guides me inside the house, makes me sit in the kitchen and brings me fruits, eggs and milk : she watches me eating, sitting in front of me, lowering her eyelids when I look up towards her ; the officer comes in, opens a drawer, takes a knife :

— For your weapon ? Oh ! darling...

She wipes my lips with a blue paper napkin, standing behind me, she grabs my head in her hands and drops a kiss in my hair, she leads me upstairs, in a red room ; a bed by the window with opened sheets ; she leaves me in the middle of the room, I step towards the bed, drawn by the whiteness and the soft scent of the sheets ; she opens the cupboard, takes a pair of pyjamas, comes closer to the bed, I sit on it, my knees are trembling, she sits against me, her arm around my shoulders, her fingers touch my cheek, her breast warms my forearm ; her other hand unbuttons my shirt, both her hands take it off and fold it on the bed, pull my underpants, arms raised high ; the sky is golden above the trees ; the pyjamas jacket brushes my chest ; the young woman is now at my feet ; she removes my sandals, then I get up and unfasten my belt, my shorts fall on my knees ; as she is crouching, the top of her dress, loosened, uncovers her breasts slightly ; a ray of light comes in from the window, crosses the floor as far as below her, lighting her dress from underneath and I see her thighs through it.

At night, I cry in my bed, I moan, she pushes the door open, sits on my bed, her hand covers my burning forehead, she draws crosses on it : « my fat one, my fat one... », her dishevelled hair flows on my shoulder, on her night gown ; on

the waist, the hips, on the breasts, slight marks of fingers : the officer's embrace, his hands still smeared with rifle grease, the sweat under his belt, on his chest and under his arms ; my foot, under the sheet, touches her thigh ; her lips tremble ; the tops of the fir trees, black, shaking, throw their nests to the ground ; the small birds cry tumbling down from one bough to another, yes, I can hear them and the murmur of the green torrents and the screams of the blind at the edge of the glowing fires.

A rather brutal voice calls her from the end of the corridor :

— Darling, come, you'll catch cold.

She gives a start, her voice becomes more tender, the young woman draws a new cross on my forehead, she gets up, bends over, sets her lips on my cheek ; she goes out of the room, leaves the door half-opened and I listen : she lies on the bed, the young man draws her against him :

— Tomorrow, they will take me and hand me over to the Scythians.

So, I get up, I wait for the middle of the night, the end of their embraces, I put my clothes on, I carry my sandals in my hand, I walk down the stairs, I push the terrace glazed door, the black wind from the trees knocks me down and chokes me, but I fly over the valley, sandals in hand. I settle on a millwheel, the warm foam splashes my knees and my thighs, half-eaten corpses float, swirl on the copper coloured pebbles, the water's jaws...

The soldier starts, Illiten is writhing on the floor, the soldier touches his gun.

In the cardinal's palace, the waiters lift the porcelain and silver dishes over the general's shoulder ; at the beginning of the dinner, the darkened courtyard, below the dining room windows, became filled with screams, calls, laughter : the little castrati are playing ball, sparrowhawk, bars ; the general feels sorry that the dinner started, he imagines the thighs tightly fitted in flannel, the locks stuck on the forehead by sweat, the little throats beating and hoarse ; the waiters are aware of the general's desire ; they promise the best pieces, extra dishes, refuge in the kitchens during the compulsory games, to the little castrati singled out by the general in the ranks, provided that they let themselves by him be fondled and hugged, without a cry.

The waiters are very young soldiers : behind the general they utter little groans, they yelp, hollow and bulge their belly ; the cardinal is deaf, half-blind ; at times, even, the general, very furtively, lets his elbow lean on a waiter's hip ; before dinner, he left the cardinal who was inquiring « about his always slightly worried soul » ; he went down to the basement, pushed the kitchen door : the waiters, in shorts rolled up to the pockets, bending over the ranges, drive their hands in the steam ; a waiter cuts a quarter of meat, in the far end, in a small

alcove lit by a blood-spattered bulb ; his shorts are smeared with fat and blood, his half-opened shirt and the front of his shorts are bloody, covered with shreds of nerve, the down on his lips and cheeks, his chin, shine with a pink sweat of blood ; the general steps forward, bends his head under the alcove's lintel, the waiter drops his knives and springs to attention, his fingers fiddling with the shorts' hem ; a button hangs on a thread between the thighs ; the general looks downwards :

— Watch your clothes, sew that button on again.

— Yes, general.

The general moves his hands towards the waiter's belly, touches the shorts, catches the button ; the waiter smiles, his right hand covers the cloth between the thighs, brushes the general's palm ; the waiter bites his lips, his belly heaves, laughter bursts out ; the general quickly withdraws his hand ; the waiters, in the kitchen, have been looking up, the general steps back, the waiter passes the palm of his bloody hand over his lips, laughter is still shaking his shoulders and his belly ; the general raises his arm in his direction :

— Continue your work.

The waiter bends over his stall, takes his knives, waves them and thrusts them in the meat quarter ; the general turns round, goes inside the kitchen, walks along the buttocks and bare legs of the cooks bending over the ranges. His eyes see and take in the curve of the cheek, the fluttering of the eyelids and lashes, the root, through the vapour, of the shoulder, the sweat, mixed with steam, running along the veins of the neck, the hip's roll of fat, over the belt, the soaked, crumpled shirt, turned up on both sides, the sweat at the hollow of the knee, the hem of the shorts tucked up as far as the root of the buttock, the motion of the shoulders on the stretched shirt, the swell of the collarbone beginning at the veins of the neck ; the general quivers, on the edge of those palpitations ; his hip, his knee, his thigh, his arm, his shoulder, his temple are roused : « To fling myself upon these bodies ready for pleasure, embrace these strong and moist backs, flatten my belly against these buttocks, these moving thighs, my hands clinging to their hips, my fingers pressing on the belly, hollowing it down to the cock, pulling the hair, my nails scraping the sweat between the hair, then my hand opening up and passing beneath the cock and closing itself again on the balls ; the other hand holding the cock and feeling it grow hard, and taut and burning and red like red-hot iron ; eat, lick the down, the hair on the nape, above the ear, nibble the ear, my tongue burrow inside, that tickling arouse the boy, a quivering run through his body burning and covered with sweat, my shoulders shiver, my eyes prick, the tears well up and flow along the boy's temples, and he, turn his head slightly and drink them ; my tongue still burrowing into his ear, and his cock beat in my hand. All the other ones sprawled across the tiled floor, in the coal, the crushed peelings and the gluey steam, legs spread apart, hands caught in the shorts' grimy hem and

pulling it and uncovering the shadow of the cock and the light from the basement window and from the reddening lamp making the sweat scintillate on that shadow my lips are waiting for ; they're writhing on the tiles, backs arched ; only shoulders, napes and heels touching the tiles, — offering their thighs and their bellies, shirt tucked up and flowing as far as the chin, stifling the mouth ; they turn over and over, the shorts' cloth cracks, the seams set free the imprisoned skin, dishwater found in the afternoon ; they roll, they embrace each other, the shorts crack, tear, the legs intertwine ; slide one upon another, slowly, after the spasms, like snakes piled up after the rush for spoils... »

— General, what are you dreaming about ?

— I saw the setting sun scintillate in the shutters' slits, like sweat in the shade.

— It will soon be two weeks that we haven't seen the governor, nor our dear son Serge, the little Sergio.

— The governor doesn't understand the soldiers, he tries to handle them with kindness, he wants to make them forget their soldier's condition ; I alone get the feeling of those little mounts ; one must order them about, submit them, make them cry, after that they'll remain faithful to you to their dying day ; harden them with two or three executions, and the promise of rapes, and here they are by your side, all close to you, lying by night at your feet.

— I've been told they are very dirty.

— Yes, some keep the same battledress on for months.

— You should, general, attend their washing, every morning.

— Your Eminence would succeed in tempting God himself.

The cardinal puts his hand in a trumpet against his ear :

— I said : God sees them naked and white the way he created them.

— Yes, God sees us all beautiful and white.

— ...hug them to the last, strike, have him flogged he who passes the palm of his bloodstained hand on his lips, kill him with these knives ; kill all the innocent, then a great peace of mind covers me, green air covers the world.

Shortly before nightfall, dinner coming to its end, the bushes open along the empty courtyard, release rebels, who jumped from the walls, having run by dusk on the warm terraces of the archbishop's palace ; they move forward through the garden, a light rifle in hand ; around the ponds, the earth is damp under their espadrilles ; the general has heard them leap ; he got up, he goes to the window, he sees the bushes trembling. The cardinal picks up his napkin, gets up, his soutane gets caught under the chair, he staggers : « General, general... », he whines, he holds out his arm towards the door, he throws his napkin on the table, two glasses clink, the general looks back :

— Do not fear anything, your Eminence.

He picks up the field telephone :

— The guard watches over the walls.

— The gold, the silverware, let them take it, everything, but...

A shot, rifle fire, the general pushes the cardinal in the corridor, the sisters, with little shrieks, surround him, join their hands, the cardinal starts praying, his gaze fixed on the cellar's small staircase. The guard marches into the garden, a rebel soldier falls, then another, the rebels run under moonlight, the sentries run on the top of the walls ; in the corridor — the cellar's cool enters her dress — the youngest sister claps her hands, then her face freezes, she dashes forward, escapes from the outstretched arms trying to stop her, runs towards a window under which the general is crouching, the phone on his knees, watching the battle under the moon :

A guard and a rebel are struggling by the pond, blood reddens the still water ; the general catches the little sister by the arm, she resists then bends down, the general leans against her shoulder, she slaps him in the face and flees ; the general puts his hand on his cheek : « Those women, those women... the boys are more manageable... » The little sister crosses the kitchen, the waiters are lying behind the ranges, pushes the glazed door, dashes into the garden, the orangerie is lit up, the black young man is holding back the little castrati, both hands pressed on the door's lintel ; the sister runs along the bushes, the general is phoning the palace, the reinforcements — twenty sleepy, drunken men —, are pushed into the truck that drops them by the archbishop's palace gates ; the little sister runs towards the two who are fighting by the pond, throws herself against them, they're fighting with knives. She throws herself against them, her breast taking their blood ; her head bumps against their shoulders, sinks into their chests, her bloodstained corset breaks ; the little sister thus lets her head weigh between the two fighters, uttering little bird's cries, then — the knives are brushing her cheeks — with one hand, she makes the corset slide and unbuttons the top of her dress ; her hair flows out of the corset, into her half-opened dress ; the young girl draws herself up, rises, bulges her chest, the soldier lets go of the rebel, his hand gripping the knife, moves down, touches the young girl's breast, the blade brushes the other breast, the young girl groans. The rebel lays his hand on the top of the breast, the two knives chink under her neck, the fresh blades, wet with pink blood, brush her throbbing veins ; the soldier's hand opens up on her breast ; the rebel's hand touches the soldier's hand, over the young girl's bare breast.

The dragonflies, chased out of the bushes by the fight, soar over the reddened water. The young girl with her tightly wrapped head, sees their black tails rise under the fluttering wings ; the two young men breathe heavily, their chests rise along the young girl's temples.

The fight moves further away, soldiers and rebels stagger in the distance, like bears, on the gravel.

The crouching general squeezes the telephone between his knees ; the cardinal

and his sisters are gasping for breath in the corridor :

— The battle is finished, governor...

« ...tear off that costume, burn those badges, the one with the butcher's knife, push them in the fire, crouching, a glow on my forehead, I opening silently the door, my foot still inside the blue room, walk towards him, lay my hands on his buttocks then on his warm and pink brow : do you want to set up a boys' brothel with me ? — With buckets in the courtyard and manure for the clients ? — Yes, but you, the master after me, a whip in your hand, a tiger's hide between the thighs, you, up on a wooden balcony, you command the theatre ; you eat from my plate, you drink from my glass, you lick the grain in my hand ; two black boys throw sand on the ergastulum — Are you willing to do it ?

I bring him against me, I hug him against me, he slavers on my cheek. Now I will put on my pilgrim's robe, he gets up by my side, his hardened cock against my thigh ; under his nails, the smell of sperm ; head tilted back, hair flowing on my wrists, mouth half-opened, where did you learn how to make love so well ? — Since I'm born, all raped me under the blue sun, they knocked me down on earth made colourless by means of so much light, my back, my belly against the dying flies, their cock penetrates as far as my heart, when they withdraw it, my belly burns ; the flies, piled up on the shit, in the cesspools, above us, shoot out, satiated, of the darkness and come down on our intertwined bodies, they vibrate, scream, drawn by the smell of sperm ; my prince knocked down under me your words lifting my chest, your wrath under my knees, sealed one to another, and the wind racing from the plain's end and blackening the wheats, child one thousand times raped, moulded, inebriated, your vomit, in the afternoon, on the stairs, other men waiting for you at the bar and stroking a gleaming bottle, their gaze fixed between your thighs, child fed with sperm, your underpants are drying on a clothes line, above the dozing boys, mixed all naked on the sheet...

The soldiers beat off the rebels beyond the walls, sergeants order fire, the soldiers fire in the trees, the sergeants call the general ; straightening himself up, phone in hand, comes closer to the kitchen door ; the rebels flee in the streets of the upper city ; the little castrati are moaning by the orangery door ; near the pond, the rebel and the soldier are stroking the young girl's breast : « Leave now, they might see you », the soldier pushes the rebel back, the young girl's hand settles on the rebel's thigh ; the sentries burst out laughing, from the top of the walls :

— Comrades, let's go and scare the cardinal, and show ourselves naked to the nuns !

The sergeants hide in the bushes, one of them aims at the rebel, fires, the rebel falls inside the pool, his large body sinks in the tepid water, the young girl snuggles up to the soldier, he strokes her nape :

— My name is Carlotta.

— Rebellion, sir.

The general lays the telephone on the corner of the table, pushes the kitchen door, his hand brushes the wall bricks ; the waiters are up, sink their arms in the boiling water, wash up, filthy and torn cloths tied behind their backs ; the waiter, in the alcove, cuts, slices, strikes the meat, the knife, the hatchet shoot out from his shoulder ; he sees the general, his shorts are beating between his thighs :

— I, Aurelio. I have my brother, Pino, in the kitchens.

The soldiers fall from the walls, spread out, hide in the city street, some escape in the mountains, others, sheltered in the slums get slaughtered there by the residents by order of the rebels ; those among the soldiers who reached the maquis, are disarmed by the mountain rebels, spared, then escorted by night to the caves so as to be interrogated and rearmed.

But the general, drunk with desire and wine, prowls about the kitchens, hand on the belt :

— General, as for Pino, he's not serious, every evening he goes down to the lower city, ear stained with soap, shirt half-opened down to the navel, battledress altered ; he drinks with rebels, whores, he does not know — he goes upstairs, he makes love, they paw him, they wash him, they comb him, they perfume him. At midnight, when he enters the barrackroom, he strips in front of his straw mattress, in his hand he takes his privates, undamaged ; he pulls them under his thighs while lying down on the mattress and he falls asleep.

Pino looks down, the last gun shots flash on the ventilators' broken panes. The cardinal blesses the sisters, his dewlaps and the rolls of fat around his knees, are trembling :

— My flock, my flock...

Fish slide quick on the dead rebel's body, the laces of his espadrilles are floating on the water surface, the soldier drags the young girl under the boxtrees ; the sergeants beat the bushes and the walls, shouting threats.

— Take me, take me...

She hugs the soldier, bites his mouth, her fingers cling to the soldier's shirt, through the sweat-soaked linen, feel the chest's down, the shoulders' hard buttons, move down as far as the belt :

— Free me, open me, I've not been created yet.

Her fingers turn on the soldier's thighs, caress the hips ; brush the swelling of the cloth between the thighs, only the palm touching the cloth and the raised fingers tremble, moved by the halo of sweat and the quivering of the muscles ; their gasping wheezes in the centre of the boxtree, like a lonely fire in the cool of evening : the soldier squats down, the young girl's hand rolls between his thighs, he grabs it, he raises it to his lips, nibbles between the phalanxes then lays it and presses it on the lower part of his belly, then she feels the throbbing of

the cock under the cloth, they roll together on the deserted earth.

He, unfastens his belt, unbuttons his battledress ; she, spreads her legs, raises herself up a bit on her back, her head, blood withdraws from her hands ; he tucks up the dress, tears the petticoat, his fingers pull the material and, torn, pink, blue, graze the earth, come back on the belly, move up as far as the breasts, come down again along the hips ; he thrusts his arms under the dress, rolls them in that imprisoned heat ; she, a bit of foam whitens the corner of the lips.

— General, why are you looking at me that way ?

The roar of a helicopter covers the animals' cries.

Her fingers, while the soldier's cock flows in her half-opened cunt, tears, devour the dark of her flesh, they sink into the earth under the surface of old powder, worms move upwards craving for coolness.

The sergeants call their men, they brush the boxtrees, the soldier withdraws his cock, like an arrow, the young girl groans, bites her lips, her head rolls among the boxwood fragments, the dried up dribble and the worms' tiny hillocks, the soldier lays his crumpled and moist fingers on her white lips, the belt has slipped on the young girl's belly ; she screams loudly, throwing her hands on the soldier's shoulders :

— Close me up again, close me up again... O, how I'm cold, how I'm burning...

The soldier's hands brush the young girl's cunt, fresh blood flows between the thighs, surprises the tips of his fingers :

— I'm going to die, cover me, strangle.

He wipes his fingers on the shreds of her dress, he gets up again, he parts the boxtrees, he jumps into the path, behind the sergeants, runs towards the wall, crouches, lies down on the earth, groans, holds out his arms, the sergeants look back :

— Tear, eat, filthy God, Virgin, your poisoned waters... all the soldiers... Part, bite, devour, Aurelio, I never prayed. Saint Francis and his bloody mice paws. At night I didn't pray ; all the soldiers undress me, I lay the crucifix between my thighs, the soldier spits on it, his saliva mixes with my liquids, with the tears of my little mouth, caressed, touched, by your fingers, bitten by your teeth, your tongue penetrates, lifts the lips of my little mouth, your nostrils tucked up on the mop of hair, your eyes, your lashes brush my belly ; Christ's head between your lips and my little pleasure mouth, ivory head and black wood, fiancée of Christ, lips of Christ, hard and cold on my little mouth. Arouse him, my soldier...

She laughs, her feet beat the ground, the sergeants part the boxtrees, she writhes, crucified, legs bare, spread apart, blood sparkles on her knees ; the sergeants come closer, bend down, her hand rises, catches a pistol, and brings it

over her forehead : « God almighty, grab that pistol from her, her body's still warm... »

The soldier snatches the pistol, throws it under the boxtree, spread his hands on the young girl's belly, the other one lies down next to her, he takes the young girl's head in his hands, pulls it towards him, kisses the already white lips, his jaws roll on the girl's cheeks ; the one caressing the belly leans over, brings his lips close to the girl's cunt, but he smells the blood, he sniffles, he spits :

— She's bleeding, don't touch.

— I don't care, it's dark already.

The sergeant unbuttons himself : « God almighty, god almighty », mates « God almighty, god almighty... » the other one who kisses and bites the mouth, withdraws his lips :

— She's coming, god almighty, you make her lips tremble.

And he flings again his mouth on the little cold face.

Just as the sergeant drives his blood-drenched cock inside — flies are sparkling around the boxtree — a bit of saliva spurts from the corner of the girl's lips and her head rolls to the side ; the sergeant pulls the head, the other one embraces the girl's breasts, lying over her, panting and his fingers dig below the breasts ; the sergeant devours the lifeless head, nibbles the ear, the veins — now dried up — of the neck, her shoulder, her hip, her knee, her foot plough the earth under them ; his cock taut beneath the cloth, brushes the other soldier's elbow ; the girl, disappeared in the shadows of the feast. The flies, then, cross the boxtrees, their wings vibrate on the little round leaves, stir the dust, rouse the stench of rot and slaver, penetrate the islet, fall upon the bodies, drawn by the vibration of muscles, by the bubbling of sperm under the skin of the soldier's cock, along the muscle.

Illiten, his breath makes holes in the floor's dust.

At the shutters, the hands and the voices of the sentries :

— O the German ! Watch over your beast well. They're having a fight at the priests' place.

— And the general, where is he ?

— He's pawing his little lads.

— The light's on in the old man's office ?

— Yes, he hasn't closed his shutters, he's sitting at his desk, he's looking at some photos.

— Disgusting, the meat, tonight, shit.

— They're all throwing up in the watchtowers.

— All fuckin' black, with white threads inside. My teeth are full of them.

— You have 'til midnight to pull them out. OK, bye, the German.

Illiten is crouching in the moonlight ; the German unties his hand from

the shutters and comes back to sit on the desk, Illiten lets his bound hands rest on his knees, the German caresses his back with the rifle butt :

— You heard what they said ? Shit, what's wrong with all of you ?

The butt moves upwards under the chin :

— Can't you remain lousy like every one ? We don't hide the sun from you, we don't forbid you to fuck. Water, we can't take it away from you, there ain't any.

All of the soldiers live, at home, like foxes, they beat their women, like you do, they're dirty, they fuck on the table or on the manure, they have a calendar on their window sill, they make bad wheat, well, they shut up. Look at me, I don't wish to be no general...

At my place it was clean, it was beautiful the hay, the wheat, the animals, one could touch all that without getting dirty.

They're stupid, coarse...

As for me, I know how to sing, I believe in God... You're asleep ?

Illiten looks up, towards the soldier ;

— So, when they arrive here, and they see your huts, your women, your clothes, and what lazy idiots you are... they beat you like mirrors.

Illiten lays his head in his bound hands, the soldier jumps on the floor, climbs on the platform, takes the chalk, crushes it against the blackboard.

Illiten, Illiten, help, help, the sun weighs on my eyelids, rises in flames along my legs, I dash forward, I brush aside the boxtrees, help Illiten, help, I crouch down, I lift the trap, Bachier screams, his shoulders roll in the white sand, I catch hold of the trap's teeth, I push them apart, the leg is bleeding, it slides on my arm, Bachir throws himself against me, he's crying ; in front of us, a small plain of white sand, the wired nettings of a tennis court shaken by the sea wind and, on a little hill, a large white villa half-covered by the bougainvillea's red leaves : now, they set traps, when they saw me captured, they ran to the boxtrees, their rackets in hand — I rub the wound with hot sand — she shouted : « Oh Sosselo, look at the little nigger », her legs bare under the short tennis skirt, quiver above my head, the racket pressed against her breast, I throw myself forward, I bite her legs, she shouts : « Oh Sosselo, he bit me, kill him » ; she laughs, he turns away to laugh, she touched the trap, she makes it move around my wound, I bite my fingers not to scream : « Leave him, little sister, they'll come to fetch him when night falls. »

— You'll put traps everywhere, Sosselo, we'll watch from the window ?

They go back to the tennis court, the ball strikes my temples, blood spurts, moves along my leg like a slug, dries on my skin like ants.

Illiten, Illiten, his tears caress my lips, his little body trembles in my arms, they're playing inside the wire nettings, why did you come in ? There was a piece of bread inside the boxtree bushes ; get up, they took mummy away... I'll grow up, I'll rebel, I'll free you all, I rise, my hand under his arms, the wound on

his leg sparkles sand and blood I'll avenge you... I'll enter the city... I'll take revenge... my dagger rings on the city's fountains...

I'll burn the wheat sowed in slavery... I promise you nothing but ashes, but you'll sweep them as free men... I'll take revenge... I'll enter the city, he's eating the wheat, next to me, lying on the mud floor, mummy will be back tomorrow morning, the soldiers said so, one of them stroked my cheek, a caress from a soldier is worth the tongue of a cobra, the little ones, at the end of the hut, are splitting their sides laughing ; they loll back on the rags, the birds chirp under the roof and outside, around the rubbish piles.

Night. Dawn : I'm going out to look for mummy, you stay with Bachir. In the streets, along the walls, against the wet lime, sleepy soldiers call each other like whores, they paw the ground with their hobnailed boots and throw dust to the middle of the street, on my bare feet, shadows rise on the façades, fins and spears, windows open, shadows tinkle in the foliage, against the trunks ; the bare heads, rise along the panes, smells of bed, green heat, dreams come out of those moths open on the east ; the white and red barrier, a soldier pours sand dreamily on the iron lever, I come near the guardroom, the soldier walks towards the watchtower, the sentry folds his blanket and throws it on his shoulder, opens the door and comes down from the watchtower, hand on the steel rail : « Hee... Hee... »

— Quick... Quick...

— ...Battledress full of it... hee.

His hand rubs the wet cloth between the thighs. The window is low, I can hear a noise of bed, of blankets... Ah ! her bare legs, their hands nailed on her legs by the sun, clubbed over them like animals, then, when I open the door and scream, they move, they jump on the belly, the sentry is breathing in my back, his hands grab my shoulders, hollow my chest, I struggle, the dress is on a soldier's head, he's breathing it, he groans, head against the straw mattress, his hands clutch the fabric, his back heaves, his knees tear on the springing's wires ; mummy, on the lower mattress, quivers under the shadows, under the folds, I fling myself on her, and I cover her naked body, my mouth against her mouth, my chest against her breasts, my belly against her belly, my knees against her knees, the soldiers move aside, turn away, go to the windows, hand on their forehead, then on the thighs, they button themselves up again :

— All night long... all night long.

— Shut up... Shut up.

The sentry yells : « Bastards, bastards... » He is standing against the bed, he shakes the soldier on the upper mattress, he snatches away the dress from him, makes it flow on his arm and lays it unfolded along me :

— Now go out.

The soldier jumps off the bed, the others walk towards the door, I'm

crying, my shoulders and belly jump, the sentry lays his hand on the nape of my neck then withdraws it, the door is shut gently ; I look at the mud floor, there is a smashed mirror under the bed, the fragments are covered with semen spatter, mummy utters a long cry, she pushes me away with her hands and her knees, she knocks me down, I clutch at the mattress the mirror... so that I can see... my weakness... forgive me, go away... go away. I fling myself again on her, I shout :

— I never saw you bare.

— My weakness... with which I made you... with which I made you... you've seen it...

— I do not touch... I do not touch...

Illiten shakes his head, the soldier lays his hand on his weapon ; the little birds bump into the shutters, the mud from their wings runs through the light-filled slits, their feet claw the painted wood...

... the little birds jump on the sand, the grey sea runs along the beach, like large wings of early morning birds, my father's hand grips my fingers ; in the semi-darkness of dawn, half buried in the sand, white bones of dead men or animals, fishbones, seaweed, teeth hypnotize me, cut my feet, my nails strike the pebbles, the buried rocks ; my father's breath, mixed to that of the waves, I want to follow it but I'm short-winded ; my father waits for me, leaning on the casemate's wall ; in his arms, my mouth biting the buckle of his belt, my tears wetting the cloth, on his belly : « They took mummy... I covered her... I held her up on the way... »

I feel his cock softening under the cloth, his hands are shaking on my hips ; a barbed wire moans above the casemate, amidst the grass bleached by salt ; a great black cloud rises, freeing the horizon and the sun shoots out over the sea, a warship sparkles, its turrets move gently, cast wide shadows on the sea :

— From here will set off the revolution,... from here will set off the revolution...

Huge wet birds pass above our heads ; between two breaths of the sea, I hear the noise of harrows in the meadows, behind the dunes, the grass, on the dunes are bent like the harrows' teeth ; the battleship with grey antennae, shining belly, sails towards Inamenas harbour ; a white procession moves across the dunes, the children drive their bare feet in the burning driftsand, the sharp grass whips their knees ; a music moans in the dust, trembles, creaks in the red and blue belts ; the procession moves away, and disappears ; gong of the sun, a child's face where sweat and sand sparkle, looks back and faces me, his skin is white, his hair is fair and very fine ; he turns above the cloud of sand ; my father grips my hand and says : « Kill him... Take my knife from my hip... »

I take the knife, I break loose from my father ; the sand cloud hides both the knife and my hand ; the child sees my outstretched arm, his face comes closer, smiling, vibrating with screams and seagulls taking flight ; the knife touches his

belly, slips on the shirt's fabric, brushes the sand-covered skin, the tip of the knife catches the navel's roll of fat, scrapes the sweat but the child smiles, he speaks :

— You have nails like claws... Is it true that you're hungry?... you eat raw things?... That's why you have animals' nails ?

But he shows the whites of his eyes, his lips turn livid, his lashes fall back on his bleached eyes, my hand clutches the haft of the knife, he's trembling like an arrow, from the wound spurts, not blood but milk, on my fingers ; the head leans over the sand cloud ; the milk, warm and light, runs on my knee ; my father and I carry the white child's body to the top of the casemate ; I throw the milk-spattered knife, in the swaying, cobweb-like grass ; my father, bending over the child, is stroking his belly, I pull off the grass blades around the child's head, I give them to my father, he lays them on the wound ; under the grass, the torn navel throws up a bit of milk ; the noise of the harrows and above it, the working men's shouts, move upwards along the dunes ; the workers' heads appear, laughing, shiny, bright :

— I've been living here for five years... Let's fight so that their smiles belong to us...

I run towards the summit of the dune, and I hold out my arms :

— Don't touch their slaves' hands.

The battleship sails behind a green islet, soldiers are shouting on deck : « The sea, the wind carry their insults... » Standing on the dune, my head tilted backwards under the sun, flies rolling on my close-cropped hair : « We are poor... we are poor... »

The workers move further away, shaken on the harrows, tufts of grass and wheat caught under their buttocks : my father bends over the child, rubs the wound with the grass, the child's head is hanging outside the cement wall. Sun strikes under the chin and on the throat...

Illiten looks up, the soldier is now crouching, his hands flat on the thighs, his chin in the open shirt ; a light wind blows through the shutters, a sudden wind, coming from the valleys and from the sea, at the moment of greatest darkening : coloured hoops are trembling then, against the wall, above Illiten, he can hear their shiver, their downpour-like murmur ; he rises slowly, unties the bonds around his wrists, grabs a large hoop, throws it on the soldier who wakes up with a start and struggles, but Illiten pulls the hoop, the soldier's weapon slips and falls on the desk ; Illiten snatches it, the hoop encircles the soldier's throat, his hands cling to the circle, push it away, Illiten raises the weapon, strikes the soldier's back with the butt, the soldier groans and falls backwards on the desk, his head knocks against Illiten's thigh, his legs, cut at the knees, beat the front part of the desk ; Illiten raises the weapon again, strikes the soldier's temple with the butt, the head jumps, blood spurts at the corner of the lips. Illiten takes the weapon, dashes to the door, opens it, flattens himself against the vestibule wall. Light is coming out from under

the governor's door, it spreads as far as Illiten's feet, he steps over a ray of light, crosses the little inside courtyard where a jet of blue water sings ; in the gallery, jumps from pillar to pillar, to the orchards' door, opens it, a soldier is sitting in the grass at the foot of the sentry box, the soldier tucked his battledress up to the knees and he's watching the ants and the centipedes climb along his legs ; he strikes a match and burns the insects and enjoys the smell of his burnt hair. Illiten attacks him, grabs his weapon, knocks him down to the ground with two blows of the butt in the shoulders and dashes forward in the orchards : those go down as far as the road enclosing the two districts of the city ; Illiten runs under the arches of foliage, hears the noise of lizards falling along the vines on the walls ; watering cans shine under the moon, by the ponds, hayforks, rakes lie on the small ploughed strips and the freshly mowed lawns, intertwined, the earth still fuming on their teeth.

Both weapons hanging on his right shoulder, Illiten climbs on the wall and jumps on the road ; with its roofs of hides and corrugated iron lifted by the wind, the lower district looks like a huge rubbish dump, or the carapace of some gigantic beast lying there in full sloughing ; Illiten propping himself with one hand on a wet granite slab, jumps into a small courtyard where dogs are fighting for a piece of meat ; through the window hole, he sees intermingled bodies quivering in the dust, arms, thighs, cheeks shining with sweat and filth ; the dogs, mouth soiled, jump in through that window and smell out those unconstrained bodies, then they leap back again into the small courtyard and drink from a bucket of foul water, their tongue smacks inside the old wood ; at the end of the room, Illiten sees a woman whose eyes are open and the dress tucked up to the knees, he smiles ; a movement she makes to get up awakens the scents of rot and skin ; shreds of cloth, of fabric, hang from the roof, moon shines through the reed hurdle, a rat runs on the corrugated iron ; the children, moved in their dreams or by the rat's passage, or by Illiten's gaze, stir, and moan, the foot of one crushing the eyelashes of another, and their belly quivering, bathed in steam and moonlight, trodden by nameless insects — cockroaches are caught between the toes.

The dogs bump into Illiten's knees ; he steps over the window sill, the children's bodies, he goes towards the woman, squats down, bends over her ; he sees her bare breasts rise towards her chin, the sweat, the drops of sweat run from one to another, on the necklace ; the woman's hand rises, takes Illiten's neck, draws the head towards her face ; Illiten feels on his cheek then on his lips the painted mouth of his mother, he shuts his eyes ; dogs' growls, children's yelps, the rat runs on the corrugated iron : « Every night he speaks to me, he waits for me like a husband. » The rat slips into the reed hurdle, it touches the shreds of cloth and fabric : « Every night he comes to smell, touch his children's and his wife's clothes, like a good husband, then he leaves happy, reassured... »

Illiten kisses his mother's eyelashes :

— Bless me, purify my killing hands.

She takes his hands, brings them to his mouth then crosses them on Illiten's brow : clamours rise, searchlights light up, on the hill :

— They'll come, each time they smash everything, they set the dogs on your brothers...

Illiten sees on the children's feet, on their knees, scars still fresh.

— Leave before the dogs come.

Illiten gets up again, steps over his brothers' bodies, then the window ; the little courtyard is soiled with blood, shit, shreds of meat ; above the buckets, swarms of mosquitoes are vibrating. Illiten flees through the slums, he reaches the river, jumps inside a boat ; a naked child, sitting in the sludge, his hand chases frogs, his large eyes wide open in spite of the night, are staring at Illiten ; on the banks, the little sand cliffs are crumbling ; Illiten pulls at the oars, the tepid water splashes his knees, his cheeks, he plunges one after another his wrists bruised by the bonds ; the two weapons stolen from the sentries are shining at the bottom of the boat ; fish, branches, grass snakes, vipers, rats, pebbles pushed by the current, corks, bump into the hull. On the opposite bank, Illiten, feet in the sludge, pulls the boat ashore, the weapons knock against one another, Illiten takes them, hangs them to his shoulder, climbs the bank ; far away on the highest spot of the city, searchlights turn, sweep as far as the bank where the child is sitting ; trucks, jeeps, half-track vehicles move off under the searchlights ; Illiten runs along the salt marshes, the salty vapour burns his eyes a bit, sleep besieges him, he pinches his wrist, salt crackles, sparkles, Illiten shivers, swarms of mosquitoes follow him, precede him ; clouds veil the moon, the shadows from the sky run on the salt, crystals split, fly, fall back again ; on salt piles, under the shovels, under the pitchforks, dead and dying birds ; on the other side of the marsh, the crystals jump in the brushwoods ; Illiten runs, blows on the swarm, keeps his eyes shut and his two weapons tight under his arms ; the mosquitoes enter his mouth, his ears, become tangled in his eyelashes, he snorts, the mosquitoes fall inside his shirt, down to the navel, Illiten thrusts his hand in his belt, the hairs around the penis are covered with insects, his fingers drive the salt to the tip of the penis ; other flies are caught in the sweat, behind his knees ; insects and crystals crackle ; suddenly the hum of the trucks, on the other side of the river...

The child in the sludge looks back, the amphibians are moving towards him, he leaps, staggers, the sludge pulls him back, the headlights warm up his back and his loins, the soldiers laugh, the child falls head in the sludge ; the driver is pushed against his wheel by his comrades, one of them presses down his camouflaged cap over his eyes, the soldier struggles, shouts : « Bastards, I don't want to run over him, I don't want to run over him... », the truck speeds up, a track catches the child, the soldiers knock on the window, tickle the driver under the armpits, on the neck, on the throat, the driver splits his sides laughing, sobs, his

forehead bangs into the windscreen, the truck enters the river, the driver brakes, stops his vehicle, shakes his head. The soldiers jump off the truck, the child, crushed, head caught in the track and legs shattered dragging on the sludge, the soldiers, suddenly frozen watch him in silence, hand on the rifle strap.

The officer gets out of his jeep, comes forward, sees the dead body : « It's you who did this ? » touches it, strokes the crushed head : « But why was he on the river bank »... blows on the face : « Bastards ! » he walks along the truck, stands in front of the cabin, the driver, his hands on the wheel, his head in his arm, weeps, slobbers, snuffles :

— It's you who were driving ?

The driver remains silent :

— Answer.

The boy remains silent, his knees are trembling against the door :

— Get off at once.

The officer climbs on the running board, grabs the soldier's arm, pulls it violently ; the soldier lets himself slip from the seat, he collapses in front of the truck, the officer pulls him upright again, grabs him by the hair, strikes him in the belly, on the cheeks :

— Are you going to answer ?

He takes the driver's rifle from the seat and strikes in the loins with the butt, the soldier collapses, hands on the belly, head forwards, he rolls over, he writhes in the sludge, he whines, the blood from his lips and from his nostrils mixes with the black sludge, the officer, with his foot, lifts up, turns over the soldier's head and shoulders ; he rolls on the side, his bare hips and chest are scored, dribble runs from his chin, his eyebrows ; the other soldiers, at the back of the truck, watch motionless, their throat quivering :

— Pull the child clear. Wrap him in my tent canvas and carry him to my jeep ; I keep him, you still might want to rape him, you savages !

The soldiers pull the child out of the tracks, stretch out a large fresh canvas, lay the body inside, a warrant officer bends over the driver, gets him on his feet again, pushes him with his back against the truck's door, slaps him on both cheeks ; the soldier opens his eyes, his hands move down along his battledress soiled with sludge and blood ; the warrant officer pushes him on the seat and grabs the steering wheel :

— Stop shaking. It's just one less of them.

The convoy starts off again, sinks into the river : « Better kill them young. »

The general kisses the cardinal's ring :

— Please go to bed, your Eminence, danger is averted.

— General, my guards are unruly.

— You are lucky, your Eminence, they're the most handsome in the garrison.

— I'm always frightened they may fraternize with the rebels.

— Is it not to bring peace that you were appointed cardinal with that beautiful crimson cloak ?

— One says they don't even respect priests. But they who mutilate children, how could they still spare the priests ?

— As far as I'm concerned, this war at least will have brought to stand naked before me the handsomest soldiers.

— General, you have seen my fear, please forget it.

— The fat that shrouds your body, the fat on your face, drowns all the feelings, all the fears that one might see flush there.

— I'm still scared... I confess.

— Yes, the ring on your trembling finger, sparkles.

— In Gori, they stole sacred vases and gold-embroidered vestments.

— Perhaps, tightly clad in those chasubles, in those golden albs, the maniple slipped in their belt, did they drink, sprawled, in their high cave, elbow and buttocks offered to the wind, the pieces of embroidery dragging in the dust, drink and sleep until late in the afternoon, hand holding gold ; linen and hemp getting wet and creased at the armpits and at the thighs, a smell of semen rising from their bodies thrown pell-mell, by the inebriation, the savage companionship, and the laughter, on the ground wet by wine, by wind, by vomit, leg shaking, like the one hanging and dragging from a whore's bed.

— Little old man, time for going to sleep.

— I'm coming, nurse, general, my son, leave in peace.

— Good night, your Eminence. I'm going to my pleasures.

Held up by his nurse — she appears only in the evening at the time of going to bed — the cardinal walks up to his oratory, from where he can see the service and the nuns lying on the paving, the youngest ones flattened on the ground, the old ones bending over. A light breeze, coming from the sacristy, lifts the saltpetre dust along the moonbeams : « My Lord God, my Lord God, give me my little death. »

The general pushes the kitchen door, the waiters and the cooks are sleeping in the two alcoves adjoining the butchery room ; the general walks along the kitchen ranges, his fingers stroke the copperware, the balustrade on which the waiters' bellies have been leaning all day, the general leans there in his turn ; on a bench are laid the aprons, the general leaves the balustrade, touches the aprons, makes the straps slip through his fingers, caresses the damp and greasy cloth, he takes an apron, flattens it against his belly and chest, thrusting his hands between his thighs with the cloth ; he stretches it on the hips and turns back, head leaning

on the shoulder to watch the stretched cloth and the folds it makes on the hips and the string tied on the buttocks ; the general unbuttons the top of his uniform ; he hears a noise in the alcove, the bamboo screen undulates, the general sees a foot through the slits, he puts on the apron, goes in front of the alcove ; the foot moves up along the screen, a bed cracks in the warm darkness : « I'm all alone, the others are on guard... » The general draws his hand over his heart, he feels a lump in his throat ; that voice of child in bed, the sweat between the nose and the lips, the unshaved chin pricking the throat... The general lifts the screen, the boy, the one of the butcher's stall, is lying on the bottom pailleasse of the bunks, naked, legs spread and dragging on both sides of the pailleasse, the lower abdomen and the root of the thighs covered by a film magazine with stuck pages and bearing suspicious stains ; the belly throbs, the breathing hollows the belly and raises the chest ; he sees the general come in, he sees the apron, the general smiles, the boy opens his eyes wide, the general comes closer to the bed, squats down, the boy doesn't move, doesn't smile, the general bends over him, blows on his face, the boy closes his eyes, his nostrils pucker up, the general blows on the throat, on the chest, on the navel, he watches the boy, continues blowing on the lower abdomen, the boy begins smiling, the general moves his hand forward, touches the boy's belly, the navel, the boy bursts out laughing, the general's hand moves up along the belly, stops at the hollow of the ribs, presses on the bone :

— There, does it hurt ? and there ? and here ? and there ?

— It's lower down that it hurts, commander.

The general trembles, sweat runs from his forehead on his eyelids, his hand moves down towards the boy's belly :

— Lower down, commander.

The general's other hand moves up on the boy's chest, covers the breast, the tip of which slides on the palm's lifeline, slides as far as the armpit, the fingers sink into the hair, sweat smears the fingers, the general draws them to his lips and licks them ; his other hand touches the film magazine :

— But you don't have a hard-on ?

— Yes I do.

The general's hand pushes the magazine ; the pubic hair appears, all tangled, blackened by sweat ; the general slips his little finger through the moist locks, presses on the root of the cock, pushes again the film magazine and the cock appears, half caught and held flat in the shirt's sleeve, the shirt being stuck and pulled under the soldier's buttocks ; the general throws away the film magazine and sets his lips on the sleeve where the cock is caught under the stretched, throbbing cloth, over the cock's veins and muscles ; the general nibbles, licks those throbings :

— That's where it hurts, commander.

The general lies on the boy, the holland apron covers the boy's naked

body, folds back his cock over his belly, the boy utters a little cry :

— You do me the artificial respiration now.

He holds open his mouth, at the bottom of which the tongue is beating, the general takes his lips, his tongue searches for the boy's, saliva boils, sparkles at the corner of their lips.

— You remember the day where I summoned you to my office...?

— Commander, there's a small animal that's asking to be fondled...

— I'd noticed you the evening you arrived, you were several on your barrackroom's doorstep, sitting, arms around the knees. You, you held them spread apart, and, between the thigh and the shorts, I saw your cock ; an ant climbing on a fold of the flesh, you drove your hand into the shorts, your fingers were stretching the cloth...

— Commander, I feel pins and needles...

— All night, I lay writhing on the bed, I was dreaming, I'd put my hand on your thigh, your legs then drew closer together, my hand caught between your thighs would slip under your shorts, your body quivered, rain rose from the Sebaou valley, twisted the trees above the barrackroom, threw the small leaves on the corrugated iron, rolled on your forehead, soaked your shorts and my palm underneath, the drops hit, hollowed the earth and mud splashed your legs ; I grab your cock, I cover it and hold it like a quivering bird ; the leaves fall on your hair ; I hold you by the cock, you struggle, you roll on the wet earth, your head hits a pebble, a trickle of blood floats away in the stream's current ; your sperm squirts on my hand ; both lying in the stream, your neck rolling on mine, the green shadows of the foliage on your bare legs, the green salivas of rain on your bare legs...

— Commander, I feel pins and needles.

— Several times, the following days I saw you again, sitting alone on the doorstep of your open room and your comrades sprawled on their bunks, legs spread, stripped to the waist, shorts unbuttoned, sleeping in their sweat under the opened ventilators ; you, arms around the knees, hair glossy and wet, you watch dreamily the trunks and the low branches of the eucalypti ; a soldier comes out of the latrines, on the right of the eucalypti, hand between the thighs ; I go there, I squat down, looking for obscene inscriptions on the low cement wall, unsticking with my fingers the pages of the film magazines abandoned around the holes, soiled and trampled ; over the low wall I watch you, my cock hangs under my thighs above the hole ; as it stiffens it exhales a stronger smell of sperm, flies come up from the bottom of the hole, vibrate around it, brushing it, biting it, settling down on its soft and purplish-blue tip ; trucks, half-track vehicles, drive along, raise the dust in the garage courtyards ; I get up dazzled, a lump in the throat, you under the trees, sitting against the barracks' wall, little dog with a red and uncovered cock dragging in the sand, mouth open and belly throbbing under the shorts, your

lips tremble with the heat, the air all round vibrates like petrol vapour.

— Commander, the little animal is going to spit.

— I desired you, the little dogs, the little cats, along the villages, which I stroked from my jeep, you, you, your cock erect inside the greasy shorts ; one morning I see you leaning over the pond, behind the garages, your washing hangs from a branch, a piece of mirror is laid on the pipe above the pond, I walk towards the pond, all I see is your hips leaning on the pond's edge, your buttocks hugged by the shorts, my hands open, round out, I want to scream, tear off this uniform, these bands ; I come closer to you, you plunge your head in the rust-coloured water, you spit, your back, your loins smell of bed bugs, my hand brushes a fold of the shorts between your buttocks, you give a start, you stand up straight again, you see me, you guess me, you stand at attention, your wet hands rolling up your shorts' hem, your cheeks becoming covered with water...

— What are you doing ? You're not at work ? You look at yourself in the mirror ? You like to look attractive ?... Blades of straw are shining under your chest.

— I was on guard tonight, general.

— Hurry up and join the others at the range.

— I haven't combed my hair yet.

— Your comb is sticking out of your hip pocket, I snatch it, the comb slipping on the top of your buttocks ; I notice your hard-on, I take the comb, I raise it above your head, I take your chin, I press my thumb on your lower lip, slaver runs on my fingers ; on your chest, on your shoulders, the marks of the night, the folds of the blanket, the mark of the rifle strap ; your hair combed, you recover your comb, before I myself put it back in your pocket and you smile lowering your moist eyelids...

— Commander, I'm going to stain your trousers...

— In the evening I summon you to my office, back from the range, you enter with your battledress covered with green slime. « Come in front of the desk. That's it. Lean against the desk. That's it. Strongly. Sit on the desk. That's it. Turn your back to me. You have a frog on your pocket. Don't move. I'll catch it. You like animals ? As for me, I love little dogs in heat, come you little frog, the soldier will crush you with his heavy hips... »

I catch the frog from your pocket ; it escapes and leaps onto your thigh, I stretch out my arm over the table, my hand brushes your thigh, the frog leaps further, onto the penis, my hand leaps and pounces on the frog, my fingers close on the fold of the cloth, where the frog is caught, a little laugh, sounding like a sob, rises from the bottom of your throat, the frog is throbbing under my hand, dribble comes out through my phalanxes ; I lay the frog on the table, I lean back in my armchair, with your back to me, you continue to giggle, I can see your shoulders shake. Turn round. The frog leaps on the ink stand, on the coloured

pencils, they roll under it, facing me you watch it still laughing, hands rolling your beret before your thighs. The frog leaps again on the edge of the table, and at one bound here it is again stuck to your thighs : « She's really bent on it. »

— It felt a spring, general.

— A spring ?

— Others who drank from it found its water good and soothing.

— Fresh ?

— Burning when it comes out.

— Clear and light ?

— Heavy, thick like milk, then very fluid after it has been running for a long time.

— And when can one drink it ? At what time is its fragrance the sweetest ?

— At noon or after sunset.

— Is it easy to find ?

— Yes, one squats down, knees leaning on the ground, on each side of the spring, one moves one's head down towards the water surface, one pushes the grass aside then one drinks sucking in ; the water squirts out on the face, one sniffs it, it runs on the lips, on the chin, on the cheeks...

— And how does one make that spring spout up ?

— It sprouts up by itself as soon as it hears footsteps, and as lips come close to its bed.

— But what if neither those footsteps nor those lips appeal to it ?...

— Then, it remains asleep...

... The general licks the soldier's ear.

— Commander, let me first pull the sleeping bag from under my buttocks.

— Let me first remove the ground sheet covering your little cannon.

— Commander, please hide, there's a comrade coming back from guard.

The soldier pushes back the general, lifts him up with his fists, the general gets up again, his legs spread on both sides of the bed ; he steps over the soldier's body :

— Use the cellar's door, under the matting.

The general lifts the matting, opens the door, bends, goes down, as far as the middle of the stairs, his knees strike fruit baskets, he holds out his hand, his fingers slip on some rotting debris, the sentry enters the alcove, lays his rifle and his cartridge belt, on the upper bunk, and with his knee touches Pino's shoulder :

— Little bastard, you sleep naked now !

Pino turns over groaning, hides his cock with his hands, his buttocks turn on the sleeping bag :

— Hey ! can you lend me your shoes for the night ? Mine hurt.

— Take them but go put them on in the guardroom, your feet they stink too much.

— Shut up, you, it's from there that you stink.

The soldier puts his finger on his cock.

— We know you wank the general off, you've got it in your blood like the whores.

— First, the general he doesn't touch me, secondly you're jealous because all the women they crave for me, and when they see you naked, they give up ; I don't have to go look for them, they don't make me pay. You, all you get is bleary-eyed tarts, instead of your bollocks it's your pockets they clear out and they give you the clap.

— OK, Pino, OK, but wait, you won't always be so fresh.

The sentry squats down, takes Pino's shoes, under his bed, head in the warmth of Pino, who puts a hand on his buttock, draws it aside a bit, the sentry looks away from Pino's buttocks :

— Bastard, you fart in my eyes.

Pino, face against the straw mattress, sneers and croons All the perfumes of Arabia, the sentry gets up again, strokes Pino's buttocks with the soles of his shoes ; Pino, face buried :

— Continue, it makes me come.

The aroused sentry rubs the buttocks, the hips and the edge of the belly, Pino bursts out laughing, lies flat on the mattress, stretches his arms and crosses them under his nape, dried mud from the soles runs on Pino's thighs, the soldier, with one hand, rubs Pino's belly with the sole, with the other, furtively, strokes the breasts and tickles the armpit ; Pino's cock, bare, vibrant, hardened, rises towards the upper bunk, Pino lifts himself up, arching his back, the tip of the cock touches the bunk, the sentry, all of a sudden, grabs the cock between both his hands, presses it, folds it backwards, on the belly, Pino yells, takes the soldier's hands, draws them apart, releases his cock ; which, grown soft, covered with fingermarks, rolls on the thigh ; the sentry, body shaking, hands red, little curly hair caught under the nails, takes back his rifle, his cartridge belt, and goes out, his shoes in hand.

Pino groans, writhes on the straw mattress, hand covering his cock.

The general comes out of the stairs, comes to crouch in front of the mattress :

— He tried to break my dick, they're all jealous, at night they will grab it and smash it.

— Tell me where it hurts, my poor darling.

The general leans his face over Pino's belly, takes in his hand the twitching cock, lifts it in the hollow of his hand, and kisses it.

— My tiny, my tiny one, my elephant calf, my eucalyptus, my flower blackened by bees...

— Go away, leave me alone, only women give me a hard-on, with your apron you look like a fool.

Pino frees himself, drags himself on his elbows to the far end of the mattress, his thighs slip under the general's cheeks who clings to the cock with his hand, and kisses its tip : young prince emerging from the sheets, fifteen years lying down, attended to, the blue air flowing on the granite tiled floor, urine drying under the carpets' velvet, the window sill covered with chipped flasks, an open wound below the throat and at the armpits' edge.

Pino draws his buttocks suddenly upwards, they strike and lift the general's chin, releasing the cock ; the general's hands slip on Pino's hips ; he shakes them off, the hands fall along the buttocks on the sleeping bag of holland soiled with bugs' blood, involuntary sperm, night dribble, and shit mixed with sweat ; one of the general's hands half-buries itself under Pino's other buttock, a finger of the other hand brushes the edge of the asshole's lips, comes back towards the cock, following the parting of the buttocks under the thighs ; the taut cock on both sides of the thighs' vice, the finger presses on the swollen ball under which it feels the two secreting olives living, the entire hand shrouds that soft and warm testicle on which the finger gets caught.

Pino, now, is groaning, his cock hardens in the extreme, and stretches the skin all around, belly, thighs, balls ; then he turns back towards the general squatting and still burrowing, face veiled by sweat and heat from the boy's body, he lies flat, folds back one leg on the other, and flings his arms around the general's neck ; he, his hands again surprised and deprived by the boy's volte-face, lets himself be hugged, then at the contact of the boy's wet hands and arms, he loses his head, a lump in his throat, he weighs on the boy, who spreads his legs as the general lies over him, all dressed, girded by the apron ; the boy's cock becomes tangled in the apron's front pocket ;

— Commander, the round is about to pass ; couldn't you wait till tomorrow morning ?

— I love you, I subsist on you, I eat you, I suck you.

— Commander, I'm not edible.

— I dig up my food, I burrow like a dog, I push my food with the end of my snout.

— I'm your carrion.

— My puppy with a little red cock.

— Little ? That's not your opinion when you have it in the mouth or up your ass...

— Don't be rude.

— You love me the way I am, the more I say, the harder you get.

— If only I could devour you and devour myself immediately after.

— Commander, the round is coming, hide in the cellar, I'll meet you

there.

The boy brings his lips close to the general's ear :

— And I'll give you a wank and suck you.

The general gives a start, he rises again, his cock taut enough to tear the skin, to burst, he lifts the matting and goes down the small staircase. Pino covers his thighs with the sleeping bag ; enter the officer, the warrant officer on duty, the relieving corporal ; Pino lying flat, legs spread under the sleeping bag, breathes, sighs, groans, he turns his head and tilts it backwards on the pillow.

— Who's that one ?

— It's Pino, lieutenant, Pino Idroscalo. From the National Assistance.

— Ah ! He's not mounting guard ?

— No, the general doesn't want him to.

— He's afraid he might catch cold ?

A soldier comes running into the alcove, he's holding a telephoned message, the officer takes it : « Illiten has escaped. Find the general. The general's colonel aide-de-camp. »

The lieutenant puts the message in his pocket.

— Sergeant, give the platoon the alarm, two men in the orchard, three others, unarmed, in the cardinal's garden, they must search the orangerie, the greenhouses, the one who finds the general passes on the message to him. Go.

They leave, Pino stirs, uncovers himself, takes his underpants of blue wool, lifts himself up on his back, slips the underpants on, gets out of the bed.

The general, leaning against the wall, in the shade, is waiting for the boy :

— Commander, Illiten escaped, they're looking for you everywhere.

— Take these five thousand Francs.

Pino grabs the money, slips it inside his underpants, moves a hand towards the general's thighs, with the other he unties the apron's string on his loins, the apron falls at the general's feet, Pino's hand strokes the general's hip, moves up towards the swordbelt, envelops the buckle, two fingers unfasten it, against the boy's palm the general's belly is trembling, the belt falls back on each side of the cock, over the thighs, the boy looks up at the young general's face, his eyes, steel blue, throw out sparks with a smell of almonds under the fair close-cropped hair ; the lips hard, fat but drawn and pale like the lips of beautiful women, are shining, wet with sweat and desire. The boy smiles, looks down, his hand unbuttons the general's trousers ; the general grows tense against the wall, the boy opens his unfastening fingers, feels the general's cock grow hard, hot, red under the underpants, the unbuttoned trousers slide down to the knees ; the boy takes in both hands the cock through the underpants' cloth, he presses it, one hand moves down under the cock, then upwards between the buttocks to the hem of the underpants. The wrist catches the humidity of the cock ; the hand clings to the underpants, at the place of the elastic, pulls it down, while the other hand,

enveloping the cock, uncovers it by making the underpants slide on the hips ; little by little the cock appears, the boy moves his mouth closer, sets his lips on the locks, the cock comes up through the cloth, at one go the boy makes the underpants fall, the cock springs up against his nostrils, soft, sinewy, swollen with sperm ; the boy bites it, takes it with his fingers and puts it in his mouth ; his other hand caresses, kneads the testicles, tickles the lower part of the buttocks ; keeping the cock in his mouth, he wanks it softly then, when he feels the sperm rising, he takes the cock out of his mouth presses it against his cheek, kisses it, crushes it against his forehead then, rising slightly rubs his throat and his chest against it ; the general sighs heavily, pulls the boy's hair, gasps, his legs taut.

An owl, come through the basement window, hits the vault and the hanging pantries, it swoops down on the general's bare belly ; sperm gushes out on the boy's face, spatters his cheeks, his nostrils, his eyelids ; the boy opens his mouth, puts in the tip of the cock ; the sperm still squirts out in his mouth, runs between his teeth, under the tongue ; heavy, warm like blood ; the boy presses the cock, lays his hands flat on the front of the general's thighs ; with the sucking movement he makes while sniffing, his fingers sink into the general's thighs, draw the buttocks' skin over the hips, his cheeks swell then fall in, the sucked up sperm becomes more fluid, more warm ; the last filaments draw sighs from the general ; the boy now sucks emptiness, his lips whistle, burst ; he takes the cock out of his mouth, licks his lips, his tongue moves up to the nostrils ; he puts the general's cock back in the underpants, the cloth becomes wet where the tip of the cock bears, softened, it mingles with the testicles under the pressure of the cloth.

The boy pulls the general's trousers up, buttons them, fastens the belt, the general stirs, he can feel between his thighs, under his buttocks, the mass of the cock and the secretion balls, the small locks stuck to the membranes, to the veins, by the sperm and the seminal sweat ; the tip of the cock itches slightly, the boy, with his hands, wipes the sperm off his face ; after he licks his hands, his fingers slide between his lips, the general sees his throat shining in the half light, when he swallows his saliva, mixed with sperm ; watching him swallow, eat his sperm that way, the general gets another hard-on ; the boy notices it, he walks up the small staircase, he opens the door ; the light from the alcove, veiled by the matting, illuminates the outlines of his body, shoulders, cheeks, hips, thighs, knees, the distending of his belly and the little shadow of the navel, the folds of the underpants ; the boy spreads his legs, puts his hands cone-shaped around his cock, thumbs driven under the underpants' elastic, he pushes his belly, navel forward, stretches his shoulders, tilts his head back, hollows, distends his belly, makes the underpants' elastic crack against the lower part of his belly covered with curly hair, weighs his cock in his hand, laughs gently, arches his back, strokes his hips and buttocks, pulls his underpants down on his thighs, half uncovers his cock, fondles it, holds it up, fingers stretching the cloth below and shaking the testicles :

— Demon, demon, infamous one, how can you live with impure hands, soiled lips ? Women who love you know you're a whore, see the marks of love and fury made on you by men.

— I have known only cruel caresses or tender cruelties. He who wants to love me will strangle me, he who wants to strangle me, loves me.

— Go away. I don't want to see you any more.

— As soon as you will have left me, your belly will stir again.

— I don't want to love boys any more. Take me to your whores. I have never slept with a woman. I'm a general now, because I don't love women. I'm a general, out of solitude, out of despair.

— Some women were in love with you. You have beautiful hair, beautiful eyes, beautiful thighs.

— Shut up. I can not make love with a dissimilar being.

— I, though, am inferior to you.

— Touching you, is to touch myself.

— With a woman, it's the same thing.

— No. I am infamous. I lead you to evil.

— You're not the first one, commander. And I fancy you.

— Shut up.

— Your sperm tastes like milk.

— Shut up.

— You're having a hard-on ?

— I love Christ too.

— He can not escape you, nailed as he is.

— Let me become a slave, let me be flogged, put in chains, let me die under the blows.

— Let me be knocked down, let my tunic be tucked up and, legs spread apart, wrists marked by irons and ropes, moaning, I hold my cock. Let me be rushed upon, let my body be licked, let drunken men lay their burning, fresh, burning tongues on my belly and on my chest, or let others spill wine glasses on them, and lay their feet bare or wearing muddy shoes, soiled with sand, rot, shit from the lower city ; a man presses his shoe upon my throat, another one, barefoot on my cock, slips my cock between his toes and, with his heel, presses on my navel. I choke. I am not afraid any more. Let one open my mouth, open my ass...

— Shut up.

The boy laughs, holds out his arms ; he looks away, offers his back and his buttocks to the general, squats down, pretends to spread his buttocks with his hands ; the general cannot stifle a little roar, he walks up to the boy, squats behind him, takes him by the waist, and knocks him down against him ; he licks his nape, his hair still smeared with brilliantine, nibbles the ear lobe ; he embraces the boy, his arms grip his torso, his hands cover the boy's cock, plunge inside the

underpants ; the boy turns his arms, slips them between the general's loins and belly, his palms rolling the general's cock through the cloth ; the general pushes with his cock against the boy's palms and buttocks ; the boy rubs his underpants' cloth against that of the uniform ; then, he rises and escapes, lifts the matting, throws himself on his straw mattress ; the general lifts the matting, leans on his elbow against the bed, the boy pushes on his shoulders, arches his back, slides his underpants down to the knees, then he rests his buttocks and his back on the sleeping back, a flap of which is dragging slightly, trampled by the general's shoes, under the bed ; he points at the underpants stopped at the knees, the general sits on the mattress at the feet of the boy, who spreads and stiffens his legs ; the general pulls the underpants by the lower end, the one covering the cock, the cloth is humid under his fingers, gluey in places : he pulls, but the boy spreads his legs, stretching the underpants, the elastic penetrates the flesh at the thighs. The boy has spread his legs so wide apart, that the underpants slipped below the knees. The boy's cock is throbbing in the shadow of the locks. The general pulls again then the boy draws his knees together, the underpants then slide down the legs, the general pulls on the elastic. He takes them in his hands.

The boy, his legs free, lies on the side and covers his belly with the sleeping bag, rubs his sweaty chest and throat with the bag's trampled end ; the general fiddles with the underpants, buries his face in it, bites it, licks it, smells it, then he slips it over his head, the lower part covering the nose and lips, like a muzzle, and he barks. The boy sees the general's tongue stretching the wool of the underpants, the lips open up, the nostrils rise under the wool ; he laughs ; the general removes the underpants, lays them between the boy's thighs ; he gets up, bends over the boy :

— I could love you ten days and ten nights.

He sets his lips on the boy's, who starts dribbling ; saliva foams, the general licks it, drinks it ; saliva runs, crosses the boy's cheek :

— I love your sweat, your dribble, your saliva, your sperm, your tears, your blood, your gall, your inner juices, your bile, your vomit, your snot, your most secret sweat, all the secretions of your cock and of your ass, your turds, the sweat, the honey of your ears.

The boy's saliva wets the mattress, making the straw come into sight :

— When do you want your next leave ? I'm leaving too. On the ship you'll come to my cabin. Here I cannot love you.

— At the far end of the Engines' courtyard, there's a deserted toilet...

— I'm always followed by that aide-de-camp colonel, he's married, father of eight children — the eldest is very handsome, a magnificent penis under the flannel — pious, timorous, submissive. To shout to all, to the soldiers, that I love the most handsome boys, the most cruel, the most sordid. Every night, I, a general, I wank under the blanket, I gird up my loins with soiled rags, I writhe, lying

on my side, I caress my bare hip, I bite my shoulder till it bleeds, look.

The general uncovers his shoulder, he bends, the boy looks up, laughs, sees the bloody marks on the shoulder, the scratches, the bites, he laughs :

— It's me you bite.

— Lay your lips on these scars.

The boy rises on his elbows, kisses the general's shoulder.

— Touch them with the tip of your cock.

The general sits on the bed, the boy rises, leaves the bed, stands up, in the position of one who's pissing, takes his cock in both hands, steps forward, and presses it on the shoulder of the general, who leans his head sideways, the boy's cock caught between his shoulder and his ear, then his cheeks, then his lips ; the cock's muscle against his teeth.

— Now lie down. Tell me if you love me a little, if you have pleasure touching me, being touched by me.

— I do. I like your skin so soft, and so rough, your belly, your neck, your eyelids, your lips stuck to my cock, your mouth wide open on my ass.

— Shut up, shut up. You don't love me. You loathe touching me and I make you drink my sperm.

— I've enjoyed that taste for so long ; it's the first milk I ever sucked.

The boy looks down, the general strokes the cock, hard and warm, the boy suddenly stiffens his legs, the general holds the boy's cock against his throat, under his chin, the boy laughs, sperm gushes out, spatters the general's uniform : surprised, he pushes back the cock against the boy's thighs, stands up :

— Child, child, go and get me a bit of water.

The boy pushes the alcove door, he pulls a pot of boiling water from the middle of the kitchen range, takes a ladle, fills it and carries it to the alcove ; he pours the boiling water over the uniform, the general pulls a handkerchief from his pocket, dips it in the ladle and rubs his epaulettes.

The boy lays the empty ladle on the bed.

The general catches the boy by the waist and kisses his nape, his boiling hot handkerchief behind the boy's ear ; his hands move downwards, one still holding the handkerchief, to the hips ; the damp and burning hot handkerchief sinks between the boy's buttocks ; the general laughs.

— Move back a bit, I will make you a little bandage.

The boy breaks loose from the general, who grabs his cock, wraps it in the wet handkerchief, ties the handkerchief around the cock :

— When I was a child, I believed that getting a hard-on meant wrapping bandages around the cock.

The boy, his arms raised, his cock bandaged, dances in the middle of the alcove ; the general takes the ladle from the bed, he holds it horizontal, in front of the boy's belly, then he moves it closer to the cock and picks it up inside the ladle

then he pushes the handle under the boy's cock, places himself behind him, holds the ladle between the boy's thighs covering his cock ; he lifts the handle, driving it between the boy's buttocks ; the boy groans, writhes, the ladle's ball between his thighs ; the general thus draws him towards the straw mattress : the boy lies there on his belly, the ladle's handle sticking out from the buttocks and the ball cutting his belly :

— Give me the handkerchief. You'll put the ladle back where you took it from.

The boy thrusts his hand under his body, pulls out the gluey handkerchief, and hands it to the general. The general puts it in his pocket :

— Goodbye now, forget everything we did. I'll come and see you tomorrow afternoon. Put the ladle away.

The boy remains silent, head buried in the sleeping bag, his buttocks slightly shaking, his back stained by shadows :

— Goodbye, you're not answering. You're asleep already, Pino ?

The boy remains silent, but farts in the midst of silence :

— It's a bugger's bye-bye to a bugger.

The general walks to the door, opens it, goes out, he crosses the kitchen. In the shadow, where the vapour is lingering, water boils, lifts up the lids, foams.

— And what if I made my sperm boil ?

The general wipes his forehead, he comes back to the alcove door, place his ear against the bamboo : the boy is crying, sniffing, the springing cracks ; the general parts two slats of the partition, he sees the boy still lying on his belly, shoulders shaken by sobs ; the ladle over the buttocks follows the breathing movement ; the general smiles and leaves.

The two platoons sent after Illiten return to the palace the following morning, before the changing of the guard : soldiers throw themselves on their straw mattresses, the trucks are eaten up by salt.

The captain obtains from the general that the soldiers remain in bed during fall-in :

— I'll go and visit them in their barrackrooms.

— General, they'll be asleep.

— They're most charming in that position.

— I beg you, general.

— Lying on the side, the battledress tight around their buttocks, the belt rolled on their thighs.

— General, please.

— You fight, you obey, I feel no desire for you. The war is soon finished, we are defeated. You're not speaking to a general any more, but to the head of a

brothel. Summon your men.

— But, general, you allowed them to rest.

— I want to see them. I know they slaughtered a child tonight, I want to see them.

The captain goes to fetch his men, he wakes them up and pushes them towards the assembling point. The general orders them to strip to the waist. The soldiers undress :

— You'll remain that way until noon.

The soldiers throw their clothes on the ground.

— Heads bare.

The soldiers remove their berets, some their light helmets. The general orders the other soldiers to break ranks. The captain goes back to his room, washes, shaves and lies down on his bed. The general retires to his office, sends his secretaries away and goes to stand by the window from where he can see the courtyard and the undressed soldiers ; he takes his binoculars and watches the bare torsos on which the ribs create desirable shadows, the bellies hollowed by hunger ; he knows that his aide-de-camp, his secretaries, leaning at the door are watching him love and desire : a soldier walks across the courtyard, stops in front of the punished soldiers, sticks out his tongue at them ; the general recognizes Pino by his soiled battledress, his plastered down hair, the underwear hanging on his shoulder, the piece of ice cream sticking out of his pocket, on the hips.

He feels again like stroking that humid and wiry body, throwing away medals, rank, title, and following him, appointing him his lieutenant of pleasures, commander and recruiter of boys, and wallowing in public debauchery, he a general, showing, exposing himself, leaning against his brothel's door, the boy inside corrupting and raping boys either younger or older than him. And he, the general, imposing a virile and cruel debauchery, creating orders, preferences, rewards, calculating, measuring the duration of pleasure, and the quantity of released sperm, offering his boys to the mad passions of men and women passing by, hastening their choice by the brutal capture of a dozing boy and the confession of his speciality ; whipping the boys, forcing the youngest ones to do the housework : wash the dirty tiled and wooden floors, change the sheets between two embraces, etc., forbidding to hug and soil those children, but putting them every night in his own bed and laying those he finds squatting and swilling down the floor, lifting their apron, unbuttoning their shorts or pulling their underpants, and knocking them down, legs spread apart like little dogs, forcing customers short of cash to be content with the latrine's cement floor when bugging and soiling the boys, chasing the sadness away from his heart and from his body, maintaining his independence and his embraces bathed in sun ; trampling the boys sleeping intermingled in the cellar staircase, in the middle of the street, after the morning's embraces ; establishing a hierarchy among the boys, sending the ones

to the common hall, the others to the rooms on the first floor, submitting the former to the latter, but punishing those in the private rooms by temporary resumption of work in the common hall ; imposing to all the most complete submission to the man or woman passing by ; forcing all boys, even the youngest, to get drunk on waking, tearing away pity from their heart, tearing away their heart from their chest ; accustoming them to pleasure and cruelty ; received or given ; working out the boys recently recruited, stolen or bought, then gradually freeing them once their submission is certain, and exciting their jealousy as far as sexual performance is concerned, so as to forget the strangeness of their new gestures ; then, « remembering all the beautiful and frail boys I met at afternoon teas and dinners in the parks of Inamenas, those returning from tennis with their shorts wet by sweat between the thighs, open-natured, joyful, hair-lock over the eyelashes, that one, suddenly feeling sick after dessert and leaving the table to vomit, and whom his favourite sister follows, heartens, precedes and helps to vomit, and holding him by the shoulders, the one lying on the perron, stripped to the waist and thighs bare, wearing only a faded swimsuit, legs falling each side of the balustrade, feet touching the rose bushes, warm belly brushed by my hand from afar ; the one leaning, wearing light shorts, sliding slightly on the buttocks and baring the loins between the shirt and the belt, legs covered by woollen socks with green ribbons, face against the rocking of the electric train ; procurers seducing one after another, pulling them out of their dwellings and throwing them brutally into pleasure, Pino pushing those heads, those faces, where tears of shame are still drying, between his thighs, and squeezing them ; I, seeing their anguish before the first client, the sweat on their hips, when he sets his hands on that place ; their anguish then their pleasure ; their look of triumph in my direction after the trial, their industriousness in following Pino's lessons and advice and little by little the sudden inspirations of their lips, of their hands by the contact with a foreign skin and in an embrace made wilder yet because of its high price ; exciting between those boys of good families jealousy and baseness, temptation of sordidness and obscene insult, exciting them, drunk, so that they betray aloud and soil their mother's voice and body ; remembering on the other hand all the wretched boys, lively, beaten, seduced already, I looking for them, capturing them and throwing them into the common hall like the small animals a child throws in a box, closing it again each time ; mixing all those boys and pushing them to fight together, setting up bloody fights between the least handsome ones, offering to men and women those battered and bloody bodies, giving them their sperm to lick and suck with the blood ; imposing a working uniform for all, those from the private rooms and those from the common hall : the swimsuit of faded cloth, with a jumper in winter, likewise faded and full of holes ; I, liking to touch, to feel those boys' cocks, through the cloth wet and viscous after a long succession of embraces, and press them and make a bit of burning hot sperm still squirt out, and with one patting on

the buttocks send those boys back to other customers ; I, in the stormy afternoon, dozing by the door and shivering, watching the street where the green and sulphurous shadow rises, getting hard-ons at boys passing by on the pavement, at the men stopping, at the boys beckoning, at the proposals, at the men's furtive and unpaid caresses, at the stiffening of the boys' legs, gradually soaked by rain, to the numbers shouted by their clear voices ; customers and boys already hugging each other brush me when entering, soaking wet, into the common hall ; when the customer weighs upon him, on the edge of the bench, one boy, head tilted backwards, smiles to me, makes eyes to me ; another, sitting on the lap of a docker with his shirt wide open, right near me, at a small table soiled with spittle and wine, hangs on the docker's neck and lets his head fall on my shoulder, laughing ; another, chased between the bench and the tables by a woman holding the boy's torn underpants, throws himself between my thighs ; a thunderclap makes him start, he gets up and attacks the woman, cock hurled at her ; they roll on the ground, the woman's hand drives the torn pants between the boy's buttocks ; the youngest of all the brothel's boys enters the bog at the end of the corridor with a butcher's assistant, closing the door on himself and the fat boy, leaning against the wall in the darkness, and drawing him by the hips, he waves at me ; the lock creaks, the door cracks under their embrace, an arm then a foot stretch under the door, stiffen, shake, recant, gradually re-enter the latrine, the door opens, the boy comes out, the shop assistant finishes fastening his belt, feet well set on the latrine's steps ; the boy comes back to him, climbs inside the latrine in front of him, and fastens his belt with one hand, with the other strokes the front of his thighs, then they go, clasped in each other's arms, to the middle of the common hall, and lean against the bar ; the boy holds out a glass of wine to the assistant, his hand on the glass is crumpled, humid, small locks are stuck to it, the assistant takes the glass, drinks half of it, and brutally, roaring with laughter, pours the rest into the boy's underpants, his large hand pulling the cloth. Wine wets the underpants in front and underneath, runs down the thighs as far as the knees, the boy rubs them together ; a man wearing a shirt, cap on the head, grabs the boy from behind and draws him against his thighs, the man's cock beats against the boy's buttocks, on the pants ; the boy struggles, pulls away the man's hands clinging to his hips ; the assistant takes the empty wine glass and caps the boy's cock with it ; around the glass, the wet cloth stretches ; the man slips the boy's underpants down his buttocks, the boy holds them back, the man tears them off, he drives his cock between the boy's buttocks, spreading them apart with his hands, the boy bursts out laughing, tilting his head backwards on the man's chest, his eyes flash towards me ; the assistant weighs on his belly, the boy feels the man's cock entering his body, and burn and pierce ; a bit of saliva runs at the corner of his lips, his cheeks turn pale, the head falls on the shoulder, pulling the man's half-opened shirt, and uncovering the man's breast where shines a drop of wine or blood, the boy's belly

grows hollow, beats above the glass turned by the assistant on the underpants, the boy's cock swelling inside the glass, the pants torn on the hips follow the movement of the glass and wind around it ; the boy's lips become livid, they suddenly part, blood and vomit spurt out, the man gasps for breath, pushes his belly and his cock forward, the shaken boy has fainted, blood and vomit run down his chest, spatter the glass, the assistant drops the glass smashing it on the tiled floor, strikes the boy's knees with his shoes, strikes the legs, tramples the feet, the underpants slide on the thigh, on the knee ; the man hugging the boy and biting his eyes, holds back the soiled pants and draws them over the boy's cock : the boy, held back only by one of the man's hands, collapses at his feet, the man's cock, pulled out, vibrating all over, from the boy's buttocks, springs up and gets caught in the shirt ; the boy, bending at the man's feet, underpants between the thighs, woke up with the fall, he moans, the butcher's assistant treads him underfoot, tramples his belly, treads the underpants, lifts them with the end of his shoe ; the man, squatting, throws himself on the boy, turns him over on his belly, lies down over him, drives again his cock between the boy's buttocks.

Outside, elephants trumpet at the far end of the zoo under the soft rain ; mahouts, half-naked, feet in the mud, push them along with their whips, under the lightnings, towards the large green tents, swollen by the wind ; a mahout, shouting, his hip gets caught in the barbed wire ; the smoke from the city rises in the rain. At my feet, enlaced, a tall sailor and a fair boy, entirely naked, roll together groaning ; the sailor's glaring white uniform, is lying with the boy's red underpants on the edge of the bench ; the sailor's open thighs on the boy's forehead, the black mop of his pubic hair mingled with the boy's fair hair, tremble with the ending spasm, the sailor's cock, fully inserted inside the mouth of the boy, who coughs, and his hands push back, lift the sailor's belly, weighing on his chin ; the sailor's sperm fills the boy's mouth, chokes him. The sailor, thrusting his head between the boy's thighs, bent like a horse's head, under the cock, growls, whinnies, spits on the testicles, the boy's cock hardens, tremendous, reddened by the morning's and the afternoon's embraces, warms the sailor's neck as far as under the ear.

The butcher's assistant passes in front of me, he goes out of the common hall stroking his thighs, under his apron ; the powerful smell of the elephants' shit rises from the street ; the assistant's buttocks, under the apron's string, are covered with hardened turds ; in the street he turns towards me in the gleaming light, his open fly uncovers his cock still hard and red, he takes it in both hands, and begins galloping as though riding a broom ; his laughter is still ringing in the street when the man with the cap and the boy, at the foot of the bar, relax and all the couples relax around me, sputter, holding out their hands towards wretched clothes.

The tiled floor shines, large trails of sperm and wine, where underpants, shirts, caps are caught, gleam as far as under the seats, in the flashes of the

storm.

Children, sheathe your swords, men cover your darts, I rise over you towards the top of the closed valley, suffocated by the smell of pine trees, I run from one end of the stadium to another, the mountain grows covered with soldiers, their spears pierce the tree leaves, I'm going to die, I never changed freedoms, the dry leaves enter my throat, the soldiers nail me with their spears, on the stadium's wet sand, I who dreamed of dying strangled by a boy inside a brothel's toilet, my wounds dry in the mountain air, I die alone by the screams of the birds of Divinity and I watch my death and my descent to hell ; the Divinity does not wait until I am completely dead, to allot me a place for eternity, I die a loyal man, my senses at peace, my mind alone touched by the sun, without revolt, I who wished to die in the confusion of pleasure and despair. »

The general lays his binoculars on the table, calls the radio operator :

— Write : « Urgent, secret. General Kostas Ziguris, Inamenas headquarters to general commanding continent headquarters — captured rebel chief, escaped tonight. Officers, soldiers and myself cannot see blood any more. Bomb necessary. Awaiting new orders. »

— Send this message immediately.

— Must it be coded, general ?

— No. Rebels, sailors who'll catch this message will burn their fingers and ears on it. What can be done against the god, against the fire that comes swooping down ?

The general hears the distant rolling of the sea, the swell of the sky, the shock of hard or flabby shells under the blue water, the loud voices of drilling soldiers and warrant officers. Beneath the sea waters, beneath the fields' earth, terror runs, threatens ; the black men, helmeted, armed with short daggers and thin ropes for hanging, appear in the hollow of the waves ; on the beaches, residents retreat, place their hands before their eyes ; treachery is in the island : all those from the East are already slaughtered, disemboweled, hanged, their bodies shine, stir by the undertow ; soldiers, in the West, move on a signal from the chiefs, against the villagers standing or kneeling, and without halt, pierce them, like one kills fish on a boat's deck ; ribbons float on their daggers ; solitary huntings draw to a close in the hollow of rocks, in the huts of saltmarshes, the still alive victims are thrown among the shadows of submarine beasts, in the salt where they struggle :

— General, the line is cut off, the rebels, during the night...

— Send the punished soldiers to repair that line, instantly. You'll be in command.

The radio operator goes out, the general tears a eucalyptus leaf thrown in by the night wind on his table : « A boy's cock tears with the same leaf noise. »

The general summons his aide-de-camp, the colonel enters the room :

— Colonel, one of your captains spoke to me about a young man, named Kment, who with his brothers and sisters prostitutes himself in the higher part of the city. Until the war ends, we must hold on. As for me I want to have fun, enjoy pleasures forbidden on the continent, therefore, I hand over my authority to you. Your first order, consequently, will be to have that young boy searched for. If you catch him in the morning, bring him to me at once, if you catch him after nightfall, give him a good bed, close the room so that he regains strength, and his freshness for my benefit.

— General, headquarters are aware of your morals.

— I have no morals. And who informed them ?

— Soldiers, warrant officers. The soldiers made a song about you. I know the culprit.

— Between you and me, colonel, I know that your wife is ugly, that you made your kids under the influence of your brother, the abbot. But, at your age, with your rank, you're not going to start touching boys. Be content with masturbating in bed... By the way, at night, I'm woken up by the cracking of your bed's springs. Please, do that earlier in the morning, all that has time to dry.

— General, you are pushed by vice... I love my wife,... my children...

— I was thinking, a few minutes ago, about your youngest boy, the one who has a passion for electric trains. Rather than imposing Military school on him, sell him to an Oriental pimp, you'll get a good price of him.

— You are young, you are a general ; I am almost old, only a colonel ; general, I used to admire you, my assignment by your sides fulfilled my desires, I would like to cure you...

— Health, is desire.

— General, I will do as you ordered... Do you wish also to know that soldier's name ?

— Excellent idea, colonel, make him come here, immediately.

— He is also the platoon's finest marksman.

— So much the better. Quick, I want to see him.

— General, he's absolutely normal.

— Never mind, since I'm handsome and a general, and all those soldiers are bored stiff in this place.

— Meanwhile, I'll have that young Kment searched for.

— O.K. I prefer wretched flesh.

The colonel steps out, the general throws his legs over the table, he strokes the uniform's cloth stretched between the thighs, then on the hip, and under the buttocks ; an ink pot capsizes under his shoe ; the general calls a sentry : « Mop up that ink. » The sentry runs out and comes back, with a rag, dips it in the spilled ink, sponges it up ; the general watches the soldier, grabs the wet rag from the soldier's hand, and flattens it on the battledress, the soldier pulls the rag away

and lays it back on the stain :

— I'll write you a voucher for a new battledress.

— Thank you, general, but you scared me.

— You have a fiancée ?

— Yes, general.

— She works ?

— Yes, general.

— Where ?

— In a bar, she's a waitress.

— She's a whore ?

— No, general.

— You've slept with her already ?

— General...

— So, you believe you're the first one ?

— I only kissed her, general.

— On her cunt ?

— General, I shall leave, if you allow me.

— Strike me. Don't be afraid. If you slaughtered that stupid colonel in front of me, I'd offer you his grade, his pistol, his salary. Go, go and kill him, search for him, search. Kill. Kill. Ah ! you hit him, oh ! how it stinks, his bug's blood. Strangle him now. With your hands. With your thighs. You'll come to the funeral. Standing next to me, you fart when his wife, covered in black clouds and blood, one hand inside the holy water basin, with bloodshot eyes, questions me about her husband's death. At the far end of the church, priests are hanging from meat hooks : She : « General, come with me, we will break in the river the phial of sperm I've been keeping since my wedding day. Please tell me, your soldiers did send home my husband's phial ? We both had one phial : I of his sperm, and he of mine... »

— General, if you please, write me the voucher.

— Wait I have no more paper, no more pen. And also I'm fond of you with that stain on your thigh, one could think that you let off ink, like an octopus. Put your tentacles around my neck, around my hips, squeeze and warm up my head at the bottom of your beak. Come, I am dead, love a dead man, who would dare punish you ?

The soldier steps back towards the door.

— All right, leave, pack up your things, you're transferred to the Ait Saada Mines.

— General, don't do that. If I die, my fiancée will die.

— Idiot. She'll fall into someone else's arms. The world, the bars are filled with handsome guys, with strong muscles and strong sex. One of those fascinates her, embraces her, seduces her, penetrates her, makes her his slave. For

him she sells herself on the streets, gets covered like a bitch along a toilet wall, standing, quivering, saliva foaming between her lips and the boy's, their tongues touching, clinging together.

The soldier goes out, running through the vestibule then in the headquarters' gallery : « The general is mad !... »

The guards overpower the soldier, but the general, coming out of his office, dashes towards them, trousers open, rubs his hardened cock on their battledress, on their rifle butts ; the colonel, in the radio room, phones over the table where the operator is crumpling messages.

— Look, colonel. What the general...

— Keep that message, I'll take care of informing headquarters.

They hear the general's screams, the colonel leaps into the gallery, he snatches the general away from the soldiers who started beating him :

— Leave him alone, he has those fits since childhood. I know him well, it will soon be over.

The general, his chin and chest covered with dribble, grapples on to the soldiers, the colonel buttons up his pants again :

— Come on, Kostas, I'll take you to your room...

The general, eyes wide open remains silent ; the soldiers, whose arms and shoulders he's clutching, do not move ; a stork shoots out from the gallery roof, the general sees its white reflection on a soldier's helmet, he starts, he puts a hand before his brow, he leans on the colonel's shoulder :

— You know that in the past I used to love with no ulterior motives, I had no other ties with life. All these boys, all these soldiers, their sperm, their saliva cover my mind and my heart.

— All of you, go away ; come, Kostas. You, go to the kitchen and bring back an infusion of vervena for the general. Hurry up.

— All those little soldiers are our slaves ; they do not serve their country, but their officers.

— Do not talk, Kostas. Lean upon my arm. Come. Tomorrow I'll have those storks killed by the prisoners.

— No. Soldiers have taken those birds under their wing. They quarantine those among them who hurt one...

The soldiers, ears shut, move off. The general looks back : they rejoin their posts, nonchalantly, belt sliding on the thigh, they lean against headquarters' walls :

— Kostas, don't look at them. They're all little hooligans.

— That's how I love them : thieves, procurers, prostitutes, denouncers, drunkards, orphans, deflowered at eleven...

— Kostas, you're at it again.

— Do you know that this morning I sent to headquarters a request for

promotion ?

— I thank you, general.

— Sunday, if weather and war are calm, I'd gladly go with you and your children, to bathe at Loutrakion : the beach is well guarded, one takes one's clothes off among the rose laurels.

— I'd be happy... my youngest boy will remain in camp, Emilienne is supposed to teach him a great lesson in oil painting.

— The request for promotion was sent by radio, this morning, before fall in.

— General, Emilienne is very fond of him, she believes he's talented... But I'll have my two other boys with me.

— Of what use can they be to me... they're as ugly as you. Their skin is hard, they have no buttocks, no imagination, no saliva ; bile instead of sperm... The colonel looks down.

In the office, the general, by the window watches the deserted courtyard : the soldiers have left with the radio operator, he sees the trail of the electric wires, he suddenly looks back and bursts out laughing, grabs the colonel by the waist and releases him immediately :

— Kostas, you're losing your head again.

— Let me lose it between a handsome boy's thighs.

— The boy who made the song on you will be brought in. I've given orders to search for young Kment.

— You're a fine procurer, colonel ; are you aware too that on my arrival in the Island, not long ago, I fell madly in love with Serge. Since then, I feel hatred for him. However, what grace, what indolence, what passion... but his sperm is not for me, I felt it as soon I saw the boy arrive : too fluid, too spiritual, blood, tears. I like sperm heavy, warm, the milk that heartens, the sperm one plays with, and that one rolls around the finger, that shakes under the lips.

— General, you do not need me any more, I shall leave. The two bomb disposal platoons must be on their way by noon.

— Do as you wish, but I want to see the soldier at once and feel that young Kment is being hunted down. There also are those ten prisoners brought back from Tifrit, the day before yesterday. Have them taken away in trucks and shot beyond the walls by the raw recruits.

— Yes, general. An excellent inuring system.

— Hurry up.

The colonel leaves. The general watches the office tiles :

... This house was once a brothel, the girls hang their soiled tatters to the low branches of the eucalypti, the scorching sun burns their half-opened cunts ; they laugh, cry, clinging to the soldiers' shoulders and tickling them between the thighs ; often, soldiers moved by their caresses, ejaculate, all dressed, at the foot

of the stairs leading to the rooms, they then remain motionless, shivering, hand on the wet cloth and holding it between their fingers. The girl hugs the robbed soldier, strokes him, paws him as far as the room, flings herself on the bed, pulling the soldier over her, and drawing the soldier's swollen sex organs against hers, open from force of habit, burned, tanned, gaping.

Between two clients the whores come to lean at the upstairs windows, their breasts pushed up within the bodice, shine in the sun, tremble like milk, flies alight there searching for crusts of semen, suck up the sweat, they run over the breasts, then disappear in the armpits' hair ; when soldiers or workmen pass by, the whores open their bodices and lift their dresses up to the belly ; as for the ones displaying themselves down below, before the door, the ones leaning at the windows spit on them.

At the end of the room, on a battered pailasse, a young whore, legs joined under a large piece of linen bloody in places, moans : a sailor deflowered her too violently, she has been delirious and bleeding in the rags for three days ; the shadows of the eucalypti shaken by the breeze pass on her cadaverous belly, blacken the hole of the navel, and the flows of blood ; rats run along the pavement, whores scream ; the men stopped in the middle of the street and embraced by the whores from below, pick up stones and throw them at the rats ; children, out from the alleys, rush forward with sticks, club the rats still alive, pick them by the tail and disappear again in the alleys screaming, fighting over the dead rats. Now and then a red sand wind rises beyond the city, comes out of some savage valley, covers the river then the corn fields ; the whores, worked on, feel the sand coming, the clients give a start, their muscles snap slowly under the gleaming skin ; their veins swell all along the whores' body ; the red sand spatters the wall facing the open window, clings with its teeth and its claws to the saltpetre, to the ivy. Far beyond the sea knives rise, in the white streets, pierce the hanging linen, men hand rifles to the children, put up in front of them some dummies to shoot at ; the children, lying on their belly in the sand of the wash-houses, machine-gun those puppets, shoulder shaken by the shots.

Young men, paid by Inanemas bankers and landlords, run through the city shouting : « Level Inamenas, burn it down, shoot all the rebels... »

The captain, above the children lying on their bellies, presses his chest.

— What fine youth, snakes jumping between the wet cliffs, arsonists, ship-wreckers, slaughterers !

The flock from Inamenas, fleeing before the shouts of those young wolves, old men snapped up and thrown on the sand, young wolves' foam upon the women's bellies, Ah ! war, war.

Whores wash late in the morning, in the horse-ponds filled with blue water ; flies coming from the heap of human and animal shit fuming at the doors of stables and huts, cover the whores' tatters, their wretched working clothes

thrown on the muddy paving stones around the horse-ponds, lift, flop down the still damp and crumpled pieces of cloth ; children, feet in the mud, harass the whores, jump in the mud, pinch their hips, trample their clothes, splash their legs, with the mud : one boy, drawing to him a goat coming out of a stable, mates with the motionless animal ; the children, all around, laugh, their glittering teeth covered here and there by blood and shreds of black meat.

The sun, invisible in the sky, burns inside the puddles ; the boy's sperm flows and shines on the goat's hair ; the shadows of the storks slide on the whores' backs, the madam screams, breasts showing, under the eucalypti : men soiled with dirty oil, cement, blood, gall, vegetal milk, are pulling her by the arms. The whores plunge their head in the water :

— Let the old woman manage by herself, tasting a bit of men's blood will do her no harm.

Their laughter stir the blue water. The children shout :

— Come on you whores, go and drink your milk, suck your sweets, spit into men's mouth.

At noon, men and whores, are asleep, clasped in each other's arms, tails and fins whipping their backs...

The colonel knocks, opens the door : pushes a soldier towards the general.

— I don't want to see him, take him back to his duty.

The colonel catches the soldier by his collar, and moves him back towards the door :

— I shall still have that young Kment searched for.

— No, I don't want to see anybody. Have a barrel filled with fresh water for me, and leave me alone here, as long as I'll say so. Lower all the apartment's curtains, let no soldier speak or laugh beneath my windows.

— You there, lower the general's curtains.

— No, colonel, do it yourself. Make him leave at once.

The soldier looks at the colonel.

— Out, can't you hear what the general said ?

The soldier salutes, steps back, opens the door and leaves :

— He has a stain of grease on his leg. Always stains, always holes, like those from Inamenas.

— General, how can you suffer such scoundrels ? But, I shall leave you alone. So I'll sleep at home tonight.

« — Your boys shall play with you inside your bed, the house smells of night's sweat, of milk, the boy lies between your wife and yourself, his pyjamas are half-opened ; a breeze of ink comes down from the window ; the alarm-clock beats in the dark under the bedside lamp's crystal. The boy unties the pyjamas' string, thrusts his hand between the thighs, you stroke his wrists, at the tip of your

fingers, brushing the down of his cock : his mother, your wife, gives a start, her hand moves upwards along her child's hip, her own cunt, is roused, swells, half-opens itself ; the ink-soaked curtain collapses ; both of you roll over the boy, you penetrate him together from the front and from the rear, he groans, head tilted on the pillow, then you make love over his body filled, emptied, on his young belly you hug each other like in the first days, both your semens mixed flow on his navel ; his body jumps, his lips tremble, a bit of blood spurts from the corners, you and your wife lick it, and pull him, each of you to his own side : the pyjamas wet, crumpled, tucked up as far as the shoulders and dragged down to the knees, your hands mould them, your teeth nibble them ; the woman squats down, walks by her boy, grabs him by the feet, lifts his legs, opens the thighs, plunges her head and teeth between them, like in a juicy water melon, that wets the cheeks and the tips of the ears, and parting them, grunts, growls, sniffs, groans.

The boy moans, head tilted on your chest, the woman imitates that moaning and laughs, lips and nostrils tickled by her boy's down ; he puts his hand on your knee, which he feels stiffened by the coming orgasm ; sperm gushes out of your taut and lonely cock, falls back, spatters your belly, your thighs, your boy's hand ; the ink breeze splashes the lamp's crystal ; the crucifix, above the bed, moves, undulates, twists like a snake, a little laugh comes from the crucifix, shakes the crown of thorns.

A bedspring snaps and pierces the mattress under the boy's buttocks ; the wind casts white four o'clocks over the wooden floor ; the female thief moulds her boy's cock, wanks it. Legs strike the wardrobe doors, your knees are as red as turkey's necks ; take good care of your boy, I might eat him, sell him, display him on some butcher's stall, have him skinned, devour him, bite him in the neck all alive, in the thighs, in the buttocks, spit back on his belly the bay leaf I ate in the afternoon, lick that vomit ; take him in my arms, carry him into the armoury, arm him and hand him over to the men-at-arms, to the prisoners, for them to tear away from him little by little the pieces of his armour and lay him bare and drag him across the wet granite, by his hair and by his feet.

And I, appearing suddenly on the rampart walk, face gleaming with fat, I dash forward on that bloody young body, and I jump, clinging to him, into the void, on the points of rain, earth rises, tears with the shock of both our bodies ; a convoy of trucks and tanks rolls over, crushes us, but I'm born again, I rise, hands slipping on the spinning tyres. The truck capsized on the embankment ; inside the open cabin, a soldier is dying, struggles like a horse lying on its flank, nostrils blowing the dust off the dashboard ; sand runs on the cliff, dogs' teeth and bones roll over the white sand :

— Pull that cock away from my throat !

— I climb into the cabin, I lie half over the soldier, I drive my fist in his mouth, I pull out a live snake, its head covered with foam ; the soldier's body

relaxes, the snake writhes around my fist ; a tear appears under the soldier's eyelid ; the boy groans under the truck, clings to the chassis with his hands, oil and grease drench his forehead and hair ; he's mine, I sell him, I drive the snake into his mouth ; the soldier glides down on his buttocks as far as the bank, thistles get caught in his belt ; he laughs, becomes silent, when his buttocks reach the wet sand ; I can hear the noise of his teeth and lips when he crunches the little white snails picked on the tufts of prickly grass.

I pull my boy from under the truck, I cover him for a moment, I say to him :

— You are my slave, for you I have leather, whip, spittle, precise gazes and caresses, vomit, quicklime, blood.

He wraps his hot arms around my neck, I lick on his cheeks the burning tears, the bay leaves melt upon his belly, under mine.

— I shall hit you, I shall whip you ; all day, all night you shall wander, naked, all shiny, all humid with saliva, and sperm, you shall rub your warm and gluey stomach against the icy marble of the bar, laughing, your jaw glittering, your hair blackened, palms of dizziness and nausea ; elbows hitting the counter ; a man has been watching for you at the far end of the room, he dashes forward, he pounces upon you, like the magnet and he flattens you against the marble, with his teeth he pulls out your hair from your nape, brutal he turns you over, puts his hand on your belly's laurel. I shall betray the one I love. »

The general wipes the sweat on his forehead, unbuttons the top of his shirt, shakes his wet back on the prickly blanket ; rubbing on the gallery's tiled floor ; birds strike the shutters ; the general writhes on his bed, his hand, under the belt and under the cloth, lifts, pulls at his cock, like one digs the earth under a root :

— « Boy, lying naked on the dry sand, on the cliff, black rats and white rats fight in the bundles of acacia wood, under the night, I part pinching them between my fingers the lips of your cock, and I spit the bay leaf in there ; I close again the sweet lips of your cock, and I arouse it with balls of amber from the sand, and I feel sperm rising and the muscle growing hard and I set my lips, wet by shame and quick remorse, on the half-opened lips of your marble cock and I suck in both the sperm and the laurel juice. »

FOURTH CHANT

The captain leaves his room at noon, he sees the general's apartment's shutters closed. His men cross the courtyard, they come to him :

— Captain, the general, what's happening, he's crazy... We were beginning to burn under that sun. Fortunately, the radio operator rescued us. We went to repair the telephone line. Look at our hands, the plants, along the railway, they spatter. Jamet got run over by the track motor car, the guys from the platoon, they were running after the hens, among the reeds of the 121th.

— Go and wash now. After grub and nap, meet up at the barbed wire storehouse. Got it ?

— Again the barbed wire, captain ? put on skin gloves, with that heat and the sores ? Couldn't we go and work in the Palace, at the old man's ?

— No. Those wires have to be put up, before the ceasefire.

— Captain, you believe in that ceasefire ? As for me, before I leave here, I'll treat myself to filling a few targets in the lower city.

— Shut up, Virido. Captain, how many days left, this morning ?

— Two thousand and six.

— Shit, poor captain, you're not out of it yet.

— I didn't ask for your advice, Virido.

— Captain, Jamet he hasn't got over what happened tonight ? All morning while mending the line, he was snivelling. Captain, you're too kind with those creatures. Jamet did right.

— You're a brute, Virido. Ain't it so, captain, how things are at Virido's, they fuck with the animals. And his sister, hey your sister, Virido, you make love with her. The Viridos — one can't tell who's the father and who's the son. Your grand-dad, Virido, wouldn't he be one of your sons, by chance.

— Belt up. I'm free, at my house. Wait for the next ambush and you'll see, you bastard.

— You're born on the manure pile. Your mother, she had no time to push the door open. Also, captain, they're foreigners, they were starving, over there, like the rebs do here.

— Where's Jamet ?

— Must be blubbering in the latrine, like the day he killed a stork.

— Find him, and tell him I want to speak to him in my room.

— Captain, did you ask the general if we could put our beer crates in the mess fridge ?

— Do as you please. And don't forget to put your dogs down.

— Captain, we've heard the radio operator at second platoon, he's in jail.

— What ? Thivai in jail ?

— A colonel and two lieutenants from security came to question him this morning : he spoke to the rebs in his mike, he warned them of the ambushes.

— Shut up, Thivai hardly knew how to use his radio, and he's a straight lad.

— Captain, if it was true, what they accuse him of, should one kill him ?

— You kill enough already.

— Thivai, he's a swell guy. You remember the day he buried a reb and his son, in front of the cave ; the chief kept quiet.

— Thivai, he could do everything and he was a writer : one day, on leave, I saw a book by him in a train station.

— He'll get along against those shirkers.

— Captain, you'll testify in his favour. You remember, when Thivai was on washing up duty, the captain would go and meet him on the oued's bank.

— Thivai and I were at school together. But what have those shirkers got against him ? Thivai, swimming in red bathing suit in the watercress water and I, girded up with a piece of cloth, beating up the farm girls towards the bank, Thivai splashing them...

The soldiers leave, retire to their barrackroom, sit down on the straw mattresses, pull away their wet shoes, lie on the mattresses, arms under the nape. Virido rummages in his locker — an ammunition crate with its cover held open by a shoelace — takes a can of condensed milk, pierces it with his knife, sticks his lips to the slit, sucks, head tilted back, kneeling on his mattress, buttocks crushing his bare heels ; sand runs under the door, lashes against the barrack walls.

— Thivai, you're there ?

— Yes, is it you Xaintrailles ?

— Yes, what have they done to you ?

— They took my notebooks and my books. Say, would you take my Aït-Saada photos to Inamenas ? Have the best ones enlarged.

— Don't worry, old pal, I'm here. Your little dog follows me everywhere. Pipo. Pipo. Can you hear him crying behind the door ? You can see nothing in there ? You have a straw mattress ?

— The electric bulb was snatched away a few minutes ago. I have my

camp bed. I like the smell of the batteries. I was thinking, when you knocked, of the farm girls at Raisko.

— Let me know... the next questioning.

— Tell me, Xaintrailles, have you seen young Emilienne again ?

— No, she doesn't leave Serge's bedside, he's wounded.

— Wait for the moment when, his wounds healing, she will dare abandon him for a few hours during daytime. Then, in the confusion and dizziness of her return to the sun, she will let you touch her arm then her shoulder.

— But she loves him. Wounded, she loves him even more.

— Are you really sure that you love her ?

— Yes, even out of the war.

— Fire, in the morning, fever, idleness, blood at your soldiers' lips and your skin shivers and you believe yourself happy ; love encircles your knees. But, after peace's return, your body useless again, your feet treading a domestic ground, far from blood and fire, and from nudity...

— I love her, Thivai !

— Yes, tell me, Xaintrailles, they say you have problems with your soldiers.

— Yes, tonight, one of them knowingly ran over a child.

— Who is it ?

— Jamet, the driver.

— Stand by him. He's an adopted child. He's been through a lot.

— I know. I command a company of orphans, of children beaten and sold, bought and sold again.

— Formerly, that's what you wished.

— Yes, but I surrendered very quickly. Thivai, I can't love any more, by dint of holding back and waiting.

— All of you, in the army, with a pure heart, you kill. Children, youths, you fight and slaughter rebels, men. Xaintrailles, you dislike rebellion, you prefer the discretion and dignity of silence. But, you eat, you are groomed, paid, medalled. Xaintrailles, you do not love life. Leave a bit of liberty to the others. I hate your matters of conscience. That colonel, those lieutenants, this morning, Xaintrailles, o how can you laugh with them. Ignorants, silly children, classroom fartars. Them, free ? Xaintrailles, you were such a freedom lover, once, little animal picking and frolicking, men's freedom will explode in your throat torn by bullets, and your death will be beautiful and you will hold out your hand to your killer and he, again, tears you, pierces you...

— Thivai, I'm unhappy, I'm useless. I love men and I don't love their freedom.

— I won't order you to lock yourself in here with me. My lips do not tremble, my eyes do not glare, when they insult me ; their books, their comic strips

are filled with prisoners proud and spitting, with bounding shoulders held down by vile and coarse sentries. No, I, I continue to wash, shave, comb my hair, in the same broken mirror ; I look down, not to burst out laughing ; I love the smell of these batteries, I'm alone at last after two years of heavy and rotting fray, I listen to the music of my heart, this morning I got scared, bring me some books, I will bury them under the battery crates.

— Dear Thivai, I feel sorry for you.

Xaintrailles and the little dog cross the empty courtyard where the storks' shadows glide ; Xaintrailles walks down to the Engines' courtyard, as he goes past he strokes the chief's bitch tied to the petrol tank's door, the bitch raises itself up, blue petrol shines underneath it ; the little dog loiters in the first platoon's barrackroom, it rummages under the straw mattresses, plays with the light helmets on the cement :

— The shirkers, what have they got against Thivai ?

— Thivai, he's educated, he doesn't think like them.

— You believe so ? he's like the others...

— By the way, Crazy Horse, he got his cross posthumously.

— The day they brought back the dead body to the general, you remember how he wept, he was trying to bring himself together, I was driving the jeep, I said to him : « General, you're a woman. » It was freezing cold, he wanted to warm up his hands between my thighs ; I made him some coffee in a little barrack under the fir trees ; he took his cock with both hands, I couldn't obey him any more because I had seen his cock. They're rotten, all of them. For them a soldier is just good to put their hands on.

— Bloody army.

— Only the women can cure us.

Captain Xaintrailles calls the little dog, he looks up towards the top of the central watchtower, the wood of the sentry box cracks, the sentry, belly flat against the protection sheet, is having a wank under the sun of blood ; blood runs in the body of the dozing soldiers, and of the insects covering them. Blood boils in the veins of the singer's neck, in the veins of the dancer's leg, neck of the singer, leg of the dancer pierced by the barbed wire ; the whores leaning at the windows watch the wedding, eat the gold from the bride's shoulder ; the bride spins in the little warm courtyard, the bridegroom observes her through the bars of a window, his fingers claw the hardened mastic ; his feet sheathed in tufts of sharp grassblades, trample the powdery ground.

Xaintrailles sees the wedding beyond the barbed wire, the procession trampling the powder and humidity ; the little dog has already pushed the Engines door, it jumps on the beds, wakes up the soldiers, nibbles their shoulders and uncovered breasts, sparkling through the mosquito nets :

— Go away Pipo. O that bloody dog. Go get some sugars from the

general.

— Attention !

— Stand at ease, you may remain lying down. I need a bulldozer for this afternoon.

— What's it for, captain ?

— Clear the pile of barbed wire behind your barracks.

The soldiers look at each other, leaning on their straw mattresses.

The little dog frolics on the driver's belly :

— You, Dafni ?

— Must wash my bulldozer, captain.

— Well, you'll wash it after.

— I don't want to spend the night over it.

— But, the review is in three days, you have time.

— With the fatigues, the guards... Today it's your barbed wire, tomorrow it will be the colonel's garden to turn over, the day after tomorrow it will be the general's, he'll come and paw me while I wash my bull.

— It's yes, or no.

— If it's no, I go to jail, if it's yes, I go too ; so I shut my mouth.

— You're all funks and shirkers.

— We all did road works and ambushes We're all seniors. Also, we don't want to obey the general any more. Thivai he wants to fuck with him ? Why does he lock him up in Transmissions ?

— It's none of your business. The general is ill, but he will get cured.

The little dog lies down on Dafni's thighs, his warm belly on the soldier's erect cock. Captain Xaintrailles goes out, the little dog lies down on Dafni's thighs, he leaps forward, but Dafni holds him back by the tail :

— Stay with us, don't go with those stinkers.

The little dog turns back, nibbles the soldier's hand, jumps.

Captain Xaintrailles crosses the courtyard again, Pino appears before him, his knife in hand ; the sun is so strong that Xaintrailles sees an assassin, he puts his hand on his hip, unfastens the automatic pistol's case :

— Captain, what's wrong with the general ? How come he doesn't want to go out no more ?

— Go away. Get out. You disgust me. You're asking for your five thousand francs ?

— None of your business, that the general loves me. He sure is the first to love me so much. Your pal Thivai, he never insults me. But I'll find you again, when you're a civilian : the orphan's knife hurts.

Xaintrailles wipes his forehead :

— You've corrupted our general.

— Ah ! he changed, your general, he doesn't give a fuck about you, your

war, your tortures ; his bands, you now what place of his body he shoves them into ? And his Eminence and the God ? Saint Wankette, pray for me.

— Shut up.

— Don't get scared, I don't want to rape you. You're too dry.

— How do you speak to the general ?

— Like the whore I am, captain ; and he answers me like the whore he'd wish to be.

— Come and see me tonight, after grub, in my room.

— You're starting too ? You don't look so... No, captain, I don't feel like it. I didn't hear the little rain at five o'clock this morning.

— Come and see me, if we escaped from the island, I, Thivai, Emilienne and Serge, would you escape with us ?

— You'd abandon me on the other shore, and I don't want to meet again with the men over there.

— We'd be good friends to you.

— All I want, myself, is to get killed here.

— Why do you want to die ?

— Because I'm a bastard child. I don't exist. Don't know how to do anything. It will be one record card less. The nurse, the instructress, when I'll kick the bucket, a little spurt of urine will splash her hand, revenge, captain. The world, it's a brothel : all the children are for sale.

The soldier buries his fingers in his hair. When he pulls them out, a black streak — grease and motor oil — divides his forehead ; the root of the hair is a bit bloody. The captain lays his hand on the soldier's shoulder, under the palm of his hand, which comes close to the veins in the neck, a little sob, brief, the soldier raises his shoulder against his temple, his cheek brushes Xaintrailles', his lips, for a moment, settle on the top of the phalanx. Xaintrailles feels, against his wrist, the small cheek burn, tremble, scent like a fresh rose in the fiery morning.

— A beast is worth more than me, it can be born, live and die, free, innocent, under the same grass, hidden, unrecognized, untouched.

— Forgive me for my insults. Will you come with us ?

— Don't take my freedom away from me. You imagine horrible things about the brothels. As for me, it's my natural element. You, you obey a governess, I obey pimps. You learned science, I was learning love. I know how to use my body. I know how to be beautiful without taking notice, while pissing, while sleeping ; I know how to be black, yellow, red, negro, viking, greek, rowing slave ; my saliva dirty like the surf, comes and goes on men's bellies like the surf, falls in their open mouth like the rain, bakes their eyelids again, like the rain fallen from the leaves, my belly grows hollow and rises under their lips like the mud in the marshes ; I am chained, nailed to the leather seat, to the bashed-in bed, to the humid straw mattress, to the viscous tiled floor, to the cement, the spitting worms crack, crunch

under my back.

— Shut up, shut up.

— When I'm still a child, the mistress lays me down, muffled up in blankets, on the brothel's doorstep, a hand lifts me up by the neck, the mistress runs away, I keep silent, fear pushes me into the overheated hall where wine and semen flow ; the blanket is pulled away, thrown under a bench, a young man is writing in an account book, at the end of the hall ; a hand grabs my throat, squeezes it ; a door opens, in the far end, a puff of wind and grass from the darkened garden, lashes my face ; a hand lifts me by the neck, like a kitten.

— Will Divinity open up her heart, when shall we drink the blood from her heart ? When does she awaken me with her hand of sun and her lips of pine ? When the women, maternally provoking, pass by, the young widows with their voices hoarse and soft and lisping, they do not look away from my half-naked body squatting in the fountain, the icy water lapping between my thighs, my wet head seized by the sun and the sand wind.

Thivai lies down on the camp bed, wrists crossed under the nape :

— Serves them right. Here I am alone at last. I am not pure. Ridiculous trying to grow a beard, I miss the icy water of Maison Forestière, this winter, the tent's cloth swelled for a while, weighing on my knees, in the morning. First, wash myself, always look on the window's side not to forget the light, move the battery crates three hours a day, lift them up at arm's length, listen well to the sound of voices, of dogs, of sand outside, watch only the muscle movements of the officers questioning me, not be emotional with Xaintrailles. Think, not dream : Xaintrailles dreams for me.

The soldiers in close formation march down towards the lower city ; children from the rubbish piles, make lewd gestures to them, the soldiers laugh, leap forward, shouting ; the children draw back, move forward again, pick up rubbish and throw it at the soldiers' feet. A naked child gets up from a smashed in rabbit hutch — a man is hiding behind an eucalyptus — climbs up the rubbish pile ; a soldier takes aim at him, the sub-machine gun's barrel moves down to the child's feet, up along his legs, the soldier sees running there a bit of sperm mixed with mud ; the soldiers move off, the man comes out from behind the tree, runs towards the hutch where the child lies, legs spread apart, face buried in the old, rotten, excremental litter, chest hollowed above the nails and the wire, penis crushed against the wire netting : the soldiers, weapon in hand, climb the ruins and the banks ; children naked, or their penis, or knee, or throat wrapped in rags, their back, their buttocks, their cheek red, wake up at the soldiers' feet and rise, head covered with straw ; inside their still warm holes, rats tremble, climb upon each other with little squeaks ; the soldiers pass by the laundry shop, in front of the commandos' dormitories,

just between the two cities ; they stop : the glass door is half-opened, a soldier, with his sten gun's butt, pushes the door : Giauhare, in the far end of the shop, is ironing shirts and battledresses ; her mother, sitting inside the back shop, in the sun and steam, is sewing, without a thimble ; the soldier walks towards Giauhare.

The girl puts her iron down, her hands cling to the board, the palm and the fingers on the hot cloth charred towards the middle ; the soldier steps forward, weapon supported by both his hands and pointed at Giauhare ; the other soldiers are stamping their feet outside, lighting cigarettes ; the soldier leaps, knocks the board over with his knee, brandishes his weapon at arm's length, grabs the girl's shoulder with his free hand, draws the girl against him ; with the sten gun's barrel, he closes the back shop door, and turns the key ; the mother knocks at the pane, screams ; the steam gradually clouds the pane ; the mother runs to the other door, opens it, goes in the garden, comes back to the street, the soldiers move aside then encircle the old woman ; she crouches down, her head strikes the knees of the motionless soldiers, her hands cling to the battledress cloth, pinch the thighs' skin ; in the shop, the soldier has knocked Giauhare down on the tiled floor, the sten gun's butt crushes the fragments of the water bowl, Giauhare's shoulder strikes the board ; the soldier, keeping his sten gun in one hand, with the other tucks up the girl's dress, she drives her fingers in the soldier's eyes, nostrils and mouth.

He spits at the girl's face, he weighs heavily on her, his free hand tears away the shreds of her dress, crumples them, thrusts them between the girl's thighs, pulls them out, raises them to his mouth, tears them with his teeth, spits them out again on the girl's bare belly. Then he brushes aside all the shreds, all the yarns from the girl's cunt, smooths the hair down, like an animal cleans the place it wants to live in ; his hand moves upwards, unbuttons the battledress ; his hip, all the right side of his body alone weighs upon the girl's left side ; his head and the girl's are connected by the filaments of dribble and saliva ; the girl's fingers claw the battledress cloth, at the shoulder ; the soldier rubs his cheek against her fingers ; his hand pulls the cock out ; the girl's knee rises, touches the tip of the cock ; the girl's gaze slips towards the tiled floor ; the iron, standing, next to the board, within the girl's reach, shines on the blue diamond-shaped tiles ; the girl's hand, while the other one is clawing the soldier's shoulder, stretches itself, touches the iron, catches it, lifts it up ; the soldier directs his hardened cock, viper's head, towards the girl's mop of hair ; his other hand drops the sten gun ; but the burning iron shoots out, the electric wire winds round the girl's wrist ; the soldier lets go of his cock, the iron swings on his open hand, the skin sizzles, the soldier screams ; the girl's hand holds the iron pressed on the soldier's hand, he writhes and falls backwards, his softened cock rolling on the battledress ; sweat flowing on the nostrils, and entering the eyes and blinding them, bathing the throat, the ears, the nape ; the girl, back on her feet, pulls the iron away ; the

soldiers grab the wounded man : he bites his charred hand, he bites his wrist, he bites his arm until fresh blood runs ; the radio operator, in his P. P. 8 calls the commandos' infirmary ; mother and daughter lock themselves up in the back shop ; children invade the garden and stare at the two embracing women ; the smell of burned flesh rises to the ceiling, filters through the slats, awakens, in the attic, Kment asleep on the straw.

The soldiers carry away the wounded man, go out, lay him down under an eucalyptus ; a jeep stops in the dust, the doctor gets out, the soldiers step aside, the probationary officer squats down, takes the wounded man's hand, turns it over, orders the soldier to lay the wounded soldier on the jeep's back seat. The two soldiers of the escort, sitting on each side of the seat, on the sheet iron, the sten gun between their legs, move away the oil cans, lie the wounded man on the red plastic cushion ; the probationary officer looks back, the jeep starts off, the wounded man groans, dribbles, the officer holds his hand.

The soldiers, sten gun in hand, in dusty battledress, shiver under the midday sun ; the children hide behind the haystacks, where rats are hissing ; Kment, head and brow covered by a leather cap, blue-jeans held around the waist by a string, stripped to the waist, climbs down along the roof, jumps into the garden, the children escape. Kment enters the back shop, stops on the threshold with his back to the light, on the floor the remains of a little chalet made of matches ; Kment looks down, Giauhare, naked, is hugging her mother ; Kment turns away and moves back to the garden, the mother pushes Giauhare towards the far end of the room : Giauhare picks up a dress from the heap of torn cloth and slips it on, hidden by her mother ; the shoulder is torn :

— Come, don't cry any more. I'll put a few stitches. Come.

Kment, hands in his pockets, walks across the garden, trampling the grass heavy with mating insects, the polished stones thrown there by the children ; picks a fig, bites into it, his fingers, covered with the cactus thorns, brush his lips ; he leaves the garden, walks towards a brook dividing the two cities, sits down at the edge of the muddy water, dips his bare feet into it : in front, on the opposite bank, the body of a newly killed child — in the night, while he was looking for rotten food under the barbed wire — shines with the flies on its belly, agglutinated on the navel, his legs spread on the water, penis lying on the sharp edge of an open can, eyelids pulled by the bees sucking dried lacrymal liquid.

Kment holds his feet in the water above the sludge, then he lolls back, lets his shoulders hit the mud trampled by the beasts. Thus lying, his cock growing hard, under the sunbeams, he watches the sky, a stork soars towards the eucalypti, two helicopters hover in the middle of the sky ; Kment listens to the animals nibbling, pinching, stinging, wetting, sucking the trunks of the eucalypti ; soldiers lie in wait, weapon in hand, beyond the barbed wire, slightly higher up, in sentry boxes covered by foliage ; other soldiers, girded in kitchen cloths, carry fuming

pots down the hill, stop before every sentry box, the sentry holds out his mess tin, immediately the ladle tinkles, the soldier brings his tin back under the leaves.

Kment licks his lips, swallows his saliva ; behind him, all along the brook, groups of sleepy children, feverish, staggering, lick their lips, watching the hill ; electric current crackles in the barbed wire ; a rat, out from the black water, hops around the child's body, runs along the arm, rummages for a while under the armpit, pulls out a few tufts of down, spits them out again on the child's chest, pulls the skin of the throat, huddles in the hollow of the throat, sticks its muzzle out, nibbles the chin ; bees and flies are buzzing, the rat sitting in the hollow of the throat, smooths down the hair under its ears with its claws, licks its fur, on the back on the loins... it sets its paws on the child's shoulder, moves back, forward, back again, leaps, climbs on the cheek, the bees withdraw to the forehead, the rat snatches them with its claws and bites them ; he spits them out on the hair, sits on the forehead, smooths down the hair of the muzzle with its claws, runs along the eyes, stops at the edge of the eyelid, nibbles the eyebrows, pulls the eyelashes, uncovers the eyes, still fresh and blue, catches the iris membrane, pulls it, hissing. Flies come and go between the penis and the navel, sink between the folds of flesh, under the down ; the rat sees them, it lets go of the membrane, hops a few seconds on the spot then jumps on the belly, the flies escape, abandoning on the child's skin, the trails, the heaps of sweat, of juices, of powder. The rat buries its muzzle into the navel, the skin covers the end of its muzzle, the inside fold touches its teeth, the rat nibbles it, bites it, tears it, bites it, tears the skin as far as the root of the penis, opens a jagged furrow of rosy froth ; it plunges under the penis, lifts it, nibbles the crumpled and tender little tip, then, moving back under the thigh, its teeth well hooked to the softened membrane, it pulls at it, gradually baring the little slit of the penis ; the skin, all tucked up, gives out a slight smell of urine, blood and dried sperm. The penis still red springs up before the rat's muzzle ; the rat drives its teeth in it, the penis's tip, torn off, fills the muzzle of the rat, which, muzzle in the air, hops and tumbles down between the thighs ; the penis's skin gradually comes back and covers the white wound ; the rat eats greedily, sitting beneath the testicles held up by the top of its head, and falling over its ears ; the sun fumes inside the wounds.

Flies, caught under the penis's membrane, die stuck in the wound ; the rat leaps on the child's knee, runs on his leg, up along the foot, keeps its balance on the toes, nibbles the nails ; the children, on the other side of the brook, pick up stones, pieces of sheet iron, and throw them at the rat ; it runs on the child's belly following the wounds, hides under the armpit, a stone hits the shoulder, the rat jumps, runs along the hip, on the black lime, it sinks under the buttock, comes out again between the child's thighs, a stone strikes its head, the rat hisses, shakes its legs, its muzzle is trembling ; a can with a sharp lid, slices one of its ears off, it scratches the wound with its claws, it enters again under the thigh, it

runs along the hip, a piece of stake, thrown by Kment, nails him into earth, from the side ; it struggles, it squeaks, black blood spurts out from between its teeth, spatters the dead body's hip and the edge of the belly ; the rat raises the stake, leaning on its legs, the children assembled behind Kment kneeling, watch the rat die. The rat sinks down, it whines, muzzle searching in the mud, its teeth nibbling the sliced ear, they throw it back against the belly, the rat covers it with its paw ; the rat jumps, its belly grows hollow and remains so, its lifted paw trembles a few seconds then stiffens ; the children yell, dribble runs down their chin, covers their chest, their belly ; they scream, the filaments of dribble sparkle, stretched, balanced from the lips to the chin then to the belly ; the children are covered with open wounds and scars, riddled, stung, torn, beaten, bitten, burned, crushed ; their wounds close up over the flies, over wisps of straw, over fragments of glass, of china, over satiated bees. The child's body is soiled by the black marks left by the rat, they wind around his arms, his thighs, his legs, around his neck, cross his cheeks, his forehead, his chest, his hairs are stuck together in tufts ; flies, wasps swarm over those wounds, over the tears made by the rat, plunge under the severed membranes, they roll in the down of the penis, bend it, vibrate, buzz, creak as if in a newborn bush.

Kment gets up, walks back towards the laundry shop, the children follow him, their feet trample the earth and the pebbles. As soon as they touch something soft, something fresh, the child bends, squats down, picks up, eats and scrapes the earth all around. Kment sits against the eucalyptus, opposite the laundry shop : the man is lying on the child in the rabbit hutch ; he hears the children's footsteps and their murmuring, he gets up, both hands leaning on the edge of the hutch ; the child, trampled, dazzled, body flattened, cheeks covered with the man's saliva, straightens himself up again, leaning on his elbows ; the man takes a banknote from his pocket and throws it on the child's belly. Kment gets up, the man puts his hands in front of his face and flees. The child brings the banknote to Kment. The boy takes it, the children form a circle around the tree, Kment, the banknote in hand, enters the grocery : little shop made of a thatched roof and mud walls, babies are rolling around behind the bamboo screen.

Kment gives the banknote, takes a loaf, leaves ; the children come to him.

Kment makes the children sit around the tree, tears a piece off, holds it out to the child the man just fucked, and shares out the rest among the others. And then he goes. He catches up with the man walking down towards the river, the man looks back sees the little knife shining at the boy's thigh, Kment moves the little knife around his cock, and smiles to the man.

Under the tree, the children are eating, the one the man fucked still smells of sweat, tobacco and man's clothes. The children pick the crumbs on their thighs, on the ground, around them ; their belly soon swollen, the elder ones

measure it, feel it, imagine the course of the bread through the stomach, the intestines, try to take a dislike to that soft bread, smeared with pale sap, falling from pocket to pocket, and rotting, blocked inside the kidneys. The children yawn, lie on the ground, nape supported by the roots of the eucalyptus.

Kment walks behind the man, chuckles ; glowing fires, puddles, fume inside the ditches ; the bells of the archbishop's palace toll in the higher part of the city, the man slows down, stops, turns back :

— If you want to kill me, do it quickly. Attack me, grab my throat, hurry.

The man raises his arms, tilts his head backwards, his throat shines under the sun ; a large blue and white liner leaves Inamenas harbour.

Kment walks towards the man, spits on that smooth and quivering throat, he spits, he spits, he burns the man's throat with his spittle.

All around, dogs are searching the sand, digging up bones, storks soar above them, blasts of air from their wings sweep the sand ; blinded dogs, growl, bare their fangs, leap on the birds, but these, with one flap of the wings, move up towards the blue air, settle on the shacks of lonely beaches, soar towards the surf, fly up the little channels dug by the sea in the sand of the beach and which flow under the blasts from their wings.

Towards the top of the beach, the sea has pushed pebbles, round stones, cuttlebones, pieces of bark, bits of cork covered by men's turds : rats plunge in, their fangs burst the seaweeds' bladders. Higher up, in the flat rocks, tiny fish tremble inside the pink-bottomed puddles. Higher up still, at the foot of the cliff, lizards run between the puddles where donkeys' and men's urine fumes.

Kment jumps among the rocks, crouches down, one hand dragging in a yellow puddle, and waits for the lizards ; he brings down his hand, the lizard escapes ; Kment on all fours, chases him ; his wet hand squashes the lizard, the little hard head turns back, over the nail ; Kment, between thumb and index, squeezes the open jaw, he raises his hand, the lizard is hanging, Kment bites the tail, gobbles it up, the belly writhes, bleeds ; Kment grabs it, gobbles it up, the lizard's legs grapple on to his lips, Kment cuts them with his teeth, spits them out on the rock, he throws into his mouth the head with its jaw opening convulsively, he crunches it, the lizard's teeth crack under his teeth ; Kment licks the tip of his fingers, he looks round, sees lizards running on the rock, disappear in the holes of the cliff, he stretches his hand out, catches two lizards, squeezes them in his fist and eats them, tail and head, belly and belly, tail and head, his lips are covered with little scales and little teeth, the remains of the legs prick his throat ; above him the grass on the cliff is on fire ; Kment rises, wipes his wet hand on his hip and dances, the smoke and the scent of grass drying the sweat on his body, he dances, his feet bare, grazed, burned on the rock, he throws his arms above his head, beats his hips, sticks out his belly, hollows it, the rags covering him, slide, get undone, fall along his thighs, he throws back over his shoulders his hair full of

itchings, flies vibrate in his ears, his knees, the muscles of his neck crack, dribble runs down his chin ; head tilted backwards, oily, black hair brushing the top of his back, he lowers himself, belly convulsed, thighs opening, knees parted, heels joined ; his buttocks touch his heels, weigh upon them ; he throws both his hands between the knees, closes his fists, presses them against the rock, his toes, reddened, curl up, nails scraping the rock ; he drops on his right shoulder, he rolls on the side, the rock's fire seizes him, from feet to nape, he crosses his wrists under the nape, he stretches his legs, the shreds of lizards swarm in his intestines, he opens his dry eyes, he widens them with his fingers, turns them towards the sun and holds them open until he gets dazzled ; then he shuts them over the tears and can go to sleep, temple and ear against the burning and sharp rock.

Emilienne supports Serge : the boy passed his arms around her shoulders, his crutch makes holes in the wet sand.

— You don't think we risk a stray bullet or a grenade ?

— No. But we left without telling your dad.

— And then, I, with those wounds all over my body, all a bullet or a grenade can do is make wound fall on wound, mix blood to blood, smash bones cracked already, tear grafted muscles...

— You still have your so beautiful head so smooth, you have no dried blood on your hair, I can cover with my palm your ear so warm, stroke your eyelids with the tip of my fingers, feel them beat, shut upon your blue eye, wet, hard.

— Never will you know my torment. What a sea to wash my secret misery in.

— Give it to me, give it to me.

— To drown it like a kitten ?

— Give.

— I wish I were alone in this world, naked, and the wind of Creation drying my shoulders, wet by childbirth. Before night, the same doe, every evening, passes near the forest border, I see its fawn-coloured coat quiver in the holes between the leaves, the same cloud stops in the circle of a tree top ; I, lying in the cooled grass, on my forehead the shadow of the crumbling ruins, I, heartless, insensitive to cold, to the doe's quivering, to the height of the cloud, I wait for the God to come down and carry me away towards the sun.

Every evening the God comes down and carries me away towards the sun and I wake up. I, the first and the last man, cherished by the gods, I behold the top of the action, the pure affection, the action and the shuddering of motions, of earth within the earth, the top of the Creation, the Gods' brow, the departure, the return, the coming and going of gods and angels, the rising of their heels, the winding of their hair around the columns of salt, the sun shining through those columns, the merry gathering of their troops, their shadowless hands covering my forehead. My muscles, my nerves stir, only under the sun, my skin trembles under

the gods' hand only, my saliva and my sperm flow on pure bellies only. From night to night, a child obscurely born on the slope of the clouds, screams, is made an angel at once. The gods ignore beauty, distance, absence.

Every evening, the God does not forget to come down and carry me towards the sun and I behold the action, the fire that does not burn, the water that does not wet ; for I alone, every night, the God creates birds, and throws them in the light of dawn, I hear the fluttering, the crash of their wings in the icy night and the wind pulls them towards the light of dawn ; for I alone, the God creates and throws the fish in the sparkling night, I hear their fall on the ice and the palms and the sea is hungry ; the God, at the edge of the world, holds my hand, fish, birds, shoot out from the spot in his body that has conceived them ; the hand dreams of birds, the birds come out and the hand closes again ; fish, birds mix during their fall, the earth and the sea are hungry, they rise ; some birds, flapped over by the wind, strike the God's brow, he catches them, he gives them to me and I throw them away at once because they die ; the wind chokes me ; my back, covered with shadows, is my chest ; I am in front, my body is in front. God, take away a bit of this strength from me, cast light on this world that came out of you, so that I see it live without you ; far from you. Push me too inside that light, and I fall still beholding you, among the sparkling of beaks and scales. God, pull yourself away from my belly, withdraw your hand from my heart, pull yourself away from my heart, pull yourself away from my lips, from my head, from all the sensitive parts of my body, die a little, you, at my feet ; may the roots of the trees and the lips of the soldiers rot. What is that voice black like a torch among the celestial choir. It is the one of the hidden God, the child raised among the young men and whose cloak shines in the coolness of the temple ; the young men do not know that he is the God, they sing of the God, and he, he sings and glorifies himself.

Emilienne leans her knee against the boy's bandaged knee, her thigh brushes the jeans, tucked over the bandage ; her hand moves down on the boy's other leg, the leg quivering under the tight cloth, crumpled under the knee :

— Do you feel pain, tonight ?

— No. Salt sticks to my bandage.

— I love you.

— I am not pure.

— Let's make love again tonight.

— My wound would open again.

— I would close it up again with my lips. O Serge, for your sake I'd sell myself on the market place...

— Happy are you happy, abandoned among us, covered with wind and milk, touched, tepid ; young men, their lips gagged with white cloth, bend over you, touch the tepid mud on your cunt, between your thighs. You hide, during gymnastics, crouching behind the charcoal kiln, blood besieging your knees ; the

old dying sister, by the half-open door, lifts her hand and lets it fall back on the sheet. You rise and you enter the room saturated with salt, sugar, gall, steam, blood ; you move closer to the bed, you touch the sheet, the old sister breathes a white sigh, she uncovers the top of her body, she unveils it, she leans towards you, she implores you, you lay your hand on the right breast, on what was, once, the place of a breast ; the nipple lies flat, almost bent inside the flesh ; you lift it with your teeth, you suck it : milk spurts out on your lips, in your nostrils, the old sister strokes your shining nape and the soapy texture of the shoulder :

— See, my child, what I've been hiding under my bed.

... You squat down, lips covered with milk ; under the bed, in a washbowl, hanging to the springs a big piece of raw and fresh meat reddens the dusty semi-darkness, blood flows from the meat and dries inside the bowl ; you get up again, your throat coming out of your mouth :

— Every night I tear a piece off and gobble it up while watching the icy moon.

... Young people, boys, prowl in daytime around the orphanage, bend their bows, their arrows pierce the moss on the walls ; while napping you listen to their shouts, the cracking of the bows, saliva foams up inside your mouth, you doze off, but an arrow strikes the dormitory window and you wake up, and you believe you see a boy's joyous face behind the pane ; his shoulders are covered by wool, his father is awaiting him, for the shooting lesson.

— You talk too much, you are feverish. Let's leave this shore. I'm looking for some shade. Do you see any shade ? There are some caves further away, along the beach.

— And inside, faggots all vibrating with bees and rats. That's where the rebels leave their dead, where children come to die of hunger, under the gaze of the rats.

— I do not know the other side of the sea. After the war I shall walk with you, I shall dance, over there where earth and men keep all their blood.

— But we'll all be dead, drowned, slaughtered, strangled, exploded ; our shadows, cast on the walls will rest in the submarine light.

— I love your dazzled eyes and the blue smoke of the sun upon your eyelids, the quivering of your weakened legs, the saliva dried at once on your lips, ô Serge, let's make love here, may salt enter our wounds, may sand fill our mouths and seal our embrace.

— I belong to the God. May the GOD devour you.

— I too want to devour you, so that you live in me, and I have no other hunger, no other desire any more.

— We've reached the caves. Breathe the smell of death. If you want to devour me, first devour all those unburied dead, bury them in your flesh and me after, inside your entrails.

They pass by the caves : half-naked children are crawling on the sand. Emilienne shivers, clutches Serge's shoulder.

The children grapple on to her knees, she feels the tiny nails claw her skin, like thistle :

— They want your blood.

A child starts to unfasten the bandages around Serge's knee.

— They want your blood.

At the cave's mouth, a child is striking a dead octopus, with a stone ; he strikes, steps back, growls, strikes again, steps back, strides over the octopus, spits at it, sits down on the twitching flesh, blows, pulls a tentacle between his thighs, holds it against his wrist, drives it inside his nostrils.

— For three days and three nights, you have been lying in wait for me, hidden in your puddle, buried under the sand, only your big eyes sticking out like bubbles. You ate my father, my mother, and you wanted to devour me. You, my mother, who escaped all the way to the stars, see, I killed your enemy, the one who seduces my father, bewitches him, clings to his neck, to his waist and steals his pay from him. My mother who escaped all the way to the stars, come down and wash my face, wring the facecloth inside my ears. Your little ones chased from their father's bed, banished, whipped by the octopus, were imploring you, at night, their teeth were chattering, their knees covered with dried blood, kneeling in the manure. O mother, come down, so that I can sit on your belly, your hands holding my hips. Men look at me on the street, gold shines in their hands. O mother, come and take us. See my squashed foot : a jeep, at night, knocked me down, the soldiers are laughing, they're gobbling up black grapes ; the lieutenant grips the gear stick between his thighs, the soldiers tap on his shoulders, I scream, writhing on the sand, my foot caught under the wheel. The lieutenant orders the driver to stop, the soldiers to get off and lift the jeep, the driver moves back, I scream, the soldiers jump in the jeep, my bones crack.

— My name is Tijena.

— What were you doing at night, outside ? Stealing ?

— The octopus was beating me, it ate me with its eyes. I was hungry.

— You are given to eat...

— So that we stay alive to inform.

— See how his lips shine, and his teeth. Move off, you and your squashed foot. Go and get some treatment in one of your underground hospitals.

— Madam, they're all going to die in the caves ; at night, it's filled with corpses making love. My mother, strangle me, kill me, tie me on your back. Come down, grab me by my injured foot, carry me away, upside down like when I came out of you.

The child lies upon the dead and quivering octopus, the sun strikes his forehead, little blue pebble, stops the blood at the shoulders, at the wrists, at the

knees.

Emilienne and Serge walk on the cuttlebones, on the pieces of bark smeared with salt and sea foam ; in front of the cave, old men lying down, they move their bare legs when Emilienne touches them. Between their legs, trails of sperm wet the white sand. A little girl is digging tunnels under those trails :

— They don't even hear the footsteps of those eating any more.

— Let's go, Serge, or let's die here, among those dead bodies, let's die the same death as theirs, pull off your bandages, tear my skirt, I abandon you, I lie down here to die next to that old man.

At night, under the wind, the rising sand gradually covers us up every night : huge octopuses suck up the sand, push it away, but we are already dead and cold ; the old man has smashed the bones of his leg, rolling over me, his head jumped on my breast, his lips opened up against my throat.

— I don't even wish to die any more neither to command action, make blood or sperm gush out, I do not know height, width, tears, wind, sea, melancholy of the perfect centuries any more ; mute are the mouths, blind are the eyes. O God, thou who descendest in the middle of History, leaving in the shadows of lashes and marble, the ancient men, thou who, in thy wisdom, in the brutality of thy decision, actest, bad expert on men's History, and rapest the Earth, broken loose from thy hands, heating it, burning it so that it splits, explodes within thy hands, and thou livest again in every living thing ; thou appearest and I suffer ; thou resistest me in everything that lives. O God, thy Creation is growing old ; we watch it die in awe. Burn, burn the Earth, fix us for ever in that fire, throw our shapes against nothingness ; burn this Earth that was our shelter against your terror ; water, palms used to protect us against your gaze and your amorous motions ; your hand tried to reach us, as we ran in the virgin forests or sought refuge under the nets in the sweat of love ; for thee, we roll ourselves on the sheets, mouth half-opened like crawl swimmers ; our heart throbs ; on our bellies throbs the liquor of sacrifice, all around, feathers fly in the golden air, stick to the sweat of our knees, cocks crow under the bed. Emilienne, don't let your leg drag on the tiled floor, the cock would tear your foot, he lifts the bared nerves with his beak, dust, fallen sand stick to the blood, blood stops the sunbeams and takes the colour of gold ; on the window pane swarming with bees and flies at its corners, children apply their pink tongue, looking down towards your half-open cunt ; outside on the river, on the canal, between the orphanage's high brick walls, slide smokes, incenses, foams, and the coats of buffaloes, ô abandoned both of them, neck hardened by the wind, head covered with flowers, lying on the surface of the black and icy water, and their back brushed by fish and sages, let's go down towards the sun ; soaking wet we dash forward on the beach, we roll in the white sand, and, smeared with sand, and salt, and froth, we serve a sacrifice of blood and feathers, clad in linen, skin on fire under the linen, genitals small and hard, salt becoming white at the corner of our

lips in the declining sun.

You ; I am blind, take my hands, push me into the fire ; sweat runs on your hips, blood envelopes your fingers like a net ; wind frees the smoke of the forests. Cover me with gold, pour basins of gold coins over my head, anoint me.

— Throw me alive to the hounds, at the foot of the walls, may all the oil and the bodies of the assault fall upon my chest, may all the rifles be crossed over my belly, may the soldiers' knees press upon my hips.

— But, you are not a whore. May wind dry the desire on all my body. God, give me a sceptre. Make my father, the governor, die and I command in his place, and the rebels obey me and I sentence all the priests to death. For me, long rides across the burnt forests ; the tyres of the jeeps and half-track vehicles digging the ash. For me and my soldiers, the trial of rebel officers in the middle of the darkened yards, the smoke from the kitchens rising to the platform where I speak ; the judgment, the soldiers attacking their disarmed officers and tearing them open with their knives ; and the rain, coming from the summits, flows on the roofs and washes the blood on the paving stones, keeps the dogs away from the bodies cut to shreds ; the soldiers, inside their dark clubs, drink, embrace, dance head to head, sit by the window panes and watch the dead bodies shine under the sunny rain ; one of them goes out, gets closer to the bodies, bends over ; on the loins, the battledress bares the white skin, marked with freckles, he squats down, his hand brushes the torn belly, sinks in a pocket along the thigh, comes out with a lighter ; the soldier slips it in his pocket, he searches the corpse, his hand, often, meets blood at the bottom of the pockets, he gets up again, the battledress cloth, soaked, sticks to his body, rain streams in the folds mixed with blood — the soldier wipes his hand on his chest, on his hips — the soldier sniffs the rain, shakes his head and spits at the same time, like a swimmer ; the general, spared, but under suspicion, is a private in his escort : thus can he easily watch the joyous flesh of the soldiers and get abused by them when he touches it ; he dances with the post's soldiers, in the club : my guards are mixed with those. But I go down again towards Inamenas : ambassadors are waiting for me there ; in the leading half-track vehicle, the general on the seat, his rifle between the thighs, watches, his body shaken by the holes and the stones on the road, the soldier sitting opposite him, he waits for a shock or some brusque motion from the soldier, to open his unbuttoned fly ; a small fruit truck crosses our convoy, my jeep brushes the hedge of wild grapes ; a severed grape jumps on my thigh ; in the half-tracks, the soldiers standing up, leaning against the sheet iron, abuse the truck driver : their hardened cocks swell the battledress cloth and touches the sheet iron. The sky darkens, the smell of squashed grapes, rises, fills the lower part of the sky, throws us, me and my soldiers, at the bottom of the vehicles...

Emilienne takes Serge's arm again, lets her head lean on the boy's shoulder, then on his chest ; through the shirt, she can feel the medal and the

chain ; she rubs her cheek against the boy's chest :

— Your golden chain, I want to see it on the top of your naked body.

— My wound, may it open, may it bleed again, under your lips. Awaken my blood, your lips chase it on my body, it gathers, it rushes into my cock.

— Come, there, on the sand, under the tamarisk palms, let's make love by the sea, so that froth and surf flow between our embracing bodies and cover the sweat on our joined bellies, that the shadow of the clouds darken your back and your loins, and I, choking, chained up, I struggle on the sand, underneath you, like a wounded bird ; I see the insects run on the tamarisks' low and sandy boughs, fall on the snail shells and the pieces of bark, lift them and sink beneath them ; their feelers shine a few seconds in the sunbeams ; a lash winds around your loins, slaps, wet, burning, and you take me.

— My golden chain flows between your breasts, tears flow from your eyes, run on your temples, you smile and tilt your head on the sand, your cheeks grow hollow, blood moves up to the top of your body, your thighs quiver under mine, sperm slaps between your belly and mine, I bite your mouth, blood spurts on my teeth, the point of my hip hollows the edge of your belly, your hand pushes my face back, your tongue licks the blood on my teeth which I close, your tongue is caught, you scream, you spit, your saliva covers the lower half of my face, I pull your tongue sideways, towards the corner of the lips, O, eat me, eat, I slip inside you, I sink inside you by your wide open cunt, boy I enter in you, spit me out baby, keep me, eat me, I am your blood, your flesh, your desire, your hunger, I withdraw from your knees when you meet some boys, I swell the bottom of your belly. Your whole body is covered with my sperm, the dress that you slip on again, after getting up, while I still lie, naked, on my back, sticks to your hips, to your belly, to your breasts, to your back ; my wrists are crossed under my nape, you come above me, you pick up some sand, and you pour it gently on my cock, the sand, wet at once by the sperm, gradually covers up the softened cock ; you bend down and you stroke that humid sand, little animal, the little animal from the fields where is it hiding under its sand pile ?

Under the caress, it rises, pierces the sand, touches your fingers, you fall beside me, I roll over you, I drive my entire hand in the top of your soaked dress, my hand covers your breasts, moves up towards your shoulder, I roll, I tuck up your dress, and my hand, my fingers walk over your belly, palm covered by the fabric ; you groan ; your cheeks, swollen ; my hand warms up on the sweet swelling of your cunt ; your breasts pierce the dress, I kiss them, I pull the fabric, they spring up against my lips, I take them and I press them both against my cheeks ; you, with your hands, you stroke my hips, your fingers brush the root of my cock, become tangled in the wet locks ; then it strikes your hip, and beats against it, you laugh no more, I roll my body over yours, my cock hardened, burning, crushed between your thighs ; you breathe, everywhere your breathing rises, I set my lips, I bite your

blood, and your breath, your veins beat against my teeth, the root of my cock rests on the lips of your cunt, I rise a little, my cock drags between your thighs, then, like a magnet, your cunt snatches it.

— Burned alive, shaken, thrown against the sand, lifted up, beaten, torn, eaten by this veiled mouth, strangled, whitened, reddened, chilled, pushed, ripened, picked, devoured, sucked up, bound, unbound, whipped, soiled, mist leaning over me, sunny rain, fish between my legs, fish lying on my belly, your sperm slices my body in two, it rises to the chest, it runs in my shoulders, it burns me, it burns me... it seethes in my throat, you press my neck in order to keep it there, but it spurts under your fingers, and fills my mouth, you take my lips, and you suck from my mouth your own semen, made tepid ; after drinking you fall beside me on the sand, fingers parted because of the sperm and numbed by the embraces ; you spread your legs, and the sun enters between your thighs, where sweat and sperm are scintillating ; I do not move, I leave intact on my body the marks of the embrace and the shreds of my dress ; I spread my legs, and, leaping, you hold them parted with your hands and you bring your face towards my cunt, and you set your lips there ; I give a start, you squeeze my thighs between your fingers ; I rise on one elbow and with the other hand I stroke your damp palms ; your lips move up along the belly, your tongue sinks slightly inside my navel, your saliva covers it, your hands slide along my hips, envelop my breasts, clutch my armpits ; your body, heavy, wet, glistening, moves upwards along mine, your chest crushes my breasts, your jaw cracks on my eyes, your cock still taut drags on my belly, bathing in sweat, sperm and saliva ; my legs slacken ; my hands leaning on your thighs, try to push you back, my fingers brush your balls, which hang beneath your cock, warm, viscous ; I leave my hand in the hollow between the cock and the thigh, I let it snuggle up inside that childlike warmth ; then, under the caress, feeling my hand snuggled up, your cock stiffens exceedingly ; my hand strokes at the root, through the locks, then moves up along the muscle as far as the soft and purple tip, I take it in my hand, I press it gently, you stir over me, you groan, like an awoken sleeper, you weigh on me, my hand moves up behind the balls, sinks between your buttocks ; I hold you, my baby ; my arm folded, my elbow between your thighs, my hand on your loins, I make you slide on me as if I were bathing a baby ; little birds jump on your jeans half-buried in the sand.

— I bite your eyes, my teeth strike the hard place on your forehead between your eyes, my nostrils get crushed in your hair. I devour, I crunch the palms, the woods, the celluloid from our childhood.

You, without childhood, and I killing mine, we can love each other as if abandoned ; the wind is our heart, our heart now beats only between our thighs. We are wanted, but I kill my father, who sees me, and before he dies, I roll over you and I take you ; we slaughter, in the illuminated night, so many priests ; we throw the cardinal's disfigured body into the pond ; the fish, terror-stricken by the smell

of rotten blood, jump out of the pond ; I have a torch in one hand and with the other I hold your breasts ; we've freed the little castrati, they tear to pieces the black young man who used to guard them ; anger reddens their shorts between the thighs ; many die in the early morning ; dawn fumes over the shreds and puddles ; I walk in a pulp of blood, nerves, eyes, cut off penises, my feet sink inside like in a sludge filled with worms and frogs ; I walk looking down, the died out torch in my fist, a lump of anguish in my throat ; all those corpses to bury. But you, cheerful, in the guardroom, the soldiers lift you up, half-naked, in a dusty and soiled blanket, they throw you in the air, and, when you're down again, they thrust their hands at the bottom of the blanket, they touch, they strike your body, under the dazzling lamp ; soldiers from the guard, woken up, watch you, sitting on their bunk beds, blanket on their shoes and rifle between their thighs. You laugh when one of those throwing you in the air touches your breasts, or your cunt ; his hand has shaken the dusty lamp, and it is the same that covers your breast or your cunt, burning and dusty. But one of them knocks the others down and carries you to the lower bunk, he lies over you, all armed, all dressed, his cartridge belts crush your belly, his mouth smells of wine and meat, he rises a little, his parted legs drag on each side of the straw mattress, unbuttons his battledress, pulls his cock out, and drives it into your cunt.

From the post's watchtower, a sentry sees a priest running away, beyond the barbed wire, at once he aims the searchlight at him and shouts : all — except the one lying on you — rush out of the guardroom, leap over the sandbags, run across the meadow of ashes, slide under the barbed wire, shout, fingers vibrating on their lips ; the priest runs to the right, to the left, they catch him, make him lie on the ash, take out their penknives and cut his head off, throw it beyond the beam of the searchlight, in the bamboos ; then, they pull off the body's clothes, gird their loins, and their brows with shreds of the cassock, tear the penis off and the eldest hangs it to his belt ; ash fumes along the body ; the sentry, in the watchtower, quivers joyfully, his hands shake on the protection sheet, the guards return to the post, under the watchtower, they draw aside with their shoulders the branches of the eucalypti, they sing, insects, drawn by the searchlights, strike the guards' foreheads and eyes. Dance, dance, scream, howl around me, whistle, drink, tear off your shirts, bite them, flies, bite the light and the fire, throw your shirts in the dust and trample, trample the sweat falling from your cheeks. Meanwhile, the soldier lying on you searches your belly, your eyes shine when you tilt your head backwards on the bloodstained pillow, but immediately the soldier takes your lips and brings your head back under his face ; rats run on the sandbags, a jackal, then two, then ten, trot towards the priest's body, they are dripping with water and slime, the river is in spate, the swamp moves back as far as the barbed wires ; the post's blankets are damp, the soldiers warm themselves up around me, waddle, the light helmet pressed against the thighs ; the general, leaning against the post

door, watches them, I can see the folds of his battledress, on the thighs, swell and radiate under the pressure of the cock. Fight, tear each other, sacrifice yourselves before me, slaughter yourselves by my feet, turn your throats, offer them to the knife ; the blade is dripping with rain, the trucks start off behind the eucalypti ; soldiers standing on the bodies, prick them with their rifles ; in the streets of the lower city, children smeared with blood, grapple on to the trucks, the headlights dazzle the cats and dogs, an old woman comes out of her hut, with her cats clinging to her tatters, she comes to me, the cats are dead and their teeth are stuck in the old woman's flesh, their slit throat is black, red insects are caught in the dried blood ; the river, at the bottom of the district, rolls bodies of priests and rebel officers. I hate you, I see your blood, I see your heart. The feast I offer to your souls, is illuminated by blood, you do not recognize me, I've wrung my own heart, I've burnt it. I have no need for a heart, take it, priest, you who inflated it, eat it for lack of my cock, which makes you quiver and obsessed you like Jesus-Christ. Eat my heart, my cock, my brain. I keep my teeth and my hands to capture and devour ; my mother, why did you not abandon me ?

— I hang to your shoulders, my belly against yours, but you keep your hands raised and your eyes gaze vacantly. I take your knees, wrath makes them tremble. Look what they've done to me ; but, while they penetrated me, the fish escaped into the entrails of the earth.

Illiten runs in the mountains, at noon he reaches the summit, falls at the feet of the sentries, at the cave's mouth. Béja, who was sleeping, jumps, rushes out of the cave and picks up Illiten ; two sentries carry the chief to a camp bed, at the far end of the cave, near a window ; Béja opens his mouth and blows into it ; the woman brings fresh water in a big glass, Béja lifts Illiten's nape and pours a bit of water in his mouth ; Illiten opens his eyes, sees the squatting woman, and, turning his back to her, he strokes her nape ; they all go outside, the woman holding the glass, as soon as they passed the cave's mouth, is caught by a sentry and kissed violently on the neck ; Béja picks the thistle thorns from Illiten's feet and hands :

— They tortured you ?

— Yes, but that's nothing. I'm used to it.

— Are you in pain ?

— I saw the governor. He should not be murdered. As long as he stays alive, war drags on in our favour. With him dead, the general would rule, and behind him, the extremist officers. Warn the platoons. Our fight is drawing to its end. I'm exhausted. All the spilled blood makes me feel like throwing up ; take my place, far from my eyes the sight of our freedom. Let me sleep. And, if you wish to, kill me during my sleep.

Illiten rolls on the side, puts his head in his fists and falls asleep.

Béja sees, on the wrists, the marks of the bonds : « I will be chief. »

The wind pushes the sun into the cave : « I will capture the city. »

The sentry knocks down the woman against the rock : « I will kill my lieutenants. »

Takes her mouth with his beak : « I will govern alone. »

Again, in the afternoon, the masses revolt ; leaders, arrived the day before from the slums, carrying orders from Béja, wander through the streets, the courtyards and the stairs.

They go and slaughter the madams and the pimps in the brothels, slaughter the men sprawled on the mattresses with the boys, slaughter the soldiers mating with the women ; the people, outside, yell at each murder ; boys and whores escape, the crowd carries them in triumph : they still have some sperm on the knees and lips : pimps, madams, clients knocked down on the tiled floor, on the mattresses, are still rattling, the crowd carries them into the common hall, and exhibits them on the bar, at the place where the first petting used to take place, over the empty glasses, the first twisting of the wrist, the first embrace ; bodies are slashed with knives, corkscrews, soiled with spittle, urine, the drawers are pulled open, the money stolen ; the boys and the whores direct the looting ; in a cellar, the crowd discovers two young boys, naked, bound together by the foot, marked at the corner of the lips by a little silver ring ; in a small room, adjoining the cave, eight naked men, stiff against the wall, are being stroked by a boy stripped to the waist, — he wanks them one after the other, his wrists soiled, attracting coal dust, shine in the shimmering semi-darkness ; the crowd invades the room, covers the men, the boy escapes, crawling between the legs ; when the crowd withdraws, the men collapse along the wall, in the pools of blood ; the crowd captures the struggling boy, his torso, his face become covered with blood ; the other whores come and grab him, and whisper in his ear, but his eyes still gaze vacantly ; upstairs, the already drunk leaders, are mating with the whores, the crowd orders the boys to reveal the hideouts ; the boy leads the crowd, but when he has pointed a finger, the crowd knocks him down, tramples him, and throws itself on the money or on the food supplies.

Towards the middle of the afternoon, the crowd filled with money, wine, semolina, forces the boys to undress, to mate with the whores ; only one boy refuses, two men, out of the crowd, order the other whores to slit his throat ; blood gushes out, the crowd wakes up, laps up the glasses ; the boy, in the fray, escapes naked, he runs through the slums, he goes to the stream where Kment is sleeping, the hungry children yapping around him, the boy bends over : « Kment, Kment. »
The boy wakes up :

— Kment, Kment, come quick Béja must be warned before the soldiers come.

He whispers in Kment's ear.

Kment gets up, shakes his tatters :

— Go to Giauhare, she'll dress you up.

The boy looks down. Kment leaves. The boy stays standing among the children, he breathes the open air, he strokes his arms, his chest, his belly, his thighs. The children escort him to the laundry shop, he enters :

— Kment told me you'd dress me up.

— Come over here. I'll try and find something for you.

She bends over a basket, he comes behind her, in the half light, he has a slight hard-on, the young girl looks back, sees the taut cock, blushes :

— Here, take this.

She holds out a pair of jeans, worn-out at the knees, and at the buttocks, the boy takes it, turns away, raises one leg, slips them on, buttons them up, then he turns back smiling to the young girl ; she looks down, the boy gives a look around, in the baskets and on the hangers, clothes everywhere, uniforms he's familiar with : those of the civil servants, soldiers, officers who come to caress him and get fucked by him ; he goes to a hanger with an uniform ; he takes the uniform's legs, he spreads them apart, and, moving his mouth close to the angle between the thighs, he spits twice.

— What were you doing in that house, I didn't see you any more.

— Kment knows.

— What were you doing in that house, Draga ?

— I was drinking.

— Where's Kment ?

— He went to see Béja.

— One day he'll get caught.

— No, he knows the military. I too, I too...

His voice becomes low, hissing ; he comes close to the girl, with a little laughter in the throat, he turns her around :

— Leave me alone, Draga, leave me alone, you smell funny, leave me alone.

— It's a smell you're going to like.

He sets his lips on the young girl's nape :

— Kment doesn't smell like that, leave me alone, your hands are wet.

He grabs her by the waist, she struggles, her back warmed by the boy's chest, Draga's head moves down along her cheek, the boy's hair brushes her eyelids ; Draga's hands move up along the breasts, shake them gently ; Giauhare resists no more, her eyes fill with tears ; the boy whispers gently in her ear and the voice hisses in the saliva :

— I smell the man, the boy, over there in the house, men, and women would bend over me, choose me, throw the money on the counter, grab me by the shoulder, and order me to do this, or that, stroke me here, or there... my nape

resting on the straw mattress, my knees spread apart...

Giauhare gives a start.

— My free hand would rise, search inside the clothes, laid on the chair, the madam wants the money, one snatches the bread, if one keeps the money one gets whipped, one can't sleep. A woman, in the afternoon, sends her chauffeur ; inside the car, the soldier caresses my belly.

— My husband is reviewing troops. Would you like to have fun ? Show me what you can do.

... Once I'm naked before her, other women dash out from the wardrobe, screaming, they throw themselves at me ; then, when all of us are exhausted, a soldier comes in, he removes the soiled carpets, sheets and curtains ; he comes back carrying a tray with some tea : I grab the bread, the soldier remains standing behind me, the women scream, the soldier falls upon me, he squeezes my head between his thighs, I bite the cloth of his battledress, I bite his buttocks ; the women squat down, grab my cock, and milk it ; my buttocks slide on the sofa's velvet ; one woman moves her cup close to my cock and dips it slightly in the tepid tea, then she holds out the cup to the other women, lays the cup on the wooden floor ; the squatting women lap up the tea from the cup, one of them rises, her lips shining :

— What's your name ?

— Draga.

She moves her mouth close to my cock, she takes it between her lips, she licks it, she sucks it, her chin rolling on my balls.

— Your mother is alive ?

— No, she died two years ago.

— Choked in a brothel. She was a whore. And your father ?

— He died as a resistant.

— My husband is the one who killed him. One evening he pushed him here in this room, in fetters ; I sucked him, like I'm sucking you now, then my husband brained him in front of me, on this sofa, banging his head against the wood of the sofa, with me still sucking him until the cock grew soft and fell inside my mouth. Your cock tastes the same...

She looks up towards me, kisses my cock ; the door opens.

The officer comes in :

— Take away those soiled curtains and sheets from the vestibule.

The soldier opens his thighs, releases my head and goes out ; the officer comes closer to me, takes my chin, raises it :

— He's a boy from Madame Lulu ?

— He was chosen by Raisko.

— Did you wash him ?

— No, Raisko took him by our order, between two clients. Look, marks

of embraces all over his body.

— You'll give him a chocolate bar before sending him back.

The women, forehead touching the floor, blow, howl.

The officer, with his thumb, lifts my upper lip, hits my teeth, rolls my lower lip, drives his nail between my teeth :

— Madame Lulu feeds them well.

... His rangers brush my bare feet ; I'm cold, it's the evening, the tea is cold where my cock is being dipped again ; the soldiers come back ; their hands feel cold on my shoulders and on my belly ; the officer walks to the far end of the room, he leans with his elbow against the chimney's marble mantelpiece, he bends, face over the aquarium and blows on the water, the fish slide at the bottom of the water, hide in the seaweed and under the pebbles ; a little finger plunges under my cock, lifts it up and makes it jump ; a window opens, and I hear the cries of the seabirds ; a woman is advancing on all fours towards my sweater and my jeans, rolled around a foot of the tea table, she bites them, she unrolls them, she drags them around the room, she lays them down, she nibbles the angle between the thighs, wets it with her saliva, pushes it before her mouth ; the officer watches her with a tired look, slightly red-eyed ; I believe they're going to send me away, I stretch and part my thighs a bit, I haven't slept for three nights, we don't sleep, the end of the war keeps the men awake, fear pushes them between our thighs. But, the women pull at my legs, make me slide on the wooden floor, turn me over on my back, part my buttocks, fight over me ; my cheek against the floor I watch them lower their mouths towards my buttocks, I feel their tongues search between my buttocks, lick the soft membrane, my crushed cock wets the floor ; the officer walks, the wooden floor creaks against my cheek ; here he is in front of me, he moves his boot close to the nape of my neck, he strikes, he raises his boot, he crushes my ear and my cheek, the tip of his dust-covered shoe tucks up my nostrils ; I keep silent, I don't move.

He pulls his cigarette from his mouth, blows the ash on my back, I give a start ; on the mantelpiece, behind the aquarium, I see the picture of a child with close-cropped hair ; the soldier is standing in front of the window, the officer removes his foot, I raise myself up a little, but a woman grabs my wrists and holds them turned over behind my back :

— Take the boy back to Madame Lulu's.

The soldier comes closer to the women, they scream, they lie over me, bathe me with tears, saliva and sweat and tea :

— Leave us the boy a few minutes more.

A woman hangs to the soldier's waist, kisses his thighs ; he pushes her away with both hands, she pulls at his belt, thus baring the soldier's belly and hip ; the others suck my back, my hair, my loins, my eyelids, they turn me over, I pretend to be dead, they suck my nipples, my armpits, my navel, three mouths

suck my cock ; two mouths suck the tips of my fingers :

— Take the boy back, pay Madame Lulu.

... The soldier bends over, grabs me by the shoulders, pulls me on the sofa, the women cling to my belly, the soldier pulls, the women hold my thighs, the soldier snatches me from under their lips, and their breasts, my feet slide under their breasts, he sits me on the sofa, pulls my clothes from the woman's mouth, lays them near me, on the sofa, I get up I slip my sweater on. While I raise my arms, a woman dashes forward and kisses my armpits, bites beneath the hair wet with sweat and pulls at it. A tear squirts out on my eyelid, another woman drinks it up at once.

I slip my jeans on, the woman's saliva wets my thighs and my cock ; the women get up, the soldier puts his hand on my shoulder, he pushes me towards the door, I squat down, I lace up my sandals, the officer comes up to me, his boot brushes my hip, the jeans' folds stretched on the joint of my thigh, I get up again, the soldier pushes me before him, in the corridor, on the tiled floor shine the trails of sperm and saliva from the curtains and the sheets :

— Take a chocolate bar from the kitchen, and give it to the boy.

The soldier stops me at the kitchen door, I lean against the door frame, legs crossed ; the soldier opens a cupboard, takes the chocolate, holds it out to me, I put it in my pocket ; once in the car, the soldier takes the streets on the outskirts of the city, his automatic rifle is lain on the seat, between us. The soldier looks in the rearview mirror :

— Those women are disgusting, you, you're a boy, but you're handsome.

— Leave me, leave me alone.

... The soldier stops the engine, the car is hidden under tall dry grass, my heart is throbbing, I slip my hand outside the window and I pick a cornflower, I hold it out to the soldier, but he grabs my fist, he turns it over, he lays me on the seat, my head between his thighs, his other hand strokes my thighs and my cock through the cloth, his hand sinks between my thighs, under the cock, moves upwards again under the buttocks, and he thus draws me towards him, his fist clutching mine against the top of the seat.

— Leave me alone, you didn't pay.

He laughs, weighs on me, his mouth nibbling and wetting my knee ; the milk from the grass dribbles on the pane, the soldier's chest weighs on my back ; cockcrows, noise of the engines ; his burning mouth moves up along my thighs as far as the belly, then leaps on my mouth and chokes it, the soldier's eyelashes beat on my cheek then on my eyelashes, my head rolls on the side, my heart hurts, blood withdraws from my lips, the soldier takes fright, he lets me go, he pushes me against the door, he drives off, he throws the car along the white path, he brakes in front of the brothel, gets out, opens my door, pulls me by the shoulder, he

supports me as far as the hall ; men drinking at the bar, turn their head towards me ; the soldier drags me before Madame Lulu, the men, when I pass by, stroke my cheeks, my belly ; Madame Lulu presses me against her thighs, the soldier gives her the banknotes :

— Has he been a good boy, my little Draga ?

Madame Lulu pushes me in front of her thighs and thus comes closer to the soldier, who holds out his hands and takes Madame Lulu's hips, her thighs quiver against my loins ; when the soldier goes away, he has some red on the cheek and on the root of his uncovered shoulder. Madame Lulu opens my lips and pours some alcohol in my mouth, a man is looking at me, sitting at a table, in a dark corner of the hall, he raises one hand, the other hand is gloved, Madame Lulu lets me go, slaps my buttocks and points at the man looking down and smoothing down his hair. I walk towards the table, the man's cloak is covering the black seat ; but, once I am seated on his knees, my arms around his quivering neck, and he starts unbuttoning me, the chocolate, suddenly, melts on my thigh, the man's hand lingers on the part of the jeans stuck to the thigh by the chocolate :

— You love me already.

But the smell of chocolate rises to my lips, and his eyes close and his hand quivers while unbuttoning me.

... The young girl is bending under the boy, her hair parted under Draga's lips ; the boy takes the breasts in his hands, lifts them to his mouth, his head buried between the young girl's shoulder and elbow :

— Leave me alone, Draga.

But the boy grips her more tightly, his fingers plunging deep under the young girl's breasts :

— Kment too used to eat at Madame Lulu's.

The boy sets his lips on the nipples, he sucks, his neck crossed over the girl's ; his hand tucks up the dress, and, gripping the cloth, moves up along the knees, the thigh, the hand lets go of the dress, which unrolls over the boy's wrist and forearm, as far as the elbow, moves upwards under the dress, sinks between the thighs, the palm covers the cunt, quivering beneath the brown mop of hair, the cunt swells under the boy's palm, opens up, the girl's head lolls back behind the boy's shoulder, blood withdraws from her lips, the tongue beating against the teeth and pushing the saliva between the lips. The breasts quiver inside the boy's free hand, his elbow leaning on the girl's navel and slipping in the sweat ; the boy pushes his belly and his hips forward, and his cock against the young girl's buttocks and at the same time he presses on the girl's cunt ; he feels his hands push the girl's lower abdomen and touch his own cock ; he nibbles the girl's ear, drives his tongue inside the lobe, the boy's saliva runs down the girl's neck ; her eyes are shut, the boy withdraws his hand from under the dress and presses it on the girl's mouth, the hand is hot, wet, little black locks coil around the fingers, the

boy stoops, holding back the girl under the shoulder, he knocks her down among the baskets ; the girl, half asleep, covers her breasts with the top of her dress, the cloth is damp ; the boy kneels down and, his elbows striking the wicker of the baskets, he lies, stretched out at full length, over the girl ; he stirs over her ; under the folds, the skin is quivering.

Their sweat seeps and mingles, through the pieces of cloth ; the girl's hair is stuck on her forehead by the boy's saliva, the foam shines then fades : the boy feels the girl's cunt rise gently under his cock, the boy nibbles the hem at the top of the dress, he makes it slide between his teeth, his lips flatten the down between the breasts and wet it ; the girl groans, her hands cling to the boy's arms, her legs slowly part but the boy parts his, squeezes the girl's thighs.

— Get up and drive my mother out of this house, drive her out, but without hitting her. Get up.

The boy gets up, his cock taut under the jeans, the skin of his chest crumpled — sweat furrowing the filth — he pushes the door, says to the old woman : « Go away, your daughter is throwing you out, she loves her own body, go away. »

The boy comes closer, catches the old woman by the shoulder and pushes her towards the garden door, opens the garden door :

— Hurry up and leave, your daughter is waiting for me, legs spread open, she might catch cold.

The boy grabs a piece of bread on the oven, he puts it in the old woman's hand ; she, speechless, lets herself be pushed down the stairs, the sun seizes her ; the boy comes back, he lies on the girl again, she throws her arms around the neck of the boy who, one hand slipped under her belly, unbuttons himself, brushes the flaps of the jeans aside, but the girl, with both her hands pulls them from under the boy's belly until they come out and hang along his hips, thus baring the boy's lower abdomen and cock and his mop of hair mingles with the girl's and the contact causes a muffled little laugh, sometimes ringing, that runs through the steam, shrouds their faces ; the boy's cock, bent back over the girl's, cracks ; the boy raises himself up a bit, the cock unbends at once and its tip feels its way against the rim of the dripping labia, slips between those labia, plunges entirely ; the part of the cock remaining outside swells, the veins beat under the stretched skin : the girl whines, rattles, tears gush from the corners of her eyes ; her cunt swallows the boy's cock, hard, vibrant, sharp, the boy crushes the girl's breasts under his sweaty chest.

The palms, outside, move up again. Kment is running across the mountain, he joins his hands over his head to shield it from the sun.

Draga now, raises himself up, breaks loose from the girl, his cock jumps out of the girl's cunt, and drags for a while over her mop of hair ; the girl licks her dried-up lips, her marble eyelids tremble under Draga's fingers ; cold grips both

youths, runs through their veins and on the trails of sperm and saliva on their bodies :

— Where's my mother ? Why did you drive her out ? I was crazy. Let me rejoin her. Go away, you.

The girl raises herself up on her elbows but Draga holds her on the ground, he writhes again over her, stirs his belly, hollows it, swells it, on the girl's belly, the breasts roll under his chest ; their knees collide, the kneecaps slide over each other :

— Let me go, I don't desire you any more. Go away. Let me hide in the shade. Go, dry yourself in the sun, while the soldiers shoot my mother on the road.

The boy's fingers cling to the girl's mop then to her cunt,

— You're mine. I will tear, burn all the linen and tie up your hands, and I will carry you away to paint you and deliver you to men, women, beasts. I get up, I set fire to the linen. I paint your cunt blue. Gold and silver flow in my hands, banknotes swell my underpants, the printer's ink melts on my thigh.

With one hand he snatches a match from the ironing board, strikes it and throws it in the baskets ; the linen catches fire, the girl screams ; her wrists pinned against the flooring by the boy, vibrate, the fingers bend back, the nails claw the boy's wrists, she spits at Draga's face, saliva runs down the boy's eyebrows, his nostrils, along his ears, down to the throat.

Draga bursts out laughing, he looks down, presses his forehead very strongly against the girl's and holds her head straight, his knee then moves up along the girl's thigh, sinks between the thighs, thrusts his dripping cock but the entrance to the labia is dry, the girl's anger hardens it, the boy's knee burrows, digs, rolls, pulls the cock towards the belly, crushes it under the navel, the girl whimpers, cries.

— Kment will kill you, he'll kill you.

— He will strike you with his foot, you'll be washing him at the horse pond with the other whores when he comes down from the mountain. Already you will have known a hundred men. Like me, you'll be dead inside.

He kisses her neck, his teeth bite the vein on the neck ; fire blazes up around them, the crepuscular scent of their sweat intoxicates them. Draga kicks away the blazing tatters writhing on the floor, thrown by the breeze against their bodies ; the flames cast reflections and shadows, on Draga's back, loins, buttocks and legs ; the linen tumbles down, the baskets collapse, smoke comes out of the house, the sun maintains it above the roof ; the crowd, in the brothel, notices the smell of the smoke, the children run around the house ; the boy gets up, takes the girl in his arms, and leaps from the flames, into the garden.

They flee towards the river, he, suddenly taut, his limbs raised like spurs ; she, covered with ashes, holding the boy's hand, her breasts firm in spite of the run.

The crowd recoils in front of the laundry shop ; the mother sat down by the river, the piece of bread on her belly ; a herd is crossing the river ; in the deserted brothel, boys and whores are picking up their clothes, crowding in the madame's room, pulling out the drawers, fighting over the silk fabrics, the bearer bonds, the money, they break the framed photographs, the trinkets. On the wall, a coloured drawing : soldiers playing with the girls and the boys, under Madame Lulu's gaze, sitting behind the cash register ; on the top of the drawing, in a garland of breasts and cocks, the inscription : « To Madame Lulu, mistress of our bodies. »

The boys hang bras, black, pink, made of lace, to their chest, they walk on tip-toe, twist their bodies, swagger and standing in line, touch each other, strike each other with their buttocks ; the girls, sprawled on the bed, embrace each other with cries of queens in heat, tear the sheets and chew the shreds and drive them, thus chewed and wet with saliva, between their thighs.

The girls take Madame Lulu's dresses, pull off their working clothes, slip the dresses on, stand before the bathroom mirrors, apply scent and make-up on themselves ; the boys take the clothes of Madame Lulu's lovers, slip them on and look at themselves in the mirrors, standing behind the girls and their hands on the girls' hips. The smallest ones drag the trousers and the jackets. All are walking on their still wet working clothes, trampling them ; in their excitement, some girls hurt themselves on Madame Lulu's hair-slides and brooches ; some boys, on her lovers' tiepins ; some others come up from the cellar, all bloody from the mutilations they inflict to the slaughtered men in the storeroom ; they bring back some wine that they drink from the bottle ; to the ones drinking, arms raised, the girls tickle the armpits or the cock, the bottle falls and breaks at the boy's feet ; little drunken children drag among the fragments of glass the bodies of Madame Lulu and the male customers ; they riddle them with glass, spit, wank over their mouths ; they tuck up the madame's dress, squat down and draw on her belly circular trails with their sperm ; dance by the dead bodies, sperm still gushing out of their cocks ; dance on one foot while raising their arms ; a boy snatches a baby's high chair from the backroom — Madame Lulu had bought a baby and used to deliver him to men and women who polluted and sodomized him —, holds it at arm's length and whirls it above Madame Lulu, then he strikes the body with it ; one foot pierces the right eye, the same foot, bloody and gluey, staves in the cunt ; blood spurts out, spatters the pulled out tufts ; the boy knocks the chair down, he holds it in position by its feet, he presses the elaborate back on the body's mouth, he lifts the chair up and, his foot on the body between the breasts, he smashes the jaw : he takes a small knife hanging under his armpit — a defence against too passionate clients — by a little string tied around the shoulder, squats down and slashes the lips, the jaws, the nose, the forehead ; the girls, squeezed in the madame's lamé dresses, turn round and round between the dead bodies, the top of their bodies and

dresses soaked with wine ; along the wall, the girls and the boys set fire to the seats, the benches, the tables : flames are licking the soiled walls — in spite of Madame Lulu's instructions for cleanliness and decency — ; the boy rises from the dead body, he takes the matches, sets fire to the counter, then, helped by the other boys, he throws the dead body on the counter and all, their face and belly illuminated, watch the pyre devour the dead body.

The slums are covered with smoke ; the soldiers are finishing their nap ; officers and civilian chiefs are resting, reading, making love in the higher part of the city or bending at the door of their sleeping children.

Kment reaches the top of the mountain ; Béja covers his shoulders with a blanket, the boy tells his story and points at the smoke. The laundry shop collapses, sparks, embers shoot out and burn the children watching from too near, fascinated, the flames feeding their famished belly ; the crowd returns to the brothel ; a group of men and women capture a boy and a girl, gag them, carry them to the higher part of the slums, on the fourth floor of an unfinished building ; the rest of the crowd scatters ; the madame's recruiters, warned by the runaways, leave their observing and capturing posts and run towards the brothel where drunken girls and boys play client and whore ; the recruiters encircle the brothel ; push the windows, and jump into the hall ; they overpower the boys and the girls, who resist weakly, chain them to the backroom's thin columns, put out the fires and, threatening them with revolvers and knives, order two boys to carry the ashes and the bodies away.

The boys, head dangling on the shoulder, eyes half-shut, sweep the ashes, push them through the backroom, to the garden door : the ash, raised by the push of the brooms and the resistance of the air, is beaten back on the boys, sticks to their knees soaked with wine and sperm, and blackens their chest wet with cooled-off sweat ; ashes, charred furniture are thrown on the rubbish piles where usually are thrown too-brutally deflowered young whores.

The recruiters gradually set all the women free, order them to undress ; the women drop the stolen clothes and go up to the rooms :

— Put back in place what you've taken, tidy away, wash the walls and the tiled floor, smooth out the sheets, get naked, the boys will go and find some men for you, Madame Lulu was a nasty woman, you'll be much happier with us.

The girls go up to the rooms, the recruiters unbind the other boys, push them out in the street, stand under the door, revolver on the hip : the boys, heavy with wine, wander in the middle of the street, — dust sticks to their bare legs — thumbs thrust in the underpants ; a worker appears at the end of the street, then three young men ; the boys see them, the one with the knife under the armpit walks towards the worker, the sun has dried the madame's blood on his hands and under his nails.

The worker sees the boy, licks his lips, the boy comes closer, puts his

hand on the worker's haversack, pulls the bottle and sucks it, the worker strikes the boy, the wine seethes on the boy's lips, the worker takes the bottle back, the boy wipes his hands on his hips, thus making his underpants slip on his thighs, baring the top of the cock and the hair, he whispers in the man's ear : « If you want women, have a look up there. »

The worker looks up : at Madame Lulu's window, a girl has tucked up her dress as far as the breasts and pressed her belly and her half-opened cunt against the pane ; the worker looks back, the three boys join him ; the boy clings to them, drinks from their bottles ; the four men have hard-ons under their overalls ; the boy drags them by the belt as far as the brothel door ; the recruiters hide in the backroom : a boy climbs over the garden wall, the recruiters see him, they dash forward, grab the boy's foot then the leg and make him fall on the ravaged shrubs, they drag him by the leg as far as the tool shed, open a hatch, push the boy before them, two recruiters go down with the boy ; the others return to the backroom, the girls are sprawled under the men, at the foot of the indoor staircase, the couples are quivering against the panelling like cockroaches smeared with wet ash ; a boy goes from one to another and arouses them with his feet or the broom's hair ; the two recruiters push the boy inside the secret underground passage, here they are in the storeroom, the boy trembles, he screams, throws himself against the wall, arms stretched out sideways ; his wide open eyes are rolling, shining in the semi-darkness, the slaughtered men's blood laps under his feet, the recruiters come closer, the boy runs to a corner, the recruiters pull out their knives, the boy runs along the wall, squats down, crawls, lifts with his forehead the hip of a slaughtered man, penetrates under the heap of bloody corpses being whipped by the recruiters, comes out again from between the thighs, gets on his feet, runs again, huddles in the corners ; the recruiters leave, lock up the storeroom door, shout from behind the door :

— We shall not kill you.

The boy goes to sit under the basement window, head on his knees, his bloody feet crossed on the mud floor.

... My mother hits me, the weasel smells the money hidden in my underpants, she wants to take it, I raise my little knife and I bleed her behind the ear, she utters a little sighing cry and collapses against me. Shit.

We are dirty, the soldiers grab Elö, plunge him in the horse pond, mummy is buried under the manure pile, dogs, cats eat rats on her nose, between her thighs ; Draga waves his fist in the madam's back, Kment works by day, Elö jumps on the soldiers' arms, the madame strokes a captain between the thighs, the bars of medals sparkle under the lamp, Draga is happy, his throat quivers, he beckons to me with his lips and eyes, I am leaning against the hand rail : « Madame Lulu gives you to the captain tonight. Go away, I'll replace you, he's a brute ! »

... I walk up the stairs again, on the landing the palms caress my bare

hips ; in the Spring, rats, dogs, vultures pulled away the manure, I can see my mother's corpse, the weasel mellowed by the thaw ; manure has preserved her well, only the cunt and the lips have putrefied ; the liquefied eyes stir inside the sockets, the soldiers throw stones at the corpse, the flies vibrate, rise to our windows, settle on our lips, at night.

I'm in love with Ismène. When her head jumps on the latrine's steps, and her undone hair soaks in the shit, and a man squatting on her makes her drunk, she is beautiful.

In the early morning, I go down to fetch her, boys and girls are asleep, dead drunk on the tiled floor, in the corridor, in the backroom, in the half-open latrine and doors beating in the wind of dawn, drunk, dripping with wine, sperm, their mouth half-open, lying on their back or on their belly, shrivelled up on their side, in the position the last clients of the night left them in ; I look for my sweet Ismène and when I've found her, I take her in my arms, she's as beautiful as ever, her hair stuck to her forehead, the down of her thighs flattened, blackened by sweat, she purrs against my chest, I kiss her cheeks, I wipe the filth off her lips, I carry her to the boys' room, I lay her by my side on the straw mattress.

... The other boys are asleep, purring in the moonlight ; the underpants are quivering on the line stretched across the room ; Draga holds Elö against him, all the boys are naked on the torn mattresses ; the nearest boy to the window, is sleeping with his hand between his thighs, straw and horsehair stick out in tufts from between his thighs, mixed with the black hair of the cock ; seagulls soar in the illuminated night, veer by the open window, the breath from their wings brushes the down and the tufts of horsehair ; all the boys have their head shaved, only I have kept my hair, men lather it with their sperm.

Ismène sighs, the stains on her body stirred by the breathing, scintillates in the moonbeams.

Draga groans, his hand moves on Elö's belly, he opens his eyes, closes them, opens them again, he rises on one elbow, his hip turns in the moonlight, his cock rolls in the shadow of the thighs ; his lip is bleeding around the silver ring :

— He hurt you ? I was hiding in the tamarisks.

— He kept me for two hours, he bit me on the lips, everywhere, the bastard !

I look down, I see blood at the tip of his cock :

— Béja wants to kill Illiten and attack the city.

— One should make the soldiers and civilians talk. Tell the girls. Madame Lulu is scared, I saw her trembling yesterday while taking the captain's money : « I saw you talk to him and make him talk. I forbid you. You must open your mouth only to receive his sperm, his spittle and his tears. »

My hand fondles the tips of Ismène's breasts, gently presses the nipple, Ismène gives a start :

— Stop it.

— Look what they did with her tonight, Draga.

— Shut up, Petrilion, Madame Lulu is coming out of her room. Listen, she opens the latrine door, she squats down, the door is wide open, she pisses, she snores, the wind chills her buttocks.

— Where does she come from, Madame Lulu, say, Draga ? I found the baby under the garden manure, rats were stirring inside.

— She comes from the mainland, over there too she used to manage a girls' brothel. Her lover was a sergeant, he got stoned to death on the first day of the Revolution ; Béja finished him off and Kment dipped his hands in his belly sliced open by the scythe. Madame Lulu let the body rot on the square, but little by little she started buying some recruiters ; and one Sunday morning she opened her brothel, there was a procession, the cardinal had been bent on visiting the slums ; the boys and girls from the brothel, half-naked, stopped the procession, the priests ran away, the cardinal's crook fell on a boy's foot, he threw himself at the cardinal, he spat in his face, the cardinal was blessing him, the soldiers jammed on the brakes, they jumped out of the jeeps, they clubbed the boy to death, Madame Lulu had locked herself in with her kids, the boy putrefied on the square ; trucks, jeeps would roll over him and gradually he became a carrion, like the others.

— Draga, it would be easy for us to kill her.

— She gives us to eat, a place to sleep.

— To drink, to fuck...

... Madame Lulu stands up again, her feet on the toilet steps getting pins and needles, her night gown falls over her buttocks, Madame Lulu moves forward in the corridor, she bends, sticks her eye to the keyhole, sees a boy's legs crossed, on the edge of the mattress, her gaze moves up to the thighs, lingers a moment on the arachnean shadow of the cock. Fuck !

... I knock on the door with my wrists and knees, Lulu gives a start, she moves away on tiptoe. I lie down again ; I can't sleep because of the bodies' heavy and warm smell.

— Draga, come along, I've got my knife, you have yours under the armpit, she's coming back to the door, let's open it, let's slit Lulu's throat, she'll fall without a cry, I know where to strike.

— Shut up, sleep.

He has a knife under the armpit, he's allowed to, as for me I've got a knife hidden under the straw mattress, Ismène is sleeping over it. In the morning, Madame Lulu pushes the door open, pushes the shutters, a boy sticks out his leg, Lulu falls forward, the boys laugh, Lulu gets up, strikes the boy with the flat of her hand, the boy bites her hand, the boys jump on the mattresses, burst out laughing ; Lulu nibbles her injured hand :

— Hurry up, the masons and bakers are waiting downstairs.

— Go skin them yourself, mother Lulu.

— I'll fetch the recruiters.

Mother Lulu walks out, the recruiters come up, heavy, yawning, with their whips, their knives and their pistols, they come into the room, prick the sleepers' buttocks or chest, with the point of their knives, whip the laughers, they notice Ismène, they whip me, I crawl under the mattress, a recruiter pushes the boys aside, he strikes a match and throws it on the straw mattress, with one hand he grabs Ismène by the waist, draws her to him by the breast, and bites her mouth ; the mattress is ablaze, I come out from under the mattress, I throw myself on the recruiter :

— Leave her alone, she's my friend.

The recruiter lowers his knife, Madame Lulu takes my shoulder, strokes my hair :

— Go down quickly, they want to wash it.

She bends over the staircase, shouts :

— Here's Petrillion, my children, give his beautiful hair a wash.

She gently pushes me towards the staircase, I walk down, they are leaning at the bar and Draga is serving them some wine ; they pull at his underpants over the counter, they look back, I stop at the bottom of the stairs, my right foot on the last step :

— Here's Petrillion, my children, give his beautiful hair a wash.

... My hand is shaking on the handrail, I walk towards the bar, Draga holds out for me a big glass of black wine, I take it, I drink it, hands fondle my hips, my back, my neck, slip between my thighs ; my skin, the fabric of my underpants get covered with a dust of flower and lime, wine runs on my lips, on my chin, a man presses his glass against the artery of my throat. I let him lay me over the counter. My natural father, in the evening, at night, looks for mummy under the bed, he comes to sit on the girls, he strokes them, his hand comes and goes in the moonbeams, the girls do not move, their chest rises, beats, little forge under the hand pricked by fire and steel, I get up, he sees me coming towards him completely naked, his hand continues touching, I hit him, he rolls in the corner of the room, he remains lying there, twisted until dawn, crying, slobbering, but in the morning he rises again, handsome, shadow on his navel, he goes out, he plunges his head in the fountain ; the girls serve him, I come to sit at the table, he removes the straw from my hair, I kiss his navel, the girls fasten his bread and his meat, inside that same dishcloth my mother for safety gave us wanks with and wiped us. He goes out in the icy dawn, his hips splashed by the fountain. At noon, he lies on some women, he curses his children loud in the brothel, he drinks, he pushes the women out in the garden, flies vibrate in his hair, his golden cloak falls on the tamarisks, powder sparkles on the granite stairs. My father, now I know those places where you go to

bed, my father, you caress me, you give me a wank, you bend my nape, with your hand, you pour wine on me, you run in the maquis by night, you crawl towards a woman, her belly moves in the moonlight, you lay, press the pistol on her belly, we call you but you fire in the night, I hear the gunfire in the river's bramble, we are hungry and you throw against our door mutilated babies, we bury our mouths and our eyes in the hole of the straw mattress, but other men order us to kiss their navel. My father, come back, wash us, lick our bodies ; men and women pressing our bodies do not know them, our bodies are clothes they slip over their imperfect bodies. You, let go of my leg, he climbs on the table, he takes my thigh, my knee, he folds it, I kneel down, my father, come and save me, his mouth bites my buttocks, his mouth bites my arm, his fingers pull my cock towards the thorny wood, clutch my throat, his knife slides on my lips ; Madame Lulu claps her hands on the top of the stairs, Draga walks down with his arm around the captain's, his chest is covered with marks of fingers, of teeth, of nails, of bones ; the captain smiles, his hand covers Draga's navel.

Ismène passes by, completely naked, a chalk rag between the thighs ; two apprentices stop her, hold her tight, one in front, the other behind, they each take an end of the rag, they saw Ismène's cunt, she's burning, she screams, Madame Lulu calls the recruiters, they come out of the backroom, they rush towards the apprentices, jostle them, grab Ismène, lay her on a free bench.

— Butter, butter. I'm coming down.

Madame Lulu comes down the stairs, bends over Ismène, my eyes are covered up, a recruiter brings some butter in his hand, Madame Lulu takes the butter, places it on Ismène's cunt, Ismène gives a start, Lulu's hand sinks between her thighs, I shudder, wine is seething in my mouth and belly. Draga fastens the captain's belt ; the captain pushes his head down and makes him kiss the badge on the belt ; dust wheels around the lamps, the fountains sing in the night outside, my father who cover yourself in a stolen blanket, and roll against your fighter comrades, come down, come and cover me with your blanket, carry me far away from here, no, leave Draga alone, he doesn't want to, up there, I can play with the soldiers, tell them : « I give you my son, crucify him on your mattresses, drink his sperm, all of you drink it. » My father, you undress and I'm already in bed, your clothes fall on the dark tiled floor, I watch the hair of your cock, you squat down, pull the blanket over you and lie against me, your lips are shining ; the tortured man screams in the night ; the soldiers drink inside the iron green tents ; the sentry paces before the open door ; I go to sleep and in the morning I wake up, alone, your clothes are on the floor, the captain is crouching, he throws the clothes on my chest : « Bring him back home and keep him. » Soldiers lift me by the shoulders and push me out ; other soldiers stand assembled under the flag ; pieces of meat are stirring against the wood. My house is cold ; Madame Lulu comes to play with the soldiers, I am sitting on my father's mattress, the soldiers

stroke Madame Lulu's shoulders, she comes to sit by me, she takes my chin, she tucks up my lips, knocks my teeth with her nails, a soldier comes forward, his hand presses my thighs, he says : « The captain said : kill him, but we pity you, we'll kill a goat and lie on our mattresses with our hands bloody ; as for you, we entrust you to Madame Lulu, you'll run errands for her ; you'll be good, obedient until your father returns. »

Madame Lulu smiles to me and strokes my hair, she draws me against her, I climb into the jeep, Madame Lulu lays her hands on the soldiers' shoulders, the warm wind raises the dust inside the jeep ; in Madame Lulu's house, there are colours on the ceiling, behind the bar, she pours drinks to the soldiers, they leave : « Come back, my darlings, every evening, free. I have what you need. »

... Then, she comes closer to me, takes my chain and my medal, makes it jump in her hand, turns it over : « Show me your penis. »

I unbutton myself, but already, with her cold firm hand, she lifts my penis from between the thighs, she rolls it between her hands :

— You know how to use it ?

She tucks up her dress, her belly is bare, her little labia open up between her thighs, I'm trembling :

— You see these little lips ? Put your willy in there. You'll see how nice it feels.

I climb on her knees, the smell of grilled meat comes from the kitchen, Madame Lulu takes my cock, she rubs it against her little labia, she gently drives it in and don't feel anything any more, it's water, I'm swivelling on water ; Madame Lulu wanks me, my head rolls on my shoulder, my father I lick my blood on your knees :

— Go and sit by the gentleman, over there, and say to him : « Drink, sir, drink. »

Night has fallen, the door lamp lights up the road works and the roadmen's caravans ; Ismène comes down the stairs, she bends over me and kisses my cheek, she makes me sit on her knees.

— Drink, love many men, give your arms, your legs, your lips. Pretend you're dead. Madame Lulu watches the customers' fingers, she'll pull them off your neck if they press it.

... In the middle of the night, the soaked underpants flap on the boys' bellies ; the foot of the table is between my thighs, the men come and go between the caravans and the brothel ; my shoulder bears the burn from a worker's lantern ; my fingers brush my chest, they glide on the sperm ; I'm scintillating, the darkest hollows in my body are scintillating ; a man, kneeling in front of me is daubing his face with my soaked underpants ; Draga inside the room, his mouth is black, open under the captain's gleaming cock, a grasshopper is climbing along the towel rail :

— I've come to fetch clean sheets.

— Can't you see you're disturbing us, Draga is waiting for his milk. Go away.

He slaps my buttocks, but his hand slides on the sperm, he swears, he wipes his hand on the sheet, and I see him slowly bend over Draga whose belly is throbbing under his throat ; and his cock, Draga grabs it and plunges it inside his seething mouth ; in the corridor, Madame Lulu takes the sheets ; once she has disappeared, I go up to the attic, I rub myself against the wall, the plaster, I open the little window and I gaze at the night ; the smokes above the waters, the birds in the smoke ; the breeze freezes the sperm on my body ; I am squatting down on the dusty fabrics, my cock drags on the lace ; on the bank of the river, the waders run among the cork, the rats come out from underneath the boats, crunch the lizards caught in the tar ; I can't hear the screams, the laughter, any more ; sperm is running on the tips of my nipples, the stars run from one to another at the bottom of the sky ; the sea rises, settles its elbow upon the earth...

Petrilion falls asleep under the basement window, the recruiters, in the common hall, are exciting the couples ; a recruiter lifts the burnt chairs, breaks the charred feet ; a boy is washing the bar with the hose, two young masons bring him down ; they hold him straight, pull off his underpants, drive the whistling jet between the boy's buttocks ; the boy struggles, bites the hands, spits ; the recruiter, sitting in the backroom, a broken chair on his knees, drops the chair and dashes forward, he separates the two young masons, the boy, with his hand, tries to snatch the hose from them, the recruiter pulls at it, the boy jumps forward, throws up the water on the bar, his body collapses, the mouth vomits the water along the bar, the recruiter hits the two masons, he pushes them in the street, he bends over the boy, he lifts him by the shoulders.

Ismène, coming down the half-burnt stairs, wipes the boy's mouth with a cloth, the recruiter returns to sit in the backroom, with his knife he cuts off the chair's charred feet, he looks up, smiles, wipes his knife on his thigh, Ismène hugs the boy, draws him away, towards the bench, lays him on the overheated leather, sits against his leg, wipes the boy's face, pulls the underpants up over his cock again, ties it on the hip ; the recruiters go down to the storeroom :

— I went to the harbour a while ago, the governor's wife and son were sitting in a green boat, they were throwing white bread to the birds, and the small children were fighting over it with the birds. I saw your sister, her dress slit on the thigh, she was hooking the fishermen, she'd put her hand on their thigh ; the boat where the governor's wife and son were sitting, was rocking on the flames, he was holding her hand, his bare foot was pushing away the fish heads on the wet sand at the bottom of the boat. Your sister Ifé was eating a piece of bread, with the other hand she was stroking the fishermen's thigh. Look, the sun has burnt my forehead. The soldiers were looking for the governor's wife and son, they were encircling the

warehouses, a soldier strikes my shoulder with the butt of his weapon ; a black stream, of gall and soot, was running out of the warehouse, moving forward on the sand, its head and body in the sun ; other boys, other girls, are displayed in the higher part of the city ; the recruiters have formed an alliance, Béja has it shouted that they'll be slaughtered and castrated when he enters the city.

... Petrilion is locked up in the storeroom, listens to his shouting, Madame Lulu was protecting him, Draga was jealous, Draga is gone, he ran away in the mountain with the laundry girl. The soldiers surround the boat, the governor's wife and son get up, a soldier lays his hand on the thigh of the governor's wife. It's Emilienne, the sister used to bathe us together at nightfall ; the son strikes the soldier, a jeep is driving down towards the harbour : the general is inside, he watches the narrow streets, his hand is lying on the driver's thigh, tight in the battledress, the children fly around the jeep ; Kment's brothers are exhibiting themselves on the pier, the jeep drives through the spray, as he goes past the general strokes the cheeks and the thighs of Kment's brothers, the jeep stops, the general gets down then presses his finger on a boy's belly, he goes to sit in the middle of the stairs going down into the sea, the soldiers grab the boy, they push him down the stairs, the general makes him sit on the steps above him, then he tilts his head between the little boy's thighs and rolls it and rubs it against the cock tenderly swollen under the light shorts, the soldiers are guarding the stairs, pushing the unbuttoned children away. Sleep, I am sitting by you, I protect you. Listen to Petrilion's cries. Every night he comes down, he comes to take me, he lifts my head open on the hole of wind and flies, he takes me in his arms, he strokes me, he wipes me, his knee cracks under my loins, his chest is gluey. When he takes my knees from underneath, his taut, erect cock swells, sparkles against his belly ; he lays me along him on the straw mattress, Draga's bed is empty ; all the boys have soap on their pubic hair ; Petrilion falls asleep, Draga comes out of the darkness ; Petrilion is sleeping, his arm raised and folded under the nape, Draga completely naked stands over Petrilion, he takes his cock, watches me, the cock rises, Draga kneads his balls, he fingers the rim of his own asshole, I close my eyes, the cock is growing taut under the moon, Draga, without a noise, gives it a wank, the rubbing, Draga's slight panting, the ebb and flow of his saliva behind the teeth, the throbbing of his throat disturb Petrilion's sleep, Petrilion stirs on the mattress, his throat swallows the saliva, his lips curl up, he whines, Draga masturbates, his stiffened muscles jut out all along his body, his knees jump, sperm gushes out, Draga guides his cock towards Petrilion's open armpit, sperm spatters the hair, Draga presses his cock all along, from the root to the red and vibrating tip, sperm runs on the straw mattress, gushes out, transparent, like mother of pearl ; Petrilion wakes up, he closes his arm, sperm smacks under the armpit, Petrilion leaps forward, Draga lolls back on his mattress and closes his eyes, Petrilion jumps on him, he grabs his throat, Draga's hands claw Petrilion's arms,

the other boys awaken, sit up on their mattresses, clap their hands, Petrillion screams, his hand covers Draga's mouth and nostrils ; a boy closes the window and comes back to sit on his mattress ; Draga throws his legs against Petrillion's chest, I remain lying, my elbow leaning on the wet spot of the mattress, I watch them fight, spit, claw, strangle each other, I fall asleep, the palms brush my hips, the great white sailing ship shines in the bay, her sails get entangled in the green foliage, the sun rises and caresses my cheek, and I can feel its apricot scent, it's watching me and tearing my dress, I rest in the linen, the small multicoloured birds beat their wings above me, fly away, come back with their beak sweetened, scintillating they soar down, settle on my belly, rummage between the shreds of my dress : couples appear on the ship's deck, they dance between the ropes, the dresses brush the links and the silver hoopings, the music is played by young boys dressed in white, their back and buttocks wet by the spray, the silver ring of their lower lip jingles against the mouthpiece of the flute ; they see me, they smile, a bird flies by my smile, a dancer girl leaves the ship, she comes to sit on the deck chair, her dress unfurls on my leg :

— Come and play with us, you'll have some jam and blue water. Come.

... Her hand moves up along my knee, rolls under it the shreds of my dress :

— I'm Draga's mother, I've escaped, a man on the ship, is in love with me, his son will love you. First come along, after that you'll return to Inamenas, you'll take the brothel street and bring Draga to me ; here, we eat transparent fruits.

Her hand strokes my cunt, it opens up, the little birds prick the lips, purify the skin slashed by the teeth of the men of darkness ; fruits fall on the ash ; negroes' feet against the deck chair, the woman runs on the shore, a sailor's cap falls on my belly, I look up, three negro sailors are eating red fruits smeared with ash and dew, juice runs down their throat ; they capture me, they carry me to the top of the mountain, they lock me up in a hut, through the screen I watch the sea and the sailing ship until night.

On deck, the dancers sit down and eat live fish, the young musicians play, the fishbones fly at their feet ; the negroes run, shout, around the hut, the top of the mountain rumbles and smokes, the negroes get undressed, smear their bodies with kaolin, their legs painted like zebras, quiver against the screen. All night they devour me, lift me up with their muzzles, eat, crunch, dribble, tear the white meats on my belly. At the top of the trees, laurel, ivy delay the first drops of the downpour...

The recruiters, inside the storeroom, are flogging Petrillion with leather whips, the boy runs to the corners, his underpants get caught by the protruding stones, the iron fittings, the wisps of cement ; the recruiters, throwing the whip, burst out laughing.

When the boy shows his face, the ring on his lips sparkles, a recruiter

strikes the ring with his whip, the lip bleeds, blood bathes the silver ; the boy dashes forward, spits on the whip, spittle spatters the recruiter's wrist, who hurls himself at the boy, hits him in the belly with his fists, the boy bites the whip hanging from the recruiter's hands and he collapses on the mud floor, his teeth still gripping the whip's lashes, the recruiter tramples him :

— To the beasts, tonight.

He lifts the boy's head with his feet, he pulls the whip away, the boy's head comes with the whip, the recruiter presses his shoe on the boy's cheek, and he pulls the lash, it slips out of the boy's mouth :

— To the hounds. The soldiers at the lighthouse have a new hound ; it has already killed two bitches while mating.

The recruiter turns the boy's head over with his shoe :

— You'll test it tonight. Get up.

The boy straightens himself, gets up leaning against the wall, his underpants hanging around his knees, he covers his cock with them, the recruiter goes out, leaving the door open : the boy follows him, his arm folded behind his back, his hand resting on the hip, the recruiter looks back all of a sudden, grabs the boy by the nape and bites his mouth, the boy foams, he laughs, rubs himself against the recruiter :

— I'll play the little snail, you'll be the big one...

The recruiter strokes the boy's trampled cheek, his hand moves down on his back, as far as the buttocks, the finger presses on the rim of the collar, the hand moves up in front, lifts the testicles, the penis ; two hard fingers feel the tip of the penis, the nail pricks the membrane ; the hand runs between the legs, comes out of the underpants, the recruiter wipes it on the boy's shoulders :

— No, you'll go to the hounds, you've got everything to please them, in front, behind. Move off, go back upstairs, get some practice with the brutal customers.

The boy follows the recruiter as far as the underground passage, the recruiter lifts the hatch, makes the boy pass in front of him and kisses his thigh as he goes past ; they leave the hut, night has fallen, insects are hopping in the moonlight ; across the valley in which the river enters backwards, trucks and jeeps crush the mud-soiled flowers ; the boy shivers, his lips, his nostrils quiver at every noise, every breath ; the recruiter takes him by the hand, and drags him towards the lit-up brothel. The child sits on a chair in the backroom, the recruiter looks back :

— What's wrong with you ? Are you coming ? If you're tired, drink some spirits, or vomit, go to the main room, you'll warm up quick.

The boy yawns, his hands tight between his thighs.

— You want the whip ?

The recruiter comes close to the boy, jostles his shoulder, the boy wipes the corner of his lips :

— My mouth tastes bitter.

The recruiter takes a bottle of spirits from the table, he raises the boy's chin, opens his mouth and pours the alcohol, the boy coughs, his nails claw the recruiter's forearm, he strikes the boy in the back ; a gust of wind flattens the tamarisks, the little birds tumble down through the light palms ; the boy looks at them, they come from the sea, they enter the backroom, they fly above the boy, spray with salt his shoulders and his nape and his throat, they play in the boats' sails, in the springs on the beaches covered with ancient bones :

— The other boys you see in the palace and the villas, their clothes are white, but their souls are muddy. All of them are slaves. You, you are little dogs, little birds.

The boy holds out his hand to the birds, a lump in his throat, a purple bird while escaping, brushes his hand, a tuft of down flies on his wrist, the boy takes it, lifts it to his lips, smells it, runs it on his nostrils, on his cheeks ; the recruiter snatches the down, he turns it, makes it vibrate in his fingers, brings it near to the boy's navel, tickles him, the boy looks up, the recruiter squats down, barks, pushes his mouth forward, the boy bursts out laughing, opens his thighs, he squats down behind the recruiter, flattens his belly against the recruiter's buttocks, draws on them with his hands the gesture of raising a tail, takes his cock out of his underpants, and places it in the crack of the ass, against the cloth, while lying on the loins and back of the recruiter, who barks, tilts his head on his shoulders, growling ; rain sings in the tamarisks and on the stairs.

The recruiter gets up, the boy remains squatting, his cock stretched out of the underpants :

— Get up, and if I see you climb up the wall again, I slit your throat.

The boy gets up, he leaves, the door closes again.

Under the dresser, a photograph of mother Lulu, half-burnt ; the recruiter squats down, strokes it :

— Under the manure, you old coquette, boy-eater, and boy-spitter, worms and rats eat you and spit you out again.

He gets up, he walks to the common hall.

Ismène is standing on a table, naked, a piece of crumpled newspaper between her thighs, the men pull at her leg, she laughs, she spits on the men's heads, they drive knives into the table, between her feet, they throw red wine on her knees, on the piece of newspaper, the soaked newspaper, heavy with wine and semen, falls on the table, a man puts it on his head, the others throw glasses of wine between Ismène's thighs :

— We'll have you bear our children, drunkards and whores. Drink, drink. Let's fill her with wine, be always drunk, we'll fuck you better that way.

— I'll have no more children, I'll have no more children, even drunkards, even whores.

— Pour, spray, let the wine get mixed forever with her cunt-juice, with her milk.

— I'll have no more milk. Pour, pour. Petrilion, you're bleeding, your shoulders ?

— The whip.

A man throws his mouth on Petrilion's shoulders, licks the blood, Petrilion tilts his head slightly forwards, the man hooks his fingers to the shoulders ; another pulls at Petrilion's underpants, draws the boy against his leg, licks the bloody tips of the nipples ; the boy with the hose is lying on the bench ; pale, shaking, a leg dragging from the bench, on the tiled floor ; a man grabs that leg, he pulls the boy, makes him slide out of the bench, lays him on the tiled floor under his body, the boy vomits, the man kisses him on the mouth, the child's vomit enters his mouth again, the man takes the boy's head, makes it ring on the tiled floor, the boy goes on vomiting, the man gets up again, wipes his mouth and throat on the boy's underpants, tramples the boy ; Ismène falls in the men's arms, Petrilion climbs on the table, blood runs on his bare legs, a man pulls off his underpants ; the blood, stopped at the navel, streams on the pubic hair ; the same man, leaning on the table, flings his mouth towards the boy's cock, Petrilion steps back, another man, behind him, bites his leg, Petrilion moves forward, the man whose tongue is touching his cock, bites it, Petrilion moves forward again, the man takes the cock between his fingers, pulls the boy, licks the blood on the locks ; then, he takes the testicles, pulls them downwards, the boy squats down, sits on the table, a man grabs his feet, he pulls them, the boy collapses, stretching his arms out sideways, head rolling on the edge of the table.

The man who was biting his legs puts his head between his thighs, Petrilion's lips open up under the man's cock, the jeans' cloth is crumpled, damp, soiled with lime, the man tightens his thighs, squeezes the boy's cheeks ; the man who got the underpants, raises a leg, slips the pants on, pulls them on his thighs, laces them on the hip ; the pants, tightened on the jeans, crack :

— Too short for me. For you too, little whore, when you walk, it hardly covers half of your cock, and when you've got a hard-on, the whole of it disappears between the buttocks.

The man walks, the underpants crack on the front, from top to bottom ; the man leans on the counter, he orders a glass for Draga ; Draga, back from the fragrant grass, has two men under him giving him a wank and sucking his cock, but neither his face nor his shoulders shake ; he takes the bottle, fills the glass, holds it out for the man.

The man grabs the boy's wrist, strokes his arm ; Draga smiles, the man drinks the wine, but his hand strokes the boy's arm, crushes it on the counter ; the recruiter passes behind the man, he walks to the table where Petrilion is lying ; the man holding Petrilion's head between his thighs has his mouth open, he pants

while tightening and opening his thighs ; the recruiter pushes aside the men bending over Petrilion and licking him and kneading all of his body ; he touches the boy's shoulder : « Petrilion, your injection. »

The boy stirs, he frees his head, the man opens his thighs :

— The injections ? We'll have the hounds tonight ? And it's Petrilion ?

The boy gets down from the table, the recruiter takes him by the shoulder, the man, at the counter, unlaces the underpants, he throws them to Petrilion, the boy catches them ; on the underpants, in front and behind, sperm runs, that of the boy, who got a wank from the man before climbing on the table.

The recruiter takes the boy to the backroom where an old woman is waiting, sitting on a chair ; she places a small piece of cloth on the table and over it, the hypodermic syringe and two phials :

— Make some water boil.

Petrilion starts trembling, he goes to the far end of the room, takes a small saucepan from the sink, fills it with water, he lays it on the gas ring, he lights the gas, he turns back and remains leaning against the sink, his back and loins in the cool, he watches the woman bending over the syringes, and the recruiter standing before her, knife hanging on the hip ; the water seethes, the boy doesn't move, he's trembling, blood withdraws from his forehead, his cheeks, his throat, the woman looks up :

— Can't you see the water is boiling ? Bring it and lie on the table. Hurry up.

The boy lifts the pan, the steam wets his face and chest, he lays the pan on the table, the woman presses her finger on the middle of the table, Petrilion climbs, he lies down on his belly.

— With you boys, we won't have those long undressings which I must go through in schools and health centres.

The woman moves closer to the recruiter and laughs with him, her hand in front of her mouth ; she gets up, plunges the syringe in the boiling water, then in the first phial ; the boy remains motionless, only his buttocks are trembling, the woman lays both her hands on them, the recruiter turns away, facing the wall ; the woman takes the syringe, rubs the boy's buttock with soaked cotton and pierces it at once ; the boy stirs, the liquid penetrates him, burns the buttock, clouds the entire body, the woman pulls out the syringe, rubs the buttock again, with a fresh cotton, the child grows pale, he whines, he crawls over the table, throws his head beyond the edge, his shoulders rise, his throat turns over inside his mouth, he spits, he moans, saliva wets his chin, hangs there ; the woman goes to the sink, fills a glass with fresh water, comes back to the table, pours it on the boy's head.

— Get up now, and walk a bit.

The boy gets down feebly from the table, the recruiter, standing on tiptoe looks through the long dusty and spattered pane above the partition

between the common hall and the backroom : Ismène, lying on the tiled floor, lets herself be eaten up ; now and then her white arm shoots out and bends back like a tall flower. The boy, standing before the table, wipes his mouth with his wrist ; the woman washes the syringe, dips it in the second phial, again she lays her finger on the middle of the table, the boy puts his hand on his chest.

— Yes, you, get on the table again, lie on your belly.

The boy steps back, the woman grabs him by the shoulder and pushes him against the table, the recruiter touches his knife. The boy climbs on the table again, the woman pierces the other buttock, again the boy lets his head hang from the table, then, his face dripping, he gets up, the woman washes her hands in the sink :

— Next time you'll wash your buttocks, they were covered with wine and sperm.

The door is open on the garden, a dog growls by the tamarisks, men's voices speak in the moving shadows ; the boy shivers, the second liquid warms his blood, the recruiter comes closer, he feels the boy under the armpits, at the hips, the boy keeps his arms raised, his cock becomes hard ; the recruiter passes his hand under the boy's cock, paws the testicles, the boy stretches himself, stiffens, strength comes back to him, his cock, fondled by the recruiter's tough hand, hardens even more, grows taut, glows red ; the recruiter looks back, he and the woman smile ; the dog and the men come closer, they are walking in the garden, the recruiter lets go of the boy.

— Go up to the room and massage your scalp with Madame Lulu's eau de Cologne. And come down right after.

The boy goes out.

— He endured both injections well. His hard-on was strong enough to unclench my fist.

The recruiter plays with the two phials :

— The injection against rabies shook him up. It's a big dog.

The woman folds her phials and syringe in a small cloth.

— The aphrodisiac will keep him all night, until morning.

— Madame Lulu, they mutilated her and threw her under the manure pile. Be careful.

The woman goes out into the garden, the hound leaps forward, the men hold him back, the recruiter positions himself in front the woman, he leads her behind the tamarisks, pushes the fence, the woman holds out her hand, the recruiter feels her breasts.

— Wait for me here, I'll go and get the money from the cash box.

— No, you'll pay me next time.

The woman moves away, the recruiter comes back into the garden : the men are waiting, a foot on the steps, the hound sniffs at the light ; the recruiter

leads the men to the hut, he makes them go down by the hatch, in the underground passage, the hound growls in the damp darkness, the recruiter leads them into the cellar ; they lock up the hound in the little storehouse ; they go back to the cellar, some benches and chairs are arranged in a circle around an army tent's canvas, laid on the mud floor ; men — soldiers with their battledress in tatters and their fat lips shiny with pork fat — sit on the chairs ; the recruiter goes up to the garden again, he runs to the backroom, grabs Draga by the shoulder, pulls him :

— Go down to the cellar, you'll make people pay. You have your knife under your armpit ?

Draga pushes aside the two men who were under him, leaves the room, his underpants in his hand ; the recruiter goes up to the boys' room, Petrillion is lying on his paillasse, his arms unfolded along his body, his hands are shaking on his thighs : the recruiter bends over him, sniffs at his face.

— You smell good, the hound will enjoy its little fiancée.

The boy remains lying ; under the recruiter's breath, his eyebrows flutter but his eyes are wide open, the recruiter strokes his shoulder :

— Get some rest, I'll come and fetch you.

The recruiter goes down again, the other recruiters are drinking at the counter, the door is open on the street : two boys, leaning against the wall, are yawning, mouth wide open ; each time a man passes in the street, they throw out their belly, shake their cocks through the underpants, utter little cries, the recruiter drinks among his comrades.

Draga, in the cellar, sits on the soldiers' knees, his whole body gets spattered with stains of fat ; in the garden, shadows crowd around the hut, two recruiters come out, they speak to the shadows, they push them through the hatch ; men and women come to light in the underground passage : Draga, sprawled on the tent canvas, under a soldier, gets up again and places himself at the entrance of the big cellar ; the hound is barking in the storeroom ; Draga holds out his hand, a woman passes in front of him, and moves away, Draga holds her back by the shoulder, the woman turns round.

— Draga ! I'm the one who dipped your cock in the cup.

— Pay.

The woman touches the man following her, the man searches in his inside pocket, takes out five banknotes, gives them to Draga, who slips them in his underpants, against his flesh.

Men and women sit on the chairs ; in the common hall, the men, watched by the recruiter, go out ; Ismène, lying among the puddles of wine and the spatters of sperm, her head tilted on his elbow, her other arm covering her belly, is asleep. Men part in the alley ; the two boys, motionless, watch them move away ; moonlight chills their belly ; the dust raised close to the ground by the night wind brushes their feet ; three helicopters rumble above the palace, their lights dazzle the two

boys ; they plunge towards the river, follow the banks up to the valley's entrance ; the two boys go in again ; the recruiter goes out into the garden, the two boys go up to their room ; one of them lies down and falls asleep at once, the other leans against the window, pulls out his cock and pisses, legs parted, the jet falls back on the brothel wall, splashes the pane of the common room ; a bird enters the room, settles on the sleeping boy's hand, then on his close cropped head, the boy stirs, the bird flies away, comes back, settles, snuggles up between the head and the mattress ; often do birds nest in that way, drawn by the heat, the sweetness of childish fragrance and the warmth of down on the temples ; other boys, coming from the warehouses, enter the room noisily, undress, throw their jeans on the floor and sprawl on the mattresses ; the birds fly along the walls, come and go between the room and the trees in full bloom, lay on the sleeping boys' lips and eyelids, small seeds, sweet powders, petals ; the boys awaken and listen to the rustle of the trees, follow the flight of the birds ; the recruiter touches Draga's shoulder, then his underpants, at the place swollen by the banknotes, all around the cock, he goes up again, walks to the fence, wanders for a while in the alleys, comes back, he goes up to the room, taps Petrilion's shoulder, the boy gets up, the recruiter takes him by the hand, he leads him into the garden, the boy steps back, the recruiter touches his knife, he pushes the boy into the hut, the two other recruiters lift the hatch, they grab the boy's leg, and pull it, the boy slips down the ladder, the two recruiters push him forward in the underground passage, Draga holds him against his body, but Petrilion resigns himself ; once again, feeling Draga's body, his blood warms up ; the soldiers have dragged the dog out of the storeroom, they keep it chained on the tent canvas, they open its mouth, tear inside its mouth a small bag of red powder, the dog swallows it, it growls under the strokes, half-collapses on its loins, lifts its back paw, the soldiers stroke it on the thigh, next to the cock, the dog yaps, it falls over completely ; men and women watch the cellar door ; Draga enters, he holds Petrilion by the neck ; men and women lick their lips, swallow their saliva ; the dog raises its head, it growls, it rises on its legs, it leaps towards Petrilion ; the boy pushed by Draga — who goes to position himself against the door —, moves closer to the dog, smacks his lips uttering bird cries, lays his hand on the dog's head, drives it in the neck's hair, under the head, the dog purrs, Petrilion rubs his hip against the dog's muzzle, the dog licks the underpants, its burning tongue enters the slit in the pants, winds round the boy's cock ; Petrilion is trembling, his cock shoots out of the tear ; the soldiers are leaning against the wall, Petrilion steps over the dog, rides it, his cock gets tangled in the long fresh hair that smells of salt and night, the dog looks back, its tongue licks the knee and the thigh of the boy who, still riding the dog, moves back as far as the tail : it rises, strikes the boy's loins and his back, Petrilion slips his hands under the dog's belly, he fondles its nipples, then the cock, the dog yaps, the dog's saliva dries on Petrilion's knee ; the boy cannot see the men and

women ; they can see him, their heart throbbing, their genitals aroused, they spy, they scrutinize the palpitations of muscles, nerves, blood on the boy's skin, they wallow in that bare skin, that taut cock in black locks, hidden under the dog's tawny coat ; the boy squeezes the animal's loins between his thighs, then he rises to his feet again ; his underpants held back on his hips by the laces, only support his testicles ; Petrilion trembles no more, he is standing behind the dog, he turns towards the men and women and throws his cock forward, then he lifts the dog's tail, and, fondling its cock with the other hand, he parts the legs, his feet slide on the tent canvas, he presses on them to keep his balance, he lies, stretching his body that way, on the animal's loins ; the tail beats against his belly, the tip brushes Petrilion chest ; the boy's cock seeks the dog's asshole, under the tail ; it finds it, penetrates it, the wet burn relaxes the boy's muscles, he begins to smile, the cock penetrates further ; the boy, holding the dog under its neck with both hands, presses it against his belly, his head rolls on the coat, his open, panting mouth wets the coat, his teeth nibble it ; the boy pushes his cock in and out, the dog yaps, its tongue licks the boy's hands joined under its mouth ; the boy frees one of his hands, he slips it between his belly and the dog's asshole ; the dog, its mouth streaming with foam, opens and closes its asshole, the lining squeezes and releases the boy's swollen cock ; Petrilion grabs his own cock at the root, gives it a wank ; his stiff legs crack, get covered with sweat ; the dog's cock, extremely taut, grows red, brushes the tent canvas ; in his excitement, the boy fastens his hand to the dog's lips ; it nibbles the boy's fingers, the sperm rises, Petrilion bites the dog's coat, its skin, sperm gushes out, the dog spreads its hind legs apart, it yaps, it lick its lips, its eyes become wet, its right hind leg gives way, the boy, his hand holding the cock at the root, bends his right leg and rolls on his side with the dog, he presses the dog's paw against his thigh in order to keep his cock inside the dog's asshole, he kneads its nipples, its cock, which sticks to his hand red and gluey ; the boy breathes heavily, he sets the dog upright again, sets himself upright too, stiffens his legs again, but this time he leans his left hand on the dog's back, hooks his fingers to the dog's coat and, standing almost straight, the dog's tail standing upright between his nipples, he shakes its cock from the root, his hand now and then hitting the dog's balls, which then touch the boy's, held up inside the torn underpants ; sperm gushes out a second time ; the dog utters a long wail ; the boy waits a little, his underpants which have slipped from the buttocks are soaked with the sweat streaming down on the cock and mixing with the dog's sweat, in its shiny coat.

The electric bulb, above the boy, throws reflections on his hair soapy with sperm, the dog's saliva and dribble stick tawny hair, sand, small leaves to the boy's cheeks, nostrils, chest, belly, thighs, hands, arms ; the boy lays his hand again on his cock, gives it a violent wank ; the soldiers slap their thighs, sperm gushes out for the third time, the boy's legs relax, sweat veils his eyes, blackens his hair, his

eyebrows, the shadow of his nostrils, he pushes his cock in twice, the dog claws the canvas with its front leg ; the boy then steps back, slowly withdraws his cock, but the dog squeezes it and holds it in ; the boy leans with both hands on the top of the dog's thighs, and he moves back, the cock remains stuck, the boy gets scared, his heart throbs, his cheeks grow pale ; the soldiers move forward :

— A fourth wank and just before the sperm comes out, pull your cock out in one go. It will release it.

The soldiers lean on the wall again, the boy stiffens his legs, — the dog laid its claws on the boy's feet, — he fucks gently, by small pressure and slight touches, he strokes with the tip of his fingers the outer membrane of the dog's asshole ; sperm rises, swells the cock, the dog relaxes its asshole for a second, the boy then pulls his cock, in one go ; the dog tightens its asshole on the tip of the cock, but the boy with his fingers pulls the asshole apart ; his whole cock is out, he turns it towards the men and women, the cock is red, crumpled, it falls back, softened inside the underpants, on the right thigh ; the boy sits down on the tent canvas, the dog turns back, the boy puts his arms on his knees, the dog licks his feet, it slips its mouth between the boy's knees and rummages between his thighs, spreading them apart with its muzzle, it licks the sperm still squirting out wetting the underpants, thrusts its tongue in the slit, pulls out the cock ; the boy then lolls on his back, spreads his thighs, his legs, he gives himself up to the dog which lays its paw on the boy's chest and licks the sweat from his throat and from his chest and its own foam, but it goes back to the boy's cock, nibbles the underpants, licks the pubic hair, bites a flap of the tear, holds it between its teeth, pulls, the underpants tear, the dog foams, shakes its mouth, hooks the tear with the claws of its front paw ; the tear opens up as far as under the cock, bares the balls, the dog sniffs at them, licks them, its tongue sinks as far as under the buttocks, touches the edge of the asshole ; the boy, his arms folded under the nape, laughs, raises his buttocks, the dog growls, brings back its muzzle on the boy's belly, licks the navel ; then it bites the underpants again, pulls, lifts the boy's thigh ; the underpants become unlaced on the hip, the dog brings back the freed flap upon the boy's other thigh, the lace unrolls under its teeth, it spits it out on the boy's belly, it drags its own cock, reddened, on the boy's leg, sperm wets Petrilion's knee, the dog lowers its belly, weighing on the boy's thigh, the animal's cock touches the boy's, which hardens slightly ; the dog yaps, bends, over Petrilion's belly, and thus moves up as far as the child's face, its cock dragging on his lips, he, without trembling, opens them and sucks that huge pointed cock ; the dog's sperm fills his mouth, as bitter as gall, the boy shuts his eyes ; the dog licks his hair, its whole belly weighs upon the child's face, its coat is wet ; the dog's paws claw the coaly earth, the tent canvas, crumpled, rolled up, covers the boy's hips and shoulders, black dust flies round, Petrilion's body is covered with black trails, the dog moves forward, turns back ; this time its tongue burrows into the boy's

thighs, the boy takes the dog's cock above his lips, he squeezes it, sperm gushes out, spatters his eyes and forehead, he puts the cock in his mouth, and bathes it in his saliva, the dog raises its tail, its wet eyes watch the men and women, its shaken loins, its tail sweeps the ground, behind the boy's head ; the boy pushes back the dog's belly, he gets up and leaning on his elbow he pushes away the dog, which weighs on his chest and growls, the boy goes on all fours, the dog turns back, sniffs at the child's buttocks, licks them, the boy, keeping his buttocks raised, lowers the upper part of his body on the canvas ; the dog lays its front paws on the boy's loins, and flattens its thighs against Petrillion's buttocks, it rubs its belly against them, it waddles, its cock sinks between the buttocks of the boy who straightens the upper part of his body and leans on his hands ; the dog pushes its cock, its hind legs quiver, scratch the canvas, it rubs its humid belly on the boy's loins, its dribble runs, spatters Petrillion's back, runs between the ribs and the swell of the hips and as far as the nape ; the dog's sperm, burning hot, enters the lower part of the boy's body, Petrillion raises his head, he sees the soldiers leaning against the wall ; they have hard-ons under their battledress ; the men and women, most of them standing, watch the dog push the boy and gradually throw him over ; the tent canvas is wet, the boy pushes back the dog's mouth with his hand, he tries to get up again, the dog remains stuck to him, so the boy moves towards the soldiers, the dog makes small steps, it hooks its front paws to the boy's belly, it embraces him ; a soldier pulls his cock out of his battledress and holds it straight, he grabs the boy by the hair and draws him towards his thighs, the boy opens his mouth, he bites the cock of the soldier, who stiffens against the wall ; the boy, still tied to the dog masturbates the soldier's cock, the tip gets crushed on his nostrils, he licks it, sperm swells the cock, gushes out, the boy takes the tip of the cock between his lips, he sucks up, the burning sperm chokes him ; the dog rubs, it yaps, it groans ; the dog's sperm and the soldier's sperm join and mix on the boy's chest ; the big toe of his right foot gets caught in a ring of the canvas ; the soldier relaxes, his heavy breathing wheezes louder than the dog's ; the soldier stiffens again, the boy catches his thighs and holds the tip of the softened cock between his lips, but this time the soldier masturbates on his own ; the dog releases its sperm between the boy's buttocks, it nibbles his loins ; the tip of his pointed cock tickles the bladder of the boy who laughs and his teeth tighten up on the soldier's cock. The soldier utters a little groan ; the boy takes the cock out of his mouth, wipes his gluey lips, the soldier throws his knee against his throat, the boy chokes, the dog shaken by the boy's cough growls and braces itself with even more fury ; the boy wants to escape, the soldier passes behind the dog, he pulls its tail, the dog growls, turns its head back, bites the soldier's knee, he strikes the dog on its loins, the dog turns back again, its cock gets twisted inside the boy's asshole, its claws scratch Petrillion's back, the boy groans, cries. The recruiter comes forward :

— That's enough, take your hound back.

The soldiers grab the dog by the breast ; one of them pulls out of his battledress pocket a piece of fresh meat, which has stuck the cloth at the knee, he places it in front of the dog's fangs, the fangs vibrate on the boy's back, the dog smells the meat, it raises its head, the soldier steps back, the dog throws its fangs forward, the soldier moves further back, the dog tears itself away from the boy, brutal, chafing his hips with its claws, it throws itself on the piece of meat, it snatches it, it drags it, in the dust, shakes it, tramples it, tears it, on the boy's foot.

Petrilion, his hands still warm and crumpled, his cock softened and burnt, his lips, his eyelids gluey, remains lying on the ground ; the soldiers tie up the dog again, they take him out of the cellar, they make him climb the ladder, the dog growls, his fangs vibrate against the soldiers' eyebrows ; they go out into the garden, the dog sniffs at the ground, it leaps, it yaps, it sniffs its coat around the asshole, its muzzle, sparkling in the moonlight ; its cock drips under the belly ; inside the cellar, Petrilion, sprawled on the canvas, eyes shut, shivers in the cool of the black earth ; men and women get up from the chairs, they bend over the child, they observe his blackened body, gluey, battered, bloody, they bend over, they touch, with the tip of the fingers, the cock, little wet ember, in the tuft of black down ; a woman squats down, kisses the boy's bloody foot ; Petrilion doesn't move, his whole body is trembling ; Draga, once the men and women have left, squats down ; the recruiter goes up to the garden, closes the fence, takes Petrilion's hand, lifts him under the shoulders, unsticks his eyelids, he unlaces the underpants, on the right hip, the cock sticks to the cloth, Draga pulls the cloth, gently unsticks the cock, the boy opens his eyes, groans ; Draga strokes, tenderly, Petrilion's gluey belly, he pulls off the pants in one go, he throws them on the tent canvas, Petrilion picks it up, he holds it out to Draga, Draga unfolds it, holds the slits, he shakes it above Draga's eyes :

— See how much it has loved you.

Petrilion stands up straight again, he leans on Draga's shoulder ; the recruiter comes down again, pulls the boy's underpants, searches, takes the banknotes, he counts them :

— Take Petrilion upstairs, to Madame Lulu's room, smear his cock with some ointment, and put him to bed. Come and meet me again after, in my bed.

The recruiter sits on a chair, goes on with counting the banknotes, Draga carries Petrilion in his arms, the boy's cock rolls on the thigh, he utters a loud scream, Draga climbs the ladder, lifts the hatch with his shaven head ; he walks through the garden, Petrilion's head hangs out of Draga's arms, his head bathes in the freshness of the grass, the trees, the flowers ; on his lips, the stars are singing ; Petrilion, dazzled by the brightness of the sky, covers his eyes with his hands, they enter the backroom : a recruiter is drinking alone at the table ; when Draga passes, he throws out his hand on the belly of Petrilion whose legs open before him are hanging from Draga's arms, he squeezes the cock between his

fingers, Petrillion screams, the recruiter squeezes harder, Petrillion shouts, the recruiter strikes Petrillion's leg, takes out his knife from his belt, pricks the boy's foot, then his arm and leg, Petrillion's cry ends up in a sob ; the recruiter drives the knife in the wound, he lets it go, the knife vibrates in the wound, the recruiter pulls it out, he lays his hands on the wounds, he rubs them, he smears the boy's leg with blood ; he presses his bloody hand again on Petrillion's cock, but the boy has fainted ; the recruiter shows his hand to Draga, the boy sits Petrillion on the chair, he takes the recruiter by the hand, he leads him to the sink, the recruiter strokes him on the shoulders, on the back, with his bloody hand ; the boy takes it, he opens the tap, sprinkles the hand, soaps it, rubs it, his fingers intertwine with those of the recruiter who presses his hard-on against the sink's wet cement ; the recruiter slips his soapy hand, inside Draga's underpants, the boy removes the hand, the recruiter grabs his knife, pricks the cloth of the underpants, on the buttocks, draws a cross through the cloth :

— Christ on his cross, had a hard-on from watching the twisted torsos and the unfastened loincloths of the dead thieves tied up on his right and on his left, fuck me, fuck me.

— No, I must look after Petrillion, the hound bit him, and you, you hurt him.

— That whore will wait. Look, he's asleep. I desire you. Little, little one...

— You know me by heart.

The other recruiter returns from the cellar, the one embracing Draga against the sink, releases the boy ; Draga lifts Petrillion and carries him up to Madame Lulu's room ; Petrillion woken up cries on Draga's shoulder ; Draga lays him on the madame's large bed, he looks for the ointment tube on the dressing table, he opens it, he squeezes it on his finger, he moves his finger close to Petrillion's cock, smears the cock with ointment, Petrillion quivers, bites his lips, Draga passes his finger under the cock, he also smears the balls, the root of the cock under the hair :

— You'll sleep here. I'll lock the door ; sleep on your back, do not turn over. Listen, they're having a fight downstairs.

— Go and relieve Ismène and lay her next to me.

— Sleep, sleep, your heart tomorrow, will be burnt again.

— Tonight I feel it's alive.

— No, no, it's your cock.

— The recruiter wants to kill me.

— No, the other one is fighting him.

— He wants all my blood.

— Blood, for his lips, still tastes like wine.

Draga leaves, Petrillion has fallen asleep, Draga goes down, sees Ismène

lying in the pools of wine and the trails of sperm, he makes his underpants snap, he goes to lean against the frame of the backroom door : the two recruiters are rolling on the ground ; the one who has the money holds the other against the tiled floor, he hits him in the belly, in the face, he gets up again, he takes Draga by the hand ; the recruiter and the boy go up to the recruiter's room ; just before going to bed, Draga unlaces his underpants, he puts them on the chair ; on the cloth, in spite of the trails of sperm and blood, the small cross is still visible ; the boy strokes the stripes ; the recruiter, stark naked, grabs that hand, draws the boy against him, and rubs his knees against the boy's buttocks.

— Have you beaten Christ ?

The recruiter lolls back on the bed with the boy, he hugs him : he squeezes him between his thighs, brings back his legs over the boy's ; Draga lets him bite his mouth ; the recruiter releases the boy, Draga rolls on the side, his leg hangs out of the bed ; the recruiter puts the light out, the mosquitoes, surprised, brush the faces, the throbbing throats, the eyes still dazzled ; the recruiter takes the boy's hand, lays it on his softened cock ; the boy's still tender fingers wind around the locks still soaked in sweat ; moonlight bathes their bodies and the bedspread.

— Christ is dead drunk, lying on the tiled floor, arms stretched out sideways, feet crushed under the table's feet, he's spitting blood, not by the side, but by the mouth.

— If he wakes up, he'll devour Ismène in the early morning.

— I've broken his teeth.

— I don't like Christ, he always asks permission before fucking.

— Me, I take.

The recruiter rolls over the boy, Draga laughs, the recruiter's hairy chest crushes his chest, his horse sweat veils his eyes, saliva seethes and sparkles in the recruiter's mouth, the boy bites it, it opens, saliva runs in the mouth of the boy who swallows it ; the recruiter spits in the boy's mouth.

Sea in the distance rolls on the beaches, cool rises from the garden, the boy huddles under the recruiter whose lips touch his eyes, the boy opens them wide, the recruiter licks them with his tongue, in the same time, his hand covers Draga's belly ; the boy turns over on his belly, the recruiter spreads his buttocks apart, he drives his taut cock in ; sea rolls pebbles at the bottom of the coves, crabs climb up steep rocks, octopuses lie in wait for them in the holes of the walls, they throw out their tentacles and wind them round the crab's claws, they pull it towards the rock, inside their holes, and gobble it up, the shell cracks in their beaks, they spit out the claws, the feelers, fragments of shell ; the recruiter licks the boy's shaven head, the hollow of his ears, the honey of his ears, wind runs on his back, as far as the nape ; he strokes the boy's temples, buried under the bedspread ; the boy falls asleep, the recruiter masturbates, bites the boy's ear,

Draga wakes up, the recruiter licks his temple :

— You were forgetting me ? Some clients said you used to dream aloud : « Manure, rats, Spring, cave... » You took your powder tonight ?

— Yes, but I feel sleepy.

— You're my best one, Draga...

A few men, with hard-ons, wander around the brothel, hoist themselves up to the windows ; the lamps are out, moonlight alone bathes Ismène's gluey body ; a rat comes out from under the counter, it runs as far as the beam, licks the wine and the sperm against Ismène's arms.

On the surface of the sea, trails of light cross one another at the spot on the horizon where the sun has set ; solitary birds dive, pluck the small fish asleep on the tufts of seaweed or fascinated by the anemones' phosphorescent heart.

FIFTH CHANT

Thivai wakes up before the brothel shuts its lights out at dawn ; he gets out of the sleeping bag ; cocks crow on the top of the hill, under the highest watchtower : the Eiffel tower ; between the bars of the small basement window, their red combs jump among the heavy grass ; the sentry climbs down the ladder, his rifle clinks against the protection sheet ; Thivai lies back again on the sleeping bag, the tall wet trees pour their dew on the red roof of the command post. Thivai feels a lump in his throat, he covers his belly with his hands. Sun flashes through the basement window, dazzles the boy :

— It's me, Xaintrailles. You'll be questioned this afternoon at headquarters. Good luck. I'm leaving for mine clearance at Ait Saada.

Thivai remains silent ; Xaintrailles squats down, looks through the window, sees Thivai lying on the camp bed, motionless, legs parted, battledress jacket covering the middle of the body :

— Thivai, can't you hear me ? Can't you see me ?

The boy keeps his eyes wide open, lice nibble his shaven head. Xaintrailles gets up again, he rubs his hands and knees.

Drivers and escort soldiers and bomb disposal men are washing and splashing themselves ; mud sparkles all around the wash-house. Thivai strokes his skull, he strokes the scratches made by the hairdresser :

— Shave him completely, with the blade.

The civilian hairdresser, once the officer has left, lays the blade down, wipes his forehead.

— Mister Thivai, I can't.

The officer comes back :

— Shave the traitor.

I smile, I look down, the hairdresser is trembling, the blade grazes my head and the tip of my ear, the officer crushes my bare toes with his red leather shoe ; the hairdresser wipes his fingers on the cloth tied around my neck, the cut hairs fall, brush my ears, my nostrils, get caught on my eyebrows, mummy, I don't want the hairdresser to cut my locks, mummy sits on the armchair, she strokes my

knee, she takes a magazine, she opens it over her knees ; behind the partition, there is Véronique, her aunt is standing, the hairdresser girl pushes her away gently, Véronique makes signs in the mirror ; my cut hairs get caught in the honeycomb pattern of my shirt ; mummy goes out without her handbag, she walks in the rain along the river ; the hairdresser looks around, he puts his hand on my pants' warm flannel, his hand moves up along my thigh, I look at Véronique, it's she who's caressing me, mummy shouts and cries in the rain ; the dockers are dragging the barbed wire through the mud ; mummy bites her wet scarf ; the hairdresser's hand sinks between my thighs, I push the hand away ; the other hand moves down along my chest, my knees knock against the marble basin, it sways, the hairdresser girl looks back, the hairdresser's hand remains open on my quivering chest, mummy shakes her shoes against the door, she comes in, it's night already, she takes my little hands in her wet hands, I get off the armchair, mummy pays the hairdresser, he pushes me against the door, mummy leads me through the black streets to the river. The dockers are warming themselves over a coal fire ; they whistle ; mummy takes me in her arms, she leaps through the mist, she climbs up the jetty, she runs on the cement ; the rocks are covered with snow, I struggle, mummy squeezes me against her breasts, I bite her hand, a tow boat whose lit-up portholes cast gleams on the black and oily sea, comes down the estuary ; mummy flings herself — I bite her hand, her arms drop me, I fall on the stairs ; mummy rolls on the rocks and dives into the sea, froth covers her up, I writhe on the steps of the staircase ; a wave carries away mummy's head, her hands slip on the smooth and shiny rock ; the tow boat turns, sailors are running on deck, they release a dinghy, jump inside, row towards the jetty, the stars light up between the clouds, my head is bathing in a pool of gall ; a sailor jumps on the staircase, he lifts me in his arms, he kisses my cheek and my forehead ; the other sailors plunge the oars, bring back mummy's body on the large flat rock ; my legs, my back are broken, the sailor runs on the jetty, he crosses the harbour, he jumps over the camp fence, a soldier runs after him, the sailor stops in front of a lit up tent, two soldiers come out, they lift the veil of the tent, the sailor lays me on a camp bed ; a lantern is swinging at the top of the central post ; blood withdraws from my hands, from my heart ; the soldiers phone, take my hands, cover my forehead, they open khaki-painted cupboards...

The jeeps and trucks start off, Thivai, struck in the middle of the forehead by the rising sun, covers his face with his battledress jacket ; the rest of his body is naked, the flies from the shit and from the wine press, scratch the earth on the edge of the basement window ; they shoot out, they frolic on Thivai's penis, sink under the hair, step over the locks ; Thivai gives a start, he spreads his thighs open, the morning breeze brushes, cools off his thighs, the sexual mass where the flies are buzzing...

... Véronique throws her hair back, I take her hair and bury my head in

it ; Véronique turns back, takes my head in her hands :

Xaintrailles kissed me in the garden.

I catch her by the waist, I bite her mouth, her breasts roll, get crushed on my chest, she pushes my arms away, I kiss her eyelids, her hand strokes my back, my belt, her eyelids taste of silt, I lick them ; my open shirt becomes soaked with sweat :

— When will you give me some of your milk ?

— First take my blood.

She laughs, I knock her down under me on the sofa.

Wind closes the books on the table, makes the pencils roll, I kiss her mouth through her hair ; my hand sinks under her dress, covers her right breast, it's shivering, it's quivering, it becomes warm under my palm, I cover the other breast, I caress it gently, I unfasten the dress, I kiss the tip of the breast, Véronique is panting under me, I crush my mouth on her breast ; the windows are wide open on the park ; Xaintrailles is walking among the tall grass, his rifle erect.

— Don't hug me too tight, Thivai, you'll break my back.

I crawl over her, her hands are kneading the shorts on my buttocks, her fingers roll the hem ;

— You're wearing your swimsuit, I can feel it. It's wet.

— I have no more underwear.

— As for me, I have no more heart.

Her fingers part my buttocks then slip under the shorts, knead the rolls of fat of the buttocks ; I close her mouth with my teeth ; open on the head of the sofa, one of Xaintrailles' books : Manual of Tactics and Strategy. I open it, I see the drawing of a Greek hoplite throwing his spear, his foot on a rose laurel, Xaintrailles, dreamily, one evening, blackened with ink a small loincloth on the hoplite's belly ; I leave the book opened ; Véronique's hand sinks between her belly and mine, she starts unbuttoning my shorts, she looks me straight in the eye, her hand unbuttons, my hand joins her hand, intertwined they uncover my thighs ; my cock grows hard under the wet swimming trunks, Véronique's hand threads its way under the swimming trunks, touches my cock, the swollen vein.

Xaintrailles is whistling under the trees, his shirt open down to the navel.

— Tonight he came in pyjamas moaning under the window of my room. He was sitting on the pond's rockery ; in his half-opened pyjamas I could see his cock erect ; with a little stick he was destroying the wormholes, his chest was rising, whining...

— The day we greeted you to our heartless club, he'd dirtied his pants, the negro had hit him in the belly, had bent his head under the wine press tap until his nose began bleeding. Your aunt was watching, standing on the steps, she was waiting for her negro.

— Before she took you, you and Xaintrailles, the negro used to take me

for walks in the wet garden, he told me the name of flowers and leaves, he crunched worms and grasshoppers ; in the evening, in front of the fire, she'd crown him with flowers, while he, would tear the tapestry of the sofa under his thighs and pull the horsehair...

Xaintrailles strokes the trees, he can't shoot in the air, the sun is dazzling him, he walks up the alley, the entrance steps, the staircase, he enters the room, walks through it, he grabs his book on the sofa, against Véronique's sweaty head ; she takes his knee, he steps back, she holds him, her hand moves up under Xaintrailles' shorts, the boy steps further back, but he's smiling, he pulls out Véronique's hand, he takes his book, he presses it under his chest.

— Shall I make the parcel for your aunt ? I'll carry it myself to the hospital.

— Her little pebbles salute her.

Xaintrailles leaves ; Véronique licks the hand that touched Xaintrailles' thigh.

— Let's go to the sea, you'll kiss me in the water.

— In salty water, only the upper part of the body can feel desire.

— I want to see the battleships closely, touch their glistening hull.

— The sailors will shoot you.

— You'll come with me.

I get up, I shake my crumpled and wet shirt. I button up my shorts ; Véronique gets up, she fastens her dress.

Downstairs, Xaintrailles crumples the packing paper, I go down to the kitchen :

— She wants to see you, to touch your heads before dying.

— I'm going to the sea with Véronique.

— Be careful, the sailors fire at those who swim towards the battleships.

— Xaintrailles, this night, I had a dream : in the lower part of the city, people were marvelling at a miracle ; my legs were cut off, I couldn't go down, the oriflammes, on the high city, were flapping like swords. The miracle was moving along the river, as far as the estuary, the children were pulling me out of my bed. At once, in the night, the crowd had started building a basilica over the hut where the miracle had come to rest. Touch, I'm alive, I'm alive, without my heart beating.

Véronique covered with blood clings to the battleship ; the sailors open a door in the side of the ship, they throw ropes, I take Véronique in my arm, I swim, I grab the rope, I fall dripping on the floor of the hold, a long line of blood covers her breast and her legs...

Thivai turns over on his belly, the flies caught under him, vibrate in the hair...

Water glimmers. Véronique, clinging to the dinghy's bow, rubs her belly and her thighs against the wet wood of the stern post, her legs move up along the

hull, I come behind her, I cling to her shoulders, my belly presses against her buttocks, my legs cover hers, on each side of the hull. She lets go of the boat, she falls over me, in the froth, her hand bends my head under water ; I struggle, my hand pulls her swimsuit on her hip, tears it, the locks of her pubic hair unfurl in the luminescent water... Thivai buries his face in the sleeping bag soiled with bugs' blood... Xaintrailles is huddled in a corner of the sitting room, Véronique plays the piano to entice him. Véronique's aunt has bought little Xaintrailles this morning, she grabs me by the neck, I watch little Xaintrailles, she leads me to her room, the negro is sprawled on the bed, a hand on his belly, he's asleep among the lace, a piece of lace caught between his teeth ; she opens her writing desk, she pulls out a photo of mummy sitting under the magnolia tree, a little white dog is licking her cheeks ; Véronique's aunt lays the photo on the pedestal table, she places her hand between my thighs and shakes my cock :

— Hurry before the negro wakes up ; on the photograph, once only.

I'm trembling, I smile, I cannot say : « I've already masturbated three times this afternoon in the orangerie, Véronique likes that smell. »

The aunt turns away, she paints her nails, I pull out my cock, it rolls on the grey flannel, I lay the tip on the little dog, the photo's glaze cools the tip of my cock, I laugh, she turns her head towards me :

— Hurry up, you're not that long with the little harbour slaves.

I tauten my legs, I rub, but my cock doesn't swell, I think of Véronique's dress, her thighs, her little mouth, soft and downy around the lips like peaches or apricots ; a leather belt girds up her hips, a crossbelt supports her breasts, sinks between her thighs, flattens her pubic hair, goes up again between the buttocks, the straps cross on the loins, the rings shine in the sun, my sperm shines on the meadow, hanging to the grass like a cocoon ; it gushes out, spatters the photo, a colourless, burning liquid, one can't see mummy's face any more, unless by transparency under the sperm.

Madam looks back, smiles, takes the photo, the negro wakes up, he stretches his limbs, I slip my gluey cock back into the shorts, Madam lifts the soiled photo to her mouth, she eats it ; on her lips, there is my sperm and in her throat the little white dog and mummy's body and the deckchair and the magnolia. I go down again, Madam locks herself up with the negro.

In the sitting room, Xaintrailles is motionless, Véronique turns on the stool, her hands brush the keyboard, I take them, I let them go, I move close to Xaintrailles, he huddles, he covers his face with his hand :

— You, you're an orphan, Véronique too, our Mother, the Great One, has eaten our little mothers, listen, she growls, she's hungry.

— Are you a boy, or a girl ?

The murmur from the garden enters by the windows, pours its cries, its whistles, its pebbles on the carpet. I, and Véronique, we lie on the carpet and make

some room between us for Xaintrailles ; he uncovers his face, Véronique lifts her dress, she tucks it up on her thighs, Xaintrailles remains huddled up.

At dinner, his throat cannot swallow ; the negro takes his thigh, under the tablecloth ; Madam doesn't eat, she licks salt from her finger, her diamond clinks on the glass ; the negro gobbles up, fat accumulates at the corner of his lips ; Véronique has tucked up her dress on her belly, under the napkin ; my foot touches her knee under the table ; Xaintrailles sleeps in my room, I let him have the bed at the end, I take the one under the window ; he doesn't dare undress, he slips himself under the sheets with his clothes on ; I go to the window, Véronique, stark naked, hard and smooth under the icy moon, her belly leaning on the rusty iron, gazes at the stars, her feet rub the cement, her shoulders are trembling, her rounded hands support her breasts, blood rises to the nipples ; I go into her room, I catch her by surprise, I hug her, my hands cross on her belly, I brush off the rust, my hands move up over her navel, up to under her breasts, cover her hands ; my pyjama belt sinks between her buttocks, I gently pull at it, Véronique collapses against me, her head rolls on my shoulder, her tongue, out from her mouth, vibrates against my cheek, feels for my mouth ; my hand moves down, covers her cunt, pulls at the down, sinks between her thighs, pinches the swell of the cunt ; a groan, coming from my room, stops my mouth on Véronique's cheek :

— It's little Xaintrailles. He's biting his cheeks.

She breaks away from me, she crosses her room, goes out in the corridor, enters my room, goes to the window, takes the shorts on my bed, bends down, slips the shorts on, without buttoning it — the buttonholes' flap falls back over her thighs ; her buttocks are well hugged by the flannel ; she steps towards Xaintrailles' bed, she sits there ; the boy raises the sheet, he sees Véronique's bare breasts, she gets up, standing with her legs parted, fists on her hips ; she slightly bends her torso towards the bed ; Xaintrailles raises the sheets again, Véronique plunges forward, pulls the sheet, in one go and intertwines with the boy, who, his shorts half-opened, struggles, screams, scratches Véronique's cheeks ; she takes his mouth, she gags him, her curly hair covers the boy's cheeks and eyes, she lifts her head, throws her hair back, then, moving backwards to the foot of the bed, taking off the boy's clothes one by one, she lets her hair drag on Xaintrailles' body, blinds his eyes, makes his mouth spit, and sweeps along his cock, bound, entangled.

Three times does she drag her hair on the boy's body, from top to bottom, from bottom to top ; the boy, appeased, takes the hair and makes it run between his fingers, his cock grows taut, Véronique winds a lock of her hair around it and she pulls, the cock stretches, extends, the buckle slips and gets caught around the foreskin ; the boy rises a little on his loins, he laughs, he takes his cock, Véronique brings back her hair on the boy's belly, unfastens with her fingers the lock tied to the foreskin, she strokes the cock, from top to bottom, lifts her head,

her hair moves out of the boy's thighs, raises the testicles ; the cock grows taut, it rises, brushes Véronique's lips ; my hand strokes Véronique's quivering back, the flannel stretched on the buttocks ; her curly hair trembles in the moonlight like waves, I drive my fingers inside, on your nape strikes the noise of the sea, the murmur of the waves, in your ear... O your eyes make a grating sound in the dark, your nails can see ; your small breasts shine between your shoulders ; Xaintrailles, lying, his chin digging in his throat, strokes your breasts like a child would stroke, entranced, pebbles in the moonlight.

All night long we make love to him, we squeeze him between our arms, between our legs, so that his heart shoots out of his chest and into the night sky...

Thivai brings back the sleeping bag on his loins, he's shivering, the sweat from his body sticks the dust of the bag ; a rat runs between the battery crates, its teeth grind on the wire. Thivai rises from the camp bed, he listens to the rat's noise ; he sits on the bed, elbows on the knees, on his feet runs the cold sweat of dawn, the one on which the executioner throws the fresh earth.

Thivai tightens his throat, his cry.

In the courtyard, soldiers bump into each other, gloss their hair, wash their hands and their cocks ; green foliage above the wash-house caresses their bare shoulders ; the sun sparkles in the broken mirrors hanging from the garden hose ; a child stripped to the waist, escapes from the wine press ; a soldier grabs his carbine, he fires, the child collapses against the camp fence : « He's the reb's son who comes to sleep inside the press every night » ; the soldier runs, lifts the child whose cheek and throat are covered with black blood, the child is breathing, the soldier takes his head by the hair, he bangs it three times on the rock protruding in the red dust ; the child is still breathing, the soldier tramples his throat, the child's eyes shoot out of the sockets and his tongue, out of the mouth ; the soldier grabs the child by the hair again, he drags him as far as the sandbags ; the soldiers, at the wash-house, watch him, their hands shaking on the comb, and their lips on the toothbrush ; the soldier drags the body on the bag, then he makes it roll on the fortifications' slope ; he pushes him with the butt of his carbine ; the body remains caught by an eucalyptus stub ; the soldier takes the pole for clearing the latrine, he waves it ; its tip is smeared with still fresh shit, from the morning sentries.

The soldier pricks the dead body with the end of the pole, he clears the head and shoulders from the stub, the end of the pole pierces the cheek then the child's shoulder, the dead body rolls down the freshly ploughed slope to the marshes where it sinks, gradually swallowed up by blue water and carnivorous slime.

Thivai comes back to his bed, his foot strikes the mess tin where a piece of cheese and ham is melting ; Thivai bends over the crates, he throws up, he spits on the batteries, dribble hangs from his chin, he groans, his hands grope for the

hood of the sleeping bag, he wipes his mouth with it, he walks groaning through the small cellar, he feels the walls, scratches the dust from the holes, releases the little stones ; he strikes a match, he burns the cobwebs, the flattened cockroaches, the fleeing spiders ; he's stark naked, his eyes are cold...

Little savage girl, under the caress, the thorns flattened in your skin, stand up again ; lying in the little lips of your cunt, they scratch my swollen cock ; in your eyes, thorns run under the crystal, scratch the lips that settle there.

Xaintrailles licks the wall under your balcony ; bottles roll on the carpet, the broken cups, I throw them in the fire, they crackle, they explode ; Madam died tonight, I vomit over the carpet, while you eat the lampshade, the moths pour their red powder on your nostrils ; Xaintrailles tries to climb the wall, his knees get grazed on the quartz, Véronique makes her teeth chatter, I run upon her, I take her mouth in my teeth, she takes my cock under the shorts, she holds it, she pulls it, I scream, my arm pushes the lamp, the bulb falls on Véronique's arm, burns the down, blackens the hem of my shorts ; Véronique screams, she bites her arm, she bathes it with saliva and tears ; I run to the kitchen, I grab the butter ; Véronique is lying on the sofa, she holds her arm raised, I smear it with butter ; Xaintrailles sings and climbs the wall, wine soils his cheeks and throat, soaks his shirt ; the negro rolled in the cup fragments, snores, ears of corn and barley are caught in his hair. Xaintrailles groans, his knee raised on the saltpetre, Véronique whines on the sofa ; the moths from the lampshade settle on her bare torso :

— Kill me, burn my lips with the bulb. Dispatch me ; how can I live with a silent heart ?

I hit her in the face, she cries, I hit her again :

— Get up, one shouldn't set a bad example for Xaintrailles.

— Kill me, choke me, cut off my legs.

— I felt nothing when she threw herself in the water. I'm a son of the wind. Stop talking and get yourself up. Here I'm not abandoned enough, why, son of the wind, I, I'm living and walking on earth ? I do not know your face. Sons of the wind, thrown on the manure, crowded up in the brothels, carrion, rot, burn... Thivai leans his forehead against the saltpetre, soldiers run along the basement window, the dust raised by their shoes and espadrilles is captured by the sunbeams crossing the cellar from one side to another, they shout :

— Thivai. Winnetou killed a kid, a little reb.

Thivai blows on the saltpetre...

I'll be condemned, they'll eat my heart and my eyes, and my mother within me hidden, by me nourished. They'll ballot for my miserable linen, my smashed mirror, my ball of amber, my golden chain and my transistor. Xaintrailles will weep for this head never kissed, this heart never pressed, these eyes never wet. O death, throw me on the manure, have the king pass by, raise his finger, stop his servants with slanted eyes under the jet-black fringe, arm them with pickaxes,

they push away the manure, hook my knees, brain the rats between my thighs ; make me rot in some deserted country peopled by vile slaves, every night the young masters of the sea come down, hide in the bushes, harpoon the slaves' families, burn their huts, ravage their fields ; then they return to their boats, wake up the oarsmen, gorge them with heavy retsina wine and make fun of them staggering on the banquet stage and feeling each other to ride on their backs. A god that is no god, but a smile of stone, wakes me up, gathers my rotten limbs. Once I left Madame's place, I became a slave ; I used to meet Véronique and Xaintraïlles who were slaves in the lower city, at night for the boats arriving loaded with spiders, crabs, red mullets ; Véronique belongs to the Cooperative, she lifts crates of fish, her forehead, her hands are bloody, sailors stroke her overcoat and underneath, her soaked shorts, dry only on the cunt ; she falls on the crates ; in the warehouse, with the light coming from outside, a sailor lays her on the big fish and his hand smeared with gall — he comes out of the ship's hold, he has brained the fish and chopped their head off — his tough hand sinks under the shorts, pinches the cunt, smears it with gall ; a child strikes the pane with his satchel ; Véronique above the sailor's shoulder gazes at the nets and sails shivering in the moonlight ; she reads a hundred times the number painted on the ship's bow ; the sailor penetrates her, smashes her forehead, between the eyes, with his closed fist ; blood rises to Véronique's eyes ; the sailor, excited by the smell of blood rising, crushes Véronique's breasts ; a fish-hook hanging from his jacket pierces Véronique's overcoat, pricks the breast ; she screams, the sailor gets up again, his cock, softened, drags a few seconds on a fish fin ; he gets up, he pushes, with his foot, Véronique under the fish ; wounded, she stays lying there until dawn ; Xaintraïlles, his belly girded in a piece of cloth, wanders from one sleazy bar to another, he squats down under the counter, under the tables, he cleans the spittoons, picks up the cigarette butts ; the men sitting at the tables push him, he falls, mouth crushed on the spittoon ; in the casinos, he threads his way between the players' legs ; women, a giant cigarette holder between their fingers, lift up his chin ; waiters gag him with his soiled cloth, they steal from him the cigarette butts swelling the pocket of his jeans ; in the evening, in front of the social commissioner, he trembles, he expects the whip, he raises his arms, the social commissioner goes through his pockets, takes out the tobacco, pours it in a money box : For our old citizens. The commissioner taps on Xaintraïlles' hip : « Now, to the kennel. »

Xaintraïlles moves back towards the door, he goes into the garden, walks to the kennel on all fours, he crawls under the fence ; the dogs, awake, mating, growl ; their warm breath runs on his shoulders ; he slides into the hole of the dog keeper ; that one, drunk, is lying across the door frame ; Xaintraïlles steps over the body, he blows out the candle and lies on the pailleasse ; in the middle of the night, the keeper wakes him up : « They send me tomorrow to military training, they will

send us to the armies, ten State slaves to one free man. I'm leaving this morning. They place us on second line of battle. Impossible to move back, or escape. Don't fall asleep, look at me, talk to me. My wife and children are scattered in the city. Last night the social commissioner's children forced me to drink, I was vomiting on the irises, they were tightly blocking the hole entrance, pushing me back. I saw one of my children passing in the alley, he was pulling a cartload of manure, his thin shoulders bare, hollowed, blackened by the pole... »

The dogs howl, the weapons clink in the darkness of dawn. I, Thivai, third son of the wind, I work at the civilian post office, I sort the letters, my foot chained to the table ; since dawn, standing, in the corner of the central room ; the free men dispatch the telegrams ; the silver ring on my lips is bleeding, my legs are unsteady, blood bursts ; at noon, a young woman employee, a free one, brings a mess tin in which are mixed bread, half-cooked meat, barley grains and biscuit ; she lays it on the tiled floor, I squat down, I eat ; she remains standing, then she sits on the table corner :

— Who were you, when you were free ?

I keep silent.

— As for me, I've been free for a year.

I look up, I see on her lip the mark of the ring.

— For a year, look.

She lifts her dress, puts her finger on her knee striped with scars.

— I had a mistress who'd make me walk on my knees over fragments of glass. She used to give me to her lovers, so that they'd continue coming to her place.

She opens the top of her dress : on her shoulders, on her throat, on the top of the breasts, teeth marks.

— This morning they took a thousand newborn children in the slaves' families, for the hounds leaving tonight on operations ; the kennel and all around, it's full of blood and shreds ; the earth is red, the air is red. They'll take away the slaves' food to feed the soldiers and the hounds ; the slaves will eat weeds and mushrooms from the woods. You have a wound on the nape, shall I bandage it ?

— No, they'd tear off the bandage. It's the commissioner : this morning, while shaving his beard ; I was late in bringing him the hot water basin.

— When you'll be free, your scars will have healed and you'll forget the blows. I have a small room on the other side of the harbour. My brother's still a slave, I work for his freedom. I haven't seen his bare face for four years ; he works in the coal mines, his body is always black, his eyes bite ; when beaten, they shed a black blood. Eat, don't look at me, don't smile at me.

I eat, I look at what I'm eating, I'm not allowed to look at life, at the free animals ; if I stare at a free man in the eye, I'm beaten 'til blood runs and that free man can make me die with one kick ; every night my shoulders swell ; I sleep in

the post van ; the telegraphists tear up the letters, they accuse me, they pull photos of naked women from their pockets, they rub my lips with them, I remain silent, I don't move, they knock me down on the letter sacks, they rub the photos against my jeans, over my cock ; they pinch the ring on my lips, they pull it, blood gushes out on their hands, they hit me, they roll my head in the bloodstained letters, they escape, catch the girls in the alleys and drag them inside the wrecks, slit the throat of a fugitive slave whose solitary cry disturbs the bloody sleep of the slaves huddled standing in the warehouse and the sleepy player opens the casino window and yawns, his head bent over the shivering harbour. All the free women caress me coming out of the phone booths, their hand slips on my hip, they look up, their gaze moves up along my belly and my chest, they leave some short letters in my pocket : addresses, obscene words. In order to see me naked, whipped, see my sweat run, my blood, they inform against me. The priests talk to the slaves, they dress the wounds, they put the rebellion to sleep...

The officer on duty pushes the cellar door.

Thivai looks back, with his back to the wall, he doesn't cover his thighs ; the officer looks down :

— The general will come and see you before noon. Get dressed, wash yourself.

Thivai tilts his head on the shoulder, he shuts his eyes ; the officer looks at the ground, the bed, Thivai's soiled feet. Thivai, eyes half-shut, sees the young officer watching him, he smiles at his surprise, at his confusion ; the young man's lips are red, swollen, with no mark of a ring ; the young officer leaves in a hurry, the sentry closes the iron gate then the door ; on his lips, a trail of coffee foam :

— The sea is calm this morning, we're expecting the 15th artillery regiment. All of them greenhorns.

Thivai opens his eyes, pushes his chest forward, under the sun.

Soldiers are marching to fall in. Flags flap, shoes rub the earth ; then, the shouts, the quarrels, the blows on the thighs and on the bellies ; Thivai's platoon returns to barracks. Soldiers fling themselves on the mattresses, they crumple the film magazines, the chief passes between the beds, slaps the thighs, pulls the hands :

— Get up, you assassins, the general needs you.

— Let him first free Thivai, and we'll obey him.

The soldiers roll over on their beds ; on the ground, film magazine pages, crumpled, soiled : the sleepy soldiers, every afternoon, bring them back from the latrine ; the chief strokes the helmets hanging from the beds, he shakes the little transparent bags in which soldiers keep killed rebels' ears and fingers ; bed bugs, gorged with blood, fall from the upper beds and from the glossy hair ; soldiers, hand between the thighs and searching there dreamily, read with one hand raised.

— The general said : if they work quick, you'll take them to the beach at the end of the day.

— Bitch, bitch, woman pimp.

Winnetou gets out of his bed, the chief grabs him by his belt :

— Tell them, you : « The general needs you, he allows you to bathe in the sea tonight. »

Winnetou breaks away, he goes to search in his pack, under the rack, he takes out a still fresh skull : inside the hollows, between the joints, filaments of dried flesh.

Winnetou climbs on his mattress again, he lies down, he lays the skull on his belly, he turns it over, makes the jaws move, and, eyes half-shut, he raises the skull above his head, looks at it, shakes the jaw ; the chief slams the door ; the general is working in his office, signing death sentences, permissions to leave, intendance or operation reports, he phones homeland headquarters, listens to rumours on homeland radio, to the shouts, the curses of the radio operators, the noises of cooking and washing, over there :

— General, the commandos refuse to obey.

— Well, let them then, they're so necessary nowadays, better not cross them. Cancel the bathing.

— General, I warned the prisoner.

— Wait a second, lieutenant ; is it the first time you're on duty here ? You've been told disgraceful things about me. The soldiers, tonight, in the watchtowers... All of it is true, my hand is still crumpled from tonight's embraces, my mouth still bruised from kisses given and received. I'm not yielding to temptations ; by satisfying my desires, and the basest ones — according to you —, I cleanse my body of every surrender and every melancholy. On this devastated island, both rebels and forces of law and order have discovered the god's triple face : the rebels have grown weary of their revolution ; we of our repression ; our mechanical combat conceals an incurable weariness of the moral functions ; every one relapses into the strongest among his original vices ; his obsessive urge to satisfy it, awakens in him some new strengths, strengths of reason and not of feelings ; a man makes himself agreeable to his god only through his own vice. Come closer, is your mother still alive ? Almost all soldiers here are orphans ; there is no natural right ; and you cannot accuse me of cruelty. Forget your heart's affections ; love blood, the palpitation of a muscle, dream of a pebble, a fish-hook...

The lieutenant moves backwards toward the door, he salutes, he leaves. The sentry, before closing the door, waves his hand, the general smiles to him ; the lieutenant goes down the stairs ; the sentry enters the office again, the general takes him by the belt, he strokes his belly, the soldier lays his carbine on the desk, he moves towards the general, who takes him by the waist and makes him sit on

his knees, kisses him on the mouth ; the soldier puts his arms around the general's neck :

— Everything that is base is beautiful, and ugly what is the highest.

The soldier covers with his hand the general's mouth :

— You are my mother, and my father, and my brother.

The general's hand strokes the tears in the battledress, on the knee and on the thigh.

— You're not the one to forbid us to cut our battledress again.

— No, thus tightly hugged, I have you in hand. You'll come with us, me, the colonel and the boys, Sunday, to Loutrakion beach.

— His wife, the whore, she's rotting rapidly. The older guys, they'd use her on rainy evenings.

— Go away, take your hands off my neck, your thighs, go away.

The soldier gets off the general's knees :

— You're wrong, general, I'm just in the right condition.

— Go away, go away.

— I'm going, I'm going.

The soldier takes his rifle, he spreads his thighs slightly ; through the unbuttoned battledress, the general sees the black underpants, feels a lump in his throat, he grabs the soldier's belt, drives his hand in the opening of the battledress, strokes the underpants, warm, stretched, swollen by the cock of the soldier, who, with his arms raised, stiffens his thighs, throws his belly forward and, head tilted on the shoulder, groans, yawns, wets his lips.

Thivai slips on his battledress, torn and stained with grease, he sits on the straw mattress, pulls the horsehair through the holes.

At noon, the general pushes the gate, Winnetou leans against the wall, with rifle at the slope. Thivai gets up, the general puts his fists on his hips.

— You don't wash ? You don't eat ?

The general comes closer. Thivai moves back towards the wall :

— Your ring is bleeding. You're the one who found the blood. You're handsome, I touch your blood, it burns my fingers, it runs in your cock, it burns my lips, my tongue. All of you, dismembered at my feet, and I, to choose a head, the most beautiful arms, two legs, the biggest cock, the heaviest torso, and assemble them, weld them with the blood.

Give your cock, your legs slip in the hollow of my hips.

My body, I do not name it, I do not know it, your hands are training it. Winnetou open, let go my blood. You, you. I tear your chest, I pull the lungs with my teeth, I empty you, I suck you like a raw quail, I dress my body with your skin. It's you that one loves, me that one touches.

The general bends his head on Thivai's chest ; he tears his shirt, he bites the throat shaded with filth and oil, bites the lips, the bloody gums. Thivai,

pressed against the wall, pushes away the general's hands kneading his belly.

Winnetou crushes a fish tin open on the stairs. The general grabs Thivai's head, he bends it sideways and bites the nape thus stretched, artery throbbing ; the general's hand crushes the ear, his nails claw the skull :

— Thivai, you so strong, so determined to uphold your passions, you let yourself die. Come out and join us ; we, your companions with frozen cheeks, treading a voiceless earth, under handless trees, mix your smoke to the one coming out of our hardened lips, bury yourself with us in the sofa's savage leather, vomit in the fire, stroke our dogs and our boys, our girls with bellies hugged in leather, breathe our fragrance of sweat and sperm, the scent of ooze between our open thighs, the smell of grass and soap on our girls' shoulders, ransack the light material covering them, bite the fresh linen over their cunts ; with their lace torn, crammed between your teeth, pull off the shreds of meat caught between your gums ; lick the maidservants' legs, their knees, kiss, when they bend to serve, the joints of their hips. I push boys upon your knees ; they're trembling in your hands, you do not wish living preys...

Once the general has left, Winnetou pushes the gate, Thivai lies down on the camp bed, legs parted, dragging on both sides of the straw mattress ; on his chest, the general's saliva, the blood taken from under his gums and left by the general's lips, the wet shreds of the shirt. The general comes back at three, he knocks Thivai down, nails his hand to the wall, Thivai grows pale, chokes, his heart throbs under the shadow of the tormentor ; his cheeks, on which no tear ever ran, are burning. Thivai, released from the general's arms, collapses, unconscious ; the cool of evening awakens him, his head has stricken a stone protruding from the wall, his battledress is open, his cock covered with earth, his lips stuck by sperm ; he gets up, lies down on the bed.

... I had no name. They used to call me Tooth ; Xaintrailles, Forehead, Véronique, Lip. Others, Hand, Belly, Shoulder, Nape, Eyelash, Cheek, Thigh, Knee, Navel, Foot. Depending on the part of the body touched by the buyer, as a sign of ownership. The social commissioner's children take me with them for a trip abroad. I prepare their hotel rooms, they wolf water melons, squatting on the white and burning sand, they throw me the rind ; without bed, without shelter, without warm clothes, I lie part of the night in the latrine, the streaming water refreshes my back ; I can't sleep in the car, it's closed ; on the beach, they throw pieces of cork and excite me by screaming and whistling, I run on all fours, I bite the cork, I bring it back at their feet ; they make me drunk with sour wine ; in the showers, on the stage, in front of the sea, I soap and rub their savage bodies from which come, for me, at any time, the weapons of death ; I kill the spiders in the latrine, before they come to sit there, I tear the paper and hold it out for them ; sitting inside the boot, my head striking the overflowing oil jerrycan, shaken by the road bumps and holes, I don't listen to their laughs, my ears hear, but neither my mind, nor my heart, nor

my throat do stir. In a city called Thivai, but one of the boy was shouting : « Thebes, Thebes, Thebes... », they set me free, I walk towards a fountain ; the sun is burning the wheatfields, I plunge my feet, my legs, in the icy water, a child turns round the road, his too short legs get caught in the bicycle chain, his thighs pistons, on both sides of the rusty frame, buzz like insect wings. I splash water on my knees, it wets the jeans tucked up to the knees.

... Three young women passed, wearing black veils, widows ; the mark of the ring on their lips ; a light wind raises their veils, they surround the fountain, I take some water in my hands, I plunge my face in it ; the drops sparkle on my close cropped hair ; a reaping machine flattens the grass, the air trembles above the engine : « Tis efus brotaun ? » I keep silent, I stare at them : « Ei gennaios, aus idonti, plain tou daimonos. » The warm and humming voice runs into my throat, it shrouds my heart. I place my hand against the ring on my lips ; they look down, their eyelashes, through the veil, covering the eye, like moths' wings.

The tallest of the three moves her hand forward, strokes my wet and sparkling head, the young masters are asleep in the car, head leaning against the window ; the girl, her dress tucked up on her thighs, her mouth half-open and her fair hair stuck to the lips. The young woman's hand covers my ear : « Esklavos ? » Her mouth swoops down, darkens my face, her mouth settles, opens and shuts itself on my ring, her hands pressing my shoulders : « Kaci. » — On the fountain edge, a bird injured by the bicycle's wheel is struggling in the mud ; one of the women squats down, takes the bird, washes his feathers in the fountain ; when she gets up again, the black material on her shoulder brushes my elbow, burns it ; the river rolls among the wheat, pebbles roll, it flows through, it pierces the fields, the hills of the sun, its water rolls on a bed of fire, it's the earth shining high in the sky ; the women move away ; a stone rolls on my foot, one of the boys, his leg out of the car, thrusts his hand back in his pocket, the other one takes the steering wheel ; I run, I crouch down inside the boot ; the young girl wakes up ; I can smell the river, I hear her voice, her joy, at approaching the estuary :

— I dislike that watery cool rising from the boot, and running on my shoulders.

The boy looks back, strikes my head with his fist :

— You, hurry drying up !

In the evening the young girl makes me sit stark naked, on a chair, before her, my belly and my chest against the back of the chair ; they eat, sitting on the sand ; the sand grows cold under my feet, they pull out a little pistol, they aim at me, the small shot pierces my thighs, riddle my ears ; my cock grows taut, flattens itself against the bars ; the young girl notices it, she looks down, fishermen drag their nets on the top of the beach ; the surf covers my feet and those of the chair ; the froth gleams green, red and blue ; the boys get up again, they go towards the fishermen, they riddle them with lead that chinks against the

fishermen's ringed lips ; the young girl comes closer to me, she bends down, she looks at my cock crushed on the bar, she strokes my skull, my riddled, bloody ears :

— My brothers want me to make love with you, I don't want to, you scare me, you have weapons under your skin. Love, you, skin, I, fear...

The boys steal fish from the boats ; they throw them before my feet. When leaving, ears, hands, navel riddled, almost cut to shreds, I pick up the fish, they slide on my belly, I throw them in the boot ; the young girl throws me my jeans, I slip them on, one foot on the bumper ; the car starts off, I fall over on the asphalt, I writhe, I groan, my jeans unbuttoned ; the car drags me across the softened asphalt ; it stops, my head, my loins, my back are bleeding ; the boys get off, they lift me up, carry me towards the sea, they plunge me into the darkened water ; my body burns, I bite my cry, the boys carry me back to the car ; they lay me in the boot on the rags and the pieces of canvas ; at the beginning of the night, I scream ; my head stuck to the rags, beats against the backseat's leather and frame. The young girl and the boys look back, they open up the hood, I can hear the tinkle of small bells, the flocks and shepherds invisible in the night ; the border puts up its towers, lights up its fires ; the boys get off, I remain alone in the car with the girl, she strokes my forehead ; the boys show the passports, their load's control papers on which I, slave, am written down ; they sit on the benches at the customs, their copper-coloured knees, covered with sweat and green dust, glisten under the neon tubes. Coins slide out of their pockets, chink on the tiled floor, the young girl's hand brushes my eyes, I catch that hand, it trembles in my fingers, blood withdraws, the young girl's head rolls on the top of the seat :

— Don't touch me. You hurt me. You drink all of my blood. Don't touch me. You burn me. Let me go...

She screams, a breath of wild mint, from the ditch where the shepherd is singing, passes over the open car. The young girl unconscious on the seat. The customs officers walk between the cars, pistol dangling on the hip ; the boys come back :

— She's feeling cold, perhaps... and that smell of blood, those cries...

... A boy takes the young girl's head on his chest, he strokes it, he kisses the hair wet with cold sweat ; the car dashes forward through the wheat's prickly dust ; at the river bank, it stops, the boys open the boot, pull me out, me screaming, crying, they throw me on the road ; the fresh air, the spray, the scent of rotten wheat, choke, wet my cry ; in the morning, body smeared with dew and bird droppings, torso and legs covered with trails of worms and slugs, I get up, I drag myself along, I fall, I crawl towards the river, waders walk along the surf, I sleep all day in the sludge ; in the evening, ravenous, I lie in wait for the waders, I look for the frailest, I see him, I grab its leg, I snap it with one single twist of the wrist, I lay the bird on the sludge, I strangle it, its legs, its beak claw my skull, I tear away the feathers from the neck and breast, the down blinds my eyes, I draw

the breast to my mouth and I bite it, I tear it ; the sludge, stirred, swallows blood and feathers, my mouth, my nostrils, my whole face plunges in the slashed flesh ; at the end, in the bloody darkness, the heart is beating, I see it beat with my blood-shot eyes, I bite it, it beats against my teeth, I pierce it, blood gushes out under my tongue ; flesh makes a grinding sound between my teeth ; the bird's head jumps in the sludge, the beak cracks, the eyes mist over ; I fall asleep, my head buried in the warm blood. In the morning, I tear the ring from my lip, I throw it with the piece of flesh it encircled, in the river, a soaring wader dives, swallows the ring ; I wash myself in the river, the wound on my lip burns like an ember ; lying in the ditch, warmed up by the breath of the wheat, I drink my blood...

The general comes for the third time, he sets Thivai on his feet again, he makes him lie on the camp bed, he strokes him.

— « I free Véronique and Xaintrilles, they tear off their ring. I enter the civilian post office, I sleep in the small room on the other side of the harbour, I enter the civilian post office, I grab Bietrix by the waist, she kisses my mutilated lip, every evening she bathes it with soft herbs, she picks for me some fine shells, I am lying in wax and starch, she comes back, she uncovers my cock, she bandages it with a wet piece of linen, she fondles my balls, I eat the plate of shells, they're fuming. Bietrix supports me by the shoulders ; when we kiss, our wounds touch each other, tears flow from our eyes, at night she lies next to me, she puts me to sleep with her fresh caresses, she opens my pyjamas, her fingers unfasten the bandage around my cock ; her breasts tremble like milk in the shadow of the sheets, I touch them, I lay my scented lips on them, my nostrils linger between the breasts, my tongue comes out of my mouth, licks the down, flattens it, my saliva bubbles on the nipple, my teeth pinch it, my lips suck the edge ; my saliva streams on the breast, Bietrix's hand lifts it towards my mouth that takes it again : my body rolls on you, the wet linen covers my cock and separates it from your cunt, you croon under me, I rub your little frozen feet between my hands ; in the middle of the night, I do not know you yet, and you haven't opened your eyes ; the harbour lights slide on my back, on your breasts, when I withdraw on your knees ; I uncover your cunt, I throw the linen at the end of the bed, I kiss the warm swell of your cunt, I blow on it my breath of son of the wind, you groan, you spread your thighs and between them I plunge my free man's growing hair, they squeeze my cheeks, on my eyes rises the acid freshness of your cunt-juice that wets the lips of your little buried secret mouth ; I laugh, each time my nostrils brush the curly tufts of your hair. Biétrix, Biétrix, Biétrix, pull out the cry from my throat, knead my heart, love me, so that I scream at last, so that men can hear my cry and no more will I be alone on the deserted sea or the pebble.

Squeeze me, make the blood flow from my wounds, from my desires, from the rents in my life, in my eyes, in my sight, harden my legs, my arms, my lips ; I alone among the living nature, I dream ; touch my veins, so that they may be

loved, recognized, desired by your hands, by your lips. Desire me, desire me, eat me ! Feel hunger for my flesh, thirst for my blood, take my body, slit its throat open, tear it to pieces and after devouring it, feel regret and desire, and eat me to eat me again. Your head tears under my teeth like a large flower with its calyx closed. Soft blades of grass, pinion my cock, hold the sperm back, the furious semen that would burn the whole of you alive. Sleep, my semen held back above your belly, sleep, smile, sleep under the arch of my thighs ; my eyes dream on your quivering breasts. Sleep without fear, stark naked, in my shadow, under my eyes and my formerly cruel and perverted fingers, in the new smell of my body, in the shudder of my despair, sleep under me, your sky with clouds and stars of saliva and blood. In your sleep, listen to its gods of sperm call for your dormant semen... »

During the night, the drunken commandos, set against Thivai by their idle chiefs and hoping for their love, drag themselves along towards the cellar where Thivai, locked up inside, has trouble finding sleep. Their feet appear at the basement window, dust fumes in the moonlight, Thivai wakes up with a start, he is naked, lying on his belly ; a stone strikes his foot, Thivai turns back, he sees the shoes rubbing the ground, the commandos come down the small staircase : « He's locked in. Wait, here's the watch patrol. We'll go in with them. »

Thivai springs to his feet, he hides in the cellar's darkest corner, he tries to muffle his heavy breathing, his belly quivers in the moonlight, the commandos stamp their feet, the patrol arrives, the lamp lights the basement window ; the sergeant is holding it, he lights up the commandos leaning against the wall :

— We want to see Thivai, let us in.

The sergeant opens the door and the gate, they dash into the cellar, Thivai runs along the wall, he disappears behind the shelves, the commandos ransack the camp bed, dust flies around, raised, falls back on their shoulders ; a commando, stripped to the waist, his small chain shaken on the chest hair, drives his arm behind the rack, grabs Thivai's leg, he pulls it ; Thivai climbs up the shelves, throws his leg in the face of the commando, who catches it with both hands, and holds it between his teeth ; Thivai bites his cry, the other commandos suspend themselves to the shelves and topple them over ; the sergeant, sprawled on the slashed bed, tries to get up again ; his bloody mouth, is moving ; blood smacks inside his mouth, the shelves crumble, Thivai appears in the dust, naked, head shaved, between his thighs, the dark hair of the penis.

The commandos pull out their knives ; Virido takes a fork from his belt — the soldiers keep fork and spoon in their pockets or belt — Thivai tilts his head against the wall, he thrusts his arms between his thighs, his entire body vibrates in the dust ; knives clink in the wet hands ; Virido steps forward, he grabs Thivai by the neck, he spits in his face, he presses on his shoulders, Thivai bends, he falls on his knees, his hands protect his chest, Virido grabs his head by the sides of the throat, tilts it backwards, holds out the fork, rubs it on the stretched throat, Thivai :

— Virido, don't kill me. Don't kill me. You're drunk. I'm Thivai.

Virido drives the fork's teeth in the artery ; blood spurts on his hand ; Thivai chokes :

— Virido, Virido.

With every word, blood gushes out and fills the mouth ; Virido licks the blood on his hand, he pulls the fork out, he drives it in the chest, between the nipples, Thivai, still kneeling grabs his arm with both his hands ; Virido breaks loose, pulls the fork out, he moves away, he turns towards the commandos :

— Kill the beast.

The commandos throw themselves on Thivai, they bite him with their mouths soiled with wine vomit ; they pierce him on his entire body, they slash his navel, the inside of his hands ; Thivai, fallen at the foot of the wall, his head striking the crumbled batteries at each stab of knife or tooth ; the commandos pierce the earth, their knives get chipped on the wall, cut the batteries' green wax ; Thivai, his eyes covered with blood, lets himself be pierced ; a knife clutched by a tender hand, colour of milk, and freckled, tears his cheek.

His eyes gouged out by the knife spatter ; the blade tears the membrane and the nerve in the socket ; the sergeant, rising on one elbow, yells, holding out the lamp with his raised arm ; a commando turns back, and with one thrust of the dagger, he chops off the hand, the lamp breaks on the camp bed's joint ; the commando goes back to Thivai's body ; blood veils their eyes, they pierce, blinded, they pull the shreds, the nerves, the earth appears at the bottom of Thivai's slashed stomach ; the hand of dead Thivai, holds Dafni's arm : the sergeant rubs his cut off hand against his chest, the mutilated arm burns, the sentries run towards the cellar ; the commandos, head buried in Thivai's stomach, tear, with their teeth, the shreds, wrap them around their head, around their wrists ; the knives drowned in flesh, sparkle when a soldier moves his hands in the red pulp ; only the scar on Thivai's lip remains untouched ; the nostrils curled up, the eyelashes torn off, the belly eviscerated, perforated as far as the bladder, the penis tucked up, the testicles pierced, the thighs skinned, the knees smashed by kicks ; the feet's phalanges torn, the hands cut to shreds...

With the sentries approaching, the commandos, crouching, growl, their chest bloody ; the sentries surround them, threaten them with their sten guns, two sentries lift up the sergeant, who has a broken spinal column and a mutilated arm ; the commandos collapse over Thivai's remains, their hands on their heads, they vomit, their back jumps, the raised dust falls back, blood-coloured. Outside, white cocks come out of the hedges, run towards the river to fight with the waders, waiting for dawn, in the mud marked by savage or amorous flights.

Xaintrilles, in the morning, awakens the general, clutches his neck. The general takes fright, calls a sentry ; Xaintrilles slaps the general ; the sentry brains Xaintrilles who is thrown in the bloody cellar.

The governor doesn't leave his room any more, the smell of blood covers the city, one has to walk a long while, climb high, to come out of the blood. Field officers' wives give night parties, with masks and disguise. Bears, vultures, cobras, dance at the women's arms, drink cups offered by cats wearing jeans.

Children run in pyjamas, rub themselves against the furs, the feathers, raise the tails, roll them around their neck ; doors and windows are opened on gardens buried under red dust ; some couples escape, jump in the dust, sink in it to the waist ; hedges, shrubs, trees under which the electric power vibrates, stop the shouts and the vomit of soldiers playing cards or fighting between the barracks. The couples embrace, make love.

The children staying in the houses drag their parents' clothes, put them on and hug each other on the beds.

The youths meet outside the city, in an abandoned palace : the Royal Inamenas ; cars, bicycles, motorbikes, drive along the sea front boulevard, beggars and famished children, squatting on the motorway, fascinated by the headlights, let themselves be hit by the bumpers, squashed by the wheels. The Royal Inamenas, built at the far end of Iguider valley, a deserted valley opening onto the sea, comprises eight hundred and fifty apartments, fifty-five interior staircases, thirty exterior ones, seventy elevators, thirteen halls, a hundred meter-long swimming pool, covered up, heated, paved with marble and tiled with blue ceramic, a gymnasium, a theatre.

The youths, some of whom have brought the maids of their younger brothers, climb the entrance steps, push the door of green bronze, part company inside the great entrance hall ; the old woman, janitor of those semi-ruins, leans from the corbelling of the main staircase :

— Accursed. Accursed, you. I who received princes, kings...

She spits on the blond heads.

One boy blinds her with his hands ; another ransacks her miserable hut put up on the first landing, the petrol lamp topples over, sets fire to the carpets, the rags, the old woman's bed :

— I, I received the devil and his general staff, I saw in his pockets the list of executions, the plans for the camps' crematoriums...

The boys run away, they leap in the staircases, in the corridors, they release the elevators, they let go, the elevators fall through the cages, the hall trembles ; the old woman yells, a boy hooks a chandelier with a pole, he draws it towards him, then he lets go, he throws it at the old woman, the crystal balls roll on the old woman's shoulders, she topples among the charred rags.

The girls, quivering, hiding behind the doors, hold their breath, the boys advance in the corridors on tiptoe ; when they see a girl, they attack her, they fight to undress her ; the maidservants walk up to the last floors, lie all dressed on the sofas, in the crumbled rooms, wait often until dawn and in the cool, for a boy to

find and undress them ; couples make love in marble bathtubs striped with inscriptions of death or sex ; a boy brings, folding it, a green tree branch inside the room, and naked, rides it passionately, then comes back to roll over the girl and make her smell the sap between his thighs and crunch the ants blackening his cock. Water doesn't come to the taps any more ; couples in the midst of orgasm, get up and run after each other in the corridor, sperm and semen streaming on their thighs ; a boy coming out of a room, takes the girl thus prepared and carries her to the bed, from which he chases the girl by him prepared : she dashes into the corridor where a boy with a dripping cock catches her and knocks her down under him, on the powdery floor covered with dead and dried up insects ; a group of girls and boys goes down to the swimming pool, they lie on the tiles, they fling themselves, they crawl, they swim one upon each other ; the last ones dive on the naked, piled up bodies ; those who, drained of their semen and of their blood, feel the cold seize their limbs, come, slowly, their knees trembling and bending, to the edge of the pool, they go down, tread on the bodies, push them aside, and lie between the bodies, rubbing themselves against them and groaning and slobbering like children seized by the warmth of the bed and of first desires ; on the walls of the pool lit up by the egg-coloured light of dawn, obscene inscriptions and drawings : mossy cannons, open almonds, a woman mounted by a dog, a woman mounted by a donkey and pulling his ears while he penetrates her, men mounting each other, women caressing each other, genitals of mating men and women seen from underneath, a man's cock bitten and swallowed by a woman's mouth, a man's head seen from the back, buried between a woman's thighs, women passing a rope between their thighs... The maidservants, neglected, are sleeping on the upper floors.

The first boys to awaken go out into the park ; the grass blades heavy with dew wet their bare legs ; they pick acid blackberries, eat them in the hollow of their hand ; they go upstairs, they look for their clothes.

The old woman gets up again, puts her chin on the corbelling ; the boys come down again, fully dressed, holding on their arms the dresses of the girls, who wake up at the bottom of the pool, shiver, whimper, rub themselves against each other ; the boys throw them their dresses ; some boys, their desire rising again, run up to the upper floors, they leap up the stairs over the broken steps, slip, their feet get caught in the carpet shreds ; the boys look for the maidservants : they will get the cruellest embraces, the colourless and burning sperm, the saliva tasting of blood ; all around, on the walls, shreds of tapestries, on the floor, shreds of carpets are flapping, lifted by the breeze.

Pulled out of bed, the maidservants, all dressed again, come down : blouses, bodices, wet by sweat and saliva, stretched by suspended desire, get torn under the boys' light strokes ; all return to the cars, motorbikes, bicycles, covered with dew and bird droppings ; crushed on the saddle, the boys' and girls' sex

organs burn ; along the sea, spray flies over the surf, splashes the window panes and the cheeks. All enter the sleeping city ; sentries walk to-and-fro in the watchtowers ; motorbikes, cars, bicycles pierce the dreams, reap the grass flattened on the road by the morning dew.

The youths hug each other before their houses, then go inside.

The door once pushed, dawn runs on the carpet and the tiled floor in the entrance ; the boy, the girl, undressed, go to bed, eyes dazzled by the sun of blood and egg.

The maidservants doze for a while on a chair in the kitchen, the sunbeam advances on the tiles, climbs on the foot ; the maidservant awakens, she gets up, she goes to the sink, tucks up her dress, takes a rag, wets it and washes her thighs and her cunt ; she shivers ; water streams on her knees, the linen where a sunbeam fumes, covers the blackened hair ; the breasts are purring under the stretched buttonholes of the bodice.

Often the soldiers drinking in the brothels, in the evening, place themselves on the sea front boulevard, wait for the youths, stop them ; they fight, they knock them down, others run after the girls, they tuck up their skirts, they gag them, they knock them over in the waste ground ; some of them bend over and rape them at top speed ; the boys, they strike them, they brain them, strike them on the cunt, cut their girls' hair with daggers, tear their silk shirts, trample, slash their buckled, pointed shoes, cut with their daggers the cloth of their tight-fitting jeans, next to the flesh.

The military police jeeps brake, truncheon blows, rifle butt blows, the soldiers are overpowered, thrown inside the jeeps ; boys and girls get up again, battered, bloody ; they huddle together in the cars, they go to Talbot's place, or Saint-Gall's, where the maidservants wash them, nurse them, cut their hair, sew up their clothes, far into the night ; half-naked, chest spattered with disinfectant, they sit on the beds or sprawl on them ; Saint-Gall, wearing only white cotton underpants, is dozing, lying on the side, legs folded against the belly.

Fabienne lies down next to the boy, her hand strokes the hip, the hem of the pants, the buttock, the folds beneath the cock ; Saint-Gall opens an eye, he turns over, rolls on Fabienne :

— Now that Audry has left for Elö, you caress me.

Fabienne's hand moves up along the hip, strokes the thigh, sinks under the pants ; Saint-Gall brushes that hand aside, he weighs on Fabienne, his knee pushes apart the young girl's thighs, his hand covers the bra, crumples it, pulls it upwards, uncovers the breast, fondles it, takes it, stirs it ; on his knee the young girl's sap is already streaming, her cunt half-open against the boy's thigh ; Saint-Gall unfastens the bra, nibbles the lace ; the unfastened bra, slides under the breast, tickles the boy's belly ; Fabienne's face, under his eyes, brightens up, takes the eyes' pale colour :

— Audry, I've forgotten him, let's not mention him. It was still the time of ethics and affection. Now I don't live any more, I don't cry any more, I don't love any more, never will you make me smile or cry, I am a stone.

The boy kisses that face, those beams, that milk, those ants, his lips suck in that transparency ; his hand pulls off the underpants that slide between his cock and Fabienne's cunt ; the young girl pulls at it ; the boy with his knee, makes it slide as far as his foot ; the boy takes Fabienne's head, shakes it, the hair rolls, unfurls on the pillow ; in the room next door the girls are talking to the maidservants ; when the servants bite the thread between their teeth, to cut it, the thimble chinks against the ring on their lip. Saint-Gall licks the hair, on both sides of Fabienne's head, the hair gets stuck to his lips :

— Sometimes I think of my mother, only she could warm me up, give me back the light ; but her memory has vanished. Serge, my brother, he screams in front of the sea ; covered with sand, he and Emilienne, they live in a little hut on the beach, they don't eat, they don't sleep, they embrace each other day and night, not to die. The children and the soldiers stay away from them ; they live naked ; Emilienne's hair sticks out of the sand like a tuft of seaweed, both naked, mixed with shreds of jeans, of panties, of dress, of bra, of blouse, bound by the slashed leather. My father continues to live up there ; as for me, I go from one house to another, wherever the boys drag me to. Loveless, hatredless, heartless, tearless, roving around the brothels, have I the strength to live solely by my body ; too many gentle hands have stroked my body ; with you it is still the heart. The brothel is the only place to live in, and I can't enter there. What a pity I wasn't born a whore. With Serge we played : he the client, I the whore.

He, so chaste then, he'd grab me by the waist, he pulled my hair back, he pushed, he rubbed his knee between my thighs, he knocked me over, he undressed me and had me undress him ; he so chaste, he knew all the positions of love, he invented them on my resolutely unconcerned body, he pushed like a kid, he got mixed between my legs, his nostrils got flattened on my cheeks, on my belly ; his tongue, while licking my cunt got pinched between his teeth ; I laughed at his little cries, his little belches.

After that, Emilienne cried against his chest ; he, yet an orphan, and dying from being a son. But, today, like me, he cut out his heart, and doesn't know how to eat it.

The Revolution received from abroad weapons, food and money.

Béja having killed Illiten, who, because of the nature of power and his state of rebel, still belonged to the ancient world, while he, Béja, neither chief, nor second in command, nor subject, nor inspired, but chosen, challenged by fate, mathematical product of historical fate, word and not mouth any more, first man to

whom no kind of god could ever suit, first man not to pray, first man without a heart, without reason, without cruelty, without mother, body crossed by life, but incapable of keeping hold of it, body without limits, shape, number, signal, Béja, shortly after the unsuccessful rebellion of the children's brothel, started to prepare a general offensive due to bring about the gathering in one place of all elite troops of the occupation army. Ships, filled with weapons, explosives, and small helicopters, cross the sea. The rebels, by radio, direct them towards the deserted beaches on the North of the island. The ships, the boats advance between the reeds ; their bottom strikes the pebbles, the bones, the skeletons. There, on the cliffs, soldiers of a Marine Light Infantry post are overpowered, many of them slaughtered, others, fleeing on the beach, brained among the rocks and kicked to death ; the rebels' radio operator sits at the table of the operator — lying on his straw mattress with his throat slit open — who copied the coded text of the next troop movements. The boats are hauled on the sand ; Béja, boarding the first unloaded boat, rushes to the main ship ; he climbs in, the expedition captain is awaiting him ; he leads Béja into his cabin, he grabs him by the shoulders, he scrutinizes him from feet to head :

— Your photo is in all the newspapers of the world, I bring you means of achieving completely your revolution. Girls in our country are in love with your deep, brown eyes, that look as if they had been painted.

Rebels' and sailors' muffled cries, the crumbling of froth on the ship's sides ; Béja looks at the porthole ; the captain spreads out some newspapers on the table ; Béja's hand strokes the books on the shelves, bound, fawn-coloured, in the golden light. The door opens, a little boy enters the cabin, he clings to the captain's thighs, he buries his head between them ; the captain strokes the little boy's back, his buttocks, he tucks up on the hips the child's red underpants, his only garment ; he turns the child over, he takes his hands which he raises to the height of his belt :

— This is my son, he wanted to meet you, since the beginning of your Revolution he only thinks of you, at night he talks in his sleep :

« Daddy, the hero, daddy, the hero ; mummy, Béja, mummy, Béja... »
The child looks down, Béja squats, he strokes the child's cheek, his shoulder ; the boy's knee is shaking under Béja's elbow ; the child looks up, his little trembling face warms Béja's icy forehead :

— We'll send you our children, but do not question me about the slavery they're held in, either in the city or in the mountains.

The boy's hand strokes Béja's battledress, on the chest ; the child touches the pockets, the epaulettes ; the strength, the loneliness of that tall body makes his hand quiver. Béja gets up again, strokes the boy's glossy hair ; a large sea bird crosses the porthole, the breath from his wings flattens the down on the child's nape ; Béja's knees make a cracking sound ; Béja, dazzled, sits on the

leather bench, the boy goes out, comes back with a glass of fresh water, he gives it to Béja who gulps it down, under the child's dark gaze.

The boat takes Béja back to the beach ; the unloading is done, the equipment — including the small helicopters taken to pieces — is hauled towards the top of the mountain. At the command post, the radio operator is puzzled — the rebel, in the coastal post, handles the night messages, but the command post operator doesn't recognize his isolated comrade's ways — he warns the general, a plane takes off, flies over the post, the airmen, with binoculars and searchlights, examine the illuminated site, they see the tracks made by the equipment on the beach, on the way to the cliff ; they fly over the post with its smashed searchlights, the radio operator, from the plane, calls the post : the rebels have fled, dawn appears on the side of the sea ; the plane rumbles, vibrates in the cold beams, the airmen pull up their battledress collar ; the plane returns to Inamenas ; a helicopter takes off, lands behind the post, on the DZ platform recently dug out by the post's soldiers ; the airmen, weapon in hand, jump from the plane ; a commando platoon moves towards the post ; the soldiers enter ; the watchtower's main searchlight rolls on its frame, creaks above their heads, the soldiers discover the bodies, the wounded, the dead, whose open throat slides in the beams ; the commando platoon occupies the post, the plane carries away the wounded, the dying ; one of those, caught in his sleep, is only wearing bloodstained underpants of black cotton ; his head rolls on the leather of the seat, blood spurts out of his torn throat ; thighs lacerated by the rebels' nails ; mouth swollen with blood ; at the corner of the lips, under the blood, the crust of night slobber ; the airmen look away ; flies, having entered the helicopter, while still on the ground, through the doors open under the propeller, vibrate around the bodies, sink at the corner of the lips, their fat white ass dragging on the down, on the transparent eyelids, in the sparkling of dawn ; a rattling noise rises, then others, the lips move, speak, blood smacks inside the mouths, the helicopter lands, the general stands waiting on the platform ; the hangar's large metal panels glitter in the rising sun.

The airmen lift the bodies ; the medical orderlies run with the stretchers, the bodies slide on the stretchers. The general comes closer, he looks at the injuries, the wounds, his eyes caress the naked, or half-naked, bodies, his hands are trembling inside his pockets ; blood shines on the black underpants of the slaughtered soldier, the general moves his hand forward, dips it in the blood, the sun strikes his forehead like a fist ; the body passes under his hand ; an abrupt movement of the stretcher bearers shakes the dead man's penis, under the underpants ; the general, his hand all bloody, follows the stretcher as far as the infirmary.

The command post's soldiers, awake since the middle of the night, warm themselves in the sun, sitting on the ground, their back to the barracks ; they see the general, their eyes close, they smile, little crocodiles in the sun ; the general

enters the infirmary, following the stretcher ; the medical orderlies lay down the stretcher in a small room, white and bare.

They leave, the general comes closer to the dead body, he touches with his bloody hand, the soldier's belly, then his pants, and through the fabric, the softened cock, his hand covers the bloody fabric, sinks between the thighs ; reddened up to the wrist, his hand comes out, comes back on the cock, the general lifts the pants with the tip of his fingers, looks underneath : black mass of flesh, hair, blood, the general lets go of the pants, his fingers sink again between the thighs, press on the cock, blood spurts, runs out of the pants along the thigh and on the belly, as far as the navel, the general bends down, he licks that blood, his fingers enter between the buttocks, lift the testicles ; he rubs his belly and his cock against the joint of the stretcher ; sunbeams run on the tiled floor, little purple birds sing on the half-opened small windows in the roof ; the general withdraws his hand, slips it under the underpants, stretches it with one finger lifting the fabric and his tongue licks the spot of the cloth thus stretched.

The stretcher bearers come back, see the general, lips and fingers bloody, leaning over the dead man ; they bring in an injured soldier, they lay him down next to the other stretcher ; the general turns back, looks at the injured man, a very young blond soldier, wounded in the head, stripped to the waist, his battledress pushed down as far as the thighs, the belt bathing in blood, around the navel :

— General, don't go too far with this one, he's fragile, don't arouse him, he would die.

The bearers leave, the general, his cock swollen, his thighs wet, leans over the soldier, his hand strokes the bloody hair, sinks in that sheaf of wheat soiled by the blood of a rat hurt by a scythe ; the soldier groans, his hand rises from his hip, the general takes it and lays it on the soldier's belly ; then he strokes his eyelids, lowers his face, kisses the soldier's livid mouth, his cheeks, his throat ; he squats down, his lips run on the belly, on the battledress bloodstained and stuck on the thighs by blood ; the general lifts the soldier by the waist, he rubs his face against the battledress, the soldier groans again, blood spurts from the corner of his lips, the general takes the soldier's thigh, from beneath, he pulls it away from the other thigh, pushes his face forward, and half-lying on the stretcher, with his muzzle he raises the soldier's cock, growling and holding up his head with each push ; the soldier's head rolls from left to right, out of the stretcher, blood rises to his forehead, his hands move upwards and repel the general's shaven head : the purple birds fly away ; the stretcher bearers come back, carrying a new wounded, whose belly is torn as far as the lungs, pieces of cotton are bathing inside the wound, trails of vomit — from other wounded soldier — run on the edges of the slit : the general continues searching between the soldier's thighs.

— My jackal, my general, that one is almost dead. In any case, he won't

be saved from death. General, your uniform is bloody. General, your hands, your face are all bloody. General, your breakfast is served at the mess. General, the chaplain wants to see the wounded...

The general looks up, blood trickles down his face ; the male nurses lay down the wounded, and go out ; the general leaves the second body, writhing in the beams ; he bends over the soldier with the torn belly ; he too caught in his sleep — his pyjamas stick to his chest, to his thighs ; the general unfastens the pyjamas. The soldier raises his hands, they touch the general's belly, they push him back, the general grabs them and presses them against his cock ; the open belly stinks already ; the general places himself before the wounded man's feet, he takes them with his hands, he pushes, he bends the soldier's legs against that torn belly, he buries his face between those thighs thus lifted, nibbles the stretched pyjamas, the folds of the cotton under the cock, the crack of the buttocks ; the lace of the unfastened pyjamas runs on his face ; the soldier's cock, stained with blood by the general's hands through the pyjamas' opening ; the general grabs it between his teeth, and pulls at it ; the wounded utters a long sigh, the general looks up, flings his mouth against the soldier's, bites the sigh and chokes it ; his uniform bathes in the soldier's belly, the buttons catch shreds, filaments of entrails ; the soldier pushes back the general's shoulders ; sun burns the officer's nape, flies move up along the beams ; the young fair wounded soldier rattles, the general looks up, he rises, he gets up, he throws himself on the dying soldier, takes his mouth with his lips, leaves him, the soldier rattles again, the general kisses his neck, picks that rattle, the soldier struggles, his fingers, livid, crackled, tremble on the cheeks of the general, who presses his thighs on the already cold ones of the dying soldier, then, after a long rattle, mouth to mouth, the wounded dies and the general bites his lips in order to suck in the blood withdrawing from the face ; the dead man's knees retract, slacken, his shoulders subside, under the officer's fingers ; the other wounded soldier raises his hands, twists them in the sun.

The nurses bring in another stretcher :

— General, your lunch is served.

The officer looks up, his hand lingers on the uncovered penis of the fair dead :

— My little lunch is here.

And he buries his head between the soldier's thighs.

— General, the chaplain is waiting for you.

— Make him go away, God is down here.

Kment sees a hare, he goes after it, he throws stones at it ; the hare, stricken in the head, rolls on the sand ; Kment brains it with his fists. The hare, its legs in the air, trembles. Kment grabs its jaw and unclenches it, he tears it, he pulls out the

tongue, he gobbles it up, sitting on the sand under the high tension wire ; insects sparkle. Kment hears a voice, some breaths, he throws away the hare's tongue, he crawls towards the rocks, he crouches, ass torn by the bramble : Giauhare appears ; Kment comes out from behind the rocks, he moves towards the young girl, he takes her by the waist : grass, stones shine along their legs :

— Draga took me.

— Béja has his planes.

Purple birds cross the tops of the cedar trees, shaking them :

— He went back to Madame Lulu.

Kment's hand tucks up the girl's dress, strokes the sweaty thighs, the gluey cunt.

— Draga is my brother. You mustn't cry. Lie on the sand.

Kment knocks Giauhare over on the burning sand, he rolls the girl's head to the side of the rising sun :

— Stare at the sun until you get dazzled.

He lies down against her, he strokes her belly, tucks up the dress as far as the navel ; snakes crawl, hiss in the bramble, their marks intertwine on the white sand ; at the far end of the valley, monkeys call each other, dive into the river, mate in the powdery foliage. Kment strokes Giauhare's breasts ; the rising sun dries them, burns them. Giauhare places her finger over the ring on her lips, because of the sun heating it. The wind rises on the emerald sea, injects it with violet-coloured blood, soaks the tamarisks, rolls bones, wrecks, ropes, on the deserted beaches.

The young officers ; captains, lieutenants, second lieutenants, in mid-day, assemble in front of the cellar where Xaintrailles has been locked up, they swear to kill the general and warm up the heart of war. Xaintrailles is groaning, lying in Thivai's blood.

The general has bathed in the sea this morning ; commandos were escorting him, he stroked them in the tepid water.

Chewing gum in their mouths, the soldiers watch the young officers, shrug their shoulders ; others are asleep on their straw mattresses, the capsized transistor, vibrating, between the thighs. The governor's jeep scatters soldiers and officers : the governor gets off the jeep, climbs the commanding post stairs, pushes the door of the deserted office ; in the small room next door, he finds the general lying on his bed, stripped to the waist, a soldier leaning over him, his battledress half-opened and his taut cock dragging on the general's belly :

— Your excellency, what a surprise !

The general, while speaking, spits out the soldier's sperm ; the soldier bends his head and looks at the governor, from below his armpit :

— General, you are dismissed. The orders come from home. I put you under arrest, until a war council is appointed.

— My little soldiers will revolt, I feed them well, I love them, I am their

wife, their fiancée. Is it not so, Wildfrei ?

The general kisses the soldier on the mouth, the governor notices, hanging on the washbasin, the linen soiled with sperm and saliva ; the soldier steps over the general, he lies down besides him, his erect cock sticking out of the fly and the general touches and strokes the hardened member ; the soldier smiles, parts his thighs ; sweat sparkles between the general's nipples ; the governor leaves, the general rolls over the soldier :

— Wildfrei, he saw the linen, how your lips have swollen. Am I handsome ? Lick my salty sweat ; your eyelids melt under my lips ; to live on your belly, eat, sleep, drink, you holding my cock and I yours, the flow of my sperm glimmers on your belly, in a moonbeam ; I see necklaces around your neck, rings around your wrists, your feet, your thighs, a collar chain around your cock ; my tongue drags on your close-cropped hair, smooths down your eyelashes, your eyebrows, the tufts of hair at your cock and armpits ; in the street, passes the slaves' procession ; a lump in the throat, watching this unknown country, this square, where, with dawn coming, they will be brought and placed between the chalk-drawn rectangles ; and you quiver under me, you recognize the smell, the moaning ; my lips search for your mouth, in the dark, your head turns away from my face ; your belly slides, rises under me ; I take your head with both my hands, I place it, I hold under my lips ; I crush your belly, your thighs, you groan, head turned towards the window where dawn rises ; a gentle wind runs on the butchers' stalls, purifies the rotting smell ; the shopkeeper yells, the loincloths, the tatters, the bonnets of your brothers shiver in the wind ; the placard beats their chest ; you struggle, your necklaces, your rings jingle, but my sweat gradually covers them, as the sun rises, and as the chalk rectangle grows empty, you doze off in the icy sweat, you fall asleep, and I can then, with one thrust of the loins, awaken you, and lying on my belly, order you to love me, to tauten your sleepy and shivering body...

... Flesh, silver, gold, nails, iris, teeth sparkle on the ravaged sheet. Your pink lips in your copper-coloured face, curl up over my cock, your saliva foams against the muscle, your lips undulate under the rise of sperm ; my balls get crushed against your cheeks, flow on your throat. I am a hound, a billy-goat, a wolf, my cock strokes your nipples ; my tongue rummages in your hair ; you, you, you're a little dog, your cock glows red in the dust ; soldier, it swells the straw daub girding your loins ; I want to cut it with my teeth, see your balls left bare ; where did you lose it ? Who tore it off from you ? I run to the enemy camp, I see you among the herd, squatting, your thighs bloody, on the grass : « Leave me alone. When a child, I used to lace up the master's sandals ; day and night ; you cannot buy me, the master, in order to be cured he needs my blood. »

— Who are you ? Where do you come from ?

— They used to call me Wildfrei, I was born of a hunter father, and a bear-eater mother ; bear's hair got mixed with their hair. The last day of winter, my

father chains up the meekest of the she-bears, to the wooden pillar in the middle of the room ; my mother prepares some cakes, my sisters put on perfume, I hear them laugh at the edge of the latch ; I am leaning against the ladder, at mid-height between the floor of the room and the latch ; the little lice jump on my fur loincloth ; my mother, her arms smeared with sugar and jam, slaps the blue paste ; through the half-opened door, I see the small flowers shiver in the snow ; my father pulls, fastens the ropes and the chains around the she bear ; I climb down, I go out in the village ; my legs, tight in the straw daub, push the light and scented snow ; around the woods, one finds tracks of unknown beasts, since the beginning of winter ; I enter the woods, my foot strikes a piece of iron, I take it in my hand, I bring it to my father, he looks down, he throws the piece of iron in the snow, the bear opens and shuts its pale blue eyes, its breath warms my chest ; I go to the girls' shed, I call, I raise the skin curtain ; my cock grows hard ; in the semi-darkness, the lying and squatting girls sew, embroider the clothes for the feast, I sit down among them, my hair touches the leather walls of the shed ; the girls look up, then down, laugh, nudge each other ; one of them pricks my bare shoulder with her needle, I take her hand then her face, the straw around my legs scrapes the white sand on the straw and wicker mattings ; my cock swells the fur loincloth, I take the girl's lips ; the ivory stick piercing her nostrils, I nibble it ; I kiss the stagnant and black waters of her eyes, all the other girls caress me, pull me by the leg, by the arm, by the hair, by the loincloth ; at night the room's floor is soiled with blood, the she bear is hanging from the pillar, tongue sticking out from its mouth ; the bear is pierced with arrows, with feathery points. During the night, the unknown beasts come back to prowl around the woods, they crush the sheds with their rolling feet, they roll the clothes, the embroiderings, the cakes, the knives, the bear, the ladder, I leap aside, but a gloved hand grabs me, lifts me up ; in the morning, bound, huddled together, I with my loincloth's fur covered with dew, my shoulders frozen, the straw on my legs bloody, my father and my mother, forever silent, walking before me, the girls, embroiderings dragging in the snow, the iron beasts push us before them as far as the river ; using whips, men coming out of the iron beasts hurl down the older men in the icy water ; the iron beasts swim on the green water, between the slabs of drifting ice, we are bound on their backs ; the soldiers grab the girls by the legs, they knock them down, they make them drunk, they unfasten the ropes binding them, they drag them into the beasts' belly, the girls laugh, they squeal ; at night, before sunset, they throw shreds of meat between our legs ; squatting, we tear, we lift the meat ; little birds fall on our shoulders ; they pick the meat from our mouths...

All around, the enemy tents shiver ; I stroke your shoulders. All the kisses, all the caresses of all the mothers on earth, cannot wet your cheeks :

— Don't touch me, don't cloud up my blood !

The herd stirs, the mating slaves are dozing, at the foot of the shaken

generating plant ; on the top of the tents, the gold-embroidered flags with a black spider sewn in the centre, flap ; a soldier comes out of the main tent ; he lifts you by the neck, he drags you towards the all lit up tent :

— The master is in pain, he cannot sleep.

The soldier pushes you in the medic's legs, he takes your arm, he raises it towards his chest, the medic pierces your wrist with a small dagger, blood spurts out, flows in an ivory cup held by a young boy with his cock ringed in iron ; the medic squeezes your wrist, you turn pale, you collapse, on the fur-lined carpet ; the medic takes the cup to the master lying in the dark, attended to by two other young boys, naked, painted in white ; the master drinks, his head raised by one of the boys, he throws the cup on the other boy's feet, motionless, eyes half-shut :

— Have him brought to me, it isn't his blood.

The medic whispers in the ear of the young boy with his cock ringed in iron, the boy comes towards you, he lifts you up, squeezes your bloody wrist between his fingers, drags you towards the master's bed ; the master takes you by the waist, he lays you on the edge of his bed, he grabs your wrist, he kisses it, he nibbles it, his lips, his tongue lick the little wound, suck the blood, the lips smack on your wrist, the blood, sucked by the master, rushes, withdraws from the veins ; your head rolls on the edge of the bed, the foam from your lips soils the sheet ; the medic strikes your nape, the master with his teeth pulls at the tear of the wound ; the medic squeezes the veins on the forearm ; above the bed, in a carved and chiselled frame, a god is smiling ; the master drops your wrist, he sprawls on his back, he wipes the sweat on his forehead with his palm ; the medic wraps a bandage around your wrist, he sends you back on the grass ; blood soils the bandage.

— You cannot buy me. Go away...

The young officers enter the alcove, pull out their pistols ; the general, bending over the other soldier, turns over ; a bullet smashes his jaw, another one smashes his forehead ; the general collapses on the soldier who pushes him back, breaks clear, rolls on the tiled floor ; the officers pick the soldier up, they chase him away ; the general, sprawled on the bed, on his belly, head and back bloody, is still moving ; a bullet in the heart, he jumps, he rattles, he chokes, blood spatters the linen hanging from the washbasin ; the officers go out, the soldier drawn by the shots assemble on the stairs of the command post. Wildfrei buttons up his battledress, the soldiers move aside, he goes down, he runs to the washhouse where he plunges his head ; the officers sit down in the general's office, search among the last papers he signed, filled with sweat and sperm ; they phone the governor's palace, order the young officers who are part of the plot to lock up the governor in his apartment ; the captive governor leans on his elbows at the window ; on his desk, a photo of Emilienne, bathing at Loutrakion, Serge, still a boy, splashing and throwing seaweeds to her.

All soldiers of the island's garrisons are confined to barracks, forced to drill. Xaintrailles, released, is placed at the head of the troops ; the colonel, under house arrest ; the young officers draw plans of operations, order the intelligence platoons to arrest all suspects, make whores and children talk, under torture.

Xaintrailles has Thivai's remains collected ; they are placed in a little wooden casket, which he keeps in a corner of his commanding office. The soldiers complain, some run away, hide in the brothels of the lower city. The officers order a search for those among them who, a short time ago, exasperated by the governor's weakness, had gone underground and were hunting down freely the rebel parties, helped by a few soldiers born on the island, but settlers. Deserter officers and soldiers, at night, enter the lower city, walk up towards the palace.

Xaintrailles jumps in his jeep ; in the palace he exhorts the deserters, he assigns them new commands. All go to sleep. Xaintrailles goes down to the command post again : some liberal politicians, in favour of negotiation, phone the home country, inform the newspapers there, the political parties, Xaintrailles has them arrested in bed.

All phone communications with the home country are cut off, the planes stranded ; the general's body is thrown in the camps' manure.

Xaintrailles has the soldiers woken up, he orders them to rebuild the sandbag walls ; the soldiers, sleepy, rifle beating their hip, lift the leaking bags, sand runs on their arms, on their shoes ; mosquitoes, drawn by the searchlights directed on the barricades, vibrate under the faces, sting the lips, drown in the eyes. Xaintrailles, by radio, has all the isolated posts called, he restores the authority of most chiefs, softened in the wait for political action.

In the morning, the island's military system has been put in order again. Xaintrailles gets up from his chair, he walks to the end of the office, he squats down, he strokes the wooden casket, takes it between his hands, raises it to his lips. He goes out, he bends over the city covered with smoke and pink vapours ; girls pass, their swimsuit stretched under the dress ; under their ears, rings of flesh-coloured china, like the lips of their cunt and of their mouth.

The liberal politicians are thrown in the city jails, their family kept under house arrest by trustworthy sentries : daughters and wives of those corrupt politicians, show themselves to the sentries, smile at them ; the soldiers have been told that those women offered themselves to some rebels, so the heavily armed soldiers do not look back when called and whistled at.

Winnetou, standing on the entrance steps above the sea, his loaded sten gun in hand, hears the calls, he looks back ; through the bay window, he sees two girls lying on the sofa, one against the other and stroking each other ; now and then they pick cherries in a cup laid on the floor ; and while eating and spitting out the stones, they continue to stroke each other, their bodice half-opened. They look at the soldier, smile, set their gaze on the fabric ; the hand of one of them tucks

up her dress, over her thighs. Winnetou sees that soft, sun-tanned flesh, where the swimsuit has left pearly marks ; the waves break, ride each other below him ; he smiles to the twins, he pushes the French window, his battledress gets caught in the rose trees, he bends, frees himself of the thorns, blood rushes to his forehead, he touches his weapon, he straightens himself, he walks in, he steps on the fur carpet ; with the breath of the sea, withered flowers tremble in the vases, collapse on the marble of secretaries and consoles ; he moves forward to the sofa, the two girls are stroking each other, they don't look at him, they are shaken by a light crystalline laugh, he bends over, he touches a shoulder, the girl laughs, shakes her hair spread out on the other girl's breasts.

Winnetou, keeping his weapon, sits on the edge of the sofa, his buttocks against the legs of one girl, who starts stroking with her fingers Winnetou's buttocks, the belt's loops ; Winnetou throws himself on the girl, turns her over on her back, pushes away the other one who rolls on the carpet and remains lying there, legs parted, dress folded up as far as the thighs, arms folded under her head. Winnetou takes the girl under the shoulders, he lifts her up, he draws her against his chest, his sten gun slips, the magazine strikes the foot of the sofa, Winnetou kisses the girl, she chokes a bit :

— My name is Alix. Have you killed many men ?

— Yesterday I killed a little reb.

— O cruel ! What had he done wrong ?

— Every night he came to sleep under the wine press.

— Squeeze me, squeeze me, like you squeeze the whores and the peasant girls. Squeeze me. Keep your rifle, so that it beats your hips and arouses you when you fuck me.

Winnetou, who hasn't slept for two nights and who is choked by anguish, throws himself on Alix ; blood, sperm, rush to his belly, to his thighs, to his legs, to his knees, his fingers squeeze the girl's armpits, his belly rubs the girl's belly, tucks up the dress to the navel ; Alix's little rounded tummy throbs under his chest. Winnetou presses the girl's face between his hands, tears flowing from under Alix's eyelids run in the folds made by the cheeks crushed on the nose and mouth ; then, Winnetou, getting rid of his sten gun and laying it on the carpet, tucks up the dress as far as the breasts, strokes, kneads the tummy, sets his lips on the navel.

— Make love to me like you make love to the whores, quick and strong.

She tightens her thighs, Winnetou parts them with his hands, then, unbuttoning himself, he pulls out his cock and plunges it in the girl's opened cunt ; his cock draws some locks of pubic hair ; locks from the boy and locks from the girl mix, brown, shiny. The boy's cunt, snapped up, pulled, pinched by the girl's foamy labia ; Winnetou stiffens his thighs, kneads Alix's tummy, squeezes her waist, strangles it, his fingers move up to the breasts, hollow them, they smell of milk and roses, Winnetou licks them ; some hairs are stuck by sweat between the

breasts, Winnetou mixes them to his, blackened by the salty air. Alix strokes them, combs them, her lips lick them at the root on the top of Winnetou's head ; she groans, arches her back ; the battledress, all around the cock, and between the buttocks, becomes wet, Alix puts her fingers there, her knees jump along Winnetou's hips, her fingers follow the sweat on Winnetou's battledress ; sperm rises, gnaws the boy's cock, gushes out, the girl, shaken, hooks her fingers to Winnetou's buttocks, and lifts herself up on her back ; the boy's cock, snapped up, squeezed, like a fish-hook in dark water, Winnetou shivers, a cold sweat runs on his nape, fear grips him, he withdraws his cock, but the girl grabs it from him, and plunges it again between her thighs, the cock again goes down, snapped by a hand unknown and mistress of the dark, into the girl's entrails. Tears shine on Alix's cheeks, Winnetou drinks them, the breasts roll under the boy, Alix's and Winnetou's nipples touch each other, bleed, burn, Winnetou's jacket opens, closes itself when the boy swells his chest, and with one hand crushes the girl's breasts one against the other, she groans, writhes, pulling at the boy's cock ; the French window bangs in the golden light, its blue panes caught in the roses ; the other girl, turned over on her belly, her legs raised and whirling, her dress tucked up as far as the root of the buttocks, sings a gentle tune, whistles to attract the purple birds ; with her foot she pushes the cherry cup towards Winnetou's sten gun ; the soldier looks up, he gets up from Alix's body, his cock jumps out, released, dangling, softened on the thigh, he buttons it up again, he walks towards the girl lying with her tucked up dress stretched on the swollen hips, he tramples the girl's hands, he crushes her under his foot, the girl yells, Alix rolls her head on the sofa :

— Shut up, Anne, you'll scare him off.

Winnetou takes his weapon, he goes out on the perron, he leans his back against the thin wooden column, the sun fumes, dries his hands, his lips, the battledress cloth ; small blue fish fly through the froth ; in the bay whitened by froth, large ships are sparkling, their antennas raised, motionless, in the heat haze ; Winnetou, gradually, feels desire rising again, weakening his knees ; the girls, lying in the same spot, Alix on the sofa, Anne on the carpet, have fallen asleep.

Winnetou watches their breasts throbbing, uncovered and touching the fur ; he unlocks the French window, silently enters the sitting room, he crouches down, he grabs Anne's shoulders, he turns over the girl woken up with a start, he places his knee on the sweaty and quivering hip, he takes the girls by the arms, he lifts her up, he holds her standing before the French window, he opens her dress from top to bottom, he unbuttons himself again, he pulls out his re-hardened cock and thrusts it between the girl's thighs ; this way, standing, he holding the girl against the pane, licking the fair hair on her forehead, the girl panting against the pane, warmed and crackling against her back.

Alix, legs parted, Winnetou's sperm drying on her thighs, remains motionless ; her half-shut eyes watch the quivering of the soldier's buttocks,

hugged in the already soaked cloth of the battledress ; her cunt swells under the hair, she lays on it the palm of her hand, she covers it, it calms down ; her hand moves up on her tummy, hardened but soft and warm on the surface, touches the smooth and fresh button of the navel ; drops of sperm roll down Alix's legs, Anne notices them, smiles ; the wild drops shine on the fur ; Anne with her bare foot rubs them. Winnetou licks the girl's ear, nibbles the lobe, spits a bit in the folds of the ear ; saliva sparkles on Anne's temples, on her cheeks ; through the half-opened French window, Winnetou hears the murmur of the harbour, the shouts of the disembarking soldiers, the officers' orders, the grinding of the cranes, the panting of the trains, under the station's huge powdery glass roof ; his cock bitten by the burning shadow, squeezed inside the girl's belly, caught by the membranes, muscles, nerves, Winnetou bumps his knees against Anne's knees ; the purple birds collapse in the rose trees ; over the sea, froth runs like fire across the steppe ; in the bay, around the boats, ice rolls under the green water : soldiers disembark, knapsack weighing on the shoulders, or dragging on the gangway ; young women holding bright umbrellas, transparent, wave their white arms, sun-tanned as far as the elbow joint, stand on tiptoe, throw biscuits to the sleepy soldiers, covered with dew, mouth twisted and soiled with pink vomit, pull their bags, lift them, drag them, umbrella hanging from the neck by the crook handle and shivering in the sea breeze. The little sellers of sodas and honey cakes slip through the worried legs of the raw recruits ; honey sticks to the soldiers' battledress, to the young women's dresses :

— Sowdah, sowdah, sowdah. Some broioche, broioche.

They pull at the skirts and the bottom of the battledress ; the soldiers, with their knees, push away those children, who, face and throat covered with snot, saliva and fish remains, and lips smeared with sugar and honey, are naked, some of them wearing a shred of sack cloth passed between the thighs and knotted on the hip ; others sell combs and wallets on little stalls : those are clad in tight, torn jeans ; others still, coming from the alleys of the lower city and the harbour, accost the soldiers pulling them by the sleeve, open their hands and show booklets of naked photos with men and women mating, seen from underneath, the genitals hand-coloured in ochre red : some children, leaning against a wall, or a bar's lattice, stare with their black and feverish eyes at the soldiers, and hold out their open hands ; children alone or in groups of two, or three, wander on the harbour, hold out their hands, make their teeth chatter, their skull is shaven, except for a tuft at the top of the head, which the soldiers pull : all day they walk about that way, until evening ; then they fall unconscious on a rubbish heap ; in the middle of the night, the din made by rats rummaging through the tin cans, wakes them up ; the recruiters pass by, they eat brioches, they laugh, boys in underpants on the pier's chain links, their shoulders, their bellies gleam under the moon, the recruiters go to them, stroke their waist, then come back to the rubbish heaps, continue eating

the brioche, bend over, squat down over the famished children lying on the peelings, panting with fever, and blow on their faces their sugared breath.

They whisper in their ear, a child then gets up, the smallest of all ; the recruiter takes him by the hand, pulls a brioche out of his pocket, gives it to the child ; an old van driven by a recruiter, arrives from the harbour ; the front seat is empty, on the back seats, boys in underpants, picked up at the harbour, at the end of the day, are dozing. Petrillion, eyes wide open, munches a brioche, bends his shoulders, the driver turns back, looks at him, throws his arm over the seat, his hand touches the fold of Petrillion's navel, above the crumpled underpants, Petrillion brushes the hand away :

— Leave me alone, the Christ.

The recruiter pushes the child with the mouth full of brioche, into the van, he places him between himself and the Christ, the child munches the brioche ; at the foot of the wall, on the heap of peelings, other children rise, but the Christ has already started off, the van drives up the alley.

At the brothel, the child pulled out of the van, is left in the common hall, to the drunkards, the sick, the crazy, the old ones, all those the brothel boys refuse to mate with.

Only after, does Ismène take him by the hand, with the tip of her fingers makes him sit in the backroom, slips under his chin a plate of grilled meat ; the child wolfs it, his cheeks get covered with ash, with juice, Ismène sitting facing him, watches him gobble up ; the recruiters have gone to bed.

Ismène takes the child by the hand again, she leads him to the common bedroom, washes his face, his belly, his thighs, his hands and lays him against her on her straw mattress ; the child turns over in his sleep, he snuggles up between the thighs of Ismène sleeping, or else under her armpit, he whines, sucks his thumb, sucks Ismène's breast.

Around them, the boys stir, groan in the beams like cattle in a stable opened to the moon.

Winnetou has fun until evening with the two twins : sitting, lying, crouching on the white wolf's fur, they eat cherries, the girls hum, their breasts bare ; Winnetou, now and then, takes his weapon, goes out on the perron : the roses shiver in the darkened breeze.

— Winnetou, Winnetou...

He sits down, he eats, he spits out the stones, Alix gets up, she sits on Winnetou's shoulders, her bare cunt wetting the soldier's shoulders, her warm thighs against Winnetou's cheeks and eyelids. He takes the girl's thighs, he strokes them, he kisses them, his hands move upwards on the hips of Alix who bends her head and kisses his lips ; stroke, knead Alix's buttocks.

Anne, lying on her side, her cunt bare, makes cherries roll on her thighs

; her little foot brushes Winnetou's knees : a purple bird, captive in the bathroom, sings, his chirp reverberates on the white tiles, Winnetou lifts his head up, Alix rubs her thighs against the soldier's neck.

A gunshot, Winnetou, with a leap, grabs his sten gun, goes out on the perron ; motionless, nostrils quivering, forehead and hands bathed in moonlight, he watches the sea, the harbour, the mountain, Alix knocks at the window pane.

— We'll get you something to eat. What do you like best ?

Winnetou opens the French window, wind sweeps in the sitting room, the two twins hug each other :

— After your little breasts and the little mouth down there...

And, saying this, he throws his hand between Alix's thighs and touches her cunt... after, Anne's tummy, the little song of her tongue... I love grilled meat with herbs, and whipped cream.

The two twins go to the kitchen ; Winnetou walks, shivering, on the perron ; headlights sparkle along the gulf, Winnetou throws his hair back. The twins come back to the sitting room, arms filled with plates, wines, fruits, lay them on the carpet ; Alix goes back to the kitchen, takes the meat from the grill, Winnetou recognizes the smell, Alix half-opens the French window, calls Winnetou, the soldier comes towards the door, Alix touches his cock through the battledress, squeezes it, shakes it :

— You feel cold. You have icicles all through your body.

Anne cuts the meat ; Winnetou comes in, his hand around Alix's waist ; all sit down, eat, drink ; Winnetou spits on the fur, the twins lay their hands or their lips on the spittle, Winnetou loosens his belt, Alix moves her hand forward, touches, fiddles with the battledress buttons, Winnetou drinks, chokes, Anne slaps his back, Alix licks the splashes of rosé wine on Winnetou's cheeks ; the soldier, drunk, pushes the girl away, he throws himself on her, he knocks her down under him, Anne slips the cup of cream under his lips, Winnetou gets up again, he takes the cup, he plunges his mouth in it, he sucks up the whipped cream, he laps, he licks, Alix pulls him by the belt...

Anne, sprawled on her back, arms folded under her nape, hums with the voice of one who's having an orgasm ; Winnetou, excited by Alix's caresses, and by Anne's voice, brings out his dripping snout from the cup, throws the cup away, takes it back, caps Alix's bare breast with it ; then, he rolls over Alix, who, panting, unbuttons him and pulls his hardened cock :

— Whip my semen.

And he licks the cream on her cheeks and on her lips ; the soldier's cock beats Alix's cunt. The mating exhales through the sitting room a smell of decaying flesh. Anne hums, Winnetou gets up from Alix's body, while she, her cheeks hollowed, her nostrils transparent, pushes him away gently with her trembling and crumpled hands.

Winnetou, then, falls over Anne. In the moments of surrender, she starts humming again, Winnetou's cock hardens, stiffens over Anne's cunt, Winnetou gets up again, Anne, silent, takes the cock, fondles it, with both hands ; when sperm swells Winnetou's cock, she pants, her nails claw the soldier's arms, her knees shake, melt, a lump grows in her throat, her breath shrouds Winnetou's face and throat :

— Give me all your juice. Give me all your juice.

Winnetou, roaring with laughter, pierces her, burns her, bleeds her at the bottom of the belly ; Anne's head rises on the fur, her forehead bangs against Winnetou's above her, with the mouth wide open, fangs vibrating :

— My dog, my love...

Alix, her leg dripping with sperm, crawls towards the sofa, touches Winnetou's weapon, strokes it, pulls it towards her, lifts it, lays it on her belly, squeezes it between her thighs, the magazine slides on the wet thigh, Winnetou lifts his head up, he leaves Anne, he throws himself on Alix, he grabs the weapon from her :

— Fuck, you want the weapon too.

His cock softened and gluey, beats against the battledress, Alix looks at it, she licks her livid lips. Winnetou goes back to Anne ; he covers her again, he spreads her arms, stretches them out sideways over the fur ; with his snout, he digs under the breasts, he lifts them up, while his cock rummages in Anne's belly ; his shoes crush the fruits rolling in the cup ; the purple birds bang against the panes, Winnetou gets up.

He buttons up his battledress, fastens his belt again, he pours wine in a cup, he drinks it, he flings his sten gun over his shoulder, he wipes his lips, he rubs his hands together, he parts his thighs, shakes his inflamed cock, goes out on the perron, leans his back against the wooden column, wind freezes his wet thighs ; with a lump in his throat he bends over the dark garden where the purple birds and the quails are cheeping : a little dog barks in the sitting room, behind the panes, leaps on the twins' breasts, Winnetou tilts his head backwards, forwards, his hand grips the column, he vomits on the roses, his other hand pressed on his chest, the sea breathes, Winnetou is panting, slobbering, crying, groaning ; vomit rolls upon the roses, weighs them down, doubles them over, runs along the stems.

... After the flight, my cheeks ablaze, I run on the beach, the tide is ebbing, I lie down in the wall of seaweed, seagulls swim on the slope of the waves, surf sparkles at my feet, the whore runs on the edge of the cliff, her dress tucked up by the wind, the scarf shivering on her bare throat ; she runs on the beach, she climbs the wall of seaweed, she lets herself slide against me, I take her by the neck, I draw her against my chest, she touches the pockets of my jeans, she thrusts her hands inside, pulls out the banknotes, my cock has grown hard ; she counts the banknotes, she slips them in her bodice, she catches my hand, she

leads me away from the beach :

— Come, I'll fuck you good.

Inside the room, on the bed, her naked body, all white, opens and shuts itself :

— My little one, my little one...

Sperm spatters the sheets, I shake my cock over the bedside rug :

— Don't dirty, my little dog.

She sits me on her knees in the kitchen, shoves into my mouth some pieces of grilled meat, my fingers smeared with juice touch her breasts, I eat with my mouth opened against her eyes, I feel her cunt swell under my buttocks, I stir them, she whines :

— They're looking for you on the coast. You killed your mother ?

— Yes, with my sister, we threw her in the pit.

— Why did you kill her ?

— My father wanted it. She used to mate with all the men of the coast.

She was asleep on her bed, she had made love all morning with a sailor. I prepared the lunch, I took the knife, I pushed the door, my mother was sleeping on the bed, legs spread, on the wet sheets I laid my hand, I turned my mother's throat, and I pierced it, blood rose along my arm ; my sister screamed, I smeared her face with blood ; my father, on the beach, his hand was shaking on the fishing net. I ran away. I felt like flying and like fucking. I was running through the warrens. Gal fell in front of me, he was escaping from the beetroot field. « I go with you ? They make me work all night, at the lighthouses. »

His jeans are soiled with beetroot juice, his vest spattered with manure. We hide until night in the warren, we eat blackberries. Gal cries, I hit him with my fists. At nightfall, we return to the coast, I bury Gal in the dry and tepid sand, he falls asleep, his hand holding mine.

... The seagulls play on the slope of the waves, they fly further away, then come back with dawn, I'm not sleeping, I rub my bloody hand on the white sand.

The whore takes my hand, we walk along the cliff : « You see, I passed there where the window is broken. »

On the beach, she gives me back the banknotes, she goes away, she strokes my nape, she goes away. I go to the rock, Gal is squatting, he pisses in a puddle, I give him a piece of grilled meat :

— I made love with the whore.

I am tired, I lie down in the sun, at the top of the beach ; Gall walks on all fours, he sits next to me, he's trembling, he cries, he chews the meat, he spits it out :

— I kept the money.

Gal's tears fall on the sand. I jump, I rise to my feet, I grab him by the waist, I knock him down under me, I strike his face, my knee crushes his hip, he

protects his face with his hands :

— Winnetou, you killed your mother, you killed her, I saw her in the pit.

I hit him, I pick up a shingle, I hit him on the forehead, blood spurts out, I vomit on the sand, on Gal's face, he knocks me over, he tramples my chest with his bare foot.

In the morning, the police constables arrest us, they jump in the dried up canal, I run towards the sluice, Gal lies down, hands up ; a constable strikes him with his truncheon ; I climb on the sluice, a bullet smashes my wrist, I fall head first in the canal, my head jumps on the cement, the constable jumps on me, brains me, the irons click on my wrists, on my feet :

— My young customer says he was raised on goat's milk, now then you all know that the goat is a thief...

— As for you...

I have dried blood under my nails, my nape burns ; the truck jumps on the tree stumps rolled by the storm, the soup burns my lips ; Gal, looking down, laps his soup ; next to me, the boy thrown between us both inside the truck, one of his hands holds the spoon, the other one strokes the hem of his shorts over his thick thighs ; the cock is hard and swells the cloth beyond the hem ; a warden walks behind my back, his whip brushes the bottom of my loins, a rat sticks his muzzle out of the hole at the corner of the refectory ; a boy throws him a piece of fat, the rat nibbles the piece, pushes it away and disappears in the hole :

— Alleganys, he ain't hungry tonight, he's been fucking too much.

The whip cracks on the boy's nape.

Gal pulls his straw mattress close to mine.

— Leave me alone. Can't you live without me ? Hey, guys, he's my wife, that one...

I lie down, I roll myself inside my military blanket ; at the far end of the dormitory, the boys roll on the mattresses, I turn over on my back, I slightly raise my head ; some boys are smoking, the fire escape door is half-opened, I hear the rustling of fir trees ; the boys embrace each other ; two of them lying on the same mattress, legs intertwined, smoke the same cigarette which they pull from each other's mouth, their half-opened pyjamas show their erect cocks, jutting out of the brown locks. The warden enters, he walks towards the mattress, whips, tramples the two boys, the lit-up cigarette falls back on one of the boys' belly, flesh sizzles, the boy howls.

In the morning, a blossoming branch rocked in the sharp wind, perfumes the corner of the double window opened wide, I lean at the window ; my shoulders shivering under the shirt, my throat bare, the honey from my ears shines in the beams of dawn ; I look at the sky, I can see circles, tanks, helmets, golden hair, I hold out my hands in the blue air, my lips crumple like dry flowers, I feel a lump in my throat my knees give way under me, I sit down on my straw mattress ; the two

boys beaten yesterday drag themselves to the washroom ; the one with his navel burnt squats down, rummages in the shoe rack, he opens a box of polish, he smears his burn with wax, he gets up again, he goes to the washbasin, he plunges his hand blackened by the blows in the icy water ; the warden passes behind him, strokes his nape, with the thongs of his whip :

— You had nightmares, Dudored ? You had a fight in your dream ?

The boy straightens himself up :

— Shut up, if you don't want to get bled one of these nights. I'll make you drink your blood straight from the bottle.

I lie down on my straw mattress, arms folded under the nape ; Gal comes back from the washroom, his khaki cloth rolled around his neck, he combs his hair, he sits down on his mattress, bends over me :

— You'll defend me, won't you ?

... I keep quiet, my eyes stare at the sky in the window, the golden hairs settle on the fir tree tops. Dudored lies down on his mattress ; in the fields he holds the beetroots between his thighs to rub them and shave their beard, I jump in my furrow, Gal works at the bottom of the field, with the little ones ; as I'm very strong, the warden pushed me in the group of elder ones ; until noon, Dudored, looking down, his shirt is knotted on the bottom of his chest, I can see, between the knot and the shorts' belt, the navel, copper-coloured and shiny ; after the meal taken on the soft and sugary earth, the warden whips the tip-cart's wheel ; bending down by Dudored's side, just when the warden passes by, his whip raised, I leap aside, my hip touches Dudored's, he throws his elbow against my thigh :

— Don't you come up against me. I killed my father.

— And I, my mother.

He looks up, my hip is still leaning against his, he looks at me :

— Your mother ? How did you do that ?

— With a knife, after that I fucked the whore.

— You want to escape ?

He looks down, I stop talking ; only in the evening, while, dripping wet, his towel around the neck, sitting on his mattress, he combs his woolly hair, I bend towards him, I say :

— Yes.

The comb stops in the locks ; Gal is shivering, lying on his mattress, I say :

— There's Gal.

— We'll take your little girl with us.

At the dawn of the third day, we jump in the straw, we run towards the city. Gal, you stop in front of the cake shop, your feet are bleeding, your lips grow wet, a man passes by, he raises his arms, Gal escapes, he hides behind us, Dudored steps towards the man, pushes the snuffbox against his belly :

— Give us all your money, or else, I'll go and tell that you fondle the

boys.

The man raises his arms, higher, pushes his hip forward, Dudored spits on his feet :

— You want me to tickle you, you shit !

Dudored thrusts his hands in the man's pockets, turns out the pockets, his hand trembles inside the man's pocket, against the thigh ; the man has a hard-on. Dudored takes the identity card, he passes it to me, I slip it in my shorts, he takes the man's scarf, his watch ; then, turning back towards me :

— Tell the little girl to spit at him.

Gal steps forward. The man turns red, then pale, Gal throwing his face forward, spits on the man's cloak, then, standing on tiptoe, spits in his face ; the spittle runs on the coat, Dudored takes Gal by the hand, he hits the man's belly with the snuffbox, the man collapses on the peelings ; we run away, Gal roaring with laughter, I enter the shops, my arms are filled with bread, cheese, wine, meat, fruits, cakes ; we go down to the Tcherkessians, they light up fires in the clay quarries ; other boys escaped from the convict prison, are leaning at the caravan windows, stripped to the waist, hair pushed back ; girls hold them in their arms ; Dudored bends in front of a fire of cork and mint, he kisses a squatting old woman, a red scarf around her head :

— I brought an almond cake, only for you.

... The old woman takes the boy's arm, kisses it as far as the elbow joint ; Dudored comes towards me, Gal is squatting, he plays at knucklebones with boys fair and naked, under the caravan ; Dudored climbs with me into a caravan, two boys are lying on a heap of golden and blue rags and fabrics, naked. Girls dressed in pieces of embroidery, panties and bras riddled with holes, stroke them with their ringed fingers ; a boy lying on his belly brings back his knee against his chest, I can see, between his thus parted buttocks, crusts of shit, the girl's hand sinks inside, strokes ; Dudored sits down on the edge of the bed, a girl passes her arm round my neck, I'm leaning against the door, the girl drags me on the mattress. Dudored pinches her hip.

— Don't be afraid, Winnetou, they never wash, nor do they wipe their ass.

While stroking the buttocks of the girl sprawled over me, and mixing inside my mouth, to my icy saliva her saliva scented with sugar and incense, I feel the tatters of her panties stuck to the buttocks ; I feel like throwing up, but I let go, I tear off the tatters, I part the thighs, squeeze the girl's hips between my knees, I open my mouth wide so that she can inject all of her venom, without me dying or vomiting. My hands knead the tatters, stuck by sweat to her back, to her loins, to her shoulders ; my fingers impregnated with tepid sweat, urine, and milk, sink inside the heavy hair, powdery, gluey in some places, stuck to the temples by the boys' saliva and by fruit juice ; my mouth, filled with saliva, twists on her lips, I bite

her cheeks, her nostrils, her forehead, her hand sinks under my loins, under the shorts, between my buttocks, her fingers pull the hair of my ass, my eyes grow wet, she kisses them, her breath surrounds my face, my tongue searches inside her nostrils, licks the crust of saliva, sperm, milk at the corner of the lips ; her breasts heavy, wet, warm, stuck to my bare chest, breathe, run, spread as far as my armpits.

Through the open window, a bird flies in, hits the rabbit skins hanging from the ceiling. Dudored sitting against me, a girl on his knees, nibbles her ear, the silver ring, pulls it, spits in the ear, licks his spittle in the folds of the ear. The girl unbuttons Dudored's shorts with her fingers shiny with fat and make-up ; pulls out the cock, combs the locks of pubic hair ; night falls ; Gal appears at the window, his face tanned by salt and mist, laughs, leaning against the leaves, his forehead in the curtains :

— Go away. Go back to play with the kids.

He looks down, jumps in the mud, he slips under the caravan, sits down on the sheep skins, throws his knucklebones : « Hop, hop, hop, hop. », his back leaning against the axle.

At night, my belly swollen with meat, wine, sugar, cream, I stir in the bed against Dudored ; the girls sleep in another caravan under the chestnut trees ; on the branches leaning against the caravan's roof, in the leaves dripping with rain and seeds, the purple birds stir, rub their beak, cheep ; the girls, under the rags, bare their ears made heavy by the copper and silver rings, listen to the birds' little din through the slats of painted wood.

... Outside, frost seizes our shoulders, men are following us, women tear their lips on pale crayfish, with my icy fingers I stroke the stall where chestnuts fume. Gal took my other hand, Dudored walks, still smiling ; a woman, behind a window fringed with heavy red curtains, looks at our bare legs, she's drinking a big glass of iced lemonade :

— We should part company because of the police. You and Gal, go, I'll go my way alone. If you wish to see me again, go to the Tcherkessians.

There's a lump in my throat, I bite my cry, Dudored moves off, he gets lost in the crowd, Gal is crying :

— Come, let's go to the whores.

I lead him in the brightly lit street. I approach a whore, she takes my hand, lays it on her gold lamé tummy, she laughs, her tummy quivers ; another whore, in a blue dress, caresses Gal. A man pushes me away from the whore, my foot falls in the gutter, my leg gets splashed with bloody mud ; the blue whore draws Gal against her tummy, Gal says :

— I'm cold, Madam.

The whore smokes a long cigarette, her hand tucks up the flap of her slit skirt, over the hip :

— Wait in front of the cinema, I'll come and fetch you later on. There won't be any more men for me tonight.

I look at her, her soaped locks on her forehead, on her temples, she looks at me with her big wet eyes, her fingers shake on the cigarette, I go, I look back, she looks down, Gal, his hand in mine, leans his back against the cinema's thin column.

Stray purple birds hit the glass roof of the shopping arcade, rats knock over the dustbin lids, pull the bones towards the holes. The whore looks at me under the neon lights, Gal falls asleep, I can see the folds of his ear, shiny with honey, his dirty neck, his red nostrils, his crust-edged eyes, his battered lips ; wind slides on the pavement, moves up my legs, under the shorts, along the thigh, the hip and as far as the shoulder, a piece of newspaper, pushed by the wind, gets wrapped around my knee, I tear it off, my hand gets wet with saliva and blood, I rub it, on the sign-covered wall ; circled crosses, Long live Death, sickles, crosses...

The whore comes forward :

— Follow me, I'll say you're my brothers, you'll sleep in my room.

Her hand strokes Gal's shoulder, awake and shivering ; in the brightly lit hall, his dazzled eyes close, the whore pushes us up the staircase, a man comes down holding the arm of the golden bellied whore, she strokes my hair :

— Come and see me, my handsome youngster.

... Her hand moves down inside my shirt, fondles my nipples, the blue whore quivers ; the slit of her dress uncovers her hip's pink and downy flesh, the fold of the thigh ; I say :

— So you wear nothing underneath ?

She keeps silent, I touch the flesh, I knead it under my fingers. Behind the doors leading to the corridor, I can hear laughter, creaking of bed springs, kisses, sighs, gargling, jingling of rings ; the whore closes her room ; I sit down on the edge of the bed, the sheets are undone, crumpled, wet in some spots, the pillow strewn with hairs fair and black, the middle of the sheets strewn with little brown locks ; with fresh powders ; the whore pushes Gal against the washbasin, she washes his face, undresses him, rubs his chest, his back, his ears, Gal laughs, nibbles the whore's wet arm, the hot water arouses him ; the whore makes him sit on the bidet, gives him the sponge :

— Your turn, now, wash yourself top and bottom.

Gal thrusts the sponge in the boiling-hot water, he presses it against his cock, he laughs, I laugh, the whore pulls off the sheets, loads her arms with them :

— Stay there, I'll get some clean ones.

She leaves ; Gal straightens himself up, the steaming water streams on his legs, wets the linoleum ; I leap forward, Gal presses the sponge by throwing it against his belly, I snatch it, I rub Gal's muzzle, I squeeze the sponge on his

shoulders, his belly, his thighs, Gal sits on the bidet again : I pass him the sponge, he laughs :

— Your turn, now. Wash yourself top and bottom.

My hoarse laugh stops the whore at the door, she sees the floor, the bed, the mattress, my shorts all splashed and dripping ; Gal scratches his cock and his thighs, looking down, shoulders shaken by laughter :

— Hurry up to get washed ; there's a party, you'll come down with me ; you're my free brothers. Mrs Theodora will give you some cakes.

Gal gets dressed again, the whore brushes his shorts ; I say :

— I feel sleepy, I don't want to go down to the party.

Gal gives a start.

— You, go down, bring me back a cake.

The whore takes Gal by the hand.

— I'll come and see you later ; cover the bed and take your shoes off.

They leave, doors bang, the whores, washed, perfumed, having got rid of their men, go down the stairs, squeal.

I take my shoes off, I lie on the bed, I fall asleep, I wake up, wind opens the window, knocks over the bedside lamp, my shoulders, my back, my loins, my cock are burning, the sky crushes my chest, a knife slices my stomach, pierces my throat, my mother cuts the cord, under your kiss my heart awakens, go away, let the rats from the pit devour you, whore, let the rats widen your crack and the seagulls, your mouth. I'm in Ecbatane, a place still too pure for you, you wrist eater. The door opens :

— You're not asleep ?

— No, come by me.

— My name is Antigone. I had my first period this summer.

— I, Winnetou, I killed my mother.

— Your belly is warm, you smell good. Mrs Theodora took Gal on her knees. She said you'd stay here 'til the manservant's return. One morning a boy came in, I took his suitcase, I removed his cloak, my heart was beating : he was the first boy ; I was stroking his fair hair, he took the suitcase back from me ; my bodice was half-opened, Mrs Theodora was coming out of her room ; on my bed, he sat down, I had the hot water running, he plunged his head in the steaming water, he rubbed it with the towel I handed out to him ; he remained silent, he was stroking my eyelashes, my shoulders, I was getting undressed against the radiator, his fingers were trembling on the hem of my panties, I lay down on the bed, legs spread apart ; he got undressed, only keeping his cotton underpants, lay next to me, took my hand, kissed it, I was rubbing myself against him, blowing in his ear, my hand was stroking his belly, lifting his underpants and touching his quivering cock buried in the balls ; he rolled over me, his chest smelled of coal vapour ; in his hair, my nails were crushing grains of soot, and my tongue was licking some on

his eyelashes.

I wash, I soil, I wash, I spit and I lick ; the boy, with his foot, hits the suitcase ; he says, rising slightly on his fists :

— Listen, inside my chest, quivers a revolution ; it springs up on my lips, at noon, on all the lips in Ecbatane. Blissful you who are the first to suck and lick the milk of freedom.

He gets up, he puts on his clothes again, he combs in front of the makeup-spattered mirror, his fair and red hair, he takes his suitcase, he goes down. At noon, blood splashes the gates of the palace, the stones, the temple staircases, the palmtree trunks ; the troop reaps, comes down, pierces, comes down, tramples, comes down, pierces, comes down, cuts, comes down, bursts, comes down, tears ; screams drowned in throats by blood, brows open on the stones, legs smashed on the fountains' dragons, chests sawed where powder blackens the blood...

— Antigone, are you free or a slave ?

— Slave. Don't you see the ring clipped to my lips ? And that one above my cunt, under the navel ?

— As for me, I'm free, that's why we could wander free in the city, miserable, filthy, sleepy, but our lips bare.

— By the end of Winter, I shall be free.

Her lips taste of flower and wind, with my thighs and my knees, I lift her legs ; blood sticks her nipples to mine, she crawls on my chest, her head rolls behind my head, her hips cover my breasts, my cock springs up between her buttocks, I hold out my arm, take my cock, I fold it against her crack, and I pull ; my opened cock, wets her navel ; my turned up cock, cracks, I let it go, softened it rolls on my thigh.

— Who, so well, taught you how to love ?

— My mother. And my father, to my sister.

I take the head of Antigone, unhappy, her mouth filled with burning-hot sperm first thing in the morning and her feet crushed under the boots ; the buttons, the badges, the teeth, the nails graze your nipples ; your eyelids swollen with saliva, your eyes splashed with wine ; the fangs, the nails, the points of the bones, and of the muscles, vibrate, run on your skin. Your price ? your thighs parted by the Madam's steady hand, your lips tucked up, your teeth knocked by the crier's hammer. Your price ? your price ?

She weeps against my neck. Gal, drunk, his mouth full of cake, his shorts unbuttoned, his shirt wet with sweat, with tears of laughter, pushes the door, he plunges his head in the washbasin, he vomits, his shorts down on the middle of the buttocks...

Winnetou wipes his soiled lips, rubs his hand on the painted wood balustrade.

In the sitting room, the twins are asleep, embraced, on the sofa.

Winnetou throws his hands towards the black sky ; froth runs on the sea ; he screams, the sten gun's barrel strikes his jaw ; dawn is coming ; he screams, tears sparkle on his cheeks ; dawn hammers his cheeks, his streaming brow.

A seagull rocks and cries on a floating mass of seaweed.

SIXTH CHANT

Xaintrailles sets for the following day the beginning of operation Ecbatane, named after the city in the home country, where most of the soldiers were born, where Xaintrailles and Thivai, when slaves, aroused the body and the heart of many men and women, where political chiefs, military and clergy men quarrel casually and leisurely and fight over a selfish youth.

The trucks are loaded, Pino appointed chief cook as a favour from Xaintrailles, the armouries almost completely emptied, the infirmary fortified, the palaces strengthened with palisades, the archbishop's palace packed with sentries, the cardinal himself taught by a sergeant the use of a sten gun.

Xaintrailles, in the evening, visits the soldiers in their barrackrooms, Winnetou goes with him, the soldiers, sitting on their straw mattresses, silent, a lump in the throat, write on their knees short letters to their fiancées, note down the inventory of their possessions, on the back of those letters. Xaintrailles gathers the letters, has them taken to the garrison's strongbox ; the secretaries will keep watch over them.

A few soldiers look up towards Xaintrailles, stare at his throat :

— Captain, it's serious this time ?

— Captain, they'll all be there to meet us ?

— Captain, one says they still fight with knives ?

— Captain, you don't think they have planes, do you ?

Wildfrei, a comrade of his, in the country, near Elö, wrote to him that they had spotted tracks of plane tyres in the maquis.

— Captain, in Ecbatane, they're abandoning us.

— Captain, why don't we go and cut off the legs of the Ecbatane people ?

Xaintrailles smiles, he looks at the weapons piled against the wall, releases the bolts, he bends over the knapsacks :

— I had new battledresses sent. Did you get them ?

— Yes, it sure was the first time. Those quartermasters, you allow us to bash their faces in, tomorrow morning, before we leave ?

Xaintrailles goes out :

— Winnetou, you're not afraid ?

— Me ? i killed my mother and Thivai, why should I be afraid to die ?

In the kitchens, Xaintrailles lays his hand on Pino's shoulder, he's busy, with his assistants, loading the saucepans, the skewers, the knives, on the field kitchen's trailer, in the middle of the inside courtyard :

— You don't need anything ? No stuff missing ?

— Captain, no, but one ladle disappeared. I suspect the late general of having stolen it. Understand why ?

Xaintrailles laughs, Winnetou snatches a piece of cheese on the cooker and eats it :

— Hey, Winnetou, don't steal my goods.

The two assistants, who bear the mark of the ring on their lips, bending over the tied packages of cooking pots, straighten themselves up, their forehead and their hands are shiny :

— Pino, make sure your men remain clean. And you too.

Xaintrailles returns to his office, Winnetou, standing in front of the door, hands leaning on the gallery's balustrade, spits ; the radio operators' room is lit up, the sets crackle, sparkle, whine ; an operator comes out, stripped to the waist, his loins girded with a soiled cloth, he hops about in the inside courtyard, looks up, sees Winnetou standing in the gallery :

— Hey ! Winnetou, come and drink, I'm going to the shower, come and drink, lolas received a package with three bottles of brandy. Come down.

— I can't, I'm guarding the captain.

— He'll guard himself all right.

— Easy, Succinio, I'm not hungry.

The radio operator re-enters the barrackroom, comes out again with a quarter litre mug filled with liquor. Succinio goes up to the gallery, gives the mug to Winnetou :

— Drink, my fat woman.

Xaintrailles appears. Succinio folds his arms on his bare chest.

— Go to bed, Succinio. Hey, go and get me a battery for my torch.

Succinio goes down the stairs, the mug gleams on the balustrade :

— Drink, Winnetou, drink.

— Do you want some, captain ?

But, Xaintrailles, eyes set on the night, keeps silent, he's dreaming. A drop of water falls from the roof on his wrist, he drinks it, it rolls on his lip, it has the taste and the colour of the ring ; Succinio comes up again, he gives the battery to Xaintrailles, Winnetou drinks, Xaintrailles goes back to the office ; the purple birds rub against the electric wires.

Inamenas is asleep, Xaintrailles had the avenues leading to the exits, blocked by barbed wire, guarded by sentries ; the youths of Inamenas crowd up, their motorcycles, their cars fidget, vibrate before the barbed wire, the girls open

their bodice, but the sentries hold their hands out ; a boy notices the mark of the ring on a sentry's lip :

— You, you were a slave ? lower your arm and let us pass. Saint-Gall, may I hit him ?

— No, he's a soldier, he can complain. Let's go back.

The motorcycles, the cars veer back on the sand of the motorway.

The sentry strokes his lips, his fist clutches the barbed wire ; froth licks the sand ; the sentry sits down on the sandhill, the plant lice jump on his thighs :

— Hey, Volodia, why didn't you shoot him ?

— Are you crazy, me, a former slave ?

— The captain, he would have stood up for you ?

— No. He's on their side.

— Did you see those girls ?

— I prefer the whores.

— The kids, they killed mother Lulu.

— The captain said he'd have the recruiters shot and the kids taken to become soldiers. And the girls, to do the soldiers' washing and cooking.

— Whores we could touch and fuck...

— Shut up, here's the guard.

The sergeant lights Volodia's face with the torch :

— You arrested them ?

— Yes, sergeant. They insulted me.

— Clench your fists. The battle we'll win it for ourselves, we'll throw to the sea all those whores and sons of whores. We'll live with the poor people.

Volodia sits down again on the sand, a tuft of thistles between his thighs, he shakes it off, the little white snails tumble down, he catches them in his fingers, he crushes them, the smell of dead flesh makes him feel like throwing up, he gets up, wipes his fingers on the battledress, he walks towards the valley forming a right angle with the motorway, shakes the posts stretching the barbed wire, looks at the brook plunging under the motorway to spring out on the top of the beach, leaning his fist against the little squat trees with their red roots bathed by the ringing water. Thus, all night, the boy's insult blocking his throat, he walks, he sits down, he bends, he pulls out, he crushes, he spits, he crunches, he rubs...

The gulls soar above his head, stand still at the crossroads of the winds.

At dawn, Xaintrailles pushes the doors, claps his hands. In one hour and a half, the trucks are loaded, the soldiers washed, armed, sitting on the rails, the trailers lifted up and hitched on. On the motorways, the sentries clear the barricades ; the trucks drive towards the Royal Palace Vale, leave the motorway, veer underneath it, join the sea ; a girl in shorts rides an old bicycle, against the wind, her thighs rub the saddle ; Virido gets up, the truck overtakes the girl, Virido, his sten gun dragging on the rail with a noise of bolts, pulls off his light helmet :

— How's life ? foaming?

The soldiers laugh, the girl tilts her torso and hair backwards, her hair rolls on her shoulders, her shiny teeth foam :

— Yes, but not for your shaving brush !

Xaintrailles, in his jeep, hears the girl, he looks back ; Virido, standing against the rail, legs parted, shakes his cock through the battledress cloth :

— Don't you want it ? All warm, all fresh.

The girl, whose shorts are caught in the fold of the thigh, keeps pedalling, panting, forehead bathed by a golden gleam ; the truck overtakes her, Virido whistles, he sees the girl's buttocks roll on the saddle and stretch and crease the shorts' light cloth and the movement uncovers the flesh of the buttocks between the shirt knotted on the navel and the top of the shorts. Virido has a hard-on, and so do all the soldiers ; the girl, whistled at by the soldiers of the rear trucks, throws her hair back ; her cunt is swollen, squeezed, hurt by the fold of the shorts, heated by the friction of the saddle, the soldiers hold it under their hands, they stroke it, they press it, they kiss it with their icy lips.

— Succinio, you know that girl ? who is she ?

— Yes, she's a whore... a free one, she gets fucked at the Royal Palace ; she also does the village men, the old, the young. Captain, if you'll allow me, I'll tell you how she fucks...

— Later, Succinio.

— Jesus-Christ, when she sucks you, or when her little cunt, soft and damp like a little woollen pouch crumples up against your lips. Jesus, Jesus, she would have given a hard-on even to the late general...

— Shut up, Succinio.

lolas nudges Succinio, their earphones get entangled :

— lolas, you still have headquarters ? Tell them we're in NY 22.

lolas handles the message, his foot strikes the wooden casket,

Xaintrailles shivers :

— And that girl, what's her name ?

— Niké.

— Stop, Baby.

The driver brakes.

— Go and tell that girl I'll take her in my jeep. You'll put her bicycle in a GMC truck.

Baby jumps out of the jeep ; waving, he stops the convoy, he plants himself, legs parted, in the middle of the road, the girl rides towards him, she gets off her bicycle :

— The captain wants to have you with him in his jeep, give me your bike.

The girl passes the handlebar to the soldier, who strokes her hand and her arm, Virido gets out of the truck, jumps off, rubs his thighs, sets his fists on

his cartridge belts, Baby grabs the bike, throws it on the pile of camp beds ; Virido has taken the girl by the waist, and kisses and nibbles her tilted-back head ; the girl struggles, Virido's fingers knead the shorts, his nails claw the fabric, the hand moves down on the buttocks, moves up, squeezes the angle where the cunt is caught and crumpled between the thighs ; his lips, woven with saliva and foam, smack on the girl's cheeks ; Baby pushes him back, he grabs the girl by the waist, he draws her against him. Virido strikes him in the back, Baby turns round, slaps Virido, while the girl leans against the truck's wheel ; the soldier sitting between the camp beds, gets up and grabs her hair, and leaning on the rail, strokes her forehead and her eyelids with his fingers ; the girl, her legs parted and her arms beating the rail, her blouse raised under her breasts, and her shorts pulled down her belly, screams, throws her mouth forward ; Virido, with Baby rolling in the dust, throws himself on the girl, takes her mouth with his teeth, and her cunt with his nails ; the soldiers, crowding against the rails, shout, embrace, the helmets bang against each other in the moist air ; Xaintrailles jumps off, dashes forward ; Virido's hand tears off the shorts' fly ; the girl's buttocks roll on the top of the chapped and hot tyre ; her hand pushes back Virido's muscled throat ; her other hand grips the boy's cock vibrating against the torn shorts.

Xaintrailles grabs Virido by the shoulder, he knocks him over, makes him kneel in the dust and strikes his forehead ; Virido, his viper-headed cock sticking out of the fly, his knees bruised by the spiky line of asphalt, holds his belly with both hands ; his forehead bleeds, his lips spit a rosy saliva ; the girl combs her hair again with her fingers, the torn shorts show the lower abdomen, the brown hair, and underneath, the pink labia of the cunt, Xaintrailles' eyes see those moist lips, the girl is slow in tidying herself up, she shakes her hair while staring at Xaintrailles ; Baby gets up again, shakes his battledress ; the soldier between the camp beds, leans out ; the girl folds her leg under the buttock, her foot leans on the wheel ; the soldier leans out, he spits on that thigh thus offered, the spittle lands on the joint of the thigh and the lower abdomen, it runs towards the cunt, along the folds ; the soldier spits again, saliva runs on the girl's pubic hair ; the girl looks up, her hair covers her shoulders, the soldier spits on the face, the girl, blinded, rubs her eyes ; Baby, who has come closer, strokes the girl's hip, Xaintrailles takes her hand and pushes her away :

— Go to the jeep. You, get dressed. And, follow me.

The girl, her face and thighs covered with saliva, flings herself against Xaintrailles, she strokes his temples, pushes herself between the young man's thighs, kisses his mouth and his cheeks ; Xaintrailles breaks loose :

— Get dressed.

The girl ties the flaps of her shorts on her hip, Virido gets up, the girl breaks away from the truck.

— You, you'll pay me another one.

— I'll fuck you to death.

In Iguider valley, Xaintrailles stops at the Talbot farm. Saint-Gall junior, and Talbot, are having lunch, in pyjamas, in the livingroom ; Xaintrailles sits down, he takes a slice of bread and jam ; in the jeep, the girl, on Xaintrailles' seat, is combing her hair ; Baby looks at her, laughs, simpers, moves his buttocks on the seat, chuckles ; the soldiers, having come down from the trucks, surround the jeep, rock their buttocks, some, who were pissing on the roadside, turn round and shake their cocks over the jeep's mudguard, whistle, but the girl combs her hair, smiles, sighs.

The soldiers come closer, Succinio and Iolas, suddenly, grab the girl's shoulders, and hold her tight against the seat ; then, Baby rolls over the girl, he sits on her knees, moves his buttocks, his loins, rubs them against the girl's thighs, while leaning back on the girl's breasts.

Virido appears, his forehead bandaged, he jostles Baby, rolls him out of the jeep ; he pulls the girl, he drags her on the road, he bends over her, gags her mouth with one hand and with the other tears the shorts again and takes his cock out of the battledress ; the girl struggles, her legs, her knees, folded back over Virido's back and loins ; shreds of the shorts drag in the dust, caught in the crack of the uplifted buttocks ; a short moment ; those buttocks rise, Virido's testicles, pulled out of the battledress, by the violence of the fucking, roll on the slope of the girl's buttocks ; all around, the silent soldiers, breathe heavily all together, stamping the ground ; one of them squats down, bends over Virido, and hugs him, his hands gripping Virido's hips.

In the livingroom, Xaintrailles waits for farmer Talbot :

— Did you see Audry in Elö ?

— Yes. His head is shaven, he keeps silent, his lips are tight. We talked to him about Serge, he said nothing. He gets beaten up, his uniform is torn everywhere, he had some blood behind the ear.

— Thivai is dead. Butchered by the commandos.

— My father said : « Xaintrailles should have kept the general alive. »

— I was in jail when they killed him.

— I can hear noise on the road. Xaintrailles, your soldiers are treating themselves to a girl. Dogs, niggers. Father was right to make them pay for the glass of water.

— Don't despise my soldiers. All of them were slaves. And so was I. Thivai had the ring on his lips. Shut up. Why did they appoint me at the head of the troops, if not to hurl me into the sun. The soldiers made up a song for this campaign, it says this :

'Risen from the mud, from the bed of infamy, we march towards you, Phoibos. Open up our brows, dry our thighs. Arm our wrists, tear the sea, turn our

feet into children's feet. Smoke our injuries, kiss our wounds. And let the heavy helmet protect the fruit of our bloody thighs, ours, the dead, knocked over at the edge of the abyss, feet crushed under the stone.'

Xaintrailles bends over the girl, her gluey tummy is throbbing. When Xaintrailles touches it, fire seizes the girl, makes her writhe ; her cunt is bleeding, tufts, torn off the mop of hair, glide with the wind on the dust. The soldiers, all of them sitting, drowsy, on the rails, rifle squeezed between the thighs, stare at Xaintrailles, eyes half-shut and knee quivering. Xaintrailles lifts the girl up by the shoulders, he drags her to the jeep, makes her sit down, the jeep starts off. Baby casts a sharp glance at the girl. Xaintrailles, leaning out, his foot on the mudguard, opens his nostrils to the scents of the ground. Baby's hand caps the gear stick, fondles it ; the girl, her eyes half-shut, smiles. Baby rubs the ball of the stick, he bends over the girl, she chuckles ; sweat ices Baby's back, Niké's soft laugh gives him a hard-on ; his hand scratches the seat's canvas against Niké's thigh ; under the tatters, the girl's cunt, burnt, glowing red, swells again, the tatter grows moist ; Baby at a glance, notices it, his hand, then, touches it, shifts it, uncovers the mop of hair which slowly opens up, like a hedgehog's fur, under the thrust of the cunt's lips.

Xaintrailles sets his foot again inside the jeep, Baby's hand runs on the girl's thigh ; Baby's light helmet slides on his nape.

— Where are you going to, handsome warriors ?

— Ask the captain, baby.

— Captain, they're vulgar, your men.

— Why do you, too, show yourself to us so lightly clad ?

— Because I don't have enough money to buy fine clothes. For instance, I'd like you to give me a nice battledress.

— In Titov Veles, Baby will give you one of mine.

— They're dirty, your soldiers. Say, captain, will you keep me with you ? I'd like to watch the battle.

The planes escort the convoy. In the evening, they arrive in the city of Titov Veles — so named because, in an era of destiny, the Spirit of Evil was tracked down there, hunted, captured, and burned by a shepherd named Veles. The young shepherd was helped in that fight by the Sun, which sent its blazing beams and illuminated the place where the Spirit Of Evil lived under the waters of a river, in great luxury, having received his wealth from those youths whom he had initiated into carnal, sensory pleasures.

Those from Titov Veles, hostile to the rebellion, for the reason that the rebels proclaimed the end of their privileges, crowd around the convoy ; women and girls stroke the soldiers' knees, the men, coming down from their perrons,

grab Xaintrailles' arm ; all night, in spite of the order of abstinence, the soldiers, sprawled about in the houses, their feet bathed, oiled, lips, cheeks shaved by the slaves, drown their fears in wine. The sentries guarding the convoy, cheeks lit up by the light from windows, wait for Niké to pass by, still dressed in tatters she kneels down and gives them a wank, with little words sweet and obscene ; sperm gushes out on the battledress, spatters the dust or the truck's wheel, Niké, her hand splashed, squeezes the cock into her mouth and the soldier, his legs stiffened, sinks his fingers in the girl's gluey and heavy hair. Petrol sings underneath the chassis.

Xaintrailles, his casket on the bedside table, falls asleep in a comfortable bed. Those from Titov Veles, with the officers of their garrison, play a bloody game : the prisoners, chiefs or simple rebels, on their way back from questioning, if they're not dead or too badly mutilated, are kept in the city jail then sold or rented to former fencing masters or sports managers who train them, day and night, to perform dangerous fights, jumps, races ; but, at the end of those exercises, they have them mate with Inamenas whores, and the children thus conceived, belong to them ; private individuals then offer themselves the spectacle of those exercises, at night, at the bottom of their private covered swimming pools ; blood, dust spatter the palmtrees and the panes of the glass roof ; when a man is killed, the fight or the lethal exercise is suspended, the dead body dragged, pulled on the ladder by slaves and sold to the flesh merchants whose servants, most of them slaves, wait outside the glass roof, dozing inside the van, the merchant keeps the bodies in an ice box and sells them to the common people, on days of famine and of rebellion. The prisoners, blinded by the neon lights, weakened by drugs, fight clumsily, blood streams, accumulates at the drain, the wounded roll in that blood, back, thigh pierced by pitiable weapons : kitchen knives, can openers, corkscrews, nail files... Others, legs or arms broken during the jumps, writhe under the fighters ; others still, run all around the pool, chest hollowed, lips covered with a bloody dribble ; the officers back the fighters on whose chest, in full flesh, they had a slave hook the badge of their battalion.

In that way, every night, about a hundred prisoners are exterminated. Children born from their forced matings are, for a while, fed by their whore mothers, in Inamenas ; the moment they're weaned, they are sold here and there, some of them, by clandestine boats, are disembarked at Ecbatane harbour and sold to the pimps, the show managers, the foreign legions. Those slaughters, those matings, those buyings, unknown to the governor and the military, makes a high, secret and sad city out of Titov Veles. Men and youths are in good spirits during the daytime ; at night, their anguished soul sheds a sweat of blood. As for the officers, those rebels they fought loyally during the day and by order, at night they wish to see them slaughter each other, without courage nor pity, having forever lost memory of their rebellion and of their fight.

Those from Titov Veles use up a lot of slaves ; these, children captured in the mountains or in the islands near Inamenas, raided in the overpopulated villages, pulled away from their family, from the epidemic, pulled from under the vultures' wing and beak, serve their masters without a word, without a cry, without a tear ; the silver ring, they clipped it on the membrane of the asshole for the boys, on the edge of the upper labia, for the girls. They are not beaten, but incessantly, at any time of day or night, called and laid on the masters' bed and turned over and turning over and tucked up and tucking up, always eager, under, and over, for the reason that their memory having been taken from them with their freedom, the semen and the sweat of their bodies is reborn in them without delay or repose and gushes out with such a gentle freshness and such a strong and hard fragrance.

And thus do they wish, those from Titov Veles, as soon as desire is born again, inject it like venom into the slaves' flank, to keep themselves free and close to the god. Dead, those slaves are dragged on a flat rock looking down upon the city : the bodies, naked, are lapidated, buried under stones in order that their vengeance does not turn against the stone throwers.

Not a single brothel in Titov Veles. Those among the people who do not own a slave, they mate with their children, and if they don't have any, with the dogs, the bitches, the donkeys, the she-asses half wild and dying under the eucalypti.

At the entrance of the temples, two slaves, a boy and a girl, relieved twice in the daytime and once at night, four and three times during the rites of Fatality, stop the worshippers, take off their shoes and mate with them, inside a sentry box, coffin-shaped, standing under the porch ; thus, emptied of all desires, their shoulders shivering, their belly light, the worshippers enter the temple and kneel before the statue of which the right eye, pierced, concealing a little electric bulb, casts a light of dazzled dawn.

The priests, kept away from all animal and human flesh by a fair priestly law, celebrate rituals in the galleries of the dome above the statue. Those, caught mating with the two slaves, male and female, of the porch, are at once dragged up to the highest gallery and thrown on the statue's head and their bodies abandoned on the pedestal, on the arms ; the hair, their ears, the shoulders of the statue are covered with dried blood, brain fragments. The folds of the hair, the folds of the ears, the slit of the lips are whitened by a powder of bone and teeth. Some slaves who regained their memory, in the midst of orgasm, would hum, during the service, an ancient song which the ravishers, hiding behind the villages' bamboo screens, heard being hummed by the children they were to kidnap. And which invoked an ancient goddess come out all armed from her father's brow, the universal god ; and in the bramble lining the flat rock, burial place for the slaves, a fallen bas relief, broken in two pieces, represented such a goddess, helmeted, the ear out of the helmet and the temples pierced with two holes ; often, the blood running from the

fresh corpses, under the flight of stones, splashed the grey stone. And that goddess, according to the song, had once ruled over a city where only two forces shared the men's will between them, Love and Fatality.

Those from Titov Veles, their heart would throb each time the sweating slave, under them, would begin the song in the panting of his chest. Poets, musicians, sculptors never entered Titov Veles ; a slave sculptor, who got brained immediately afterwards, had erected a giant statue of the god. Only the law and constitution makers could live there and take slaves. The young men, after the day's exercises, were instructed by jurists in the passion of History and the Law of Castes.

The classrooms then became filled with sweaty girls and boys, shirts half-opened and belt dangling on the thigh ; the girls rolled their head on the boys' shoulder ; standing, leaning against the partitions, hand on the knee squeezing the roll of paper sheets and pencils, all listen, their eyebrow blackened, sweat running behind the ear ; the master has the windows shut, because the slaves shout in the gardens and the kitchens of the community, call upon each other from kennel to kennel ; the Master, standing on a small stage, exhorts the young people to courage, action, in contempt of pleasure and philosophy.

The slaves, outside, pick up the dung under the horses' belly, the sunbeams warm up their soiled wrists ; others, male and female, lying under the cars, the mud, the grease of the chassis blackens their face and throat, blinds their eyes. At night, the grease, remaining in the ear folds, in spite of the vapour baths, runs on the master's pillow.

Soldiers from the garrison, who had raped one of those females, were thrown in the swimming pools and died under the slaves' cold gaze. Rebels seldom came to Titov Veles ; those of the lower classes feared them, drunkenness and vice had changed them into cattle : one couldn't even distinguish them any more from the animals they mated with ; dying from the same epidemics, they crawled under the eucalypti ; they had enough to eat ; but, gradually, the craftsmen, the merchants would leave their shops, go up to their rooms and lie down, their animals or their children between their thighs.

The rebels thus killed a few in their bed ; the bodies with their throat slit open would then stay for months, rotting on the straw mattresses, swarms of shiny flies came and went between the windows, the children who caught these flies, blood spurted out on their fingers ; birds too, vultures or crows, pushed the shutters and, flapping their wings loudly, threw themselves on those sprawled corpses ; some rebels, excited by anger, went to take away those corpses, they then came out of the houses, mouth, nostrils, eyes blackened with flies, they ran to dive into the river, and long after, their loins would heave from fear and disgust.

At dawn, the convoy was reduced by thirteen trucks, that were left in the

Titov Velez garrison, guarded by four platoons.

Xaintrailles takes with him four trucks, two command-cars, two jeeps ; seven platoons of fifty men each ; three half-tracks ; ten crates of hand grenades, a complete equipment for mining and mine clearance ; the small convoy advances at low speed, enters Thilissi gorge, skirts round the massif on top of which lies the Cave of Foxes, the rebels' headquarters. Three planes follow the convoy.

Béja scans the slope of his mountain with binoculars stolen while ransacking the coastal post ; at the end of the cave, experts from the friend country are assembling the pieces of the helicopters ; the airmen play with the rebels at the cave's mouth ; this one, several times attacked, is impregnable for the reason that the planes, hammering it with bombs and tracer bullets, and burning it with streams of napalm, the cave's mouth, happening to face the sea, and being protected under the gorge, the wind from the sea stops the fire and sends the smoke back, and the bombs explode in the gorge's shingle bed.

Béja sees the trucks on the road and the planes in the sky ; the convoy stops at an isolated post, hill 720, nicknamed, by the soldiers the Tower of the Pig : the Titov Veles commander had placed there a pig that he owned, for it to get fat, under the care of the soldiers, in the open air ; those same soldiers and the commando platoon, gone up there to mine the massif, one night of drunkenness and hunger, had slit its throat, cut it up and eaten all night, sprawled on the grass around the post. That commander, the following day, went up to the post, and asked to see his pig ; the soldiers showed him the opened fence, saying it had been taken by the rebels, while the cook, with a few soldiers, threw the remains under the stew-pans and buried the bones and shreds of skin, with a hayfork, under the manure. The commander climbed back into his jeep, shoved the driver aside, took the wheel ; at that moment, commando radio operator Thivai's dog, ran to rub itself against the jeep's tyre, holding in its mouth the pig's tail and ears.

Around the post lies the village of Thilissi, several times ransacked by the rebels : that village, famous in all the island of Inamenas, and as far as Ecbatane, for its pottery and for its blankets, was inhabited by very handsome people, covered with jewels and speaking only in poems. At the beginning of the century, those from Titov Veles, had tried to submit them to their martial law, the children had been captured and taken down to Titov Veles, their head shaven, and were placed in the army barracks, but their hands could not hold and handle the weapons given to them to defend the republic ; vainly, the rebels, fifty years later had wanted them to regain a freedom which their poems didn't say they had ever lost. Therefore, they had, during daytime, surrounded the village, burned the houses, the workshops, the cattle, which were running away in the meadows, while they set fire to the bramble, the haystacks, the fruit trees ; butchered with an axe, ten children lying in their cradles, at the entrance of the small gardens ; the occupation army, then, was distributing sacks of wheat, soldiers adopted the

children of those who had been slaughtered and took care of them in the post, but, neither the orphans, nor the widows, would reveal the rebels' hiding place, for the reason that they saw them only during slaughter.

That people worshipped a cloud, at the bottom of the sky, always gilded by the sun ; they called it the Rock of the Gods.

The soldiers, having come down to Thilissi, go and drink, under a palm roof, a peppery wine ; behind their back, the women, the children, the men squatting behind the reed screens, weave, knead under the light of the oil lamps ; all tremble when night darkens the sacred cloud, the ridge of which resounds with the shouts of the gods.

Virido, Winnetou, Succinio, lying under the roof, mouth scented with wine and honey, stomach appeased, fall asleep, their weapons laid on the damp straw ; jackals assault the walls of houses on the village border, claw the saltpetre and roll on their back, with cries of terror ; towards the top of the village, on the rampart walk of the fortified post, the sentry drags his hand on the wall bristling with glass points. Inside the barrackroom, a soldier lays a child on the straw mattress of a comrade slaughtered by the rebels ; he undresses the child, rolls him in the blanket ; on the table, in the pools of coffee, a closed film magazine, is bathing, ink mixes with coffee ; the soldier bends over the child, draws a cross on his forehead, the child, his eyes wide open, pulls his hand from under the blanket, touches the soldier's arm ; the soldier straightens himself up, he goes to sit on the stool, takes the film magazine, shakes it, opens it, reads it under the flickering light ; when the light goes out, he sticks the wire again in the battery hole ; the sentry stops at the door, other soldiers arrive, with shrill voices, their shirt opened, some of them with bare feet, the sentry puts a finger on his mouth, the soldiers then become silent, they enter the room, undress in the dark, lie down and dream, knees raised, hand fiddling with the little chain around their neck.

Virido, and some of the soldiers involved in the operation, have installed their camp beds in the post's attic, under the watchtower towards which one climbs through a latch in the roof of that same attic ; they lie down, they fight, roll on the camp beds, paint themselves, they sew up their battledress ; the post's chief, a young volunteer sergeant, who came back from Titov Veles with Xaintrailles — his chiefs assembled in a martial court forgave him the murder of a soldier who refused to go and fight — enters the kitchen where Pino is washing the dishes with his assistants and the post's cooks. He's drunk, he holds a bottle of liquor in his hand, he grabs a knife on the table, he pricks Pino's buttocks, those of the other cooks, who don't move : « Leave him alone, he's drunk, it will pass away. »

The sergeant drags the blade across the nape of Pino whose face is shrouded with steam and sweat :

— Well then, the cooks ? in Inamenas, little perfumed soldiers, you were eating prime cuts ; always the first at Commissariat arrivals, the good bits for your

bastard officers, the bad ones for the bums in the sticks. Here, one eats jackal meat. And one doesn't fuck. One worships the cloud. Snotty-nosed ones who killed your general. For five years I've been dying in this gorge. And I get court-martialled because I killed a traitor. I can't speak any more. Shit sticks to my ass. Those at the court were holding their noses ; I'm twenty-two years old. I never saw any girls. Once only, I slept with one of my men... I threw up for three days afterwards.

I'll get to the cloud before you. There's my woman-flame. I shove her up my mouth and up my ass. Rub, rub, washerwomen, beat, sluts. You. You. You. You. He pricks the knot of the small cord on the cooks' loins, he laughs, he drinks, he spits, sweat shines on his forehead, under the fair locks. The sergeant leaves the kitchen, he throws the knife in the manure, he goes round the post, he catches the sentry standing against the parapet and masturbating under the moon :

— Do like me, stupid, drink. Here, drink.

He uncorks the bottle and throws the liquor on the mouth of the soldier who licks his lips, takes his hand out from his battledress, drinks from the bottle until he chokes. The sergeant goes back to the kitchen, he appears at the door, he laughs, passes behind the cooks, unfastens the small cord of their aprons. Then he grabs from the bloodstained table, a rolling pin, he goes towards Pino, he strikes him, hard, on the temple ; Pino collapses, the sergeant strikes him on the throat ; a cook attacks the sergeant, pulls the rolling pin away from him ; the sergeant breaks loose, he escapes into the night ; the cook picks Pino up, lays him in the alcove, Pino opens his eyes, at the corner of the lips and on his throat, blood spurts out, flowers under the skin. The sergeant goes up to the attic, he opens the latch; hoists himself up in the watchtower ; the commandos, upright on their camp beds, scratch their foot, their cock, their back ; the sergeant, his pistol dangling on his hip, throws himself on the sentry, pushes him towards the hole, the soldier falls on a commando, whose foot, turned up, breaks, the commando yells, the sentry gets up again, hooks his hands to the latch, but the sergeant tramples them with his rangers ; then he turns the machine gun, he points it at the sky, he tilts it down over the hole, he cocks it, he fires, bullets tear up the floor, the commandos dash into the staircase, the sergeant fires, riddles the camp beds, the commandos knock at the door of Xaintrailles's room, grab their weapons and go up the stairs to the attic again. Saltpetre runs on their bare backs ; the sergeant tilts the machine gun upwards, he points it at the sky, he aims at the spot of the horizon where the sacred cloud has fallen tonight ; he fires, he screams, he fires, his feet stamp the watchtower's floor, his sleeves are tucked up on his forearms, he aims at the stars, the planets, the nebulae, the gunshots detonate, echo, in the caves of the mountain, in the gorges as far as Titov Veles, where the chiefs believe captain Xaintrailles to have started Operation Ecbatane early and the youths jump out of bed and go down in pyjamas in the street and all of them assemble at the

gymnasium, to keep awake there around a fire and under the image of the statue, in sign of union with the fighting men.

The sergeant throws his bottle out of the watchtower, it explodes on the rampart walk, the fragments, the broken glass sparkle at the sentry's feet ; the sergeant hears a noise in the attic, he grabs his pistol, Xaintrailles dashes forward, he catches his feet ; the sergeant losing his balance aims at him ; with a carbine shot, Xaintrailles sends the pistol flying, he then hoists himself up in the watchtower, overpowers the sergeant, slaps him, the machine gun swivels, Xaintrailles brings it to a standstill, unloads it :

— You woke up all the rebs in Inamenas.

Lights appear here and there on the mountainside and as far as the coastal plain. Xaintrailles has the sergeant confined in his room, guarded by three of his men ; he sends a message to the garrison chief in Titov Veles, who, at once, jumps into his jeep with two commandos, rushes into the gorge, brakes at the post barrier, he goes up to the sergeant's room, and for an hour, he abuses him, beats him, strikes him with a rifle butt, kicks him, covers him with spittle, insults, gradually his blows change into brutal caresses. Xaintrailles, sitting at his camp table, writes a long letter to the governor, for him to forgive his rebellion, on the table there is an old photo of Thivai, at the time of his liberation, fishing crabs with a Tcherkessian, in the rocks of Ecbatane. The commander, bending over the sergeant, kneads his belly, unbuttons him ; the sergeant, his head tilted back on the pillow, his eyes wide open, keeps quiet, only his hands, when the caress becomes more violent, rise, touch the officer's arm. The window, opened on the night ; above, the laughter of the soldiers lying in the attic ; the commander summons his commandos ; they grab the sergeant by the shoulders and feet ; they take him out of the room, they carry him away, throw him in the jeep ; the commander to Xaintrailles :

— I take him down to Titov Veles, to send him back to the home country. Tomorrow, I send you a new post chief. Wait until he gets there to begin the operation.

And he jumps into his jeep, he strikes in the forehead the sergeant held by the two commandos, he takes the wheel, starts the engine.

Béja has the helicopters taken out of the cave : they are pushed on side of the mountain facing the sea. The soldiers, leaning at the windows, at the walls of the rampart walk, shrug their shoulders ; nipples hooked to the saltpetre, they spit down below on the jeep's bonnet ; the commander looks up, the soldiers crouch down, the commander turns back :

— You, Hermione, wipe that spittle shining under the moon.

The commando jumps from the jeep, he takes the rag handed to him by the commander, wipes the spittle : he has two scars on his lips.

— Hermione, you've soiled your battledress again. When will you find the time and how, to take a slave ?

The commando gives the rag back to the commander :

— Or else, as soon as you've seen a woman in front of a small garden, you begin leaking ?

The soldier climbs back into the jeep, the sergeant's head bounces on his moist thigh. The jeep drives down towards Thilissi.

— You'll go and see the doctor tomorrow morning, little mare. A real Titov Veles commando controls his whole body.

The soldiers back at the windows, at the walls, watch the jeep jolt along through the village :

— Hermione, he wants to get transferred to the home country, for sure.

The jeep comes out of the village, speeds towards the gorge ; all of a sudden, shouts, flashes on the top of the slope ; the jeep speeds up, a bullet pierces the front right tyre ; the jeep skids, crashes against a rock, the soldiers jump, crouch down behind the bashed in jeep, a grenade hisses, falls in its middle, on the back of the seat, the commander jumps on the road, a bullet flattens him against the bonnet, the jeep blows up, explodes, burns, blazes, crackles, blows, sizzles, the soldiers, behind, fire engulfs them from foot to head, they howl, they roll, standing against the rock ; the tufts of broom above the rock catch fire, those tufts, ablaze, roll, disintegrate on the soldiers' heads ; three rebels jump on the road, one of them pulls the commander's half-charred body, pierces his throat, soils his uniform, takes the weapon, the two others fire at the soldiers jumping against the rock ; Xaintrailles runs into the post, he assembles all the soldiers, weapons fly above their heads ; the soldiers, stripped to the waist, helmet rolling on the nape, run through the sleeping village, lie down behind a small building site on the way out from the village, aim at the rebels, fire ; the rebels, lit up by the gleam of the dying fire, made languid by the heat of the blaze, intoxicated by the smell of powder, clutch their weapons in their weakened fists, the bullets mow them down, they collapse in the dust ; the soldiers fire at the slope, higher up, as far as the vines lit up by the fire, shadows run between the vine branches ; the soldiers fire, the shadows jump, the dust from the shaken leaves falls back on the toppled bodies in the hollows of which the blood moves forward like the flies.

The soldiers come out of the building site, walk on the road ; the soldiers, behind the jeep with its incandescent metal plates, lying on the rock, throw out their charred arms towards the open air ; Xaintrailles comes close, he touches one of those hands, it crumbles, ash runs on the soldier's bloody foot ; then, gradually, in the freed air, in the night's sharp wind, the bodies relax, slide against the rock and collapse on the road, raising the ash ; their lips, their hands bloody under the ash covering them, writhe, tremble ; so do they die, the arteries, the eyes, the muscles burnt, under the gaze of the soldiers back from the vines,

hips covered with dust and crushed grapes ; in the twisted, incandescent scrap heap, a mass of ashes raised by the strength of the wind, a leg dressed in charred tatters, and folded on the back of the seat ; and on the knee, the small chain, and the enrolment plate, intact ; Xaintrailles bends over, the commander, pulled by the rebel in the middle of the road, his bare belly is roasted, its blisters look like flies grappling onto a purulent carrion.

Xaintrailles leaves a sergeant and three platoons at the post, he moves into the mountain with four platoons, he hunts down the rebels who left the vines before the hounds and disappeared in the night, through the cordon. At dawn, he stops below the rebels' cave, the radio operator calls Titov Veles, the planes take off on Xaintrailles' order, fly up the gorge, Xaintrailles and his men crawl under the bramble ; the planes spot the platoons, Xaintrailles, by radio, orders the pilots to direct and protect the assault ; the rebels, hiding in the rocks, lying on the ridges, their throbbing throat getting caught in the bramble, cock their rifles ; they blocked the entrance to the cave with stones, during the night, they dug exit passages all around the cave, pulled out tufts and shrubs, so as to prevent a surprise attack.

The planes swoop down on the cave, Xaintrailles and his men climb towards the gorge, the planes machine-gun the rebels, Xaintrailles, taking advantage of the confusion, rushes in to the gorge, he looks for the cave's mouth, the soldiers' rifles strike the stones ; the rebels flee towards the emergency passages, the planes machine-gun them ; Béja, on the seaward slope, orders his three helicopters to take off, they dive towards the sea, fly over the motorway, swoop on Inamenas ; each helicopter drops thirty-five bombs on the government palace, on headquarters, on the command post, on the harbour ; over the airport, they get machine-gunned by planes taking off and giving them chase ; two helicopters are shot down, Béja's gets back to the mountain, Béja jumps off, the planes coming from Inamenas join the ones machine-gunning the cave ; Xaintrailles, in the din of stones and bullets, scans the wall, the chaos of rocks ; the rebels crawl beneath the rocks ; the hillock above the cave catches fire ; the rebels having escaped through the emergency exits, skirt round the mountain and attack Xaintrailles in the rear ; the planes dive into the gorge, one of them, its wing having struck an overhanging rock, blazes up and falls whirling down ; smoke blinds Xaintrailles, a rebel pulls his weapon from him and fires it off in his back ; Xaintrailles seizes his own belly with both hands and he collapses, the soldiers are shouting in the smoke ; two planes crash against a spur, their carcasses roll, split the rocks and shatter on the bed of shingle ; soldiers caught under those pieces of incandescent metal, howl, their hands curl up, on the metal edge and melt at once, hissing ; Béja, his hand injured by a bullet received over Inamenas, jumps in the gorge, appears in the midst of the soldiers, kills six of them straight off, the rebels surround them ; some, hiding on the overhangs, fire at the planes with

machine-guns, the soldiers, disarmed, pick up stones and throw them on the rebels clinging to the vibrating machine-guns, climb up the walls, hurl the brained rebels off the platforms, reload the machine-guns, burn their hands and arms on them.

Xaintrailles' body, trampled, burned, lapidated by the stones thrown by the soldiers, Virido, hidden in the smoke, bends down, he pushes the stones aside, he clears the feet, he pulls them, a rebel leaps forward, grabs Virido by the waist, Virido takes out his knife and, the rebel still clutching his waist with his arms, he thrusts his knife over the arms, into the lower abdomen ; the rebel's arms let go, he collapses, his head running along Virido's buttocks ; the soldier takes his weapon and his cartridge belts ; Virido tramples the rebel's head, he lays his foot on the rebel's belly, he crows like a cock, shakes his bare hair, dives into the fight, brains, guns down, slaughters, his hand, his throat, his thighs covered with powder and blood, his lips foaming, his forehead blue with anger ; the ones he wounded, he pushes them with his fist ; a rebel aims at him, he leaps, turns round him, grabs his jaw and throws him against the rock, another tears his battledress, the tatters get trampled by the soldiers, Virido, legs bare, rushes at the rebel, kills him with a bullet in the belly and a dagger thrust in the throat, the rebel collapses, Virido squats down, pulls the rebel's battledress by the feet, tears it off from him ; then, hiding behind a spur, he slips on the battledress, tightens the waist, a rebel who saw him, rushes at the soldier, Virido raises his belt, whirls it, the rebel comes closer, the belt strikes him in the forehead, whips his face, blinds his eyes, Virido springs forward, the rebel, his hands before him, steps back, Virido whips his eyes, his lips, blood rises, spurts out, Virido waves his dagger, he thrusts it into the rebel's chest, the blade tears through the lung, the rebel collapses, his blood splashes the front of Virido's body, who, spitting, snuffling, chest raised by hiccups, sperm and piss gushing out of his taut cock, throws himself in the midst of combat ; Winnetou, Wildfrei, Dafni, are fighting step by step under an overhang ; Béja, shoulder torn by a tracer bullet fired from a blazing plane, runs in the gorge, assembles all his men, all come out from between the rocks, other planes take off from Inamenas on fire, the rebels surround the platoons, throw grenades, the soldiers jump, their limbs ripped off, bump into unscathed soldiers, knock them down on the shingle ; Virido, coming out of the smoke, attacks Béja in the rear, but Béja hears his footsteps on the shingle, he turns round, he fires off his sten gun in Virido's belly, the soldier screams and collapses on the shingle, breaks his teeth and nose against them ; Béja fires point-blank in the back and shoulders of the soldier, who jumps, blood spurts out of his lips, spatters the white and luminous stones ; Winnetou, driven back against the rock by three rebels coming forward, their knives open in their bloody hands, shouts, spits, his sten gun's magazine shines on the shingle, it's empty, Winnetou picks it up, he throws it at a rebel, then, pulling out his knife, taking his sten gun and placing it before his chest, he makes

a rush upon the rebels whose weapons, jammed by dust and blood, jingle at their feet ; Winnetou flings himself upon the flaming knives, they pierce his thighs, his belly, burn his hands, Winnetou plunges his knife in the raised dust through which the shingle sparkles, blood burns on his throat, slides on his shoulder like a caress, his eyes grow moist, blood seeps from his cheeks, from his knees ; all around, the bodies bloody, charred, fume under the sun ; a song rises from the mouths crammed with pebbles ; the purple birds, the doves, escaped from the holes, from their nests under the roots, the larks, from their nests under the shingle shooting out, cry, over the fray, drawn, intoxicated by the smell of powder and blood.

Winnetou, his hands pierced, falls head against the shingle, he's still breathing, the battledress stuck to his back by blood, his head vibrates, sea flows into his mouth, violet vomit, nauseating flowers and leaves, exploded temples, gall, a low sun.

A rebel thrusts his knife between the soldier's shoulders, turns the blade in the hollow of the back ; Winnetou, his hands curl up, clutch the little stones, his rattle rolls under the rumbling of the shingle. Béja pushes his men aside, he throws himself on Wildfrei, pierces him on the rock, he aims at Dafni who's escaping, the bullet tears through Dafni's stomach, blood spurts out of the wound, splashes his chest and his fair hair ; with his hands, he holds back his entrails, pink under the sun, flowing on his thighs ; Dafni, bending forward, escapes from the fight, he comes to sit on an overhang, his eyes mist over, his head rolls on his bloody chest ; at the end of the gorge, between the high walls, he sees the smoke that bloodshed is expelling from the capital, preceded by swarms of shining wasps.

He sees embers flash and burn out through that smoke, his lips open, blood spurts out in hiccups, wets, warms up the whole front of his battledress, slaps between the folds, under the cloth, under the belt ; his head, thrown forward by the hiccups, strikes his knees, the bloody flood streams across the stones, scored by the knives' blades ; Béja catches up with Dafni, he takes his head, pulls it backward, the soldier groans. Béja grabs the spattered hair, throws the head against the rock and kicks the wounded soldier in the stomach ; then, he bends down, he picks up a stone, he lays the soldier on the platform, he throws the stone in the open belly ; the stone slides in the wound, the soldier's head jumps on the rock ; his eyes open wide ; Béja wipes his hands on the wall, he yells, he springs forwards ; already, Wildfrei, against the wall, is writhing ; the rebels turning back rush again at the other soldiers ; the planes in the torn, incandescent air, advance in jerks, like dragonflies. Béja comes closer to Wildfrei, the soldier, his arms crucified on the wall, by the blood and the gun's report, rattles, his chest half-bared, Béja waves his knife, he strokes with it Wildfrei's offered throat, then thrusts it up to the hilt ; the soldier's head rolls on his wrist ; Béja shivers, his blood freezes, he leans against the wall, he breathes heavily, next to him, Wildfrei's body

collapses on the shingle, the soldier's tongue protrudes from his mouth, under the thrust of slaughter ; the teeth chop it off, during the fall.

Béja turns away ; he looks up, sees the blue sky, free ; reverberation of blood and tears, and vibration of the planes, he wipes the sweat off his forehead with his bloodstained wrist. The soldiers, surrounded, are moving back ; one by one, they get slaughtered, on the rebels' shoes — which they dispatch the soldiers with — are stuck shreds of flesh and tufts of hair.

The planes machine-gun the rebels hiding under the overhangs, their own machine-guns pointed at the sky from the chimneys in the wall. A squadron flies over Inamenas ; in the capital, soldiers, servants, city officials, throw pails on the small blazes ; the firemen water the ruins of the palaces : the governor, after coming out of his blazing room, runs on the terrace, his smashed arms dangling on his hips : Serge and Emilienne, burnt alive in their boat, in the harbour on fire, are rattling, under the smoke ; a smell of grilled fish floats on the smoky city ; riding the walls of palaces and barracks, soldiers, servants, children, priests charred in their flight ; poking them with long poles, rescuers topple them down, the raised ash falls back on the rescuers' faces ; in the harbour, ships are burning, flames run on the waves ; in the ruins of the warehouses, crates of food, sacks of wheat burst, under the high gates, the jets of water wash the charred bodies of beggars and children caught in their sleep, in their fever, by fire ; in the upper city the trees are burning ; cherry trees, their boughs bent over the orchards keeping their fruit undamaged and covered with dew, while the boughs bending over the street crumble in ashes on the asphalt.

Béja jumps in his helicopter, he rushes to Inamenas where the rebels, swarming from the slums, attack the rescuers, against the palace walls ; Béja, his three men bending in the cabin, flies over the river, the estuary, the aircraft lands on the shore ; Béja and his three men, running on the sand, laugh, cry, tremble ; a flight of purple birds passes over their heads with a small noise of wings and cries. Béja and his men follow the line of rubbish piles to the slums ; Kment is waiting for Béja in front of the brothels ; Béja enters with his three men, they kill all the clients in the common hall and in the rooms, throw the bodies out of the windows ; the recruiters flee through the garden, go down to the cellars, Kment, Draga, Petrilion lead Béja to the hut, Béja and his men open the hatch, they run through the storerooms, they see the recruiters hiding behind the pile of empty bottles, they pull them, brain them, they drag them out of the storerooms, Béja, his foot slides, gets entangled in the tent canvas, he looks down, sees the fresh blood, the dried sperm, the dog's hair, the child's locks, he strikes the recruiter, sets his foot on his throat ; the recruiters are hoisted up in the garden, left in the custody of five rebels, young ones, escaped from the brothel before Petrilion arrived.

Giauhare leaning on Kment's shoulder, walks through the brothel, Draga

appears, she looks down ; Draga bends over, kisses her on the nape. Béja walks up to the upper city : the soldiers are rising in mutiny, pillage the archbishop's palace, kill the new black young man who locked himself up in the dormitory, with his little castrati. Ismène comes down the brothel staircase, she passes in front of Kment, naked, her body soiled with sperm, wine, spittle, Giauhare, buries her head in Kment's shoulder, then, all of a sudden, takes Ismène in her arms, kisses her cheeks, licks her forehead, her ears, her eyelids. Béja meets groups of soldiers, arms loaded with ammunition crates ; in the small gardens, soldiers butcher hens, rabbits, snap flowers, stick them in their buttonhole ; Béja enters the ruins of the government palace ; the governor walks among the ruins, he takes Béja's arm :

— I know you, here is the palace I've been wishing to give you back, out of justice, ever since I came. Take it.

He goes away. He crosses the blackened courtyard, passes under the portal's arch, and disappears in the smoke. Béja walks up the steps cluttered with charred furniture, slashed bodies, his hand slips, trembles on the marble balustrade ; upstairs, he gazes out of the window, columns of smoke are moving up towards the mountains ; the Pier, the Admiralty are still burning in full noon. Béja climbs the palace façade, tears off the Ecbatane flag, hands to the staff some torn and soiled underpants he found in the brothel ; then he goes down again, the mutinous soldiers come to him, lead him to the engine sheds, the armouries, the ammunition storerooms, the rebels rejoin Béja ; in the gorge, under the hail of bullets, rebels leap from one overhang to another, the tracer bullets tear off the tufts of grass, smash the stones ; a bullet pierces the feet of a leaping rebel, he falls, face on the ground, another bullet pierces his nape ; the back, the shoulders, the loins jump ; the planes warned of Béja's victory, come closer down ; half of the squadron dives towards Inamenas ; the other half flies over the gorge, hunts down the rebels trapped down there. The planes skirt round Inamenas, try to land at the airport, but it is in the hands of the rebels and the mutinous soldiers : officers, petty officers, soldiers remained faithful are double-locked in the hangars ; on the ground, the rebels put up the machine-guns, fire, some planes are shot down, they fall in the marshes bordering the runway ; the grass catches fire, a petrol tank blazes up with a muffled noise ; the intact planes fly up high in the sky, they assemble, decide by radio to cross the sea.

— Let's flee to Ecbatane and come back here in full force.

— The government won't care to reconquer a ruined city. Let's stay here and at least die as heroes.

Three planes break away from the group, they dive towards the airport, machine-gun it, but the violent and regular shots from the rebels hiding on the ground riddle the planes ; two of them blaze up and fall straight in the marshes, metal plates bounce on metal plates, an airman, half-charred, jumps out of the scrap heap, slides on a wing, the sticking out wing tip decapitates him. The third

plane hit, tail in flames, flees horizontally, whirling, it cuts the tops of a little wood of eucalypti on the bank of the river and dives whistling into the dead water which closes up immediately over the incandescent carcass...

On the ground, the rebels embrace each other, shout, bite each other's arms ; soldiers bring basketfuls of brioches pillaged at the mess. The rebels invade the city, they slaughter the liberal politicians in their jails : those politicians, arms raised, groan, protest their revolutionary conviction, throw themselves in the rebels' arms to kiss them.

But Béja has ordered the slaughter of all settlers, with the exception of the governor who is to commit suicide. Béja, Illiten having been killed for being too mild, intends to govern only a miserable people ; he's only interested in the crowd. He will order the destruction of all towns of Inamenas, will tear away the children from their mothers, abolish the principles of family, affection and property. His rabble, with children's brows, he'll throw them upon the barricades in Titov Veles.

He sits down in the governor's office ; with his hand he wipes the ashes off the table, he flings his foot on the table, two rebels, standing at the door, rifle in hand, rise on their heels, look through the landing window.

The youths from Inamenas, led by Saint-Gall, flee to the Royal Inamenas ; Saint-Gall, with a kick of his sole, kills the old woman janitor, buries her body under the ruins : all assemble in the cellars, count their weapons, their hand grenades ; Saint-Gall summons in a small storeroom a restricted council, orders the slaughter of the weakest individuals, the council comes out, Saint-Gall points out the victims, his lieutenants overpower them, push them in the central corridor, against the ladders, they aim their guns at them, they fire, the boys collapse, run along the rungs of the ladders, some girls fling themselves on them, moaning.

Saint-Gall orders a withdrawal under the central wing, he takes the girls by the wrists, he drags them along ; rats, at the moment the boys close the corridor doors, come out of the holes, the heaps of canvas, bedsprings, burst mattresses, jump on the bodies, bite the throat of the dying : one rat lays its paw on a burning cartridge case, it squeaks, turns in circles, lifting its shaking paw. Saint-Gall disposes his boys at the windows, the ventilators, Fabienne, her hand around the boy's waist, with the other hand she strokes his hair ; Saint-Gall, between two orders, holds the girl tight in his arms :

— Tonight I leave the hotel, I go to the Ryswick cape, alone.

— The rebs have certainly already killed your relative. Their bloody children are already bathing on our beaches ; all along the coast from Ryswick to Loutrakion, the sand is red with their blood.

— Pierzinski, take command. I'll be back before dawn.

Saint-Gall, at nightfall slips out of the luxury hotel, he runs towards the sea ; the top of the beach is littered with mating bodies, their arms and legs, smeared with sperm and blood sparkle under the moon ; in the middle of the night

he rushes into the villa's garden ; in the hall, his foot slides in a pool of blood, he climbs the marble staircase ; a shadow runs across the first landing, Saint-Gall fires, the shadow collapses, Saint-Gall moves forward, his foot strikes a small quivering body, he bends down, a trickle of blood runs on his foot, he turns the head over, then the whole body, that of a child clutching in his hand a silver candlestick, Saint-Gall strikes him in the head with his pistol butt, pushes the body rolling down the stairs ; he rushes into the vestibule, he pushes the door of the first room, he enters, the switch has been ripped off, Saint-Gall gets closer to the bed, draws the curtains aside : his father's sister, whom the Inamenas youths call the Relative, is lying on the ravaged bed, her hand caught in the canopy's ropes ; Saint-Gall pulls that hand, the body falls back on the bloodstained sheets, Saint-Gall lifts the dress, the uncovered cunt is bruised, scored with nail and teeth marks. Saint-Gall moves to the window : down below, the deserted harbour shines under the moon, the small waves shake the chain links on the pier : rich and idle, the Relative had a harbour built, and warehouses, docks, a whole town around them, terraced on the hills along the coast ; but her intendants, her slaves, had in vain scoured the villages, the deserts of the island ; in vain, she herself had written to merchants and shipowners in the island and abroad asking their boats to put into her port ; only one family, dragged from the Guildo desert, under Thilissi, accepted to come and live in Ryswick. They were installed in the town's most beautiful house, every morning slaves brought them fruit, cooked dishes, wines, children came to play with the Relative's dogs, monkeys and birds. Then one morning, the family, overwhelmed by boredom, disappeared. The Relative shut herself up forever behind the high walls of her villa ; the Inamenas mayor - five years before the rebellion's beginning — having, one winter day, sent her two young flute players, she listened to them then, immediately after, had their legs smashed, to take revenge for the capital and the radiance of its harbour. She had nevertheless become fond of her nephew Saint-Gall, often inviting him to Ryswick, enjoyed his presence during the day, and would send him back in the evening to Inamenas, all swollen with caresses and sugar ; one evening, she noticed he was becoming a young man, fire rose to her cheeks, she kept the child for dinner and during the night, deflowered him. The boy did not come back but he would send short letters, drawings, poems, little clay statues.

Saint-Gall sits down before the desk, with its flap shining in the moonlight, he opens the drawers, he unrolls a paper tied with a gilded thread, reads to the bottom of the page, gets up, places the sheet in a beam of light, leans his elbow to the window ledge : « ... to my slaves, the whip. To my nephew, as a salary for his virginity that I took from him against his will, the orangeries I own in Loutrakion, so that his sweaty and quivering body wander there amidst their fragrance... to my intendants, they'll mention themselves in the will... »

Saint-Gall folds the paper, he thrusts it in his pocket, he leaves the room

; in the stairs, the body, which he forgot, makes him fall, his chin hits the marble step, his broken teeth, he spits them out with the blood, he goes down into the gardens, he strokes the top of the boxtrees, bends over a large flower : « a lily » and drinks the dew from the shivering petals. At dawn, he runs, between the hotel's brambles, he goes up into the central wing ; all the boys and all the girls lie with their throat slit open, on the spot where they fought ; Saint-Gall chokes, he walks on tiptoe between the toppled bodies, kneeling, their face turned towards dawn and moist with dew, on their foreheads, on their intact clothes mixed with blood. Saint-Gall does not dare touch these motionless heads, these eyelids open on eyes still fresh, these livid lips, their hair alone touched and twisted by the hand of the slaughterers ; Saint-Gall goes down again, gets on his motorbike, returns to Inamenas, the motorbike moves forward over heaps of naked and torn bodies ; the dogs, which are lifting them, growl, leap at Saint-Gall's bare legs, his shoulders are frozen, blood sticks his nipples to his shirt soaked with dew and sweat ; monkeys, come down from the mountain, as in the time of epidemics, wander in groups through the alleys, hair wet and gilded by dawn ; on their hands, ribbons, tufts of woman's hair, they move aside before the motorbike, hold out their arms, their claws brush Saint-Gall's shoulders ; they shake their head, the sun pounces on Saint-Gall, the saddle and the petrol tank burn his thighs and his cock crushed under the light shorts ; Saint-Gall stops his motorbike, strokes the heads of the cooing monkeys, then, he throws his bike forward, the wheel squashes the paw of one monkey, who raises his fist, takes its paws in its hands, parts the fingers, rubs the phalanx, lays the paw on the ground again, shouts, waves its hands against its cheeks, takes its paw again, sits down back to the wall, licks the underside of its paw ; Saint-Gall stops the motorbike in front of the house ; in the garden, the flowers, the shrubs are burnt ; on the entrance steps, his father's naked body, throat slit open, head folded under the shoulders, legs caught in the balustrade's rose trees, penis curled up on the lower abdomen ; Saint-Gall lets go of the motorbike, he bends over, he lifts the shoulders, takes the head, drags the corpse to the top of the steps, lays the head in the ravaged livingroom, on the flap of a desk, he lies down on the white bear fur, rolls on the side, falls asleep.

Béja, lying on Serge's bed, guarded by ten rebels, awakens, he gets up, removes his clothes, takes a shower, shaves with Serge's razor, combs himself with his comb ; he goes round the room, his hand on the window ledge, strokes the Virginian creeper ; on the bookcase, topples all the books, all the records, the record player is on, Béja moves the pickup arm, twists it, pulls it off, throws it under his shoe and crushes it. Then, he gets down into the garden, goes and sits on a marble bench looking down upon the city and the harbour, his guards follow him. He sees the streets, the deserted avenues, opened on the sea, a few children only are bathing in the blue water then, with their swimming trunks wet, squat down on the rocks under the jetty, pull out crabs, hold each other's hand, in the crevices.

Béja looks round, his gaze falls on the slums ; the alleys flooded with sun and dew, fill with shadows of monkeys and men ; but, not a single voice among that tumult of footsteps, leaps, matings ; a rebel bends over Béja :

— A scholar says that tonight he saw the waters rise on the Lannilis island, opposite the harbour, and the earth shook under Elö.

Béja brushes the rebel aside.

In the gorge, the rebels, little by little, extricate themselves, they've shot ten planes down ; the gorge becoming impassable because of the congestion of the carcasses and the dead bodies, the rebels rush out, the planes nosedive, three rebels fall, dead, twenty throw themselves, safe and sound into Thilissi village ; they capture women, children, push them before themselves as shields as far as the post entrance ; the soldiers don't dare fire ; the rebels, still pushing their hostages before them, rush into the post courtyard ; the soldiers were waiting for reinforcements and orders from Titov Veles ; they take refuge, barricade themselves in the attic ; the rebels set fire everywhere ; Pino gets up in the latrine, he fastens his belt, he goes out, he runs to the kitchen ; he sees two rebels throw blazing papers in the latrine, he grabs the butchery knives, on the table ; the assistants, locked up in the attic, burn with the soldiers, he hides behind the pile of pots, clutching his knives in his hands ; the rebels saw him, one of them sets a newspaper ablaze, the other snatches it from him, they advance towards the kitchen ; rats run on the manure, the high altitude weakens them, they can't dig holes, the rebels kill the rats, wave them on the point of their daggers :

— We saw you, we'll slit your throat, you ugly rat.

Pino holds his breath, his throat throbs against the greasy bottom of a Norwegian stew-pan ; the rebels invade the kitchen, close the door behind them, move forward, with a kick topple the pan ; Pino, discovered steps back towards the wall, his head bangs against the shelf where salt, pepper and sugar are stored ; a rebel thrusts his dagger forward, laughing, Pino clutches his knives, his throat is throbbing, covered with salt, pepper and sugar that slide under his shirt down to his cock ; he crosses his knives, before his chest and his belly, the rebel strikes them with his dagger ; the other rebel leaps aside, thrusts his dagger into Pino's hip, the soldier utters a long groan, and, still clutching his knives in his hands, sinks down along the wall, sideways, blood streams on his leg, it spurts out from the corner of his lips ; the rebel, facing Pino, twirls his dagger in his hand, he throws it in the soldier's knee, Pino screams, shrill sobs, blood slaps inside his mouth, but he remains standing, his elbows grazed on the wall's saltpetre, licks the sugar on his lips ; the rebels disarm him, thrust their daggers in his belly.

Outside, the soldiers, caught by the fire, jump from the attic windows ; down below, are held up the rebels' daggers, they impale themselves there, dragging the rebels down in their fall ; those who, only unconscious, are still alive, the rebels, just bending lightly, stab their back or their heart ; the courtyard echoes

with a thousand cries, sighs, calls, groans, rattles ; the purple birds, come down from the gorge with the rebels, roll in the blood, cheep ; knife blows, now and then, cut them in two ; in the kitchen, Pino, disarmed, slashed through and through, rattles under the feet of two rebels, his legs where shreds of battledress are stuck, by blood, lie on the heap of tumbled pans, the handle of a large frying pan sticks out between his thighs ; ashes, embers fly out of the attic, fall back on the rebels' bodies, shoulders and hair ; in the kitchen outhouse, the quarters of meat collapse, the blood stops the fire ; the rebels stick their knives in the meat, roasted, tear pieces off and gobble them up, from the point of their knives, then, turning back, sink those same fuming blades into Pino's quivering body, the blades tear the bones, make a grinding sound on the throat muscles ; a rebel squatting, Pino's head squeezed between his thighs, pulls the soldier's head ; Pino yells, rattles, the rebel pulls, spits, then, getting up, he leans his foot on Pino's shoulder, lifts the head and in one go, tears it off ; he takes it by the ears, and dancing, buttocks rolling, back undulating, kisses it on the mouth and rests it on his shoulder.

The rebels, teeth gripping bloody bones, hardly roasted, wipe their hands on that head, laugh, belch, lips brushing the hair pulled out in tufts, then, the rebel throws the head in the air, all push it with their foot, out into the courtyard where they play with it, in the blood and ashes, with shouts and hoarse laughter ; the women and children they pushed before them as shields, escape, but bullets knock them down against the barrier ; a child, head caught in the lever, screams ; a rebel comes, raises the barrier, the crushed head, makes a grinding sound ; the child's legs give a start, fall back on the ground, livid, muscles tensed ; the rebel lets go of the barrier, the child, his head released, slides along the lever to the ground, where he quivers then relaxes, stiffens : the rebel comes forward, bends over, touches the child's knee, a woman crawls, one hand pressed on the earth, the other covering her forehead, she lets herself roll, beyond the barrier towards the path leading to the village, the rebel throws himself on her, he steps on the woman's dress, he wrings it, he knocks the head over his thigh, he squats down and unbuttoning himself, and tucking up the woman's dress, in the same time he's raping her, he thrusts his dagger in her throat ; another woman flung herself on the child, she covers him with her entire body, licks, nibbles the crushed head, presses it against her mouth, bathes it with her tears and her saliva ; a rebel grabs her by the shoulder, he knocks her down under the barrier, he squats down, the woman gets up again, pushes back the rebel's rifle, and his hands tucking up her dress ; the rebel leans the rifle barrel against the woman's leg, he fires, the bullet smashes the knee, blood gushes out, splashes the rebel's chest ; the woman writhes, the rebel paws the woman's belly, carves it, tears away the lower abdomen, takes out the baby wrapped in the entrails ; he tears the entrails, which wind around his wrist, he spits, he throws his wrist, the entrails whip the dust, the rebel

plunges both his hands, assembles the baby's still supple limbs, lifts them up in both his hands, the woman moans, her feet rub the dust, her fingers gently claw the rebel's arms. He lays the baby on the mother's half-exposed breasts, opens her mouth with both his hands, the baby slides in the dust, the rebel, with one hand grabs the head, which he pushes into the mother's open mouth, then, he gets up, he tramples the little body which the mother swallows, he tramples the woman's gluey mouth ; the other rebels are wolfing the roasted meat.

A few houses they set fire to at the bottom of the village burn, crumble at the border of the fields ; the villagers flee to the forests, the rebels scatter in the houses, set fire to the workshops, huddle in the women's dresses, topple over the oil jars, smash the looms, wind the threads around their heads, bite the fruit, throw it away, barely tasted, in the blazes, tear the meat and the bread in the pantries, lie down on the straw mattresses, get up again, burst them with the point of their knives. The reinforcements from Titov Veles are assembled on the square, Niké slips between the trucks, holds out her arms to the soldiers who pull at them, the girl climbs on the tyre, the soldiers stroke her hair, her shoulders, her breasts ; the soldiers from the other truck grab her waist by the back of the shorts and draw her towards them, she struggles ; a soldier comes down from the truck, plunges his head under the girl's arched buttocks, sinks his head between the thighs, kisses the exposed navel, he pulls the girl away, carries her on his shoulders, to the other truck, the girl holding his hair and licking his cock crushed against her chin, the girl's legs crossed in the soldier's back ; she feels the soldier's laugh and his tongue tremble against her cunt, his saliva moistens the shorts ; the soldier carries her behind the truck, he knocks her down under him, in the dust, he fucks her on the burning pavement, she cries under the shock, she drinks the tears, his lips run on the girl's chest, nibble the unbuttoned blouse, entirely folded back, crumpled under the armpits ; on the breasts that he takes in his mouth, and sucks with a persistent blink ; the girl's hair, unfastened, rolls in the dust :

— You hurt me, my baby.

But the soldier whose eyelids flutter on the girl's throat, dreams...

— ... Ash, my puppy... You hurt me so much in the belly, I wanted to kill you, your father covered my belly, your foot lifted my navel, at night I used to strike it with my shoe ; by day with the knives, the small pans ; I pressed my belly to strangle you and I felt you live, I listened, at night, to the spluttering of your mouth, against my loins. But, today I hate you less, you paid for my outings with Aurelio, the ransom, the brand new bed. I'm beginning to love you at the places of your body that secrete gold... little sperm, you're the one who threw me in this latrine.

Aurelio doesn't want to work, my war widow's pension isn't enough for him, you eat, I tear away the food from your mouth, the scarf from your throat, you

don't die, the Ainu and the Tcherkessians feed you with shellfish and lard ; at night, when you undress before your bed, I kick you over, I spit on the mortuary photo of your father, a soldier.

When Aurelio makes love to me, at dawn, under the sheet, the photo gets crumpled, I rub it against Aurelio's gluey cock ; in the dark, you watch us embrace, the light of dawn rises on Aurelio's buttocks and back as he bends over me ; wind pushes the window, ices our intermingled bodies :

— Use your little broom to shut the window.

He would get up, rush on you, drag you out of bed, his tall naked body quivering in the milky light, squeeze your dishevelled head between his thighs, against his cock, your mouth crushed against the black locks of his cock ; silence, collisions of wet chests, lark under kite ; gets up, his cock asleep, bushy between his thighs, fat and hairy spider, rushes on you, drags you out of bed, the floor's splinters entering the flesh of your knees, strikes your little naked body, so thin :

— Leave him alone now, I've got another idea, I'm going to feed him, fatten him, Aurelio, do you slightly fancy his little body ?

Try, touch, see if you can love him...

He embraces you, he presses you against him, he pulls at your cock, he tucks it up, he crushes it against his thigh, he rubs it ; he takes your hand, he drags it on his thighs, on his cock, underneath, in the crack, he turns you over, puts his arms around your chest, leans his taut cock against your crack, thrusts it between your buttocks ; you struggle ; Aurelio crosses his hands on your cock, and gives it a wank, you cry, you snuffle, your hands try to repel Aurelio's hips, but he penetrates you, his cock, swollen, ringed, digs your belly :

— It doesn't yet enter completely ; but, with a bit of practice... also, he's still too thin.

His thighs rub your buttocks, he withdraws his cock from your asshole, widened, bruised ; he kicks you over on your bed, then he comes back to mine, bends over and thrusts between my worried lips his cock still hot, where I recognize your baby smell ; you writhe on your bed, groaning, your fist between your buttocks, closing them over your inflamed asshole...

Awake, sweat sticks my body against the leather, they drink champagne, they caress Ainu girls, they pull them into cabins with mahogany doors, they scream, blood runs under the door ; he pours champagne on my chest, they throw each other the shreds of my shorts and my shirt : a guard comes out of a cabin, his battledress smeared with blood, and sperm, on the thighs, the Ainu girl trembles on the sofa, under the neon light ; naked, the guard's cap on her shaven head. The boot of a guard sprawled in the armchair crushes my cock on my thigh ; a priest passes by on the balcony, recites his breviary in a low voice, the sky's blood reddens his wrist ; dawn ices my naked body, the priest, seeing me, raises his cassock, and, roaring with laughter, shakes his long and thin cock ; the smell

pricks my nostrils ; in the harbour, ships bringing wheat and sugar are machine-gunned by the guards, they blaze up, they flame in the veiled daylight, the smell of grilled wheat and melted sugar rises as far as the balcony ; a black hand grabs the priest's breviary, draws the priest over the balcony, the priest crashes to the wet parvis in front of the basilica, his tucked-up cassock exposing livid thighs, scored with flagellations.

I get up again, my head hits the edge of the violet marble chimney ; in the fire a priest's head is burning ; on the tonsure, runs the roasted flesh ; the moths are stuck to the window in the grey light of dawn ; a guard gets up, he walks to the window, he strokes the pane.

— So begins the new world. A bit more time and you will see the water and the light.

An eagle with golden wings, brushes the pane ; in the distance, on the basilica, a golden bell tolls ; the eagle clings to the pane, the wet belly feathers leaning against the pane at the spot where the guard laid his hand. The door is open, I go down the stairs, I am naked ; outside, those who are digging the snow do not see that I am naked, I run ; Aurelio and my mother, all mixed together ; my hand in the grey water of dawn ; I take the milkpan, I drink the icy milk ; the needle vibrates in my hand, I move towards the bed, I raise my hand, the needle flashes, I thrust it into Aurelio's back, it pierces his heart, sinks into my mother's bosom, pierces her heart and nails both of them to the sheet ; the needle's ball makes a little shiny stain in Aurelio's back ; I have no blood on my hand ; I take my father's photo from the wall, I press it against my chest ; the icy milk runs in my chest...

The girl lifts up Ash's body. A soldier, coming down from the truck, approaches the girl, the cigarette falls in the open tank ; the fire catches like a wave in a crack in the rocks ; the trucks explode ; rifles, soldiers shoot out in the golden air, bloody stumps fall back in the dust, rifles burst high in the smoke ; Titov Veles is in flames : the slaves let themselves be caught and swallowed by fire ; the youths, locked up in the gymnasiums, scream, the glass roofs collapse ; smoke chokes the priests in the temples ; fire catches in the mating sentry boxes, runs up to the slaves' rock, blackens the sacred stone.

Saint-Gall runs across the mountain, he enters the forest, his dagger is dangling on his hip ; the dew from the cedar trees runs on his forehead, on his lips ; to his knees cling cobwebs, salivas, pieces of moss ; hardened stems, stretched, swollen with milk, vibrate like cocks in the glaring light. A clearing as regular as a park avenue ; an untrodden grass, shrill birds and insects ; above the cedar trees, sparklings of insects' wings on the high voltage cable.

Saint-Gall lies down on the clay of the slope ; a small helicopter rumbles ; it crosses the clearing, it comes back, it turns above the trees, it comes down, it lands on the flattened grass ; a young man in a blue sweater comes down ; the grass blades, unbent, enter the cabin ; he opens the other door, helps down a

young girl wearing a cloak of blue broadcloth ; they run through the tall grass ; the purple birds and the eaglets run along the slope ; the young girl, with one hand, holds the hand of the boy, with the other lifts her hair shaken by the run ; she sees the birds, she laughs, she chases them ; the purple birds flee in the underwood ; the eaglets hop on the tip of their wings ; the young girl bends over, she touches an eaglet, it opens up, it rises, it totters ; the young girl strokes its beak, it nibbles her finger ; they sit down in the middle of the clearing, take out some drinks and fruit ; cormorants fly over the top of the cedars.

Saint-Gall comes out of the wood, he walks towards the couple lying down ; his shorts on the hip are burnt by a pistol shot ; the young girl looks up, then down, Saint-Gall moves forward in the sun, he sits down between the boy and the young girl.

— Help yourself, if you are thirsty or hungry.

Saint-Gall takes a banana, he raises it to his lips, he looks at the young girl, her eyes shine, dreamily ; the young girl takes the boy's hand, her fingers are trembling ; in the valley, towards the sea, sounds of explosions :

— We're on honeymoon.

— Haven't you seen the city burning ?

— We live in Ecbatane.

— Here, the mothers devour their children, mate with the dogs. Before tonight, this forest will burn. Leave, tell Ecbatane that hell is marching on her.

He gets up, he catches an eaglet, he wrings its neck, he finds another one in the clay, he butchers it with his dagger, he throws the little dead bodies at the couple's feet, he rushes at the young girl, and with his knife opened, his loaded pistol in hand, he embraces her, standing ; the boy dashes forward ; Saint-Gall withdraws his burning cock, he runs into the forest ; the young girl collapses in the boy's arms :

— It was blood, fire. Pour some water, water, I'm dying.

Smoke comes up from Titov Veles ; the boy carries the young girl in his arms, he lays her in the helicopter ; smoke flattens and veils the grass like mist, the helicopter flies off, dives towards the sea. Saint-Gall, crouching in the smoky forest, his ass bare, next to a spring, chokes, he gets up again, takes his turds in both hands, smears his face, his body, his clothes, throws himself in the spring, pistol against the temple ; at the moment the face touches the water, the pistol fires, blood gushes out, reddens the sparkling water under the smoke, the head rolls on the copper-coloured stones ; the deers, the boars, the monkeys, the eagles chased by the fire, pass crying, above the drowned body ; the crayfish draw back under the armpits ; beyond the clearing, on the slope towards the sea, fire catches the eagles in their flight, hurls them hissing against the ground, chases the monkeys and the deers between the brooms in the granitic chaos, catches their legs and flattens them, nostrils in the ember ; the whole mountain is burning, the

stones explode, the plane carcasses, in the gorge, lifted up by the blast of the fire, hit the walls and the overhangs. Fire moves up to Elö where the rebels, drunk, slaughter the boys from the Little Convict Prison ; some have recognized Audry, the son of the police chief, murdered by them in the Spring ; they hunt him through the ransacked school, the boy leaps over the slaughtered bodies, he locks himself up in the hen house, the rebels climb up the metal grating ; they throw him knives taken from the refectory ; Audry huddles in a rabbit cage, his heart throbs against their quivering fur, he lies down at the bottom of the cage, he draws the rabbits over his body, the rebels pull off the door, they lift the cage up, they empty it, the rabbits slide, escape between the rebels' legs ; Audry remains clinging to the bottom of the cage, the rebels pull him by the feet, they drag him on the earth soiled with shit ; one rebel grabs a cock by the neck, the other rebels maintain Audry with his legs and arms spread out ; the rebel brings the cock's head near to Audry's neck, the cock struggles, its wings beat the rebel's wrist and Audry's face ; the rebel thrusts the cock's beak in Audry's throat ; blood gushes out, blinds the cock ; above, in the smoky air, the eagles and the seagulls cry ; the cock cries, its bloody beak digs into the wound ; Audry, arms stretched out sideways, rattles ; the foam from his lips runs on the rebel's shoe, an eagle dives, hooks its claws on the rebel's head, sinks them into the sweating forehead, its wings beat ; the rebel collapses ; the cock escapes ; the eagle leaps, settles on Audry's dead body, covers his face and the wound with its wings, head raised ; the rebels step aside, run away ; everywhere in the Little Prison buildings, disfigured corpses, boiled in the wash-house copper, mutilated, cut to pieces on the butchery stall, raped on the black earth of the cellar, broken bottles sticking out between the buttocks, bare and scored with floggings, eyes gouged out, hands nailed to the desks by knives and pens dipped in ink, decapitated bodies on the stake's block, bloody hatchets thrown in the dust of wood shavings ; charred bodies half-buried in the central heating boilers ; patients scalded in their beds, dying nurses, their mouth inflamed by vitriol, children nailed to the crucifix of both chapels, priests buried, choked inside the harmoniums, teeth smashed by the ciborium, genitals squeezed inside the cruets ; mouths crammed with grains of burning incense, eyes pierced and gouged out with scouts' rosaries.

In Inamenas, the looting goes on for six days ; the lower city is deserted ; the looters sleep where they looted and killed. The cardinal, locked up in his room, is guarded by ten rebels. Béja kills a woman who was throwing herself on the cardinal and wanted to rape him. The cardinal is fed, looked after.

— Let's spare him, all the important people in the capital trusted him with their secrets, he knows where they hid their treasures. Make him talk, under torture. In the end, once we'll have enough money, we'll kill him.

The cardinal keeps silent, a rebel wrings his wrists. The cardinal utters a little cry, tears well from the corner of his eyelids ; « My God, Thy will be done, but if possible, move this cup of bitterness away from my mouth. For a while. A martyr, My Lord, but not so soon... »

« Under cabin number two, of the Talbot swimming pool. » Hot milk, fruit saved from the fire. The cardinal throws himself, his nose soaks in the bowl, the fruit juice runs on his throat.

« And where else, where's the gold ? speak. » Béja, Béja, when he speaks, shit comes out of his mouth. « You don't want to talk ? » The door opens, a rebel pushes towards the cardinal's feet a heap of washed bodies, naked :

— See your little sisters. We've delivered them from their vows.

See their smile, their swollen lips, their joyful breasts, their pubic hair blackened by sweat...

In the rebel's pocket, a scalpel stolen during the looting of the hospital :

— You talk or I'll bleed you...

He squats down, thrusts the scalpel in the youngest sister's white throat, a pink foam squirts out on the rebel's wrist ; the cardinal gives a start, he looks through the open window, the blue sky veiled with pink smoke, the cedar tops covered with violet ashes, a sigh comes out of his mouth and brushes the wrist of the rebel holding his throat. Two guards drag him as far as his private chapel, they lift him up, they sit him on the altar, they kneel down, they kiss his sandals :

— We salute you, king of the Whites.

The little sisters' bodies are sitting in the confessionals. A rebel grabs an Easter candle from a candlestick, he places it between the cardinal's thighs, he lights it up, wax runs along the candle, like sperm along an erect cock, a rebel opens the tabernacle, takes the ciborium, sets it upside down on the cardinal's head, another one spits in his face. The cardinal, with a backhanded movement of the surplice, wipes his cheek ; his legs drag on the polished floor, the hosts run down along his temples, get caught in his ears ; with a trembling hand, he shakes them off, takes the hosts in his joined hands ; a rebel, sitting on the floor, is crunching a large host. Since the morning, the cardinal tightens his thighs, he wants to piss : « My Lord, take me quickly in your paradise, so that I, more quickly, may relieve myself there. »

Tears flow on his cheeks, and mix with spittle. A rebel is sitting at the harmonium, he puts his fists on the keyboard, he pulls, he tears off the knobs, he nibbles them in his mouth. The crows, scared by the noise of the harmonium, shoot out of the gargoyles, dive sleepily towards the lower city.

Béja walks through the cloisters of the archbishop's palace, he kicks aside the bodies of the priests, the deacons and the sisters ; the refectory doors are open, smeared with blood, some rebels are asleep on the benches, a body rises on the stage, Béja walks towards the body ; that of a young sister with her

dress tucked up ; the cornet is bathing in blood. Béja bends over, he takes the little sister's hand, he stands her up, she hides her face with her hand, a crucifix falls against the wall, a rebel awakens, he straightens himself up, he lies down again, his head resting on his dagger, which is bloodstained, a piece of heart is spitted on it ; Béja drags the little sister in the corridors, she lets her head roll on the rebel's shoulder, he enters a dark parlour, the morning beams filter through the shutters ; light up the polished floor ; Béja clasps the little sister in his arms, against the red tapestry ; the noise of the explosions makes the French window pane crackle, Béja takes her mouth, her waist, the little sister hugs him, Béja pulls her cornet off, throws it on the floor, tramples it ; the little sister laughs against the rebel's throat :

— I saw the other life, it's all black. His Eminence and his god were lying. Spikes burn between the thighs. A soldier was bending over me, his half-circumcised penis was entering my secret hole, but I wished for a brave soldier. A priest offered himself to make me come, then a deacon, but their glans was covered. The Christ then arrived, he was turning around me, he looked down, showed his bare heart : « Thy heart is not enough for me, the engagement is dragging on, look for another fiancée. »

Béja knocks the girl on the sunny wooden floor, he bites her lips, he spits the torn flesh into her mouth ; the girl holds his cock and squeezes it between her thighs :

— Grow hard, little plough, open, tear, sow.

Rain suddenly lashes against the shutters of the little parlour ; Béja rises from the dead girl, her dream achieved ; he runs in the cloister, he hears the cardinal's cries ; it stops raining in the beginning of the afternoon. Béja strokes the forehead and the hair moist with sweat, the cardinal gives a start, as though he was stroked by a lynx :

— You can make your sacrifice now, we'll resuscitate a deacon for you. You, search in the corridors, in the cells, in the latrine. How many do you want, bishop ? How many to tuck up your chasuble ?

— One alone would be enough, or one of you, for the salvation of your soul.

The rebels search among the piles of corpses, they find a young tonsured deacon with only his eyes gouged out, they pull him from under the bodies, they push him towards the cardinal :

— My son, prepare the divine service, I shall get dressed by myself.

He retires in the sacristy, he leans out of the window : the wall is too high, he would break his legs ; he kneels before the gilded chest, he dresses his soiled body ; he holds the deacon's hands :

— Blessed are you, who can not see all these satans.

At the moment of elevation, two rebels grab the deacon who was taking

the cruets behind the altar, they slit his throat, they pull out his heart, a rebel is standing in front of the altar, his hands holding pistols, another, with bare hands, on the right of the cardinal ; this one is praying, his head on the altar cloth, the rebel with bare hands, takes the heart and lays it in the chalice, under the paten ; a rebel, behind the altar, slips on the deacon's effects, he fills a cruet with blood he comes to the cardinal's right, looking down. The cardinal uncovers the chalice, brings it closer to the cruet, the rebel pours the blood ; the cardinal moves his fingers forward, the smell of blood rises, the cardinal looks at the bottom of the chalice. Then, they rush at him, open his mouth, pour the deacon's blood, thrust the bloody heart into his throat. Choking, the chasuble splashed with blood, he falls backwards, his teeth bite into the heart, his mouth spits, Béja squats down, takes his head on his knee :

— We offered you a real sacrifice, and here you are getting angry with your god.

Towards the evening, covered with spittle, blood, urine, the cardinal straightens himself up. To the rebel spitting at his forehead :

— Enough. I'm a negro. I have no gold. Enough of this white skin, I'm a negro. I was, with you. I surrender.

— He wants to be king. Let's kill him, Béja

— I'm a negro. I'm a negro. I am free. Negro.

— Let's see if it's true, then.

And, throwing themselves on him, they flay him.

At night, looting is done by torchlight. The power stations all exploded during the bombing ; hangings, carpets catch fire. In the cathedral, the looters, climbing on step ladders, put on the emergency light, gas explodes in the rebels' face, women wrap themselves up in the chasubles, chase each other between the pillars, spit on the tabernacle. Couples embrace on the altar; others, on the organ's high manual. Groups of children, squatting around the ciboriums, are gobbling up hosts. Already, food is running low ; new-born children, abandoned in the lower city houses by their mothers gone up to loot, die, under the rats' sharp gaze. A child makes a large host roll on the paving stones, like a hoop ; another, squatting on a pomp ciborium, drops his turds. A man embraces a wooden statue of the virgin, he cleaves the statue with his dagger at the place of the cunt, he throws himself forward, his teeth nibble the cheeks and the faded lips, he pulls out his cock, gives it a wank and sinks half of it into the slit. A street musician, sitting in the pulpit, marks the rhythm of the matings with his drum. Already, a few rats, drawn by the smell of sperm and undernourished flesh, of the spilled wine and the grains stuck by blood to the looters' tatters, trot between the mating bodies, lick the sperm running from body to body and mixing, nibble hands opening up through the spasm, knees slackening ; attack children asleep or sunk in dream and terror. Women made mad by the inebriation and the sight of gold, draw their own

children against their bodies, open their thighs and, these children having penetrated them by force, they brain them or slit their throats before they could get up. One woman, eight months' pregnant is squatting in the light from a stained glass window, her skirts tucked up over her shit, a long black snake slips from under a confessional, as far as the heap of turds, raises its head, and plunges it between the woman's buttocks ; she screams, she falls forehead against the paving stone ; the snake digs, hisses, it penetrates as far as the intestines, it tears them, it injects its venom into the foetus, its head bores inside the flesh ; the woman yells, the sweat from her forehead mixes, on the stone, with the foam falling from her lips ; the snake withdraws its soiled head, it flees through the cloister's half-opened door, it crawls towards the pond of reddened water, dives, swims for a while between the slicks of blood ; moves up again on the stone, warms itself up, flees again towards the small garden's fence where it stops and coils up between the shoes of a living man, entered, unknown, in Inamenas before the start of the looting, while the echo of the last explosion was fading away.

Some rebels, hosts spitted on their cocks, chase the women, the statues they bump into, vibrate. Naked men search through the cupboards of the sacristy ; dressed by women who, in the same time, caress them, masturbate them, they go up to the altar, pierce their own wrist with the dagger, suck up the blood, while the women tuck up their chasuble and make incense burn between their legs. A young rebel, his gilded chasuble stuck to his bloodstained nipples, motionless in a beam of light flowing from the stained glass, dreams, the sprinkled incense fuming along his thighs, he stares at the image of the crucified god, he holds out his arms, joins his feet, rolls his head over his shoulder. He dances. The palms, lifted for a moment by the panting of the bodies mating on the altar, veil the image of the god. The young rebel dances, caparisoned with gold and linen, the nails under his shoes chink in the sharp beams. At each turning round, he looks at the god, smiles to him, holds out his arms, tilts his head on the shoulder ; the image of the god, veiled by shadows and lights, comes to life, the young rebel goes up to the altar, still dancing, he holds out his arms but the living man dashes out of the small garden and takes his throat and knocks him down on the altar steps, and, pulling a girl from under a man bending over her, he drags her under the young rebel ; then, grabbing the image of the god, he tears it up, he throws it in a fire blazing up at his feet. He strides along between the mating couples, he bends over, his hand brushes the bodies ; those, under the stroke, tense up, blood seethes in their veins. The man returns to the small garden, squats down, speaks to the snake coiled up at his feet ; the snake dashes on the burning pebbles, crawls between the clumps of shrubs ; as it crawls by, the dew-covered flowers, the insects shrivel up, the pebbles lose their lustre ; the snake steals again into the cathedral, pushing before him a tuft of flowered grass.

A wave runs along the island of Lannilis, it rises inside the creeks, it drowns the wheat on the low headlands, it splashes, it covers up the capes ; it comes together ; flown over by a tepid spray, it rolls towards Inamenas harbour ; it bursts the pier, smashes the charred wrecks, blackens, throws the boats against the jetty.

Kment, in the cathedral, is looking for Giauhare ; prostrate women cling to his knees ; pull at his penis ; a blue beam of light bathes his forehead, a woman tears off from him the shreds of a loincloth girding his thighs, he steps over the bodies at the sacristy door ; a rebel is hugging Giauhare against the dresser ; she screams ; he, the rebel, girded with liturgical pieces of cloth, the muscles of his leg quivering, his left hand leaning on the tapestry soiled with melted wax, growls, his right hand holding his cock and tucking up Giauhare's wet dress ; Kment strikes him in the back with his fist, the naked rebel collapses at his feet, the gilded stole covering his cock ; he has no more lips ; Kment looks at Giauhare, a rat comes out of her mouth :

— Do not kiss me, the rat has just come out. O Kment, the water is rising in the city. Let's run away. The streets are getting filled with starving snakes, they hunt the rats, this one had taken refuge in my mouth, he bit this man's lips. Listen to the hissing of the snakes at the bottom of the walls. Their eyes see the women's bellies, they eat the pregnant women's bellies. Don't look back.

She bends over, she takes the rat in her hand, she strokes it :

— Rat, do not tremble any more, follow our footsteps, leap over the blood, my little one ; spit out the shreds of child's flesh caught in your teeth, spit, little one, spit...

Kment takes Giauhare by the waist ; the girl strokes his hardened cock, they walk through the devastated naves, the snakes jump at Kment's legs ; the boy, Giauhare lolled back in his arms, leaps among the dry grass. The sea overflows ; the rain on the burnt, torn, napalmed mountains, swells the springs, carries away the families from the foul-smelling villages, rolls in the streets the corpses of children that their mothers used to feed with sheep droppings, rolls and washes the mutilated corpses of the Elö children, splashes, like fire does, on the forge of shingle, crackles on the blackened metal plates ; on the beaches, hollows the sand, rolls the pieces of bark, the bones, the ropes, riddles the sea, blazes up on the surf.

Kment runs in the upper city, his bare feet sink in the bloody sludge pouring out from the looted villas, from the disemboweled gardens, he hugs Giauhare in his arms, the girl's hand covers his forehead ; a door is banging under the cathedral's dome, Kment dives inside : a young deacon escaped from the slaughter, is praying, his head in his hands, kneeling on a small bench ; Kment crosses the crypt, he goes up to the altar, the young deacon looks up, Kment opens the tabernacle with one hand, the other one holding Giauhare leaning back, her

breasts exposed and the dress tucked in, streaming wet, between the thighs ; Kment, arching his back, clutches the ciborium in his fist, he opens it, he takes two large hosts, he eats one, the other one, he shoves it between Giauhare's lips ; the young deacon steps back to the far end of the crypt ; Kment takes two other hosts, slips one in his shirt pocket, the other one, under Giauhare's dress, between the thighs ; then, he comes down again, Giauhare, woken up, chews the host ; Kment goes out, runs under the rain, he swallows the host, he runs as far as Titov Veles, collapses at the foot of the slaves' rock, lays Giauhare on the streaming and icy grass, lies down over her, blows on her face, Giauhare strokes Kment's temples :

— A child is moving within me since this morning : Touch. The last-born of the world, and a rat made it.

SEVENTH CHANT

The waters are covering the archipelago ; the top of the mountains emerges alone from a whirlpool of mud, of stones, of branches, of tools, of axles, of cartridge magazines, of tyres, of plane carcasses, of knives. A glaring sunshine hammers the waters. The slaves' rock looms up from a red whirlwind in which two half-track vehicles are banging against each other, filled with naked soldiers with their wounds washed. Charges, mines, grenades, bombs, still explode at the bottom of the water, lift it up, tear it. Then, in a space of time of one day and two nights, the waters retire as far as the ruins of Titov Veles. In the morning, clear waters, run through by sea currents, surround the rock covered with a thick and light mud ; then, towards noon, retire again as far as the ruins of Titov Veles, washing the area thus exposed ; during the night, beaches form at the limit of the retired waters. Until the first glimmers of dawn, an island takes shape, limited by what once was the stinking suburbs of Titov Veles and the Thilissi village.

The trees bowing to the ground under the weight of mud, unbend, shoot out in the freed air ; the springs, choked by the corpses of men and children made thirsty by the fire, squirt out in the dark, search for their ancient bed under the bent grass ; then, having found it, dash forward, break with cries of joy, to the waterfalls, mix, get lost, flow away from each other, with laughter.

In the first light, swarms of bees, squalling bird flights, swoop down on the island, shake the heavy flowers, the foliage, the crumpled tree tops, throw themselves in the dust, fly over the still dark valleys ; the sky splashed with wild birds, blazing bees, unveils, turns towards the sun whose wound is drying and shrinking. The springs coil around the ruins, dig their new bed in what once was a temple's nave or the sewer of a slaves' prison.

On the rock, summit of the new island, mud rises ; Kment, leaning on an elbow, straightens himself up, naked, the wounds of his forehead and knees washed, his hair swollen and glossy with mud, his lips red, his mouth filled with sludge ; standing, arching his back, hands on his hips, he opens his eyes and looks round : then, squatting down, he searches in the mud with his hands, releases, lifts up Giauhare's body, which he hugs against him and kisses on the lips, on the shoulders and on the breasts. Giauhare wakes up, the silt runs out of her shut

eyelids, in the folds of her ears ; her cheeks swollen with sludge, Kment kisses them and taking Giauhare's lips between his, he sucks up that silt ; thus they mix the sludge of their mouths, their original semen ; thus, naked, frozen, they give each other life and sun inflames them and places them in its orbit, like two new planets. They rush forward, they dive in the jumble of flowers, foliage, birds and springs. Kment's hand on Giauhare's belly, and hers on the boy's chest ; sun sparkles in their hair.

A drum beats in the distance, down below, in a clearing between the fir trees. Kment and Giauhare embrace, against a tree dripping with sap, their saliva, their semen mixes with the sap ; at their feet, half-buried in a hole, two purple birds mate, their wings beating wildly ; on the top of the trees, eagles clinging to the boughs, grease their beak with resin. Kment and Giauhare dash forward, languid and dripping with sweat, dew, semen and sap, they dive in the sunbeams, between the thick branches, gluey with drool and droppings.

A drove of deer, lying in the sun, below the rock, bells and falls asleep. Kment and Giauhare, their hearts throbbing, run towards the sea, they throw themselves against the sand, their fingers sink into it, discover some quails caught by the night's movement, release them, roll on the sand as far as the surf ; above the shore, their head sticking out of the foliage at the forest border, young calves are watching them, then fawns, eaglets, wolves ; Kment raises his hand ; the young animals leap forward, come and roll themselves in the blue water ; an eaglet alights, opens up and lies over Giauhare, its belly's warm fur throbs on the breasts ; a hind lies down next to Kment ; the boy hugs it, squeezes the animal's loins between his legs, two young bulls are banging their foreheads against each other, their body half in the water, a little wolf licks Giauhare's forehead, another, by the water, hesitates, then enters, shiny fish jump on its mouth ; with its paw, it chases them away ; then all mix together and, from that heap of furs, of feathers, of claws, of talons, of little horns and little fangs come out a noise of tongue and of muscles, some cheepings, moans, pantings, Kment's laugh ; seagulls come from the high seas dive towards the beach, alight on the backs of the wolf cubs, of the fawns ; Kment gets up again, he laughs, foam on his lips and on his throat, a seagull huddled against his cheek, a calf pushing at his loins, he lifts up Giauhare, he carries her in his arms to the depths of the forest, he lays her in the bed of a tepid spring, he lies upon her, over his back and his loins, the grass closes up ; the birds look for them, they search the bushes ; perched on the back of the fawns, they cry, their beak caught in the cobwebs, in the cocoons. The seagulls shoot out in the wet sky, the high palms, released, spring up in the pink mist, turning aside the swarms and the bustling flights ; a purple bird with a blue eye, flutters above the spring, it settles on a rush, it cheeps, Kment raises his head, his fists turn at the bottom of the water on the copper-coloured sand, he throws his head forward, barks, baring his teeth and the beams lighting up his gums red and dripping like

the inside of his cock ; the bird takes fright, it shakes its wings, it moves away, Kment splashes it with his foot ; Giauhare sighs, her ears drowned, blood rushing to her temples, her half-open cunt appearing from the sunny water ; Kment's hand lifts up Giauhare's loins and his mouth takes the cunt and his tongue enters inside, sucks in the fragrant juice, his nostrils crushed against the folds of the belly ; Giauhare trembles, her legs move up along Kment's buttocks and hips, cross over his back ; Kment's hands are pressed on Giauhare's thighs, his lips touched by the sun are stuck to the lips of the cunt, the pubic hair tickling the hollow of his cheeks ; Kment swells his cheeks, blows into Giauhare's cunt his warm and sweet breath ; Giauhare's hands, buried in Kment's hair, pull at it, tie it around the ears, bring it back over the forehead of the boy, whose cock drags, soaks in the water, through the little swarms, golden, ringed, shaken, mottled with violet spots ; the little swarms coil around the thighs of the boy who stamps his feet, shaking his testicles and the disk of his knees ; the animals warned by the purple bird's song, lie down along the spring, their sex organs erect, their lips streaming, groan, nibble the watercress, lick their fur, their feathers ; a hind, lying on its side, offers itself, head buried under a heap of red roots and its mouth opened, to a young wolf with bleeding gums.

Other wolf cubs, their tongue dripping, roll in the grass, watch for gazes from Giauhare, breathing heavily, her sharp eye drowned in the downy fur. Giauhare, Kment's hands up along her belly and covering her breasts, sees the little wolves, smiles, Kment kisses that smile and his knee crushes Giauhare's cunt.

But after nightfall, Giauhare gets up from Kment's side, walks towards the little wolves asleep in a huddle inside the hollow stump of an eucalyptus, one alone is awake, Giauhare takes it in her arms, carries it to the top of the mountain, lays it on the creepers bathed in moonlight and, lying over the little wolf, strokes it and hugs it.

Kment, at dawn, jumps up, he picks up a stone, he runs on the beach, in the forest's lost paths, the rising sun a fist blow on his forehead ; his knees, as the sun rises and spills around, bathe in a steam of blood ; all day, he searches through the island, icy fruits fall and burst on his shoulders ; a female monkey, which he hadn't noticed, catches his penis through a hedge of bluish thorns ; Kment brandishes the stone, he throws it, the female, hit in the middle of the forehead, collapses on the other side of the hedge, on its young fast asleep.

Kment returns to the lower part of the island, lies down by a spring, he can't sleep, he jumps in the sea, his knees brushed in the dark waters by luminous fishes, his feet strike living stones and mother of pearl ; his cock is fuming under the fringe of froth bubbling around his loins, he takes it, he thrusts it into the sea, he squeezes it between his thighs, he claws the sand and, throwing his hair back, he screams, he moves forward in the water, the belly shaken, his lips smack, his nostrils quiver, his hands stroke, hug his chest, his belly, his thighs, he screams,

tears stream on his throat ; the breathing of the sea, similar to that of love, gives him back speech and his cry finishes in a moan formed with ancient, mutilated, softened words ; he returns to the spring, he lies down on his belly, his thighs, his belly, his chest rub the icy watercress and clay, his cock gets grazed on the pebbles, the thorns, digs a hole, coils up inside it ; at once Kment calms down, he brings back around his cock the turned-up earth and holding back his buried cock, he rises on an elbow, stiffens his legs and, sweat sticking the dust to his forehead, to his belly, he mates with the dark and mute earth.

Immediately after the first sowing, the birds asleep on the boughs, shoot out in confusion, dash into the night, kill themselves against the trunks, get strangled in the loops of the creepers ; the awoken animals, collide and tear each other up ; a couple of deer, asleep in the middle of a clearing, leaps and collides, the broken antlers get entangled in the heavy air and fall back, shrivelled up ; Kment's back gets covered with blood, with feathers, with hair, with claws, with ripped-off beaks ; all alone, on the top of the mountain, above the tumult, moist with moonlight, drunk, transparent, wild, Giauhare and the wolf, embracing, their eyes sad, make love, Giauhare filled with dreams and the wolf holding back his fire and his muscles.

Kment, for two days, hunts ; he kills with stones, he strangles, he pushes the animals in the ravines, throws himself howling on their remains, raises their broken limbs, cuts off their tongue and ties them against his nape ; he pulls the teeth out and hangs them as a necklace on his throat ; he sinks his foot in the wounds, the blood he drinks drowns his anguish, strangles the cry of his loneliness.

At night, when he sees an eye sparkle, he leaps forward, he gouges it out with a pointed bamboo, the animal bites his arm, Kment sinks his javelin in the fur, and holds it plunged inside until the animal collapses and relaxes its jaw, then he bends over, he recognizes the animal, he bathes his hair in the blood, his feet curve round the animal's hooves, his arm looks for the sex organs ; but he kills only males and his penis softens, flows back into his belly. Kment, standing before the purplish-blue sea, stiffens his body :

— O you, light and night, male and female, give me the double sex and let the embrace forever happen only at my only wish and within my own entrails.

But Kment, down in the forest again, vainly covering the fuming animals, touches his silent belly ; he rushes up to the top of the mountain, catches unawares in the middle of the night Giauhare lying, breathing heavily, under the young wolf ; he picks up a stone, he throws it at the wolf's head, killing him on the spot, he bends over, he exposes Giauhare, he throws the remains into the trees, the birds shoot out, Kment takes Giauhare's head in his hands, he bites it, he bathes it with foam and tears, all night he yaps, he blows in her mouth, presses her tongue, but Giauhare remains silent, she kisses the boy's lips, she utters little

wolf's cries ; her breasts, which Kment is nibbling, her belly on which he presses his fist, have grown hard, brown like the she-wolf's hide ; the down of the cunt and of the armpits strangles Kment's throat, like tufts of dry grass, he spits them out again, his fingers run upon the crumpled skin, riddled, smeared with a stale and powerful smell, covered with scabs, chafed ; when he thrusts his cock inside, the lips of Giauhare's cunt close up on it, sharp-edged ; their sex juices drown it, hardens it, stretches it, tears it, it bleeds, Kment wants to pull it out, but Giauhare tightens her thighs ; the sex juices change, soften Kment's cock, devour it ; Kment gets up and flees into the forest, screaming, his hand covering the wound. Giauhare falls asleep, with the double sex.

Kment jumps, leaps over the small valleys, the animals laugh, in the shadows ; when he sits or lies down to rest and dream, they pinch his feet, drop their shit on his shoulders, sting his chest. He wanders on, escorted by bear and lion cubs, squalling and purring pumas, his feet bloody, his legs smeared with white clay, tufts of down stuck behind his ears ; one morning he ties between his thighs a bamboo stick splashed with sap and milk ; every night, he goes near the clearing where Giauhare lies ; he watches her dream and come alone, he masturbates the bamboo while watching her, his lips move ; one evening, he jumps on her, he covers her and when he returns to the banks of the spring, he touches the wound between his thighs : his cock is growing again, he sits down, he rubs his hand on the lymph of a plant emerging from the water, he bends his back, his nape, his eyes observe the bud between his thighs, he smears it with lymph, fondles it, pets it :

— Grow, grow, and I'll give you something to eat.

As Kment comes to take back his cock from her, Giauhare feels desire rise again, and her embrace becomes stronger every time. From now on, they only live bound together, lying at the top of the island, fed by their own semen ; beneath them, the ground grows hollow, purple birds nest between their thighs, under their armpits, in their palms ; during the night, dribble, droppings run on Kment's back. All around, shrubs shrivel up ; flowers wither and rot on the earth ; insects die, birds flying over, if their shadow touches the earth, fall, thrash about on their shadow, their beak falls off, their plumage and eye grow dull ; the semen flowing from between Giauhare and Kment's bodies makes the earth die ; around, in the creepers, in the rushes, animals groan ; Kment, one night, gets up, he goes into the forest, cuts the fresh creepers, he weaves them, he spreads the matting on the ground, he takes Giauhare in his arms, he lays her on the matting and lies down over her ; in the morning, animals and plants straighten themselves up, intertwine, make rasping sounds until evening when, darkness looming up again, animals and opened flowers take fright ; all night, a beam fallen from the moonless sky lights up the sacred stone, on the slaves' rock ; Kment and Giauhare walk up, watch the goddess once sculpted from the model of a slave, the day she was granted back

her freedom. They kneel down, they stroke the veined stone ; below them, the night sea, slack, sparkles through the violet hedges ; Giauhare's hand clutches Kment's penis ; both kneeling, the skin of their thighs hardened.

The drum beats in the clearing below ; through the projected roots, they see the lying beasts intermingled ; a cry echoes from the deep of the sky, the beam burns, the cry comes down, Kment and Giauhare hide in a hedge, fall asleep ; in the middle of the night, a great beating of wings shakes the hedge ; cry and beam of light have died out ; on the horizon, a bright sail, swollen by a stormy wind mixing all the secret breaths of earth and sea...

Kment and Giauhare, woken up, walk, knees and fists in the thorns, push the hedge aside ; a man bending over the stone, is mating with the goddess ; a mane sticks out of his nape and of his back ; on his head a dove and a crown of thorns ; his bare legs are vibrating, incandescent ; in the distance, on the sea, the sail scuds along towards the island and the fish shoot out, sparkle on the forge, strike the sides of the boat, play in the deep beneath the shadow of the hull ; the boat is empty but a beam of light, the first one of dawn, watches and stands by, upon the sail. Kment kneels down before Giauhare, and Giauhare before Kment. Fists on the ground, they kiss each other on the knees, on the genitals, on the forehead.

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Tomb For 500,000 Soldiers, Pierre Guyotat's unique elision of brutal warfare and sexual ecstasy, is regularly acclaimed as the greatest French novel of modern times. Completed when its author was only twenty-five and never before published in English – the only copy of a previous translation was destroyed by fire – it now appears in a brilliant new version which retains all of the original's detonating sensory power.

Guyotat hallucinated the subject matter of the novel as a young soldier during the Algerian War, gazing out from a watchtower over the desert at night. Compacting together elements from mythology, Lautréamont's "Maldoror" and Luis Buñuel's film "Los Olvidados", he assembled a vision of contemporary life as a relentless display of slavery, prostitution and degradation, in which only catastrophic eruptions of atrocity and the delirious intervention of depraved sex acts can possess meaning for the book's lacerated human figures.

Ever more relevant as the terror-torn 21st century unfurls, **Tomb For 500,000 Soldiers** is a headlong ride of exhilaration and horror which precipitates the reader into extreme, uncharted psycho-sexual terrain, a zone Guyotat himself has alluded to as "the anus of the world".

Translated by Romain Slocombe, with an introduction by Stephen Barber.

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